

***A Critical Review of the Role of the Theological Values of the Religious Vow  
of Poverty in the Face of Consumerist Lifestyle among the Youth of South  
Africa***

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Anne Thembekile Mkwanazi declare that

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Anne Thembekile Mkwanazi

26 February 2015

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all Religious women who gave themselves to the ministry of restoring the dignity of others, especially the vulnerable, those whose well-being is at stake because they are turned into commodities, especially women who are forced into sex industries. To all the women who work tirelessly for counter trafficking of people and restoring of human dignity throughout the world.

## Acknowledgement

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## Abbreviations

CCL: Code of Canon Law, in this paper, the New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law (2004) will be used instead of the original code of 1983.

PC: *Perfectae Caritatis* is the Decree on the Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life.

GS: *Gaudium et Spes* is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

USSCCB: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

NRSV: The New Revised Standard Version

NJB: The New Jerusalem Bible

Church: The word church written in capital letters means the Catholic Church and in the small letters refers to the church at large.

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## Abstract

Africans have suffered considerably as a result of numerous forms of devastating encounters with external forces. These include historical episodes such as Africa's problematic trade relations first, with the Arab world and later Europe, and secondly, the notorious North Atlantic slave trade which saw millions of young African men and women being shipped out of the continent of Africa. In addition, colonialism legitimized the looting of most of Africa's mineral wealth and other forms of natural resources, also negative environmental effects caused mainly by the industrialized North, and lately globalization through which both neo-colonialism and neo-liberal economics have impacted African countries.

Because of this history, it is no surprise that Africa's scholarly and intellectual traditions are replete with responses to injustices, particularly those that are directly or indirectly linked to the historical factors mentioned above. It could be argued that most African intellectual discourse is a coordinated response by Africans to injustice emanating from outside the African continent. It seems that protest scholarship dominates African intellectual discourse generally.

Africans have regrettably also suffered immensely from numerous problems related to domestic challenges. These include challenges relating to lack of good governance, power struggles that commonly end up in ethnic conflicts, corruption and looting by government officials, and the list goes on. This raises a number of questions, such as why it is that despite the experiences they have gone through and their being highly conscientised concerning matters of injustice, Africans still perpetrate injustice against their fellow Africans.

Against this background, this thesis seeks to investigate a related issue, namely, why is it that despite a well-developed theological discourse regarding the dangers of consumerism, ordinary Africans are still getting trapped in the vicious cycle of materialism and a consumerist lifestyle. Using the theology of the religious vow of poverty as a framework, this thesis investigates factors that may cause ordinary people to disregard the values that encourage simplicity, frugality and responsible consumption.

## Chapter One

### *1.1. The Background and Motivation for the Study*

As a Catholic religious sister<sup>1</sup> I have had the privilege of working with young women between the ages of 16 to 25, at the Jabulani self-help project<sup>2</sup> based in Mariannhill, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. These young women originated from different parts of KwaZulu-Natal and faced a range of problems, such as unemployment, shelter and food insecurity. These led them to the center to seek for help. Amongst these women were those who were fortunate to have either escaped or been rescued from captivity after they had fallen prey to unscrupulous human traffickers who had no other intention but to coerce them into participating in the sex trade. Kimberly McCabe (2008:31) a researcher in human trafficking, observes that “[s]ex traffickers attract their victims from the poverty of their homes with promises of employment, marriage, or an education. The victims are then forced into prostitution...”<sup>3</sup>

Listening to their stories gave me insight into their backgrounds as to where they come from, their situations at home and how the perpetrators lured them. Although these women were driven by poverty to leave their homes in search of a job, some of them were from families which were managing, relatively, to meet their basic needs. To understand the meaning of basic needs, Pete Alcock (2006:64) explains it in terms of poverty and subsistence. His view is that being at the level of subsistence living means to cope with the “minimum needed to sustain life, and so being below subsistence level is to be experiencing absolute poverty because one does not have enough to live on.” For further clarification, Alcock quotes Townsend (1979) who describes poverty in the following words:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary... in the societies to which they belong (2006:64).

Against the background of this definition of poverty, this thesis does not seek to deal with women in this category; rather it seeks to deal with those who are above the subsistence level.

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<sup>1</sup> Religious sister in this thesis means those who have consecrated themselves to God within the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. These do not involve themselves with marriage and its practices but they live a life characterized by the evangelical counsels, which are the vows of chastity, obedience and poverty.

<sup>2</sup>Jabulani Centre is a Self Help project for women around the area.

<sup>3</sup>More literature on human trafficking: *Understanding and Counteracting Trafficking in Persons: The Acts of the Seminar for Women Religious*. 2004. International Organization for Migration; O'Connor, M. 2013. *The Church and Human Trafficking*. Cluster Publications; Lawrence, B. N. & Roberts, R. (eds). 2012. *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*. Ohio: University Press; Ebegebulem, P. 2012. *Stop Trafficking in Women and Children*. Ibadan: Oluben Printers.

It is concerned with those who came from families that were managing ,but who wanted more than what they have and decided that going to the city to find a job will earn them the privilege of getting money to buy whatever they want. They were attracted to fashion and status; they talked about acquiring brand name cell phones such as Blackberry and others, fashionable clothing and shoes that have been seen as the social norm either through television or other forms of commercial advertisement.

This aspiration revealed the attraction to a consumerist lifestyle that is affecting everyone. One can thus infer that it is this desire that made them fall into the hands of the traffickers. This consumerism seems to have become the norm of life today. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: "Consumerism is the buying and using of goods and services; the belief that it is good for a society or an individual person to buy and use a large quantity of goods and services." Consumerism does not only occupy peoples' attention through obsession with buying but it also takes one's attention out of all that is necessary in life and can lead not only to self-destruction, but also affect peoples' culture.

It is against this background that as a religious woman I wondered whether the values that are embedded in the vow of poverty,<sup>4</sup> such as simplicity, sharing and hospitality, would make any difference if they were shown to young women such as those of rural KwaZulu-Natal. It is crucial at this point to mention that I am not suggesting that these women should become religious sisters but I am wondering if the above mentioned values of the vow of poverty would make an impact on them and their lives. Sandra Schneiders (1986:90), a New Testament scholar, explains that the "theology of evangelical poverty, the object of the religious vow, is rooted in the Gospel values of joyous dependence on God and open-hearted sharing of God's gifts within the human community." If this theology affects all of human community it is therefore in all communities. It will be interesting to see if these are also part of African theologies and how are they utilised.

The hypothesis is that, in addition to African people being swayed by waves of Western culture, there may be additional factors that are contributing to the general lack of response to theological and African cultural values that are antithetical to the pursuit of consumerist

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<sup>4</sup>The vow of poverty is professed by those who chose to consecrate themselves to God through the Church. But this vow is also professed by religious of other traditions such as Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans and those who choose to do so out of choice without any formal or institutional commitment.

lifestyles, and the aspirations that lead people into complicated situations – particularly looking at young women of rural KwaZulu-Natal and their being lured into sex trafficking.

## ***1.2. Literature Review***

This study consists of three major sections. The first part addresses the issue of consumerism. The second part discusses the theological values of the religious vow of poverty. The last section deals with African Christian theology. There is an abundance of literature on all three of these areas. In the section below, I briefly survey some of the books and articles that are relevant to each of these areas.

### ***1.2.1 Literature Review on Consumerism***

With regards to consumerism, the work of scholars such as Ernst Conradie and Adam Setmeyer will be considered. For example, in his book *Christianity and Ecological Theology*, Conradie (2006:47) offers a theological critique of consumerism. He points at how human beings have become victims of consumerism, and the result that people have become victims of their own desires. In his second book *Christianity and a Critique of Consumerism: A Survey of Six Points of Entry* (2009), Conradie is illustrating how consumerism has affected the church and society. Further, he points out that consumerism, even though a Western and Northern phenomenon, is also equally a phenomenon here in South Africa. With similar concerns, Setmeyer (2010:306-314), in an article titled “Consumerism, Catholicism, and Hall’s Theology of the Cross”, looks at consumerism within a particular context and puts forward how Catholic methodologies can be applied to demonstrate how Catholicism can address consumerism in a way that could ultimately foster responsible consumer behaviors.

Consumerism affects not only society and the churches but it goes so far as to contaminate the youth, resulting in the formation of a youth culture.<sup>5</sup> There is ample literature on this theme by scholars such as Anita Louisa Cloete, Tuulikki Pietilia and Paul Willis.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on consumerism and the youth see: Kramer, J. B. 2006. Ethical Analysis and Recommended Action in Response to the Dangers Associated with Youth Consumerism, *Ethics and Behavior*. Vol. 16 (4). Pgs 291-303; Nava, M. 1992. *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*. Great Britain: Biddles LTD, Guildford; Valkenburg, P. M. 2000. Media and Youth Consumerism, in *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Pgs 52-56.

Anita Cloete in her article, “The Youth Culture, Media and Sexuality: What Could Faith Communities Contribute” (2012), writes extensively on youth culture, tracing it from its origin. She discusses several aspects of youth culture as they become manifest in different aspects of life within a particular social context. For example, this work covers a variety of subjects such as peer pressure, media and sexuality, and how the faith community can contribute by educating the youth on the understanding of morality.

Concurrently Tuulikki Pietilla in the article “Body Politic: The Emergence of a ‘Kwaito Nation’ in South Africa” (2012), writes on how *Kwaito* music, influenced by consumerism, shapes the youth culture and how consumerism itself “devours the young minds and lives” (:147). Paul Willis concurs with the two scholars in a sense that he highlight how the youth shape their own style either in music or fashion, all this influenced by consumerism.

### ***1.2.2. Literature on the Vow of Poverty***

When it comes to the vow of poverty, theologians and scholars on religious life were consulted. Sandra Schneiders writes extensively on the religious vow of poverty. In her book, *New Wineskins: Reclaiming Religious Life Today* (1986), Schneiders focuses on the renewal of religious women. She writes on the doctrinal foundations of religious life, specifically emphasizing the theology of the vows, one of which is poverty. She looks at contemporary responses to the religious vow of poverty (:95-113). In her recent publication *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* (2013:234), she goes deeper in contextualizing this vow. She discusses the vow of poverty in the contemporary world in relation to, amongst a number of issues, the culture of consumerism, and the commodity economy. The vow of poverty is described in contradiction to consumerism and something that can counteract its influence.

Another scholar who addresses this is Diarmuid O’Murchu. A priest, theologian and social psychologist, he has written extensively on the religious vow of poverty in his book, *Religious Life: A Prophetic Vision* (1991:59-173). O’Murchu has conducted a great deal of research on the subject of the religious vow of poverty. He starts by looking at the history of this vow, where he traces it back to the beginning of religious life during the time of the rise of monasticism in Egypt, and up to the West in the current time. He views the religious vow of poverty as a resource for sharing and caring. In his subsequent writing in *Poverty*,

*Celibacy, and Obedience* (1999:64-81), he explores more on this vow and addresses it as a way of challenging the violence of consumerism and deprivation, exploring how the vow of poverty can be used as a tool to counteract a consumerist lifestyle. This literature is a useful resource in tracing the historical development of and contemporary attitudes toward the religious vow of poverty.

In addition to the above, other scholars such as Gerard Nwagwu, Aylward Shorter, and Martin O'Reilly look at the religious vow of poverty from an African perspective. Gerard Nwagwu, a specialist in religious life, wrote an article, "Religious Vows in Traditional African Context" (2008) in which she looks at the religious vows within an African context as well as the attitudes towards the vow of poverty today. Among other things, she explores the desire for a comfortable life amidst economic hardships. She looks at these from the perspective of Africa's divergent worldviews (:132-151). In another article, "Inculturation of Consecrated Life in Africa" (1997), she dwells on poverty within an African context and shows the values that are embedded in the vow of poverty, such as generosity, and how this was valued in African culture.

In his book, *Religious Poverty in Africa* (1999), Aylward Shorter addresses the issue of how poverty was lived in various parts of Africa and how religious can be poor in the sight of God as a witness to evangelization. Martin O'Reilly published a book titled *The Challenge of Being a Religious in Africa Today* (1996) in which he writes on religious poverty looking at the role of the missionaries and their attitudes towards African cultures. Among other aspects of poverty, he highlights the misconceptions about religious poverty and the meaning of religious poverty today (:163-168).

### ***1.2.3. Literature on African Theology***

With regard to the work of leading African theologians, a number of observations could be made. First, as would be expected, the theological basis of the religious vow of poverty is not necessarily a focus of the work of these theologians. Second, some of the values which the vow of poverty was meant to promote also form part of the core foundations within the wider spectrum of African theologies. For instance, in African inculturation theology, there is a strong focus on promoting traditional African values such as Ubuntu, communitarianism and respect for nature and other fellow creatures.<sup>6</sup> This is seen in the works of Maake Masango,

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<sup>6</sup>See Idowu (1965), Mbiti (1978), Nyamiti (1971, 1978) and Pato (1997).



Mercy Amba Oduyoye and John Mbiti. In the article “African Spirituality that Shapes the Concept of Ubuntu” (2006:112), Masango, a practical theologian, emphasizes the value of Ubuntu within the African culture which discourages individualism. He highlights the communal aspect as propagated in the Zulu proverb “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, meaning “a person is a person because of other people.”

Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a prominent African woman theologian, wrote an article on “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology” (1979:110) in which she highlights that “Africans recognize life as life-in-community,” where there is no separation between people because of the emphasis on the “wholeness of the person” (:111). John Mbiti, an African theologian, in his article “African Views of the Universe” (1996:174-180) brings in the concepts of the universe and the connectedness of nature and the human beings. Mbiti shows the relationship and unity of God’s creation mirrored in African culture.

Various works within the field of African liberation theology include a critique of the exploitative nature of capitalism and its subsequent institutions. This critique singles out areas such as the individualistic approach of capitalism, capitalism’s devastating effects on the environment due to unsustainable forms of development, the unequal distribution of wealth manifested in the constantly widening gap between the wealthy North and the poor South, particularly Africa. Jean-Marc Ela, an African Liberation theologian, in his article “Christianity and Liberation” (1994:142) calls for awareness of the economic depression of Africa imposed by the North and the West. He further draws attention to the exploitation that has violated the dignity of Africa.

Musimbi Kanyoro, an African woman theologian, in her article “Engendered Communal Theology: African Women’s Contribution to Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (2001:166), deals with the economic struggle in Africa. She points out that structural adjustment programs favor only a certain group and leave other groups stranded. Engelbert Mveng, another African theologian, in his article “Impoverishment and Liberation” (1994:157), addresses poverty that has covered the whole of Africa due to the trade practices of the West and North, which have bred and continue to breed social inequalities that, in turn, perpetuate poverty in Africa.

In African women’s theology, the concern with social inequalities and commitment to social justice, and in particular regarding women in Africa, is reflected through persistent lobbying by African women theologians, wherein they highlight the plight of women in a male

dominated dispensation. Here women call for the recognition of women as an equal in the family of the human species. This includes urging men to realize that human development can only be realized once all human beings, men and women included, are afforded equal opportunities to be creators of their own destiny. The yearning for equality is well narrated by African women theologians such as Isabel Phiri and Sarojin Nadar (2006:7), in the article “What in a Name? Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women’s Theologians.” These scholars quote Phiri (2004) who argues that “...all women would like to see the end of sexism in their lives and the establishment of a more just society of men and women that seek the well-being of the other...” Mercy Oduyoye in her book *Introducing African Women’s Theology* (2001:29), asserts that “Women’s theology shows a keen awareness of the fact that ‘the past’ is often misused for the subjugation of women while traditional values that are advantageous to women and ecology are overlooked.”

Musimbi Kanyoro highlights a cultural aspect within African theology in her article “Engendered Communal Theology: African Women’s Contribution to Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (2001:167). She asserts that “we African women theologians make the claim that inculturation is not sufficient unless the cultures we reclaim are analyzed and deemed worthy in terms of promoting justice and support for life and the dignity of women.” All the women mentioned highlight the same aspects of women’s liberation in theology that will enable them to express themselves the way God created them. Against the background of the above, it could be argued, however, that while some of the theological values that inform the religious vow of poverty definitely form part of the central discourse in African theology, not much research has been done on the impact of these values on the way African Christians behave in their everyday lives.

### ***1.3. Questions to be Asked***

Ever since it became clear that Africa is the new “center of Christianity” (Ntamushobora 2009:47), a great deal of attention has been given to various expressions of Christianity in Africa. For example, the past three to four decades have seen a proliferation of literature from both African and Western scholars who have focused on themes ranging from factors that might be behind the high growth rate of Christianity in Africa to contributions of Christianity in the public discourse (cf. Gifford 1994, Baur 1994). While that has been and probably continues to be the case, especially with recent studies focusing on the growth of charismatic churches in Africa, (cf. Gifford 2004, Meyer 2007), not much research has been done in terms of looking at factors that may be contributing to why the kind of theological values,

such as those that inform the religious vow of poverty, have not seemed to influence the way ordinary Africans, especially young women, perceive reality and subsequently conduct their lives.

The question that arises is: Would values of the vow of poverty have any significant impact on the way the youth of South Africa respond to the pressures of consumerism?

The sub-questions related to this central question may be formulated as follows:

1. What could be the driving forces behind consumerism among the youth of South Africa?
2. How are the theological values embedded within the vow of poverty operating?
3. Are the values inherent in such theologies also found within the framework of the African theological discourse?
4. Why are these theological values not making any impact in the way young people respond towards the pressures of consumerism?

### ***Objectives***

1. To investigate the impact of consumerism among the youth of South Africa.
2. To investigate the theological values that inform the religious vow of poverty.
3. To locate these theological values within the framework of African theological discourse.
4. To investigate why these values have no impact on the way young people conduct their lives.

### ***1.4. Research Methods***

This was a non-empirical study. This means that the study was comprised mainly of a literature review through which information was gathered. This means that this research did not include any interviews or questionnaires for the purpose of this study. The concentration was on literature in English (that is monographs and edited volumes), as a means of gathering information. Both published and unpublished academic articles were consulted. However, literature in other languages, for example Zulu were considered, especially if they dealt with the theme relevant to this study. Relevant media publications such as newspapers, magazine articles and news broadcasts were also considered, as were Masters and PhD dissertations.

The library of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg and Pietermaritzburg Cluster libraries served as key sources of information. In addition, the library of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood in Mariannhill, KwaZulu-Natal were used as a resource for this paper.

### ***1.5. Theoretical Framework***

This thesis uses the theology of the religious vow of poverty as its theoretical framework, specifically as interpreted by Schneiders (1986:90) as follows: the “theology of the evangelical poverty, the object of the religious vow, is rooted in the gospel values of joyous dependence on God and open-hearted sharing of God’s gifts within the human community.” One may wonder why I am choosing this framework in relation to young women who have no intention to commit themselves to this vow. The reason is that the vow of poverty has ceased to be an institutional observation only, and has encompassed all of humankind. Once more Schneiders (1986:88) explains that “the Church renounced its centuries old adversary stance toward the world and reaffirmed its solidarity with all humankind in the task of transforming this world into a just and peaceful context for human life and growth.” For example, the document of the Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, which is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of 7 December 1965, pays attention to the “change in the social order” (:6) which affects the original cultures with the phenomenon of the time, currently consumerism.

In the midst of all this, the vow of poverty remains important amongst Catholic religious worldwide and is encouraged by the Church. To support this, the document on the renewal of religious life *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), emphasizes that religious should nurture this vow and express it as it unfolds especially “for the support of the poor, whom all religious should love with deep yearning for Christ” (:13). This is what prompts scholars such as Schneiders to dedicate time and write extensively on the practice of this vow within the Catholic Church. She notes that there is more emphasis today on the realization and the utilization of this vow among those who profess it. She writes:

Many religious are coming to see the vow as a public commitment to responsible stewardship of the goods of the earth and to the struggle for a just economic order in which an equitable sharing of limited resources will hasten the end of the oppression of the poor by the rich (1986:91).

Since this vow ceases to be a private practice undertaken only by religious, it is an invitation for them to come out of their institutes and reach out to society because this vow is now

valuable to all of humankind. The *Code of Canon Law* stresses that “[a]ll Christians are called to poverty of spirit inspiring them to share their goods and resources with the less fortunate world” (CCL 600). To this O’Murchu (1991:160) points out tools that can be used to take this ministry further. In his words:

As a liminal value system, the vow of poverty (which should be renamed a vow for responsible stewardship) challenges all people to live simply, that is, uncluttered by excess baggage for personal comfort and aggrandizement; to share generously their time, talents and resources; to espouse fully the call to be stewards (not masters) of creation, to respect the natural ecological processes of our universe; to denounce and confront the injustices that polarize people and undermine human dignity.

He further highlights how the “dominant underlying values – sharing, simplicity, ecological stewardship, care and concern for the created order – resonate deeply within all people” (1991:160). Within the vow of poverty, Schneiders emphasises virtues such as hospitality, writing that “[h]ospitality offers a marvellous experience of solidarity with other people” (1986:187). She also mentions voluntary simplicity of lifestyle (:185), and reminds that “sharing is more than the equitable distribution of goods. It is a recognition of our common life as creatures of the same God and a concrete living of that common life” (:103).

As is evident in the introduction above, the theology of the vow of poverty highlights other theologies such as liberation of the poor, responsible stewardship and economic justice and the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality. This thesis will analyze these themes in order to address the plight of young women who are lured by the consumerist lifestyle and which leads them into harmful situations such as sex trafficking. O’Murchu (1999:76) states that the “mutuality of our vowed state knows no boundaries of exclusion.” Thus young women who are deceived by the vices of consumerism are included in this thinking.

### ***1.6. Structure of the Dissertation***

Chapter one introduces the whole study. A brief summary of the methodology, theoretical framework, hypothesis and procedure is included. Chapter two discusses the invasion of consumerism into society, and its effects on society, the church and among young people, while also showing its positive and negative contribution.

In chapter three, the religious vow of poverty is discussed. Chapter four then briefly gives the background of the development of this vow, tracing it from specific figures who contributed to its understanding and practice from the early centuries up to the current period.

Chapter five discusses the theological values of the vow of poverty in our contemporary time as explained in Schneiders (1986). Chapter six examines whether the theological values in the vow of poverty form a part of African theology, and if so, which forms they take.

Chapter seven is the concluding chapter, offering concluding remarks followed by suggestions and recommendations for further research.

Having laid the structure of a thesis, the following chapters unfold the work that the thesis has undertaken.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Invasion of Consumerist Culture in our Society**

#### ***2.0.Introduction***

One of the key issues that emerged clearly in the story involving young women at Mariannhill is that ordinary people, and the youth in particular, are becoming victims of unscrupulous individuals and organised groups who prey on unsuspecting victims, particularly those who are desperate to make quick money. This reality was attributed to, albeit indirectly, the pressures of consumerism wherein it was also argued that poverty was not the only reason people were being easily lured into swindles. In recognition of this reality, this chapter offers a brief overview of the reality of consumerism within the African context. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section looks at the phenomenon of consumerism in general. Here the focus is on questions such as what is meant by consumerism and the link between consumerism and globalization of the world. Second, it includes the ambiguity of consumerism, especially in view of the fact that there are schools of thought that see consumerism as an indication of a healthy economic environment. Lastly, this section looks at consumerism and its contribution to or effect on youth or popular culture. All these are viewed against the background of expressions or manifestations of consumerism in African communities.

#### ***2.1.What is Consumerism?***

Consumerism is a phenomenon that has become noticeably rampant in society. This has also ushered in a new way of thinking and a new outlook towards life. This is like a virus that has contaminated the world and has manifested itself in different forms. Setmeyer (2010:306) asserts that “Consumerism, in one understanding, is the phenomenon produced by the misdirected desire to find fulfilment in things outside of God, particularly in the consumption of material possessions.” On consumerism, Conradie (2006:47) writes that “the possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principal cultural aspiration and the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social status and national success” (:47).

Consumerism has been influential in society in the sense that it has affected the culture of origin and its practices very adversely. Culture of origin in this thesis refers to the African culture and for the purpose of this paper, the Zulu culture. This is because consumerism has

emerged with a culture of its own. As Conradie (2006:47) asserts, “the term ‘consumerism’ refers to a cultural orientation” (2008:47) which tampers with the culture of origin, the Zulu culture. Citing Colin Gunton, Conradie “adds that the consumer culture has introduced a rigid uniformity...which is imposing social uniformity” (:47). This is well displayed in the fashions arising from this phenomenon which will be discussed later in the thesis.

Consumerism also affects nature, writes Paul Santmire (2010) who brings in the notion of environmental consumerism. He laments that “[c]onsumerism means nothing less than the threatened ‘End of Nature’ and, with that prospect, untold human dislocations and sufferings and the destruction of many other species, as well” (:332).

Another factor is that consumerism is associated with the affluent. Suniya Luthar (2003:7) asserts that “...many affluent people...live exactly the kind of lives they want. They are able to purchase an endless variety of goods and services.” This is what affluence encourages in society. Conradie addresses the culture of affluence as a germ of the consumerist culture. He asserts that

It is not only the affluent who are caught into the trap of consumerism. James Childis comments that the black Americans are also experiencing the side-effects of consumerism: ‘The aggressive marketing of goods and pleasures within poor, African American communities has had a corrosive effect on their traditional nonmarket values of love, care, and service to others’ (2006:49).

It is this aggressive marketing that had perceivably deceived those young women of rural KwaZulu-Natal who found themselves faced with a challenge to learn to make a choice according to the need rather than the want. Addressing the need might help to prevent their self-exposure to the undesirable behaviour and exploitation to which they are vulnerable.

As indicated earlier, consumerism has had an impact on different spheres of people’s lives, and this is well conveyed through globalization and its link with consumerism.

### ***2.1.1. The Link between Consumerism and Globalization***

Consumerism and its resultant consumerist lifestyle has been a common feature in modern Western societies, where capitalism is the most dominant model upon which the economies are restructured. Because of this, consumerism in its current form is in a way synonymous with cultures of the West, American culture in particular. As time has passed and with the advent of globalization, this picture has changed drastically. Globalization, especially its economic component, has made it possible for international companies to export



commodities to various parts of the world. As a result, certain commodities have become international brands that are sold throughout the world. A wide range of commodities ranging from beverages, food chains, franchises, clothing stores, household goods and cars have become recognisable features of consumer societies all over the world. All this has become possible because of the success of globalization.

Globalization is a connectedness of the world which results in uniformity through multinational trading and common communication. Simon Reich (1998) gives a multi-faceted explanation of globalization from different scholars. He points out that it is rather complex to give a definite definition of globalization since “globalization remains so elusive as to defy definition” (:2). Philip Cerny defines globalization in economic and political terms:

Globalization is defined here as a set of economic and political structures and processes deriving from the changing character of the goods and assets that comprise the base of the international political economy-in particular, the increasing structural differentiation of those goods and assets (:4).

For clarity, Reich (1998) proposes four possible interpretations such as globalization as a historical epoch, globalization as the confluence of economic phenomena, globalization as the hegemony of American values and globalization as technological and social revolution. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the last two mentioned above.

### ***2.1.2. Globalization as the Hegemony of American Values***

Reich (1998:14) asserts that “[g]lobalization represents the universalizing of American values...predicated on a normative, indeed moral foundation.” He sees America spreading its liberal democracy throughout the world, imposing it even on countries that lack democratic experience. Rather than coming in as an influence on ethnic culture, this culture is taking over the culture of origin, depending on the geography and ethnicity. Clifford Geertz (1973:11) says, “Culture is public because meaning is.” If globalization brings with it a common culture, definitely that culture cannot be ignored because of its powerful influence in society. Hamid Molwana in Reich (1998) suggests that “[g]lobalization has brought more surface homogenization than fundamental change” (:14), epitomized by the influence of the American culture which is characterized globally by fashion and new trends such as youth culture that values superficial things.

### ***2.1.3. Globalization as Technological and Social Revolution***

Technology introduced new inventions which use machinery as a means of production instead of human work force. This revolutionary move has affected human behaviour in the sense that human creativity is replaced by technology. Examples here of are big companies, factories and manufacturers where general operations take place with machines, designing and planning are created on the computers, and thus a human work force is no longer needed, which leads to unemployment. This is how globalization has influenced people of different cultures throughout the world. Other effects of globalization are held in high esteem as stated in the quote below:

[g]lobalization has led to the bridging of the gap between me [one] and various other parts of the world because now, at the click of a button, I [one] can virtually transport [one] myself to another part of the world and get to know of the events that take place there (:2).<sup>7</sup>

It is true that communication has become common in the sense that media conveys similar news throughout the entire world in a minute. Further, with globalization, carefully structured marketing strategies and distribution mechanisms made it possible for goods that were previously available to consumers in the West to also reach overseas markets. Because of this, consumers in Africa and Asia now have access to the same products as their Western counterparts. This did not end there. As many cultural scholars have observed, one of the unintended consequences of globalization has taken the form of cultural exportation, whereby the world and, Africa in particular, have become consumers of Western culture, through universalization of the American film and music industry. As would be expected, this inadvertently has had a huge impact on local cultures as can be seen in expressions of popular culture that have emerged especially among the impressionable youth in different parts of the world. As reflected in this paragraph, consumerism has the potential to influence any given society for better or for worse. To demonstrate this let us turn to the positive effects of consumerism.

### ***2.2.The Positive Effects of Consumerism***

Generally, consumerism is regarded as a negative phenomenon. This view is common amongst those who see consumerist lifestyles as an insult to those who can hardly put food on the table, due to the reality of the gaps between the haves and the have-nots. This will be

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<sup>7</sup><http://getanessay.wordpress.com/effects-of-globalization/>. Accessed 2013.10.05.

discussed later in this chapter. In the meantime I will focus on those areas that are seen as the positive contributions of consumerism in society.

As indicated in the previous sections, consumerism is effected through continuous consumption of certain goods by as many people as possible. This is characterised by obsessive buying of material goods in the form of clothes, food items, cars, and so on. It is said that in consumerist societies, a notion of want supersedes that of need since many people buy things simply because they desire to have them and not because they need them. While the benefits of this may not be that obvious, economic experts have argued that a slight change in consumer behaviour can be detrimental for the economy as that could slow down production and later result in job losses and slow economic development. For example, Adam Smith,<sup>8</sup> who is considered the father of modern economics, had the following to say in his seminal work *The Wealth of Nations*: “Consumption is the sole end purpose of production; and the interests of the producer ought to be attended to only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer.” A British industrialist, Alfred Robens (2011),<sup>9</sup> echoes Smith’s ideas, albeit indirectly and in a different context when he wrote: “We should never be allowed to forget that it is the customer who determines how many people are employed and what sort of wage companies can afford to pay.”

Perhaps one could further argue that one of the positive benefits of consumerism is that, due to a highly competitive environment whereby manufactures are competing for the attention of consumers, inventors are increasingly producing quality products that are gradually contributing to improvements in the quality of life for millions of people all over the world. For example, one could point to a number of benefits that come with improvements in technology: first, there are vastly newly-invented improvements in the area of technology that are likely to contribute to job creation and new life skills in society, resulting in poverty eradication while developing the well-being of the country. This is evident in the industries whereby newly-invented machinery produces certain goods in large quantities and performs jobs that were otherwise physically taxing for people.

Second are the means of communication such as the internet, and tele-communications, cell phones, newspapers and different types of media. These easily transmit the news to the whole

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.gradesaver.com/the-wealth-of-nations/e-text/> Accessed 08/06/2014.

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.infobarrel.com/consumers\\_are\\_the\\_Most\\_important\\_part\\_of\\_the\\_paper](http://www.infobarrel.com/consumers_are_the_Most_important_part_of_the_paper) Accessed 08/06/2014.

world, such as with the deadly Tsunami that took place in Sri Lanka in 2004<sup>10</sup> and the one in Japan on 2011 March 11,<sup>11</sup> because of the new broadcasting system that works throughout the whole world. Through media, the world can be in solidarity with each other; for example, when the late President Nelson Mandela died, the whole world was well represented at his funeral. The global telecommunications network keeps people informed, both young and old, of news from different parts of the world.

Another contribution to communication is that of marketing, the means used by business or services to reach an optimum potential clientele. This is a form of advertising whereby people are informed about what is on the market and available for them. This is good in the sense that everybody is informed about where to get a particular product. All this new information allows everybody to live a better and more comfortable lifestyle according to a person's financial limit (Shukla, 2009).<sup>12</sup> This improves people's lives in that it updates people on what is available on the market and what is yet to come. In this way people are able to discern what is best, and what is destructive for their lives and enables them to make "a moral and cultural choice" (*Centesimus Annus* 36). These positive contributions of consumerism mentioned above also have the potential to influence development in society. Unfortunately, despite all these positive effects, there are also the negative consequences of consumerism that are manifested as foreign and invasive phenomena in society, including in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

### ***2.3. The Negative Effects of Consumerism***

The positive influence of consumerism is displayed in constructive developments in society, but amidst the positive contributions, there are also negative effects that are relentless in the destruction of communities. Although this affects almost all aspects of life, this thesis will only address two characteristics: these are the destruction of African culture, and specifically in KwaZulu-Natal and environmental degradation. Culture "consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members" (Geertz 1973:11).

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<sup>10</sup>[www.universetoday.com/.../tsunami.2004...](http://www.universetoday.com/.../tsunami.2004...) Accessed 03.01.2014.

<sup>11</sup> [Science.howstuffworks.com/.../tsunami.ht](http://Science.howstuffworks.com/.../tsunami.ht). Accessed 03.01.2014.

<sup>12</sup> Amitabh Shukla 2009. <http://www.paggu.com/business/world-econo>. Accessed 28 June 2013.

First, it can be strongly argued that consumerism disrupts and undermines developed structures of local cultures, to the extent of destroying their traditional values and leaving them culturally bankrupt. Consumerism has created a culture of its own and coming together with globalization, which brings with it a common, but a foreign culture, in this regard an American culture as described earlier (cf. Reich 1998:14), communal structures are destroyed. Each time when culture evolves it forms new behaviours and it is this behaviour of consumerism that might have fascinated young women of rural KwaZulu-Natal, to the extent that they would expose themselves to dangerous behaviour and situations that could potentially destroy them.

Consumerist culture encourages individualistic behaviour, even among family members especially among the affluent. Schneiders puts it this way “[t]he commodity economy is *radically individualistic (sic)*” (2013:234). This individualistic behaviour encourages selfishness which leads to self-centeredness. John Kavanaugh (1991:8) observes that “[p]eople are having substitute relationships with their cars, computers, VCRs and bank accounts.” An example of this is where people are dedicating more time working on computer while giving less time for the family members, or where everybody occupies themselves in their corners with their favourite gadgets. This environment kills the family spirit and the notion that “family is sacred: it is the place in which life-the gift of God-can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed...” (*Centesimus Annus* 39). In this way consumerism is the venom that kills the essence and the soul of the family as a structure. This is because “the goals of each individuals as well as the values and beliefs of their culture” (Campbell 2010:283) as individuals alienate the communal culture. Thus the “affluent have become the victims of their own desires”, as Conradie (2009:31) puts it.

Behavioural patterns like this in any given community lead to the degradation of human dignity and self-destruction. This comes as no surprise, since it appears that the fabric of cultural values that kept communities together are no longer practiced and visible in communities especially in rural Kwazulu-Natal. The above statement is linked to my experience and what I have observed is that there is a lack of sharing of resources that prompts young women to leave their homes to seek greener pastures in the cities. All this contributes negatively to society at large, because what is affecting families and communities also affects the culture of people.

The second factor is environmental destruction. Addressing this issue, Andrew Gibson (2011:171) highlights that “[h]igh upon a list is the view that consumerism is linked to wasteful forms of industrial production that may well be leading us toward ‘planetary ecocide’ and ‘cultural paralysis.’” According to Santmire (2010:332), “consumerism means nothing less than the threatened End of Nature ... sufferings and the destruction of many species, as well.” Shukla (2009) similarly asserts that “consumerism has also resulted in ecological imbalances. The natural habitat is being destroyed to create more goods and build more buildings, affecting the weather... which results in global warming...” Though not mentioned by these authors, this cry calls for responsible stewardship whereby people will start responding with respect towards nature. As O’Murchu (1991:160) stresses: “[we are] called to be stewards (not masters) of creation...”, therefore consumerist behaviour should be controlled for the purpose of preserving nature.

#### ***2.4. The Effects of Consumerism in the Church***

Consumerism has managed to find its way into the spaces of worship since its culture has affected even those who constitute the congregation. These bring with them their adulterated ideas thus disturbing the equilibrium and the smooth running of the church. On the other hand, it is not easy for the church to divorce itself from this world since it is of the people of this world. Evy McDonald in Conradie (2008:54) also laments this drifting of the church into consumerism, thus saying

A theology of consumption began to invade our culture - and our churches. Slowly, almost imperceptively, we wandered away from the foundational teachings of Jesus - sharing our wealth, identifying with the marginalized, living a life of grateful stewardship – and began to identify our worth with how much money we made or how many possessions we owned. ... We need to ask ourselves: What do we worship? The gospel of Matthew warns us that ‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ (Mt. 6:21). All too often our treasure lie tucked away in the department store sale.

The church finds itself being part of consumerism to the extent of promoting it. This results in the church succumbing to it, with both positive and negative effects as will be illustrated below.

##### ***2.4.1. Positive Effects of Consumerism in the Church***

The positive contribution of consumerism is that people can worship where they are comfortable, for it is no longer obligatory to attend church where one is disenchanted. Conradie explains this better. People “select a church that will cater for their needs, where

they can find their preferred mode of worship and where they can associate with people with whom they feel at home” (2009:63). This sounds like the fulfilment of the message of Jesus who “proclaims liberating news in the midst of our very poverty-not by denying our poverty, but by setting us free from the oppression and blindness which would have us deny it and enslave ourselves” (Setmeyer, 2010:309). In other words, consumerism brought freedom of worship to people.

#### ***2.4.2. Negative Effects of Consumerism in the Church***

Within the freedom of choice where one feels comfortable to worship there is also a dark side of consumerism in the sense that the gospel message no longer only conveys the good news, and no longer remains the healing word of Christ. The church itself has become a product of consumerism in a sense that it has to market itself as a product that is in demand on the market (cf. Conradie 2009:63-65). This notion is evident in the emerging churches, whose leadership and membership are perceivably protagonists of the consumerist lifestyle.

The gospel of prosperity promotes false doctrine. The emerging churches, such as Pentecostal churches, are the ones most associated with this notion (cf. 2009:62). David Jones (2013:1), in his article “Errors of the Prosperity Gospel”, asserts that the prosperity gospel “teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy.” This is true; God wants everyone to be free from any form of suffering, but the manner in which the message is conveyed is of concern, because it distorts the true meaning of the gospel and confuses people who have no hermeneutical background.

Examples hereof are the following: Telling people who are HIV and AIDS positive that blessed/holy water will heal HIV and AIDS<sup>13</sup> is deceitful, creating false hope and putting the life of those affected in jeopardy. The facts are misleading, medically and scientifically incorrect, since the cure for HIV and AIDS has not yet been established and researchers continue with their investigations.<sup>14</sup> The pastor is thus dishonest and is compromising the integrity of the Gospel, instead of promoting sound Christian morals, good sexual conduct, meticulous care during blood transfusions and a disposition that may lead to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

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<sup>13</sup><http://www.enca.com/south-africa/hivaids-holy-water-cure-put-test>. Accessed 01/10/2014.

<sup>14</sup><http://www.enca.com/south-africa/hivaids-holy-water-cure-put-test>. Accessed 01/10/2014

The gospel of prosperity also fuels greed instead of encouraging conversion of souls. Jones (2013:1) further asserts that “Teachers of the prosperity gospel encourage their followers to pray for and even demand material flourishing from God,” pretending that the Gospel can be used as a wealth generating mechanism. Lee Grady (2013)<sup>15</sup> in the article “5 Ways the Prosperity Gospel is Hurting Africa,” laments that the “prosperity gospel teaches people to focus on getting, not giving... Church members are continually urged to sow financial seeds to reap bigger and bigger rewards” (2013). The same notion is found in Jones (2013) who quotes Gloria Copeland who preached: “Give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000...in short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.” This practice does not attempt to bring people back to God or help them to understand the gospel values but is about the pastors earning themselves fame and wealth using the word of God. It leads to irresponsible stewardship. This collides with the gospel truth because the preachers of the prosperity gospel use the gospel to justify their demands put on people, instead of being good guides. To this Pope John Paul II urges that “the sons and daughters of the Church must serve as examples and guides they are called upon, in conformity with the program announced by Jesus himself...”<sup>16</sup> In this context, the Bible is used to fulfil the greed of the preacher. And this keeps poor people in poverty, for in blind obedience they believe that when they give everything to God, they will in turn be rewarded a hundred fold.

Another shocking factor is the division that it brings among the members of the congregation in the sense that it creates segregation between the rich and the poor. This is encouraged by the pastors who instead of preaching, boast “about how much they paid for suits, shoes, necklaces and watches ... They tell their followers that spirituality is measured by whether they have a big house or a first-class ticket” (Grady, 2013). Only the rich can keep up with the standards and demands of the pastor, whilst the poor are left behind because they cannot reach the imposed demands. When this prosperity gospel that portrays the message of self-praise and encourages materialism reaches the ears of young women, even those in rural KwaZulu-Natal, what gain does it hold for them other than to encourage them to accumulate more material goods? This could be another factor that lures young women into the realm of aimlessly wanting more and to have more than they already have, because that is the gospel (good news/“divine truth”) preached to them. These misleading teachings and practices appear to hold great attraction, especially among young people, and inculcate materialistic

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<sup>15</sup><http://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/19113-5way...> Accessed 01/01/2014.

<sup>16</sup>[www.Rider.edu/files/ccm-overconsumption.pdf](http://www.Rider.edu/files/ccm-overconsumption.pdf). Accessed 02.06.2013.



values of discontent. These foster an insatiable desire and quest to want and to have more as they subscribe to the prevailing culture of these churches. Based on such evidence, it seems justified to claim that this part of the church has drifted away from the core values that it ought to represent.

This practice comes as a challenge to the mainline churches who will then try to keep up with the standard so as not to lose membership. “Others try to cater for various needs by creating various options for religious consumers...” (Conradie 2009:64). Besides this attempt, the mainline churches are not innocent of the vices of the prosperity gospel because they have a way of getting the same message across. The mainline churches are disciplined because of their formation that their pastors have to undergo (differing according to different denominations); therefore it is not easy to proclaim a prosperity gospel. But a closer observation reveals that these aspects are also there in a different form. Though not preaching prosperity, they seem to have fallen strongly into the vices of consumerism and this is seen by the type of car or house the congregation has to purchase for the pastor. This is how consumerism has contaminated the church.<sup>17</sup> This commodification of Christianity, as Conradie (2009) calls it, not only affects culture and the church but it goes down to young people who finds themselves also having to keep up with the demands of the time.

### ***2.5. The Effects of Consumerism among the Youth***

It is important to mention that there is hardly any literature written about the youth in rural areas in South Africa, and KwaZulu-Natal in particular; therefore this paper will engage the literature that describes youth culture in the world. Consumerism has had a negative influence on society, from culture to spaces of worship in both rural and urban areas. This has also affected young people, including those in rural areas, particularly those who have access to television (cf. Conradie 2009:11). Unfortunately, its impact on the youth is not constructive for community building. This is because consumerism has introduced new ways of doing things which the youth have subscribed to and have normalized it as a model for life. Consumerism’s urgency “appears as one symptom of the wider impatient and acquisitive mind-set of the youth: an overall desirous orientation that itself consumes or devours the young minds and lives” (Pietilä, 2013:147). This mind-set prompts the youth to want to express themselves in a way that will free them from that which holds them to the society

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<sup>17</sup>This is seen in the literature of Ernst Conradie (2006) in *Christianity and Ecological Theology, The Church and Climate Change* (2008), Adam Setmeyer (2010). Consumerism, Catholicism, and Hall’s Theology of the Cross, in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*.

they belong. On the other hand, it leads them to develop their own culture influenced by consumerism.

### ***2.5.1. Youth Culture as a Sub-culture in Society***

At this juncture a definition of youth culture is imperative in order to understand this subject clearly. The definition below describes how youth culture is a sub-culture within the main culture'. In his book *The Youth Culture*, Dan O'Sullivan (1974) illustrates culture as follows:

Culture; sub-culture [:] The usual meaning of culture is 'high culture': all the music, art and literature that form our heritage. One could argue that the appreciation of this type of culture can be initiated only by a long period of education ... Social scientists, however, use the term to mean the whole way of life of a particular society including its laws, religion and language. By sub-culture they usually mean a group of people who have their own life, but who are living geographically inside the main culture. The term youth culture is used in this sense (:21).

In the light of this definition, the implication is that the youth find themselves being faced with life challenges that are created by their sub-culture. These challenges influence everything around them, including cultural values, knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law and custom as mentioned by Slonim (1991:4).

Cloete provides a brief background on where the title 'youth culture' originated. She states that the use of the term 'youth' came into existence after the "Industrial Revolution by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries" (2012:1). Before these centuries, child labour was common, resulting in the lack of distinction between children and adults - children were counted among adults who were working class. It was only in 1904 that the term adolescent, teenagers or youth came into use through the writings of Stanley Hall. Thus a new culture for young people emerged as a youth culture, which was further developed in schools (cf. Cloete 2012:1). She further quotes Miles (2000:11), who suggests "that a better conceptual understanding of youth is not to focus on the characteristics of young people of a particular age but rather to try to conceptualise youth as a way of life" (Cloete 2012:2).

Even though the above statement suggests that it is best to conceptualize youth as a way of life, I argue that it is also necessary to describe it by its characteristics in order to understand what youth culture is. Since in African culture a child belongs to society, as individualism is discouraged (cf. Masango 2006), this paper will describe youth according to its characteristics. To paint a clear picture of youth culture, Michael Brake (1985) refers to Parsons (1942, 1950) who describes select characteristics of this culture. "[t]he characteristics

he describes suggest high school teenage culture, concern with glamour, looking attractive, having fun, all located in the educational system” (:40). Although not comprehensive, these characteristics are also true of South African youth. The following section further explores the characteristics of youth culture.

### **2.5.2. *The Characteristics of Youth Culture: Identity Construction***

Campbell (2010:294) asserts that “consumers cannot be both materialistic and engaged in identity-construction.” No matter how true this can be, it is within the cultural context of consumerism that the youth construct their identity. Youth culture displays itself through its own peculiar characteristics which unfold in many ways and it also possesses many characteristics which are derived from consumerist culture. Cara Heaven and Matthew Tubridy (2013:152) mentions that “Identity structures the way persons understand themselves and their world in both a descriptive and a perspective sense.” Young people are curious and are ready to explore and venture into the unknown. Therefore they will always identify with something or someone that can enable them to express themselves freely. To illustrate this, an example of a youth culture known as the *Izikhothane* will be described. *Izikhothane* is a youth culture popular in the Gauteng province, East Rand and Soweto. This is a group of youth within South African culture that identifies with a culture of bragging and acts of waste.<sup>18</sup> This new culture among youth has become popular “from its roots on the East Rand, the culture has spread to township across greater Johannesburg and who knows where else”.<sup>19</sup> For more clarity, the definition of the word *Izikhothane* will be expounded on.

The word *izikhothane* is derived from a Zulu proverb *ukukhotha* which is ‘to lick’, and *ukukhothana* means ‘lick each other’. Nyembezi and Nxumalo (1966:202) use the proverb ‘*Ukukhotha ubhici- Ukusiza umuntu ekuhluphekeni okukhulu*’ (:202). This means to lick the secretion of the eye; it is to help the other person who is seriously afflicted by a problem. By licking the eye of someone you are removing the exposed secretion that is obvious to everyone’s sight; this also means to hide somebody else’s shame, especially in cases occurring in a poverty stricken environment.

However, this youth culture does not seem to derive its practices from the above proverb, because the youth’s practices are contrary to the proverb. Instead the youth culture of

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<sup>18</sup><http://www.activateleadership.co.za/blog/izikhothane-clever-statement-or-waste-of-youth-have-your-say>. Accessed 02.07.2013.

<sup>19</sup>[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=529510863729854&story\\_fbid=39873](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=529510863729854&story_fbid=39873). Accessed 2013/07/04.

*Izikhothane* promotes and encourages arrogant behaviour, promotes unpleasantness in society and results in irresponsibility among the youth. This is well-put in *The Star* newspaper posted on Tuesday March 12, 2013. *The Star* reported that

*Izikhothane*, the Zulu word for “those who lick”, have gained an infamous reputation for their acts of waste- they tear up or burn wads of cash, designer clothes and shoes, and recklessly slosh expensive alcohol on the ground.<sup>20</sup>

Such incidents were also reported by Des Motloutsi, who expressed his dismay: “I could not believe what was happening. Notes were flying all over and people were pushing each other while catching the money. *Izikhothane* were also spilling expensive liquor.”<sup>21</sup> Apart from deviating from the word *ukukhotha*, this behaviour is the opposite of *ukukhothana* because there is no sympathising with the needy and the poor in these acts. This is how the youth culture of *Ubukhothane* is displaying itself, thus going against the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality that these young people should be learning.

Nonetheless, youth culture is not in itself a destructive phenomenon. It is only when it goes to the other extremes, like *Izikhothane*'s practice, that it becomes destructive and affects society negatively. Rather, youth culture is important because it shapes young people and helps them to find their identities. This identity construction affects the entire behaviour of the youth and displays itself also in fashion, music and in sexuality.

### ***2.5.2.1.Fashion and the Youth***

It is typical for girls to look glamorous and presentable. This stylish look makes them fit in, either in their perception of society or among their peers. Youth shine when it comes to creating their own style - whether acceptable or not in community, as long as it suits them. On the other hand, marketing pushes certain fashions to attract youth minds and prompt them to want to have that particular fashion. Bogatsu (2009) explains that clothing –for example, in the context of South Africa, smart expensive clothing – though it may be a sign of affiliation, may not communicate a fundamentally ‘township look’ (:5). For example, a glamorous look is not an urban look only; this fashion has also reached the rural areas. The two examples show that fashion can create one’s identity and a sense of belonging, such as that projected in *Izikhothane*.

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<sup>20</sup><http://www.activateleadership.co.za/blog/izikhothane-clever-statement-or-waste-of-youth-have-your-say>. Accessed 02.07.2013.

<sup>21</sup><http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2012/11/15/izikhothane-tear-up-r100-notes>. Accessed 02.07.2013.

Lebo Motsegoa (2013), in the newspaper *The Star*, describes the *Izikhothane*'s identity in terms of their fashion. They wear floral shirts, Muracchini t-shirts, and different colours of the same Rozmola's expensive shoes - this applies to both girls and boys. A documentary broadcast by the TV show *3<sup>rd</sup> Degree* showcased the extravagant life this youth is living. In this show two young women were interviewed on their consumerist lifestyle; Nellie, living an affluent life, expressed that more than being *isikhothane*, she enjoys fashion to an extent that each time there is new fashion she has to buy it. She voiced that her father bought her a Blackberry Z10 in addition to other two expensive phones she already owns. Another interviewee by the name of Lerato admitted being part of the *Izikhothane*. She displayed her wardrobe of expensive clothing and shoes; for her buying was not a problem. She claimed that her mother works and her father is a celebrity so she can afford to wear whatever she wants.<sup>22</sup> Clearly these two young women will not understand a simple lifestyle because their lives prove their desire to keep up with the consumerist lifestyle that has become a culture in our society.

Consumerist lifestyle is the only requirement to belong to this group - you have to buy the most expensive clothes which require huge amounts of money. This is where the problem begins. If parents cannot afford this fashion, the decision is made to get employment. In the case of young women of rural KwaZulu-Natal, they will make their way to the city with their deceivers in hope of getting gainful occupation. Thus "There appears to be substantial evidence to suggest that consumerism plays a key role in structuring aspects of young people's lifestyle" (Miles Stephens 2000:98).

#### ***2.5.2.2. Music and the Youth***

Fashion shows how the youth create their look. Even though fashion and music go together in the youth culture, music also plays an important role in this culture. It is also necessary to say that music varies and affects different people in different ways. Since this paper is in a South African context, the famous genre that will be used to illustrate this is *Kwaito*. *Kwaito* emerged in the 1990's and carried with it political and historical awareness. It is also known for its sassiness, promoting immorality and vices of consumerism, all of which are against the values that promote morality in society (cf. Pietila 2013).

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<sup>22</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvt7fm9pjkw>. Accessed 29/09/2014.

A critique is that its “focus on bodily enjoyment, fashionable clothes, and expensive cars signals empty-minded and imitative consumerism” (Pietilä 2013:151). Nonetheless, it seems that there is more to it that attracts young people into this music. Willis states that it is “the beat and the rhythm that they [young people] liked when accounting for their own musical tastes” (1990:65). Though writing from an English context, Willis further clarifies that “people who liked ‘house music’, dressed in the ‘house style’” (:88). The type of music (genre) always goes with a type of dance and style of dress - the same applies to *Kwaito*.

Angela McRobbie (2000:147) brings in the gender perspective by highlighting that though the rhythm can be the same, females’ expression of music differs from that of males. Feminine expression differs in the sense that women’s music “symbolizes the world that is ‘naturally’ theirs – the world of the emotions, of caring, feeling, loving and sacrificing,” but whether this applies to all cultures is another story.

If this is true, fashionable music is not all bad noise, but it also educates and instils pride in women’s sexuality, and in turn teaches a woman these values in a different form. This means that it can all be *Kwaito*, but its expression of femininity and masculinity will not be the same. McRobbie (2000:139) accentuates that rock music shapes how their users formulate their own sexuality. She asserts that “... rock operates both as a form of sexual expression and as a form of sexual control.” She elaborates how both the male and the female act differently in expressing themselves in music. She notes that “masculinity in rock is not determined by one all-embracing definition. Rather, rock offers...heterosexual expression” (:142). This takes us to the next level - that of sexuality and the youth.

### ***2.5.2.3. Sexuality and the Youth***

“Sexuality is a broad area of study related to an individual’s sex, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation.”<sup>23</sup> Unlike fashion and music which is external, sexuality is intimate and rather more of a personal factor. Schneiders (1986:135) defines sexuality as a “capacity for freely chosen relationships, relationships with people of both sexes, relationships of equality, respect, and friendship which may or may not be sexually expressed.” This definition shows that sexuality is a relational behaviour that challenges people to identify themselves within a sphere of community. But unfortunately with the influence of new trends that are invading the community, the dignity of sexuality is fading

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<sup>23</sup>[www.apa.org/topics/orientation.html](http://www.apa.org/topics/orientation.html). Accessed 07.07. 2013.

away in the communities. Consumerism has made it normal for people to engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour in the sense that they can change partners as often as they like.

In this way, sexual activity is commercialized amongst the youth to the extent of making it a competition about how often a person has been engaged in it. Studies conducted amongst young people on sexuality in England revealed that “over half of the respondents had reportedly had sexual intercourse before the age of 18” (Plant & Plant 1992:90), whereas Cloete (2015:5) reveals that in South Africa “The risky sexual behaviour of youth, such as engaging in sexual intercourse at a very young age (e.g. 12-13 years old) and having multiple sexual partners, gives the impression that they are misinformed with the matter...” This is a sign that consumerism has overshadowed sound cultural values in society whereby people were educated about the virtuous meaning of life. This irresponsible behaviour indicates that there is an outcry for guidance and morality in our society. To confirm this, Cloete (2012:4) raises a concern that

Youngsters need guidance on how to understand what is happening to them emotionally, physically and spiritually with regard to their sexual development, as well as guidance on how to respond appropriately to these changes in their bodies which affect their whole life.

Guidance will help young people learn about the importance of life and teach them the kind of moral behaviour that will earn them dignity in the future. This does not mean that young people do not hold morals, but immorality can come from the external sources that they are attracted to, such as the vices of consumerism, that will lead them to exploitative behaviour and cause self-damage. This is what is missing in the trends of youth culture - the instilling of good values that will enhance young people’s growth towards being responsible future leaders of tomorrow.

## ***2.6. Conclusion***

This chapter has focused on the influence of consumerist behaviour, and its constructive and destructive effects on society. Consumerism also affects the spaces of worship whereby the prosperity gospel has become the sermon of the times instead of those that preach the Good News to the poor. This phenomenon is growing like yeast in dough and has extended to young people who in turn have developed their culture through the influence of consumerism. Through fashion, music and sexuality, their identity is constructed.

## Chapter Three

### The Background of the Religious Vow of Poverty

#### *3.0. Introduction*

In order to comprehend the concept of the theological values one will need to understand the background of the vow of poverty, therefore this chapter will basically give a brief overview of the evangelical counsels according to the tradition of the Catholic Church. A religious vow of poverty is one of those rare religious commitments that are premised on a wide range of theological moral values, such as simplicity, sharing, hospitality and environmental stewardship, and so on. The vow of poverty is probably almost the only religious commitment that openly and deliberately promotes a lifestyle that is directly in opposition to that of consumerism. It is for this reason that it made sense to use this vow as a theoretical framework upon which this study is based. It is also necessary to mention that besides the vow of poverty, there are other two vows of chastity and obedience. In order to give the meaning of the vows one has to explain them within the context of religious life, of which a brief background will be given.

#### *3.1.A Brief Background to Religious Life in the Catholic Church*

As mentioned earlier, the history of the vow of poverty can hardly be dealt with separately from the history of religious life; hence I would like to begin this section with a brief history of religious life. In this paper the religious life I will be talking about is that of the Roman Catholic Church, bearing in mind that there is also religious life in other denominations, such as the Orthodox, Anglicans and Lutherans. Orthodox religious life shares the common history of monasticism with the Catholic Church because its roots also derive from St Antony of Egypt.<sup>24</sup> Lutheran and Anglican religious life emerged with Reformation in the history of the Church and are still viable today. These communities also take vows of poverty, obedience and chastity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>[File:///C:/Users/general/AppData/Local/Temp/CW3Z21T1.hmt](file:///C:/Users/general/AppData/Local/Temp/CW3Z21T1.hmt). Accessed 2014/10/22.

<sup>25</sup><http://conciliaranglican.com/2013/07/08/ask-an-anglican-what-is-anglican-monasticism/> Accessed 2014/10/17.  
<http://arlife.org.uk/about-the-religious-life>. Accessed 2014/10/17.



Religious life, according to Schneiders (2000:xxiii), is “a form of life in the Roman Catholic Church characterized by the lifelong profession<sup>26</sup> of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience according to the approved constitutions of a particular order or congregation.” Throughout history, religious life has passed through various phases of development within a particular era. This is seen where different authors give different accounts of the beginning of religious life. Some trace it as far back as the New Testament era, while others locate it in the second to third century period. Religious life, like any other form of life with culture, has evolved from its beginning up to the present moment and over time; it has taken a different form and shaped itself according to a particular epoch in history. Schneiders (2000:9) postulates that “Religious Life is a *state of life*, like marriage,” therefore it is as ancient a practice as marriage. Scholars such as Arbuckle and Fleming (1990) bring in the aspect of the New Testament as the origin of religious life. Arbuckle and Fleming (:4) assert that,

In late New Testament times, the very first, at best implicit, beginnings of religious life existed in the small groupings of lay women who were either widows or virgins living in community. The widows engaged in what might be called a rudimentary apostolic life; the virgins lived in secluded life of prayer and asceticism.

O’Murchu (1991:62) traces religious life even further to the Old Testament period. He comments that if the

prophetic tradition of the Old Testaments becomes predominantly a communitarian movement in the New Testament times...is it not possible that the early Christian communities referred to in Acts 2:44ff. and 4:32ff. are in fact, the first monks?

O’Murchu (1991) argues that the prophetic tradition which was communitarian might have been the religious movement of the Old Testament times. Therefore the text of the early Christian community from the Acts of the Apostle 2:44 which says, “[a]nd all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed” was a model of religious life up until today. But it was not the first communitarian movement of that time since he lifts the Old Testament up as an example. While these authors trace the history of religious life from the biblical times, other authors take it from the early centuries of Christianity, beginning

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<sup>26</sup>For the meaning of profession see: Schneiders, S. 2001. *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life*. Pgs 100-114. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press; Schneiders, S. 2013. *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World*. Pg 229. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press.

with the virgins and ascetics which will be dealt with later in this paper. Schneiders (2000) comments on the transformation of religious life in a sense that religious life was and is still characterized by the vows of chastity, obedience and poverty. These vows are at the heart of religious life, and although three in number, they are interrelated, for one vow enhances the other.

### ***3.2. Definition of a Vow***

A vow is a solemn promise that a person takes in religious life as a sign of giving her/his life to God to serve within a certain congregation or order. There are three common vows—those of poverty, obedience and chastity, with the exception of the Benedictine community that takes the fourth vow of stability and also some other communities who take as an extra vow, the vow of silence. Vows can be made in public or private even though the *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (1192) states that

The distinction between a public and private vow is not exact because members of some secular institutes and some associations of the faithful take vows which are accepted by a legitimate superior, yet these are considered private vows or, in the case of secular institutes, “semi-public vows”. A more accurate distinction, modelled on the difference between solemn and simple vows, is simply this: a public vow is one which is recognized as such by the Church; otherwise it is private.

A public vow is usually professed in the presence of a delegate of the Church which in many instances is the superior; habitually it is carried out when a person professes the first or the final vows in the Church. This is the “promise underpinning a commitment to God or to another person” (O’Murchu 1999:21). In religious life it is a promise between a person, who commits her/himself, and God. In marriage it is a promise between spouses in the presence of God. It is important to be aware that it is not only religious people who take a vow; married people also bind themselves with a vow which they make before God and to each other through their matrimonial vows, and both must be “fulfilled by virtue of religion” (CCL 1191). Promising under a vow is as solemn as making an oath (cf. O’Murchu 1999:21). The same notion is found in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2003:590) which states that “Frequently a vow was accompanied by an oath invoking a curse if the vow was broken. When...fulfilled, Gods praises were sung.”

Schneiders’ (1986:54) interpretation on individual vows asserts that the “vow was defined as solemn promise made to God to do something supererogatory and more pleasing to God than

its opposite.” Those who profess these vows are obliged to be faithful in keeping them in the Church and the community at large. For the purposes of those who may not be familiar with the three vows in the Catholic Church, the next section will offer a brief overview of each vow. It should be noted that one cannot talk about the vow of poverty and totally exclude obedience and chastity because these three are interconnected and depend on the other.

### **3.2.1. *The Vow of Obedience***

The vow of obedience is the vow whereby each religious person is obliged to listen to the other. This vow requires respect and self-discipline because every member of the community has to be listened to. This self-discipline is what makes people humble, which enables them to give respect to the superiors who are leading figures of the community and to some extent acting on behalf of God. Martin O’Reilly (1996:175) asserts that “The word, *obedience*, is derived from the Latin words *ob-audire*, meaning to listen attentively.” This vow helps members of a community live together in harmony without succumbing to one another but with due respect; “when a brother or sister speaks and is listened to, religious then believe that God’s will is revealed” (:175). Obedience means a careful critical listening in a sober state of mind so that a decision under obedience may not be harmful to the individual or for the community but instead it should be constructive for every member of the community.

On the whole, obedience encourages self-discipline and harmony in community life. It also encourages mutual discernment in order to be able to discern the will of God. The vow of obedience is the vow that has been highlighted from the early centuries in the Church. Aumann (1985:41-2) asserts that “obedience was the very foundation of the cenobitic life-obedience to the rule and to the superior,” so that there can be submission, listening and mutuality among the community members.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.2.2. *The Vow of Celibacy/Chastity***

Consecrated celibacy is a life freely chosen in response to God’s call whereby a person commits her/himself to God; they choose not to be married so that they may avail themselves freely to God’s people. Schneiders (2000:117) defines this vow as follows

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<sup>27</sup> For more literature on the vow of obedience, see: O’Murchu (1991), Schneiders (1986, 2000, 2001 and 2013).

Consecrated celibacy is the freely chosen response to a personally discerned vocation to charismatically grounded, religiously motivated, sexuality abstinent, lifelong commitment to Christ that is externally symbolized by remaining unmarried.

Chastity is the vow that binds all the vows because it expresses the love that embraces all three vows. In other words, if one has no love, one will be unable to be faithful to other vows. Nwagwu (2007) defines chastity in terms of the African context. She says “[c]onsecrated chastity focuses on the purity and selflessness of love; love for God that enables the human heart to express love for others, especially the poor, the needy, without asking and hoping anything in return” (:136). She relates this with the African virtues of love and sacrifice that African people live in their everyday life. She further asserts that chastity “ensures self-mastery and discipline over the senses and passions” (2008:147). One may stress that all this is done outside the state of marriage, because the emphasis is on purity of heart which is believed to be gained by being celibate and this self-giving to God is done out of one’s free will.<sup>28</sup>

Owing to the centrality of the vow of poverty in this study, a slightly more detailed look at this vow is offered below.

### **3.2.3. *The Vow of Poverty***

Although the young women who are the concern of this paper are not committed to this vow, this vow is discussed here in order to enable understanding of what is it about. The vow of poverty is a voluntary act that calls to those who have professed it to live a simple lifestyle whereby one is detached from all material things and is sharing their resources freely with the world. This is a consecrated poverty that religious people, meaning those who chose to consecrate themselves to God, choose to live, opting for a “real possessionlessness” (Schneiders 2013:232) lifestyle. This means that “they abrogated the conditions of selfish, greed, competition, envy, domination, and violence that warred against the life of love they aspire to ...” (Schneiders 2001:112). The document of the Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis* (13) expresses this as the “voluntary poverty” which should be cultivated “diligently and if needs be, express it in new forms.” This is a vow freely chosen, by those who commit themselves to God in religious life. This does not mean that Religious should be poverty stricken but it means that Religious deny themselves material things and a wealthy

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<sup>28</sup>More literature on chastity/celibacy see: Azevedo (1985), O’Murchu (1991), Schneiders (1986, 2000, 2001).

lifestyle. For more clarity, Schneiders (2013:226) explains that “evangelical poverty involves a commitment to the abolition of material destitution, which is an evil not intended by God and inimical to human dignity.”

“Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic exhortation of His Holiness, on the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council,” asserts that through following Christ, religious should desire “to live in poverty in the use of this world’s goods which are necessary for your daily sustenance” (:16). In addition to this they “should willingly contribute part of what they possess for the other needs of the Church and for the support of the poor...” (*PC* 13). Furthermore Schneiders (1986:190) asserts that “Religious poverty is an evangelically inspired and structured relationship to material creation which involves owning well, using well, and suffering well for the purpose of transforming human existence, our own included.” This is the poverty that religious profess. She further clarifies that,

In principle, it means to participate prophetically in the human effort to convert the race from exploitation to responsible stewardship, to liberate the poor by an equitable distribution of goods, to create economic structures which will effectively relate finite resources to human ends. But it also means to model a sharing of life through a sharing of goods that expresses a Christian experience of poverty of spirit.

Schneiders has articulated the meaning of this vow according to religious life. This type of poverty is not the evil poverty that is imposed on the innocents through some form of deprivation and dehumanisation in their lives. However, it is the poverty which the Church calls the poverty of Spirit which will be discussed in the next session.

In an attempt to clarify the meaning of the vow of poverty Schneiders (1986:169), brings in a new word, “analogous.”

An analogous term is one which is used of a number of realities to which the term applies in a way that is both somewhat the same and somehow different... [w]e can speak of a poor person, poor soil, a poor idea, a poor joke, poor taste, a poor excuse; of material, intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, cultural, physical poverty, all this suggests that something is not enough. [She further explains that] [p]overty is, first and properly, the lack of sufficient material goods. [She explains this by raising a question] whether poverty of spirit, the virtue of poverty to which all Christian aspire and which religious make the object of a vow, is actually an analogue of poverty, i.e., kind of poverty, or whether it has another relationship to poverty which is being obscured or confused by a literalist understanding term.

Schneiders seem to raise the concern about the misunderstanding of religious poverty, at the same time clarifying what religious poverty is in comparison to economic poverty. She shows the dissimilarities between the religious vow of poverty and the poverty as in a form of devastation. Alcock (2006:64) describes the latter as being below the subsistence level, and referring to Townsend who defines it as a “lack of resources” in one’s life. But the religious poverty, as Schneiders (1986) emphasizes, is poverty of spirit which energizes and inspires those who profess it as a virtuous life. Instead of associating poverty with evil, which is imposed on people, with the vow of poverty, she enlightens us that the vow of poverty is a virtue in a sense that religious seek to distance themselves from wealth and material products while choosing to live a simple lifestyle.

Religious poverty does not suggest destitution or spiritual powerlessness in order for it to be fruitful, but it allows one to have the freedom to give oneself as an offering to God without any reservations. Since poverty is explained as a deficiency of something, religious poverty according to Schneiders (1986:171) “is not an analogue of real poverty,” but it is a self-sacrificial life that one chooses in order to reach out to those who are caught up and forced into evil poverty – and the undesirable behaviour and situations such poverty leads people into as a consequence. Christian Jayakumar (1999:9) elaborates that “powerlessness and hopelessness reinforce each other to hold the poor in permanent captivity within a vicious cycle of deprivation.” This is not the poverty to which religious are called to. Unlike the religious poverty which is lived out of love, these hopelessness and powerlessness cause undesirable behaviour to those subjected to it. In order to explain voluntary poverty further, the next section will look at poverty of spirit, and how it enables voluntary poverty among religious.

### ***3.2.3.1. Poverty of Spirit***

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3). It is likely that the Church based the notion of poverty of spirit on this text, because it stresses that “Religious should be poor in fact and in spirit, having their treasure in heaven” (PC 13). This is the poverty of total dependence on God both for the community and the individual. This total dependence, on the other hand, does not mean that “community [can] sit in chapel expecting a financial windfall to eliminate debt and pay the bills” (Schneiders 2013:298). But

it means that the community has the right to raise their own income for their living, and has to share things for the use of common good instead of individuals owning them. O'Murchu (1999:79) writes of the effect of the non-possessive attachment inherent in poverty of spirit. For those professing this vow, their "radical availability to God automatically means a richly endowed participation in the unfolding reign of God, characterized by justice, love, peace, and liberation." Further he asserts that "[b]eing poor in spirit is not a precondition for entry into God's New Reign; it is about participation in the process of its unfolding and growth," which Schneiders (2013:299) stresses is "undertook by a vow of life rooted in complete dispossession." This is to confirm that it is only God who grants the grace to God's people in order for them to be able to continue the mission that Jesus began in this world. It is this poverty that enables religious people, who could have enjoyed their wealth, to share with others. In this context of this study, it is the hope to share with young women in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

### ***3.3. Conclusion***

This chapter explained the vow of poverty and its contemporary meaning in order to further understanding of the vow and shed light on its significance. For more clarity, religious life was traced as far back as the New Testament and the definition of the vow was given according to the Catholic Church. Because the nature of this vow is interwoven with the vows of obedience and chastity, the latter was also briefly explained. The following chapter will go deeper in endeavouring to trace the origin of the vow of poverty in the Catholic Church.

## Chapter Four

### A Brief Historical Background of the Development of the Vow of Poverty

#### *4.0. Introduction*

In chapter three, the meaning of the evangelical counsels with a special focus on the vow of poverty was given. This chapter will further trace the history of the vow from the beginning up to the current period. Given the centrality as well as the relevance of this vow for this study, this chapter will focus on the development of the vow of poverty in general. To do that the chapter will consist of a brief historical overview of the vow of poverty wherein the vow of poverty will be located within the rich and long history of the Catholic Church including specific tradition(s) of the Catholic Church of which it is part.

Given the obviously broad and diverse history of the Catholic Church, only carefully selected phases of this history (as represented by certain leading figures of the Catholic tradition) will be included in this background. It is also beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a comprehensive account, a broad survey or an extensive analysis of various reforms that characterise the development of this vow in the history of the Catholic Church and its different strands. In other words, the chapter will merely cover some of the easily detectable traces and ways in which the vow of poverty has been practised over centuries, beginning with the virgins and ascetics and up to the current era, particularly as this found expression in various leading figures such as St Antony, St Augustine, St Benedict, St Francis of Assisi and others within the Catholic tradition.<sup>29</sup>

#### *4.1. The Virgins and the Ascetics in the East*

The virgins and ascetics were men and women who desired to dedicate their lives to God and live a life of asceticism and virginity. Jo Ann Kay McNamara (1996:63) highlights that “Asceticism (and virginity) was a rejection of the world and the flesh.” These “[w]omen who sought an independent religious life, women who wanted to test the full range of their spiritual prowess ... fled to the desert” (1996:63). Depending on the location where these

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<sup>29</sup>For more literature on the historical background see: Swan, L 2001. *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women*. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press; Ramsey, B. 1986. The Center of Religious Poverty, in Fleming, S. J. (ed). *Paths of Renewal for Religious*. Pgs 128-138. Review for Religious: St Louis; Woods, R. 1998. *Mysticism and Prophecy: The Dominican Tradition*. Great Britain: Redwood Books.



were situated, “They were under the care of the local bishop and were frequently well-educated” (Sheldrake 1991:109). Even though different authors relate the origins of the virgins, they differ as to the time frame they set it in; for example, Aumann claims that “[t]here are numerous texts from the third century that describe the role of the virgins and other celibates in the life of the church...” (1985:36). In contrast to Aumann, Battelli (1990:5) asserts that “virgins and ascetics [were] found in all Christian communities” from the “first two centuries.” Although Schneiders (1986:48) does not specify the exact period, she highlights that “the first religious were the virgins and the widows of the first centuries of the Christian era.”

The widows and the virgins did not only spend time praying and fasting but they also engaged in social activities. Battelli (1990:6) asserts that “consecrated persons ... particularly the virgins and widows, [dedicated] themselves to works of mercy such as the care of orphans and sick people.” To support this, Sheldrake (1991:109) highlights that “virgins frequently gave hospitality to the needy and undertook various form of charity.” Having looked at the life of the virgins and ascetics one may then ask, what does this have to do with the vow of poverty? By rejecting the world, and through prayer and fasting as well as works of charity, the virgins and widows display the vow of poverty, as it is known today. This then developed into a more visible phenomenon in the Church – that of Christian monasticism in the East, from which the origin of religious life can be traced.

#### ***4.2. Christian Monasticism in the East***

According to O’Murchu (1991:62), “[m]ost historians opt for the second half of the third century (250-300 A.D) and trace the origins of monastic life mainly to Northern Egypt.” Early monastic life was of two types: that of eremitic or hermitage and that of the cenobitic life. Its origin is attributed to St Antony of Egypt. The hermit, “a young peasant orphan of relative affluence, experienced a conversion through hearing the gospel message of voluntary poverty (Matthew 19:21)” (McGinn 2002:134). “If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven” (Aumann 1985:135). To St Antony this invitation to follow Christ completely was the beginning of detachment from worldly things. In response to the call, Antony rid himself of all property as well as attachments, including his sister whom he entrusted to the convent. He retired to the desert at

age 20 and remained there until he departed this life at age 105 (cf. 1985:135). It is during this time that St Antony earned many followers through his wisdom and guidance to those who wished to lead an ascetic life; it is also this that made him the father of monasticism in the East. This then was the beginning of monasticism in the Church.

Then the solitary life developed into cenobitic life where people lived in communities. St Pachomius, “born about 209 in Upper Egypt, was a pagan Egyptian peasant press-ganged into the imperial army” (McGinn 2000:137). “Legend has it that about 323 an angel gave him a bronze tablet engraved with a rule charting the shift from eremitic solitude to a communal life combining shared living quarters, meals, and manual labour with solitary prayer, silence and contemplation” (McNamara 1996:70). This introduced new rules and regulations that had to be followed to keep the community serene. In addition to this, the monks had to live their daily lives as prescribed and “obedience to the superior” (Aumann1985:42). Formation was also introduced at this time as a form of initiating new members to rules and regulations of the monastery before they could become full members (cf. Aumann 1985).

It is this close look at the life of St Pachomius and his community as shown in this section that clearly indicates that self-sacrifice and discipline reflects what could be described as early expressions of the vow of poverty. This marked the beginning of structured community life in the East. Let us now turn towards the West and its development of the vow of poverty.

### ***4.3. Christian Monasticism in the West***

According to authors such as Aumann (1985) and Battelli (1990), it is possible that monasticism was brought to the West by the people who had been on pilgrimage in the East. Angelo Di Berardino (1986:26) is of the opinion that the “first monks to be seen in the West were companions of Saint Athanasius during his exile.” The important figures of monasticism in the West that will be looked at in this paper are St Augustine and St Benedict.

#### ***4.3.1. St Augustine***

St Augustine, an African born saint who is a well-known theologian of the early centuries, lived during 354-430. According to Aumann (1985:66), St Augustine came into “contact with the monastic life at Milan and in 386 he retired with a few companions to a quasi-monastic retreat.” His form of monasticism was different to that of St Pachomius and other

predecessors because he established a community of the “servants of God” which fostered “personal poverty and celibacy” (1985:66), and apostolic active life for men and women. This was a clerical type of community whereby religious had to reach out to the poor. Di Berardino explains that the “African monasteries served as places of refuge during the Vandal invasion” (1986:26).

The notion of personal poverty St Augustine introduced in his communities and the opening of houses where the poor and the devastated would receive refuge, clearly illustrates examples of the vow of poverty which has contributed to its current practice. This portrays a good example of hospitality that his monks and nuns practiced with the poor and oppressed. Against this background, it can be argued that St. Augustine’s theology had a major influence on the development of the vow of poverty.

#### ***4.3.2. St Benedict and the Benedictine Monasteries***

Another prominent figure whose contribution through his beliefs and teachings contributed significantly to the development of the vow of poverty is St Benedict of Nursia who lived during the years 480-547. St Benedict was “born of an illustrious family and was educated in Rome; he retired to a life of solitude at Subiaco, about forty miles from the city of Rome” (Aumann 1985:69). It was during this time that he received an invitation to be a spiritual director from the group of monks. However, he was unsuccessful, due to their failure to observe a monastic rule. He then left for Subiaco where he attracted many followers and in a short period had “organized twelve monasteries of twelve monks each, some with what is similar to the Lauras of St Pachomius in the East” (:69).

These lived a simple lifestyle without any basic rule for monasticism except that they were subject to the superior, in this case St Benedict, as the overall figure of the monasteries (cf. Aumann 1985:69). Unfortunately, St Benedict experienced a second rejection and left the monastery with a few companions for Monte Cassino “where he laid the foundations of the famous monastery” (Battelli 1990:12). This is where St Benedict wrote his classical rule for the Benedictine monasteries which still exists and is viable today. “Benedict wrote his Rule, which would become the monastic rule par excellence” (Battelli1990:12). Similarly, Aumann writes that “The Rule of St Benedict is the most influential document in all of Western

monasticism...” (1985:69). This earned St Benedict the title father of monasticism in the West.

Benedictine monasteries conceptualized poverty differently in a sense that the “monastery was a socially self-contained, economically self-sufficient unit of feudal society” (Schneiders (2013:382). But these still lived in poverty. To clarify this, Schneiders (1986:171) asserts that, “individual monastics had nothing of their own, but the monastery was a prosperous economic unit that provided comfortably for the needs of its members.” For income generating, “[t]he Benedictine tradition involves active cultivation both of the soil and the soul... reared cattle and horses, raised bees... They drained wetlands and irrigated fields” (Sutton 2012:29). In order to achieve this, a great deal of time was given to manual work “seven to eight hours per day,” and the monks were to “have enough food to eat and sleep” (Battelli1990:12). This did not only contribute to the vow of poverty, but it also marked the practice of stewardship within the Benedictine monasteries.

#### ***4.4. Middle Ages and the Mendicants Orders***

Benedictine monasteries proved to be prosperous communities whereby the monks generated income for the community’s sustainability. In contrast to this form of monasticism, the Middle Ages gave birth to a new form of monasticism that rejected wealth altogether. It is also during this period that the vow of poverty made a vast contribution in the Church through the mendicant orders.

Mendicancy is a movement that emerged between the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Italy and France. Mendicants lived on begging for their sustenance and walked barefooted as a sign of the rejection of the affluence the Church had adopted. These movements emerged in order to combat continuing heresies, misuse of the economy and the abuse of leadership in the Church (cf. Schneiders 2013:13). It is amazing though that the saints, from different parts of Europe during the Middle Ages, came up with the same notion of poverty through their different encounters in the Church. While St Francis rejected the feudal system, St Dominic sought to correct the Albigensian heresy<sup>30</sup> that was taking place in Southern France. This proved to be a revolutionary move because “Dominic and Francis were both endeavouring to correct abuses

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<sup>30</sup>For more reading on Albigensian heresy refer to <http://www.stisidore-yubacity.org/faqalbigenses.html>. Accessed 16/04/2013.

in the Church and restore the Christian life to gospel standards through their preaching and their poverty” (Aumann 1985:134). At this juncture, the focus will be on St Francis of Assisi whose radical poverty was directed against the feudalism that had affected the Church in Italy. This discussion will not address St Dominic, whose focus was to correct the doctrinal errors of the time.

#### ***4.4.1. St Francis of Assisi’s Expression of Poverty***

According to Aumann, Francis Bernadone was born between 1181 or 1182 in Assisi, from a wealthy family. He lived a life of luxury until he “was converted in 1206 or 1207 from a life of wealth and laxity to a life of poverty and penance” (1985:135). His conversion led him to yearn for a life of simplicity and radical poverty inspired by the poor Christ in the gospel. For St Francis the “gospel was being ignored and almost everywhere, due to wealth of priests and monks and the temporal power of ecclesiastical prelates” (Aumann 1985:134). This was carried out through feudalism<sup>31</sup> which invaded and corrupted the Church.

In rejection of this system, St Francis decided to live in austere poverty thus also rejecting all the wealth he enjoyed before. He deserted everything he owned; just as St Antony, the founder of monasticism who was motivated by the same passage of Mt 19:21.<sup>32</sup> This radical act led to a liberation movement which preserved faith for those who wished to live it. According to Battelli (1990:26), St Francis was not establishing a religious order but this movement emerged from the desire which “aimed at purifying the Church” from vices of worldliness, wealth and “too much power in temporal matters” (1990:25). Aumann (1985:135) writes that the “rule of St Francis stressed poverty, humility and complete submission to the authority of the Church.” It is only later on that the “controversies arose in regard to the degree of poverty...” (1985:153), but this will not form part of this paper.

St Francis’ poverty sought to liberate people from the oppression of the feudal system and free them from the injustices that were imposed on them through this system. His other form of expression of poverty was through his love of nature, which reveals in him a quality of simplicity and responsible stewardship. St Francis “is associated with love of animals and

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<sup>31</sup>For more on feudalism see Virtues Catholic Encyclopedia 1965.

<sup>32</sup>... If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me’.

nature” (Sutton 2012:32), and went as far as calling nature his brothers and sisters. All this brings out the uniqueness of St Francis’ sense of poverty which was exclusively applied in order to purify the Church. St. Francis’ life was an expression of what would be commonly known as the vow of poverty today.

#### ***4.5. St Ignatius of Loyola and the Reformation***

After the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, when religious life and theology flourished especially because of the mendicant orders, religious life experienced a decline during the period of the Renaissance. The papacy departed from Rome to reside for about seventy years in Avignon (1309-1377), hence subject to French politics. The end of the so-called Avignonese exile was followed by a kind of papal schism (1378-1417). During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries the papacy and clergy fell prey to worldliness, with very sad effects on the people of God. This plight would cry out for a radical reform “*in capite et in membris*”, as was being said, a reform “of the head and of the members” (Battelli 1990:34).

The council of Trent came into place during this time. More congregations emerged, one of them being the Society of Jesus, known as Jesuits, founded by St Ignatius of Loyola (born in 1491). St Ignatius is known for his Spiritual Exercises which he was inspired to write during his recuperation from a leg injury suffered during the war in which he was a part (cf. Aumann 1985, Ganss 1991).

##### ***4.5.1. St Ignatius’ Notion of Poverty***

St Ignatius of Loyola had a twofold notion of poverty; one is actual poverty that is concerned with material goods and the other is spiritual poverty which is detachment from the worldly things (Both of this are engraved in the spiritual exercises). This process is included in the *Spiritual Exercises* (cf. Ganss 1991, Fleming 1978). First, on actual poverty, St Ignatius wrote his deliberations on how to treat material goods, alms and property. He urged the members of the Society to know that they have no “civil rights to anything, either in common or in private.” Second, spiritual poverty encouraged the self-discipline and detachment towards material things (Ganss 1991:220). Even today, the Spiritual Exercises are worthwhile, have spread widely, and are used ecumenically. The spiritual exercises are another useful tool that would help people resist the vices of consumerism, if they could be introduced to everybody. St Ignatius’ contributions to the vow of poverty have become worldwide but whether they are accessible to everybody remains a question.

#### ***4.6. 17th Century to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

Yet another prosperous but confusing period in the history of religious life in the Church came into existence. This was the period of the French Revolution, Enlightenment and Colonialism. During this time, new congregations emerged. Congregations such as the Holy Ghost Fathers, the Missionaries of Mary, Redemptorists and Passionists were founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for different purposes (cf. Battelli 1990:38). Among them were women's congregations such as "the Ursulines, the Visitandines, the Daughters of Charity, and others strove for this independence" with less success (McNamara 1996:464).

It was only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that St Vincent de Paul succeeded in "founding the Institute of the Daughters of Charity in 1633, [he managed this] by changing their exterior appearances... [by giving them] a habit...the dress of farm girls in Northern France" (Battelli 1990:43). MacNamara highlights that St Vincent de Paul partnered with Louise de Marillac in founding these congregations (cf. 1996:482), which later on gave birth to the "Sisters of Charity of St Antide Thouret (1765-1826)" (Battelli1990:43). In their rule, St Vincent de Paul encouraged service to the poor and slaves, and established a feeding scheme that was to be administered to the refugees (cf. McNamara 1996:483). These professed three vows. It was in their dress code and works of charity that the Daughters of Charity expressed their poverty as well as through working tirelessly for the needy. Though not emerging directly from the Daughters of Charity, the Missionaries of Charity who have a strong emphasis on poverty, were founded by the renowned Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

##### ***4.6.1. Modern Period and Mother Teresa***

Mother Teresa, Gonxha Agnes "was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1910 in Skopje a city situated at the crossroads of Balkans history."<sup>33</sup> After profession as a sister, she taught for 20 years in the Loreto School in India and it is in this setting that she was inspired to serve the poor. In 1946 Mother Teresa received "a call within a call,"<sup>34</sup> which prompted her to leave the Loreto convent and attend to the poor and "some of her students offered to follow her" (Gonzalez-Balado 1996:6).

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<sup>33</sup>[www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20031019\\_madre\\_teresa.en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre_teresa.en.html). Accessed 30. 04. 2013.

<sup>34</sup>[www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20031019\\_madre\\_teresa.en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre_teresa.en.html). Accessed 30. 04. 2013.

In 1950 she established the congregation of the Missionaries of Charity in the Archdiocese of Calcutta. This followed the traditional profession of the Church with the exception that Mother Teresa took an extra vow of commitment to “the poorest of the poor.”<sup>35</sup> Her works of charity among the orphans, the dying and the marginalised inspired Gonzalez-Balado (1996:9-11) to produce a book, *Mother Teresa in Her Own Words*, of which he describes Mother Teresa’s work among the poor. Mother Teresa did not only desire to liberate the poor but she also wished to develop them and enhance their dignity, so that they too might feel free to live in this world. Her love of the poor is a vivid witness of how she lived her vow of poverty. She thus contributed vastly to the current Church. Along these lines, this paper investigates whether the vow of poverty can contribute to combating consumerism in our contemporary world.

#### ***4.7. Conclusion***

This chapter has traced the development of the vow of poverty from the early centuries to the present times. It has also shown how new communities emerged who lived the vow of poverty, from the practices of the consecrated virgins, ascetics, to St Antony the hermit and to the communal life of St Pachomius in the East. Then these moved to the West where St Augustine, the well-known theologian of the early centuries, and St Benedict, founder of monasticism in the West and well known for his classical rule of monasticism, vastly contributed to the development of both religious life and vow of poverty in the Church. St Benedict also introduced a communal form of poverty, whereby the monasteries sustained themselves, proved to be prosperous and generated their own income for common use in the community.

The Middle Ages gave rise to new orders, but importantly it was the rise of the mendicant orders of St Francis of Assisi and St Dominic which opted for radical poverty to counteract the social and clerical structures of their time. Then followed the 16<sup>th</sup> century period of Reformation in the Church where St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, introduced two forms of poverty - actual and spiritual poverty. Then from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century, new communities emerged for both male and female congregations which were dedicated to the works of poverty. These movements display the development of poverty in the history of

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<sup>35</sup><http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/1234a.htm>. Accessed 16. 03.2013.



religious life. This then continued to our current period whereby the renowned figure Mother Teresa of Calcutta vividly and in person gave the example of what poverty should be today. Having outlined the history of the vow of poverty, the next chapter will now look at the theology and values of the vow of poverty as it is practiced in the Church today.

## Chapter Five

### Theological Values of the Vow of Poverty

#### 5.0. Introduction

In chapter four a brief history of the development of the vow of poverty offered a background to what could be said to be a theology or theologies behind the vow of poverty. In line with this, this chapter is titled ‘theological’ because, drawing on the work of theologian Sandra Schneiders, the focus will be on the theologies and values that are embedded in the vow of poverty. Therefore the collective term ‘theological values’ will be used in this chapter. The term ‘theological values’ will be used even though the theologies and the values will be described as different entities in this paper. The following questions will be used to build the structure of the discussion in this chapter. First, what is meant by theology in this thesis? Second, how may one identify such a theology? Third, how may such a theology be described? After describing these theologies, the values of these theologies will be discussed to show how they have been and are practiced today.

#### 5.1. Definition of Theology

There are various definitions of theology, according to different schools of theology. As stated by the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2003) “[t]he word ‘theology’ is derived from the Greek *theos* and *logos*: ‘discourse about God.’ Hence it has come to mean ‘knowledge about God’” (Twetten 2003:921). A second scholar defines it as a “Discourse about God either from the point of view of what can be known about Him (*sic*) from the created world by the natural power of reason... or from the point of view of a revelation by God and received by man in Faith” (Letter and Jill 2003:891). For Letter and Jill (2003:921), “Theology in the Christian context may be described as ‘faith seeking understanding.’ It is a branch of learning in which a Christian, using his reason enlightened by divine faith seeks to understand the mysteries of God revealed in and through history.” Bernard Lonergan in his book *Method in Theology* (1972:9) states that “theology mediates between a cultural matrix and significance and role of a religion in that matrix.” Theology encompasses the whole of the universe and all that exists in it with the understanding that God exists in every situation and in every creature. This is the theology that society longs for, that divine truth which brings more light and understanding to all human beings who seeks to know the truth.

### *5.1.1. Identifying Theologies of the Vow of Poverty*

This paper will use the theologies of the vow of poverty according to Schneiders (1986). As mentioned earlier, theology ought to be contextual, relevant and address the current crises such as consumerism. Schneiders postulates that the “glory of theology is its ministerial relationship to the ultimate truth of revelation, and the poverty of theology is its never to be overcome inadequacy and relativity in relation to the truth which it seeks to serve” (1986:96). O’Murchu (1991) introduces the chapter on poverty with a quotation by Leonardo Boff that says, “Religious life must reinterpret its vow of poverty, moving away from an interior, private and ascetical meaning to one of public commitment to solidarity with the economically poor and socially downtrodden” (:159). Both these scholars are contextualizing and thus bringing out what is seen as the theologies of the vow of poverty today. This is why Schneiders (1986:91) highlights that consecrated people are beginning to see the vow of poverty “as a public commitment to responsible stewardship...struggle for a just economic order... [and] the end of the oppression of the poor by the rich.” Schneiders extracts from within the relevant current religious life, the theologies inherent within the vow of poverty such as liberation theology, stewardship and economic justice, that are relevant for our time. She affirms that theology is not static, and encourages that Religious should concern themselves with “those aspects... which seem problematic at any given moment.” To this she proposes two motives why this theology should be developed.

The first is that theological reflection, even when it does not afford us certainty, does give us clarity, and in our confusing and rapidly changing times such clarity is a major source of coherence and conviction in our attempts to live religious life. Secondly, theology is a basically contemplative activity because the subject matter of theological reflection is the mystery of God and all those lesser mysteries that mediate God’s presence and action in our lives (1986:22).

Since nothing is absolute, “...religious poverty could never be absolute...” (Schneiders 1986:53), thus everything is subject to change. This means that the theology of religious life evolves, thus affecting the theology of the vow of poverty. It is certainly not absolute in its nature; rather it is mysterious in the sense that its characteristics are the same today as they

were in their origins. This is evidenced by those who chose to live as witnesses to this life, in different orders and congregations with their different charisms,<sup>36</sup> in the context of their time.

## **Describing Theologies of the Vow of Poverty**

### ***5.2.1. Liberation Theology***

Schneiders (1986) mentions liberation of the poor, responsible stewardship and a just economy as the theologies of the vow of poverty. This section will discuss liberation theology according to the context of religious life. The giant of liberation theology is Gustavo Gutierrez, a Catholic priest who was concerned with the conditions of the people of his surroundings, which prompted him to contextualize theology according to its social context (cf. 1973). The above-mentioned theologies concern themselves with the social well-being of human beings. In other words they are all liberating; because of their nature; there is some overlap throughout this section. Earlier on O'Murchu (1991) quoted Boff who suggested that religious people should move away from their interior way of living and reach out to the economically poor and the socially downtrodden. In this context, the theology of the vow of poverty seeks to reach out. More so, this seems to be the mission of the Church at large whereby the poor should be taken into consideration rather than being left desolate.

The document of the Vatican Council II (*GS 1*) states that “[t]he joys and hope, the grief and anguish of the men (*sic*) of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.” Having based their conception of poverty on biblical and Church tradition, religious opt for the radical route that will not only make them poor, but which prompts them to experience poverty that will enable them to love unconditionally, and have “full involvement in the human enterprise” (Schneiders 2013:231). Religious are trying to follow the example of Christ by sharing in the experiences of the poor.

In spite of Boff's suggestion, the question might arise as to how religious can involve themselves with the world, while they have excluded themselves with the matters of the world. The answer to this is that religious, through their commitment, are called to serve humanity and especially the poor. By the poor here it does not mean only those who live

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<sup>36</sup>The word charism means the Spirit that guides and gives character to the particular community or order.

below the subsistence level, but it means all those who are in one way or another imprisoned by certain life circumstances - such as young people who are caught up in consumerism. History reveals that religious people have practiced works of charity from the early centuries up to the current period in the Church. Up to now the Church has done well in taking care of the poor and orphans and being hospitable towards others (cf. Battelli 1990, Sheldrake 1991, Gonzalez-Balado 1996). This does not mean that the mission is accomplished. It means that it has taken different forms in the sense that societal needs and demands change. Currently there is more demand for subsistence support and a loud cry for solidarity from our society. There is a need for those who will speak or act on behalf of the community, because people are imprisoned with fear and some are confused by the radical changes that are taking place in the world which are fostered by globalization. To respond to this Schneiders suggests the “use of corporate resources to influence policy and practice on whatever level is accessible to us” (1986:183).

The example of this is seen in Joan Chittister (1990) who together with her Benedictine community worked for nuclear disarmament; these religious women dared the utmost and follow their conscience by being the voice of the voiceless. This was an unusual move for religious women and it brought on them humiliation. Treading beyond their norm of life, it resulted in them losing funds from their trusted donors because they challenged the unjust political system (cf. Chittister 1990:135). Further, they went as far as donating 10% from their little budget in order to help others. This was done in spite of their financial struggle. Chittister revealed that “[o]ftentimes, money that we need to pay the bills goes to other peace groups, but somehow we find other money to live on” (1990:135).

These women, by their act, liberated many poor people who had no means of challenging the situation. They stood their ground and forgot about their comfort and chose to be the voice of the voiceless and make the universe a safe space for everyone. For them liberation was not only directed to human beings but it was also directed to the environment. Besides being liberators of others, they also proved to be responsible stewards who reverently took care of what was entrusted to them by standing up against nuclear weapons. This is what the theology of the vow of poverty put as a challenge among the vowed people. The same applies to South Africa whereby people see the situation that consumerism is causing but cannot voice it; it is time therefore for religious in South Africa to be a voice of the voiceless and

challenge the government when it comes to the culture of consumerism - like Chittister and others did with nuclear disarmament.

### **5.2.2. A Theology of Stewardship**

The word stewardship derives its roots from the Bible (Luke 16:1-8). O'Murchu (1999:65) raises our awareness that "[m]any scholars have noted that the notion of humans as masters of the goods of creation does not occur in the New Testament. Instead, the notion of stewardship predominates." This maintains that human beings have responsibility over all creatures of the earth, which should be characterized by faithfulness, honesty and generosity. It is also a recognition that all that human beings possess belongs to God; thus they are responsible for any actions taken for and against this world. For Peter Block (2013), "Stewardship is creating a sustainable connection with the people in our playing field that is the answer to our concerns about economics" (:15). Further, "stewardship is a person using every talent and repeatedly sacrificing desires to do the right thing."<sup>37</sup> Thus stewardship is characterized by caring for one another and for everything in the world.

#### **5.2.2.1. Who is a Steward?**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter addresses different kinds of stewardship. First, they mention stewards of creation. This involves the environment, respect for human life, and development of the world through human intelligence and work. Second is a steward of vocation - that is being fully Christian. Third is a steward of the Church. This is where human beings are co-creators with God in the sense that each member of the Church has a specific role to play in the Church.<sup>38</sup> This goes beyond being another's keeper because it extends to the whole of creation. The above explanation confirms that this theology is indeed rooted in the Church which is Christ's body.

Scott Robin (2000) highlights misconceptions of the meaning of the word steward, listing words such as caretaker, manager, custodian, agent, ambassador, warden and guardian that are confused with steward. He asserts that there is no real word in English that can capture the meaning because "we do not have any terms in our modern vocabulary that carry the

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<sup>37</sup><http://www.christianet.com/cardonations/meaningofstewardship.htm>. Accessed 29.10.2013.

<sup>38</sup><http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/ste...> Accessed 29.10.2013.

richness of this term” (:27). While for him there is unsatisfactory understanding of the meaning of this word, in spite of this uncertainty he ventures that a “steward is one who shares one’s own resources with others” (:28), which is how the theology of stewardship is practiced among religious who vow poverty. He also asserts that a “steward carries the identification of one who draws clear lines between investing and exploitation, between management and control, between caretaking and domination, between use and waste” (:30).

#### ***5.2.2.2. Practice of Stewardship***

O’Murchu (1991:160) suggests that the vow of poverty “should be renamed the vow of responsible stewardship.” Human beings are given a responsibility to take care of all the goods of the earth, thus their task is to respond responsibly to what has been entrusted to them. The opposite of this leads to misunderstanding of stewardship, whereby human beings perceive themselves as masters of what is entrusted to them, be it other human beings or any form of creation. The result is the destruction that the contemporary world is experiencing. Stewardship means that human beings are made responsible for the universe and all of God’s creation. It is also a recognition that all that human beings possess belongs to God, thus they are responsible for any actions taken for and against this world.

The USCCB pastoral letter on stewardship states that “Jesus’ disciples and Christian stewards recognize God as the origin of life, giver of freedom, and source of all things.”<sup>39</sup> This is a call for human beings to respect other creatures rather than exerting control over others and creation and treating the world as they please, as evident in consumerism. This also brings the awareness that all human beings are interdependent on one another but totally dependent on God. As O’Murchu (1999:65) asserts, “we are called to look after what is entrusted to our care, bearing in mind that we are doing it on behalf of someone who has given us use and usufruct in trust.” This is the responsibility given to every human being by God. Therefore it is necessary that “we look to the life and teaching of Jesus for guidance in living as Christian stewards.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup><http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/stew...> Accessed 29/10/2013.

<sup>40</sup><http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/ste...> Accessed 29.10.2013.

### ***5.2.2.3. Women and Stewardship***

Most cultures associate women with creation. Writings of scholars such as Sherry Ortner (1974:73), describe how “women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture.” Women, like nature, are also nurturers. In keeping with this, Rae (1994:29) postulates that “[i]t can be argued that women do not have to learn that they are part of nature; because of our biological properties-menstruation, pregnancy, birthing, and nurturance – we recognize ourselves as part of nature rather than as ‘other’.” In this manner women tend to have a holistic approach to life. This is why many women theologians talk more widely about ecology. As Rakoczy (2004:301) clarifies, “‘Environment’ refers to what is around us while ‘ecology’ is a more holistic word” which embraces all of creation. Does this not apply to all women of all cultures?

Therefore nature, and especially women, like men, deserve to be treated with respect in this world, because they were both created in the image of God (cf. Gonzalez 2007) and equally given responsibility over nature. While one may argue that this is true of all cultures, there is also a paradox as to why the world is ripped of its beauty and women of their humanity. Stewardship is for both men and women because they are entrusted with the goods of the earth, thus both should be responsible stewards. In other words, there should be no domination of another gender; instead there should be a more constructive exercise of power that promotes good stewardship towards all since stewardship is for all, men and women alike. This will help young women to participate fully in society; instead of subscribing to the pressures of consumerism which in turn leads them into undesirable situations like sex trafficking; they will be able to treasure themselves as future women in society. In turn, men, instead of using women for their entertainment, will respect them and become responsible stewards towards women, because “stewardship begins with the willingness to be accountable for some larger body than ourselves” (Block 2013:16).

### ***5.2.3. A Theology of Economic Justice***

Schneiders (1986) mentions this aspect as a third factor under theologies of the vow of poverty. There is a large body of scholarship making the link between irresponsible stewardship, oppression of the poor and how economics are handled in the world. Another query is how theology connects with economics, though Schneiders does not delve deeply



into this subject. Maybe the question that should be asked is what has the church to do with states or global economics? Before proceeding with this subject it is important to briefly give a short definition of what economic justice is.

### ***5.2.3.1. Definition of Economic Justice***

Economic justice consists of two words, economy and justice. Economy reflects engagement in currency and justice with making the things right for humanity. Economic injustice is one of the negative phenomena that are growing throughout the world and it is prompted by the practice whereby the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Economic justice can best be explained using the two separate words: first, economy and second, justice.

### ***5.2.3.2. Definition of Economy***

It is important to note that there is more than one definition of economy<sup>41</sup> but in this thesis the approach will be that of theology. According to Ann-Cathrin Jarl (2003:3), the “word economic goes back to the Greek *Oikos*, meaning household, and *nomos*, meaning law. *Oikonomia* thus denotes rules or law of the household.” For the *Oikos Journey: A Theological Reflection on the Economic Crisis in South Africa* (2006:23), in order to “understand God’s economy, we must step back from a limited notion of ‘economics’ meaning a specialised academic subject understood only by experts, and return to these original basic roots.” The notions of the origins of economics give power to God and to the stipulated rules of the household, and guidance as to how to distribute the economy evenly, rather than defining it as a science. *The Oikos Journey* (2006) gives a warning on this aspect. It cautions that “economics cannot be seen as a technical matter, or a science that can be left to the experts...[but highlights that] Economics- meaning the way that people relate to each other over resources – matters a great deal...” (:21).

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<sup>41</sup>For more literature on the definition of economy see: 1) Study about BBA: Definition of Economics by [Bba-study.blogspot.com/.../definition-of-...](http://Bba-study.blogspot.com/.../definition-of-...) Accessed 11.10.2014.2) Investopedia <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/economics.asp>. Accessed 20.12.2013. 3) Henry George. Economics and Political Economy<sup>41</sup> <http://www.henrygeorge.org/def2.htm>. Accessed 20.12.2013.

### ***5.2.3.3. Description of Justice***

Justice is an action that is carried out in order to make right the wrong that is imposed on other people. Jarl (2006) asserts that there is no definite definition or description of justice because justice can only be described in connection with an unjust act. As Kanyoro explains, “[t]o seek justice is to break the boundaries of injustice” (2001:177). Behaviour such as oppression, exploitation and illegal treatment of the other are at the heart of injustice (cf. Jarl 2006:91). O’Murchu points out that “As a biblical term ‘justice’ is a prescriptive rather than a descriptive term” (1999:71). Jarl (2003) makes the connection between justice and theology, in his work he concurs with Harrison who sees the danger of exclusion of ethical conduct when dealing with economy. She sees an urgent need to engage Christian ethics which should teach people about the importance of economic justice. This is because according to Harrison in Jarl “there is a faith commitment to the poor and that this faith commitment is combined with empathy and solidarity” (:80). This is how economic justice is a theological issue.

### ***5.2.3.4. Economic Justice: A Challenge for Christianity Today***

Economic justice, like liberation theology and responsible stewardship, is also a global concern, but more so it is the concern of South Africa. It is a social issue that Christianity engages with, and religious dare to address it within their vow of poverty. Schneiders admits that it “is not easy to work out what the vow of poverty means in today’s world” (1986:103), especially in connection with the economy. Nonetheless, she asserts that there “are innumerable ways in which religious can begin to exercise their vow of poverty in relation to the economic and environmental situation of our time” (:183). This does not mean that the previous methods the Church has engaged in, such as the Social Teachings, are ineffective but it suggests that a great deal has evolved in life and the way of looking at life has changed therefore a different approach is necessary. Therefore not only religious but religion at large should strive to fight the economic injustices that people are subjected to. In other words, all are called to be a voice of the voiceless in our societies.

Economic injustice is exacerbated by consumerism, a subject to which Conradie (2009) dedicates a whole chapter. Conradie addresses consumerism and economic inequality, amongst other concerns, where he first explains how economic inequalities are fuelled by consumerism. He describes how the few affluent occupy a huge space in comparison to the

poor, and that the affluent create uncomfortable conditions for the poor due to the demands of their lifestyles. The very same people are the ones who control the economy and perpetuate the economic injustices that have become a norm in society. Second, Conradie addresses the impact of consumerism on the poor in South Africa, whereby the inequalities of South Africa and the widening gap between the rich and the poor are disturbing social stability (2009).

*The Oikos Journey* (2006) confirms that economic injustice is a global issue. Referring specifically to the economic policy change in South Africa, it traces how, after the election of 1994 (:16), “[w]ithin two years economic policies were changed to fit in with global capital’s requirements” (:17). It is clear that these policies were changed without considering the poor, as is shown in Conradie (2009). It can also be inferred that the procedures guiding the process were influenced by consumerism. This has had devastating effects on the poor, leaving people helpless in many ways. One of which is that even young women in rural KwaZulu-Natal wish for this affluent life, encouraging the idea that moving to a better place will give them a job and thus earn them the status they long for. In short they easily buy into the vices of consumerism.

This situation brings a challenge to religion. The concept of being a voice of the voiceless needs to be remembered in order to “participate prophetically in the human effort...to create the economic structures which will effectively relate finite resources to human ends” (Schneiders 1986:103). In such a new scenario, poor people, especially women would benefit in the share of their economy because economy would be distributed evenly. That is why scholars such as (Schneiders 1986:91) advocate the necessity of engaging with “the struggle for a just economic order in which an equitable sharing of limited resources will hasten the end of the oppression of the poor by the rich.” This is how economic justice is a challenge to Christianity today.

### **5.3. *The Values Embedded in the Theology of the Vow of Poverty***

Having discussed the theologies of this vow, we now turn to the values derived from it. Schneiders (1986) highlights simplicity, sharing and hospitality as the virtues of the vow of poverty. This idea is seconded by O’Murchu (1991:160) who sees the vow as a call to stewardship and that, in this light, its evolution and the development should be examined. He claims that the “dominant underlying values – sharing, simplicity, ecological stewardship,

care and concern for the created order – resonate deeply within all people” (1991:160). A third scholar, Gerald Grosh (1986), writes on the models of poverty; among the seven he names are “simplicity of life” (:121) and communitarian sharing (:120). While Schneiders prefers the term virtues, O’Murchu uses the term values, while the term model appears to be more favourable to other scholars such as Grosh. Given the close proximity between values and the notion of morality, the term values will feature more in this discussion.

### *5.3.1. Value of Simplicity*

Schneiders (1986:185) describes simplicity as a “witness value as a challenge to our culture’s operative definition of happiness as ‘more of everything’.” She further highlights the notion of “[v]oluntary simplicity of lifestyle,” a value which could have an impact in the lives of young women who are faced with the challenges of a consumerist culture. Religious people are called to live a simple lifestyle through their commitment to God. They do this by denying themselves the excesses of life. As O’Murchu (1991:160) asserts, “[a]s a liminal value system, the vow of poverty...challenges all people to live simply, that is, uncluttered by excess baggage for personal comfort and aggrandizement...” In other words, self-discipline and detachment towards material things are of importance to everyone. Schneiders (1986) concurs with O’Murchu and confirms that “material goods create a clutter in one’s life.” She further asserts that it is the voluntary simplicity of life that fulfils individual spiritual life (cf: 185).

Conradie, whose background is not of religious life, also writes on the virtue of simplicity. He asserts that “simplicity does not imply a call to poverty or ameliorating poverty.” He quotes Elgin (2000:339) who distinguishes between the two, clarifying that “poverty is involuntary and debilitating whereas simplicity is voluntary and enabling” (2009:49). This is the understanding that those who are trapped in consumerist lifestyle need to acquire. Grosh explains that “[simplicity] is easily linked with the model of poverty as union with the poor” (1986:121). It is this simplicity that helps religious people to live a spiritual life that enables them to be available to each other in community and to those they are commissioned to serve without sparing themselves. The same spirit can be adopted by everyone so that young people may learn from their youth that living a simple lifestyle does not mean being poverty

stricken. Rather it shows one's contentment and self-control and counteracts a consumerist lifestyle.

Even though Schneiders, O'Murchu and Grosh write as theologians in the context of religious life, and Conradie writes as a theologian, this same concept of simplicity applies to young women such as those of rural KwaZulu-Natal. These young women may learn that being simple is not a thing to despise; instead it is a value that creates a healthy society. This might also teach them that glamorous looks do not always bring the best out of a person but a simple lifestyle freely chosen demands less and life can be affordable. In this way, young women would hardly be tempted to acquire unnecessary things that would lead them into the temptation of moving away from their homes for what is an uncertain, yet assumed to be better, life with strangers.

### *5.3.2. The Value of Sharing*

From its roots, sharing has always been at the heart of religious life. This practice was derived from the early Christian movement in the Acts of the Apostle 2:44-45. Contemporary scholars show concern and dedicate time to demonstrating the importance of the value of sharing today. In the book published in (1991) O'Murchu devotes a chapter on poverty entitled "Resources for Sharing and Caring." In another book, published in (1999) he developed his discussion on the vow, devoting a chapter to it called "Violence against Consumerism and Deprivation" (:64). In this work, O'Murchu encourages sharing not only among religious people, but among the laity as well, arguing that this sharing will then teach people to be responsible, and they will in turn learn to counteract consumerism and stop the depriving of the poor. Grosh (1986:120) highlights that the significance of sharing "is that it aims at eliminating differences between 'rich and poor' and focuses on the equality of all." This is why "the vowed life frowned upon those societal values of possessiveness, greed, and the accumulation of wealth" (O'Murchu1999:64). Sharing does not only mean to share wealth but it extends to all human activity of everyday life. For more clarity, Schneiders asserts that

To share means to enter into relationship with the other on the basis of recognition that the other has a right to participate in the gift of God to all people, that we have no right to more than we need when another is in want. Sharing is more than the equitable distribution of goods.

It is a recognition of our common life as creatures of the same God and a concrete living of that common life (1986:103).

The same view is expressed by Shorter who sees sharing as the even distribution of resources, not only among the members of a community but also to those outside the community (cf. 1999:28). Emphasizing communal sharing, Mwangwu (1997) writes on the African context and says that generosity is a value in an African culture - sharing is extended to the community at large and the community rejects individualism.

Schneiders (1986:103) asserts that the vow of poverty “means to model a sharing of life through a sharing of goods that expresses a Christian experience of poverty of spirit.” It is the poverty of spirit that energises religious people to give and share freely from the little they have. Adopting this value will help to combat consumerism and its fostering of unhealthy behaviour in society, such as that which the *Izikhothane* groups are displaying. If this spirit of sharing can be visible in the society, young women may adopt it, grow up with the community spirit and shy away from the individualism that is killing African culture. This would also contribute to the communitarianism that our communities are lacking; influenced by the individualism that consumerism has bred (cf. Kavanaugh 1991).

### **5.3.3. *The Value of Hospitality***

Hospitality is a prominent value especially within Benedictine spirituality. Chittister affirms this, quoting from the 5<sup>th</sup> century Rule of St Benedict which shows the significance of this value: “Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ, because Christ will say ‘I was a stranger and you took me in’...” (1990:161). This signified that Benedictine monasteries were welcoming houses where all guests were treated as though they were Christ. Such hospitality encouraged solidarity with others and would “involve the active and joyful breaking down of social barriers and breaking open of private supplies” (Schneiders 1986:174,187). The value of hospitality could help young women to get back into community and look for the common good of all instead of concentrating on their private enterprises.

Religious communities are comprised of members of different ages and if a community is international this contributes to cultural diversity. It is human culture that the young take care of the elderly and the other way round; this also applies to community life. Besides this, the community cares for individual needs through the sharing of common resources. Religious

communities, even those who differ from Benedictine spirituality, extended this rule to the extent of opening their doors to strangers. This welcoming practice then became hospitality which religious people have adopted for themselves. Hospitality enriches religious as Schneiders (1986:187) highlights: “[h]ospitality offers a marvellous experience of solidarity with other people,” meaning that no one should be neglected since everybody should be taken care of. Those who can, should help and welcome those in need; this applies not only to those who have vowed poverty but to society at large.

This value is very human in the sense that if people could adhere to it there would be less hostility towards the other. For example, if all affluent people would be hospitable towards their neighbours, everyone would fit into society, including the young women who wish to leave their homes in search of jobs. These young women leave their elderly without help and support with the hope of gaining more. They expose themselves to hostile situations that will ruin their future. It is important to acknowledge that hostility is imposed on these women - they do not call for it. But if hospitality was part of these women’s environment, they might not feel they need to leave their homes for something better elsewhere; and where that may be, they do not know.

#### ***5.4. Conclusion***

In this chapter, the theologies of the vow of poverty - encompassing liberation of the poor, stewardship and economic justice - were discussed. Engaging with liberation theology, religious people show their concern and engagement with the poor and the oppressed. Responsible stewardship revealed the importance of relationship with one another and nature, which in turn brings harmony towards God’s creation. The concern with economic injustice reveals the challenges and effects of inequality that consumerism has introduced in society. Engagement with social issues marks the new developmental phase in religious life, and that the vow of poverty allows religious to become a voice of the voiceless in contemporary society. The chapter highlighted the values of the vow of poverty, proposing that if young women would adopt these values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality, their lives may be protected from the dangers of consumerism.

## Chapter 6

### Theological Values in African Theology

#### *6.0. Introduction*

This chapter is entitled theological values because it seeks to investigate whether the theologies and values of the vow of poverty exist in African theological discourse. Theologies of liberation, stewardship and economic justice are amongst those which religious people involve themselves while engaging with the social issues. The living out of values such as simplicity, sharing and hospitality inherent in the vow of poverty show how this vow has been expressed by religious people throughout the ages. The purpose of this chapter is to locate these within African theology, addressing African young women and African issues in South Africa.

#### *6.1. Definition of African Theology*

It is not easy to give one solid definition of African theology because theology formulates itself according to specific contexts. Theology is situational, contextual and cultural. Appiah Kubi (in Muzorewa 1985:96) “contends that African theology should be practical and relevant to the African people’s needs. It should be situational, activist, dynamic, and liberative.” African theology, like all other theologies, addresses certain aspects of Christianity. African theologians seek to Africanize Christianity and make it a space where African people can fit. To this, Harry Sawyer (1987:12) writes that the “African theology should stand firmly within the main stream of the Christian tradition and should be genuinely ecumenical.” Nonetheless, African theology should address African issues. In this chapter, it should be noted, terms such as African theology, African Christianity and the African church will be used interchangeably as sometimes it is not easy to distinguish their differences. On this, Tinyiko Maluleke (1997:2) writes,

I assume that the phenomenon of African Christianity and African theology are so closely related that the two terms may be used interchangeably. African theologies exist because of African Christianities, and without African theologies we would not have any sustainable African Christianities. African Christianities are therefore expressions of African theology.

One cannot easily separate the two and since these two fall under one umbrella - the church - sometimes the word church will also be used in this discussion.



An important approach taken by African theology is that of liberation theology. In the African context, it seeks to liberate all people of all spheres from any form of oppression, be it religious, political, economic or social. Ela (1994:141) stresses that “human being’s liberation means decolonization, development, social justice, and respect for imprescriptible rights and basic freedom.” More so, it also seeks to liberate African theological thinking from the Western theological thinking approach which was based on Western cultural foundations. Ntamushobora (2009:48) highlights that “Western theology was centered on an individualistic worldview that did not fit the African believer’s community-oriented worldview.”

### ***6.2.African Liberation Theology***

Liberation theology forms a significant part of African theology. Notable scholars such as Mugambi, Ela and Mveng have contributed a great deal to laying the foundations for this theology. African liberation theologians seek to liberate people from the unjust structures and the Western way of thinking that is imposed on African people (cf. Ntamushobora 2009). African liberation theology seeks liberation from Western theology in order to be able to liberate the people of Africa in their own context. Mugambi (2002:190) highlights that “...African Christian theologians must ask themselves ... whether African churches should continue to rely on theological packages designed for other cultures and historical context.” In an attempt to respond to this, one may suggest that theologians should go beyond the Western thinking and address current issues according to their needs. For instance, in South Africa during the apartheid era, liberation theology became prominent in the sense that religious and theologians of different denominations stood against the apartheid regime using liberation theology as a tool. Archbishop Denis Hurley, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Reverend Allan Boesak and Father Simangaliso Mkhathshwa, amongst many others, fought towards the same goal, which was the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. They also became the voice of the voiceless whereby the few fought for all against the unjust social structures which denied the dignity of all human beings. Out of this struggle emerged a new theology; a Black Theology.<sup>42</sup> Writers such as Albert Nolan and Richard Broederick

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<sup>42</sup>More on Black Theology see: Mosala I & Tlhagale, B 1986. *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Essays in Black Theology*. Johannesburg: Stokaville Publishers; Mosala, I 1989. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W. B. Eerdmans Publications; Cone, H J 2010. *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fourtieth Anniversary Edition*. New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

(1987:17), reflected on black theology and concerns such as “questions about suffering, human dignity, poverty and most of all about liberation from oppression.” Such questions prompted more theologians to consider how to solve the problem of oppression in South Africa and to move away from Western thinking.

Theologians stood their ground, resisting any ideology that prejudices and disadvantages people on the basis of the colour of their skin, for the sake of people’s liberation. Eventually they defeated the oppressive system.

Ela (1994:140), an African theologian, put it this way: “We stand against oppression in any form because the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands our participation in the struggle to free people from all kinds of dehumanization.” This is what the theologians of South Africa prophesied during apartheid. But unfortunately this dehumanization of people continues to manifest itself in different forms, such as globalization. This has enforced a culture of consumerism and has overshadowed peoples’ cultures and their sound moral basis throughout Africa.

### ***6.2.1. African Women’s Liberation Theology***

The chapter on the theologies of the vow of poverty did not segregate genders because the vows mean the same for all religious members, depending on their charism. This section will deal with gender differences because women’s expression of liberation differs to that of men within African theology. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, though not writing from an African perspective, pleads that “Liberation theology must address the patriarchal domination and sexual exploitation of women” (1996:8). If this is addressed, young women who fall victim to this will then be liberated.

African women’s liberation theology resulted from the experiences of women theologians who felt that women experiences of God and culture were neglected by male theologians in their writings. Women’s such as Oduyoye assert that “[c]ulture is experienced by women as a tool for domination, but there are aspects that can be liberative so they do not undertake a wholesale condemnation of either” (2001:28). Phiri and Nadar write that “African women theologians find that women’s experiences of culture are excluded in projects such as inculturation” (2010:94). In addition to this, Kanyoro (2001:167) laments that “African

women theologians are caught in the dilemma of disagreeing with the presentation of inculturation as a basis for African liberation theology.” Such realities prompted these women to stand up and start speaking out as women who seek liberation.

For African women theologians however, their experiences of culture are excluded in projects such as inculturation. In other words, when describing or analysing culture within the inculturation process, the experiences of African males are often taken as the norm and standard (Phiri and Nadar 2006:11).

If this is to be addressed, it will certainly help young women who, through the influence of consumerism, find themselves powerless in the male dominated world. The same concern was raised by the Cameroonian scholar, Rose Zoé-Obianga (1979), who observed modern life with its negative values creeping into young African women’s culture. She pleaded that young women would be helped to “meet the demands of modern life, while promoting values that are not irreconcilable with the legacy of their ancestors” (:145). The same concern relates to the fate of young women from KwaZulu-Natal’s rural areas.

Furthermore the oppression of women is neither supported nor by culture or by the creator (cf. Kanyoro 2001). In other words, feminine oppression derives from scripture whereby women are always subject to men; this can be traced back to both the Old and the New Testaments. Such oppression is the result of misinterpretation of scripture, because, first, Genesis 1:27 reads “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them” (*NRSV*). Second, the Gospel of John 10:10 from the *NJB* says, “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full,” and the *NRSV* translation, “have it abundantly” (cf. Kanyoro 2001). If in spite of these words there is still oppression of women, it is clear that these scriptures did not make an impact even to the theologians who should be the ones carrying the Good News. Certainly if they would have understood these words, they would have never excluded the stories and experiences of women in the process of inculturation. Had women been part of this process, the concept of theology would be different. This would then influence young women positively because this struggle would raise solutions to current problems such as consumerism and how to deal with it.

### *6.3. Stewardship in African Theology*

In an African context, stewardship is a part of communal structure whereby everything is interconnected according to the African view of cosmology. By African cosmology I mean that everything that exists depends on each other for its existence (Mungwini and Viriri 2010:39). Furthermore, Kalemba Mwambazambi, quoting Bujo (1998) affirms that “the human person and cosmos are supplemented at such a point that they cannot exist without this interdependence” (2010:61). The same concept is found in Oduyoye (2001:35) where she demonstrates the aspects of relatedness and inter-relatedness between human beings and nature. She writes that “[h]umanity’s well-being depends on the harmonious relationship of the whole creation, and human culture evolves from the utilization and adaptation to the natural environment.” Mbiti (1996:180), though not mentioning the word stewardship, also brings this notion out in this phrase, “Man (sic) is not the master in the universe; he is only the centre, the friend, the beneficiary, the user. For that reason he has to live in harmony with the universe, obeying the laws of natural, moral and mystical order.” This confirms that stewardship is engraved in the African culture. The question then arises why address stewardship when it is engraved in the culture?

The concept of stewardship is reflected in the writings of these authors whereby the interconnectedness of God’s creation is presented. This then raises another question as to what happened to Africa that this was corrupted. And more so, why do Africans themselves suddenly disrespect this sacredness? This shows that colonialism and at present, consumerism, interfered with African culture. It also illustrates that the notion of stewardship has become shaped by consumerism, whereby the steward has become the master. Santmire (2010:337) puts it well: “[i]ndeed, “stewardship”, at least as far as its general usage is concerned, seems to be very much at home in the culture of consumerism.” This might sound very much like the American worldview but there is the need to admit that this has also become the South African way of interpreting stewardship. The truth is that this is totally against the notion of stewardship, of taking care of the goods of the earth entrusted to human beings.

In the article “The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology” (1979:110), Oduyoye, affirms that in “African religion, as in Christianity, God leaves

humankind in charge of the world, as a steward. In both African and Christian myths of origin, humankind becomes the centre of the universe.” This does not mean that, in Santmire’s words, “God is a kind of absent landlord”, a view that “only strengthens the notion in the popular mind that what has been given to them by God is theirs” (Santmire 2010:336), but it is a call to responsible stewardship. The same applies to the issue of gender, whereby males perceive themselves as superior to females because of how culture positions them. Stewardship calls them to account, especially in the case whereby male superiority considers females to be a source of entertainment. They might believe that because they possess money, they can buy women as entertainment while overlooking the image of God that a woman holds. This is irresponsible stewardship because God has entrusted us with and thus we need to be trustworthy. To crown all this, Oduyoye (2001:35) conveys a message to all Africans by asserting that “ecological sensitivity in Africa is human dependence on nature for food, energy and shelter,” thus human beings should treat the environment with respect. Human well-being will benefit more by the absence of destruction than in the situation of destruction. This holistic approach to life bears testimony to the fact that stewardship is indeed integral part of African Christian theology which brings life to the fullest.

#### ***6.4.Economic Justice in an African Theology***

The African continent is known for its rich mineral and natural resources but unfortunately the tragedy is that it is the poorest continent on earth. Again the blame goes to colonialism which has occupied Africa for its own benefit. Mungwini and Viriri (2010) put it this way: colonialism “profitably invested in the exploitation of both natural and human resources” thus denying Africa “of its recognition as a result suppressing it of its memory” (:31). This is reflected well in African scholars’ concern for the injustices imposed on the African continent by those nations who proved to be more powerful than Africa. To begin with, Mveng (1994:162) laments the exploitation of the natural resources that the colonizers ripped from Africa for their benefit. He illustrates: “[y]esterday, colonization had imposed cash crops: cacao, coffee, cotton, and so on. Today the erstwhile colonizers do not know what to do with our crops. As for other raw materials, they name their own prices and the prices sink ever lower” while leaving Africa without profit from their grown resources. Is this not a good example of economic injustice that was imposed on the African continent by colonizers?

A similar plight was raised by Ela (1994:138) when presenting the concerns of the Zairean bishops on the continuing struggle of the present Congo. He transcribes: “Failure upon failure! In the meantime, shameless exploitation, organized pillage for the profit of foreign countries and their intermediaries-while the mass of the people wallow in misery, at times in artificially created situations.” Even though this is the example of the Congo, this struggle is for Africa at large whereby Africa serves as a producer for foreign enterprise without benefit. This does not end here, as Mveng continues, pointing out the struggle that the “rural economy, where the phenomenon of money is linked to production for export, is thus coopted by the industries and consumer needs of the rich countries” (1994:157). This in turn causes inequalities among Africans, and corruption, as people try to make ends meet, living from the little that is there. For Kanyoro (2001:166) “[e]conomic conflict has been aggravated by globalization, the aftermath of structural adjustment programs, corrupt leadership and bad management of national economies.” This is indeed true. In addition, globalization introduces the culture of consumerism which enforces a culture of entitlement. It is also important to note that consumerism exacerbates corruption and economic inequalities (Conradie 2009) on our continent, but more so in South Africa.

Economic injustice creates a huge gap between the poor and the rich especially here in South Africa, and this in turn creates an affluent class while the poor get poorer (Conradie 2009, *Oikos Journey* 2006). Looking at this background one may wonder whether the economic situation of Africa will ever recover now that consumerism has brought corruption that is eating our society’s rights like a cancer. Yet there has to be a solution to this plight. As Ela (1994:142) voices, “we cannot ignore the situations of dependency and economic practices imposed on us by the North” and the West, on Africa. Therefore the African values that once held community together need to be recalled, to bring about more order and serenity and to counter the commotion in our societies.

### ***6.5.Values within African Theology***

Values such as simplicity, sharing and hospitality form part of African theology. African studies reveal that these are part of the values of *Ubuntu* which African culture embraces with warmth. The tragedy though is that these values have disappeared in communities, thus leaving the communities with a crisis that results in disharmony. The literature consulted

hardly touches on simplicity but there is ample mention of sharing and hospitality. The reason could be that it is not easy, especially in the Zulu culture, to talk about these values as separate entities because these complement each other. This means that where there is no simplicity there will certainly be lack of sharing and hospitality. It is the simplicity that makes human beings respond positively towards life; in other words, *Ubuntu* cannot be practiced partially because it embraces the fullness of life. This fullness of life breathes in the notion of humanness. “In other words, *Ubuntu* is part of humanity; it is also a response that shapes humanity into humanness” (cf. Masango 2006:107).

The Spirit of sharing is central to African worldview and religious practices. Oduyoye (2001:96) asserts that “Sharing and solidarity covers all aspects of life, land, farming, food, drink, joyful events, sad events-all are experienced in community...” Unfortunately this sounds like history because it has disappeared in many communities, and this is well demonstrated in the culture of *Izikhothane* and in the mimicking of the consumerist lifestyle that young people are struggling with. Sharing that was once a guide to community is no longer - instead it is replaced by advertising of what is new in the market and this is mistaken as sharing because everyone is exposed to it and everyone will have a share in admiring what is advertised. This has totally turned the notion of sharing into something else that is destructive to oneself and the community at large. To this Ela (1994:138) asks “[w]hat meaning can faith have in churches that seek to be liberated without sharing the peoples’ battles with the forces of oppression assaulting their dignity?” This sharing does not mean sharing only goods and resources but it also means sharing respect with one another. Such sharing might help with restoring the dignity of those women who find themselves forced into sex industries because of their vulnerability. At the same time, they are hindered from sharing their bodies freely with those they prefer to share with.

African Christian theologians consulted for this study have also shared on the value of hospitality. Oduyoye (2001:93) dedicates a chapter to “Hospitality and Spirituality” in an attempt to shed more light on this value. She asserts that “Hospitality is a fundamental African value”; she expands using the definition given by Rose-Zoe Obianga though claiming that she expanded on it herself. This definition gives four explanations of what hospitality is. She mentions “(1) welcoming/receiving, reception; (2) charity/ almsgiving; (3) boarding and lodging/hotel, hospital; and (4) protecting/sanctuary, integration.”

While she shows the significance of this value, Oduyoye also points out its weaknesses in a sense that it has become a key issue in African theology (cf. 2001:32). Her concern suggests that there is a problem concerning the value of hospitality within Africa today. To clarify this she says: “This has put the burden of community and individual wholeness on a few who are seen to have ‘made it’ economically and who are also ‘traditional’ enough to feel that they have obligations towards others” (:33). Bénézet Bujo (1992:68) shares Oduyoye’s view that “[t]raditional hospitality is nowadays being abused as a pretext for parasitism.” He further explains that in “traditional Africa, no one was allowed to become a burden to anyone else.” He asserts that after “three days, guests were expected to help their host in the fields and in general to earn their keep.” Oduyoye (2001) quotes from the instruction of “... Julius Nyerere of Tanzania who linked hospitality with work and economic productivity: ‘Treat your guests as guests for two days, and on the third day, give them hoes.’ That is, put them to work doing whatever you do to sustain your hospitality... to prevent dependence and parasitism” (:95). Though hospitality is the strength of the community, it also has its weak points as mentioned above.

Kanyoro, on the other hand, has a different opinion on hospitality as she introduces gender aspects of this value. She is flabbergasted by how an African community which passionately holds the value of hospitality is so unkind to women. She writes, “It is interesting to me that the African society, which is very hospitable to new life, has not provided a theology that affirms the woman through whom new life finds the possibility for growth” (2001:172). Such a question is relevant to the women who are trafficked for the sex industries,<sup>43</sup> who are exploited through and through because they are women and ripped of their dignity as women through the hostility that others direct towards them. This brief explanation of the values raises the question that if these values are or were part of African theology, why do people fall so easily into the vices of consumerism? On the other hand, culture may also contribute towards the plight of these women because women may give themselves in the spirit of simplicity, sharing who they are within the frame of hospitality. Except, unknowingly, they expose themselves to the danger of human trafficking as they naïvely follow the promise of a job that will offer them the kind of life they desire (cf. Campbell 2010).

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<sup>43</sup><http://www.thetruthistsexy.co.za/>. Accessed 10/2/2014. This article explains how Thandi was trafficked with a promise for a job and residence but ended up in the sex industry in Cape Town.



## ***6.6. Conclusion***

This chapter has shown that the theological values of the vow of poverty form part of African theology today. African liberation theology still seeks to liberate those who are captives of unjust structures in our societies. Exploration of the concept of stewardship revealed the interrelatedness and connectedness of God's creation, with humanity being given authority from above to take care of God's creation. The problem of economic injustice exposed how Africa has been stripped of its riches for the benefit of the West, while leaving the continent too poor to recover. The values of simplicity and hospitality were also discussed, where, in the African context this takes the form of *Ubuntu*. Here the values are communal and operate collectively in the sense that respecting them and living them will bring harmony in society.

## Chapter Seven

### Concluding Remarks, Suggestions and Recommendations for Further Research

#### *7.0.Introduction*

This study set out to examine and critically review the values inherent in the vow of poverty, in the face of the consumerist lifestyle sought after by young women such as those of rural KwaZulu-Natal. The study revealed that these young women are not exposed to and do not know about these values. Or if they know about them, there is not enough emphasis on them in their communities. Instead there is enormous influence arising from the consumerist life style, and this has taken over the culture of origin in communities such as rural KwaZulu-Natal. The study has shown that the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality shared by religious life and African theology exist in the social practices of African cultures even though they are not clearly visible in communities anymore. In view of this background, the research question asked whether the theological values of the vow of poverty would have any significant impact on the way young people in South Africa, particularly young women in rural KwaZulu-Natal; respond to the pressures of consumerism.

#### *7.1.Concluding Remarks*

The answer to this question should be positive; in other words, it should be ‘yes’. As chapter six has shown, that the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality are not restricted to religious people – in fact they are part of African culture (Oduyoye 2001, Kanyoro 2001), which means they should be known among African people, including among young women of rural KwaZulu-Natal. If these values exist in African theology, they are surely part of African culture. In the context of this study, this is the Zulu culture of *Ubuntu* (Masango 2006). Every young African woman, therefore, is brought up in an environment that lives and teaches these theological and African values. In spite of this, the problem persists that people aspire to an affluent lifestyle, and the vices of consumerism become more influential in our communities. The failure of religion and African culture to counteract the influence of consumerism shows that there is a problem. Some reasons that may be behind the problem are outlined below.

First, as has been mentioned, the values of the vow of poverty are part of an oath taken by religious people, and young people may not be interested in these. Chapter six addressed the same values in African theological discourse, however these discussions are typically limited to highly sophisticated academic discourse with which ordinary people are rarely engaged. Secondly, the clergy who serve as a bridge between the academic sphere and ordinary Christians are usually not well equipped to pass on to the congregants in the church the information they obtain from higher institutions of learning. Thirdly, there may be the view that the role of theology is beyond influencing the way people respond to life situations. Rather, it may be perceived instead to be merely academic reflection on abstract matters of faith. Apart from these reasons, there are other factors that might play a crucial role in the lack of positive influence that these values have on people, namely, socio-economic factors, political factors and theological factors.

### ***7.1.1. Socio-economic Factors***

Amongst the socio-economic factors affecting the lack of influence of the values inherent in the vow of poverty is the point that consumerism has created a “culture of entitlement” (Conradie 2009:25). Everybody, with or without choice, is part of it and in order to fit into this society, one has to buy into the vices of consumerism. And this distorts the culture that has been there from the beginning. Further, this has tampered with the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality, and encourages individualism, irresponsible behaviour and hostility towards one another. In other words, consumerism has oppressed communal structures and has encouraged the individualism that is growing stronger in society today (Schneiders 2009). This encourages behaviour that is only concerned with “my”, an attitude which excludes or separates oneself from the other, as reflected in such phrases as “[y]ou do your thing and I do mine” (Kavanaugh 1991:41). This has become a new idiom in Africa and is contrary to the values of *Ubuntu*.

This behavioural attitude results in irresponsible behaviour as seen in the *Izikhothane* trend. Young people adopt this behaviour from their seniors and mentors alike - for example, in the case of Nellie who owns more than one cell phone that her father bought for her, and Lerato who buys expensive clothes whenever she feels like because her parents can afford it.<sup>44</sup> This

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<sup>44</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyt7fm9pjkw>. Accessed 29/09/2014.

behaviour goes against the value of simplicity. Instead of being taught such values, these young women are introduced to the consumerist affluent lifestyle.

This is a clear indication that the youth have bought into the vices of consumerism. As a result of this it has become common to measure people's success on the basis of either what they are worth or the material possessions that they own. Their "focus on bodily enjoyment, fashionable clothes, and expensive car signals empty-minded and imitative consumerism" (Pietilia 2013:151); this is the kind of life that characterised by television commercials and the lifestyles of celebrities. Given the influence of the media on the young and impressionable, the temptation to regard consumerism as a norm remains very strong and whoever sounds a warning against this practice is either seen as out of touch with reality or envious towards those who are "successful" (Kavanaugh 1991).

This kind of behaviour is justified by economists who insist that buying is good for the economic development of the country.<sup>45</sup> However, consumerism leads to hostility towards each other, as seen in human trafficking and sex industries whereby young women are imprisoned and used for profit. When a woman is put on sale and a customer buys her in order to satisfy not only his needs but also the industry so that the business may grow, this is consumerism.<sup>46</sup> In a situation like this, people are only concerned about profit even if it means being hostile and destructive to others. In this environment, even if the theological values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality will be known they will never make any significant impact for consumerism is more influential. There seems to be a general understanding, especially in the African communities, that to prove that you are successful you must live a consumerist lifestyle. This is the thinking that people need to be liberated from.

Within this frame of thinking, there is unlikely to be concerted effort or commitment within society to encourage people to live simple and less extravagant lifestyles even if communities know about these values, because even those who are poor are striving for an affluent life (Conradie 2009).

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<sup>45</sup>[http://www.infobarrel.com/consumers\\_are\\_the\\_Most\\_important\\_part\\_of\\_the\\_paper](http://www.infobarrel.com/consumers_are_the_Most_important_part_of_the_paper). Accessed 08/06/2014

<sup>46</sup><http://www.thetruthisntsexy.co.za/>. Accessed 10/2/2014.

### 7.1.2. *Political Factors*

Another factor which negates the impact of theological values on consumerism is that of contemporary political discourse. Africa's current problems are blamed on the past failure of Africa to stand its ground against exploitation from the West. The cry is that corruption began by Europeans who ripped Africa resources; a situation that, well buttressed by consumerism, is continuing today on the national level (Ela 1994, Mveng 1994). Corruption is growing like a germ, especially here in South Africa, fuelled by greed and consumerism (Conradie 2009). A wide African political discourse perceives that consumerism is not an African problem. Because Africa has always been left behind economically and in development, the assumption is that in their conditions, there is no way that Africans could become consumers. Rather consumerism is considered to be a lifestyle that Africans have inherited from Europeans. In this way parallels are drawn between colonialism, the corruption of the African way of living and consumerism.

Globalization has opened doors for all to see what is outside their own area and has allowed people to be exposed to and welcome new things into their lives. Regrettably one of them is consumerism which boosts corruption (Kanyoro 2001) and reinforces economic injustice. South Africa ranks high among those countries with the greatest disparity between rich and poor. A minority enjoy the greatest proportion of wealth, privilege and comfort while the majority share in the least proportion of the economy and live below the poverty line (Conradie 2009, *Oikos Journey* 2006). This clearly indicates that the value of sharing is not practiced within communities today.

Very few people, especially African people, regard calls against opulence to be directed towards them. Similarly, most African people do not consider themselves to be culprits when it comes to consumerist behaviour. Perhaps the only time that Africans come close to admitting their consumerist lifestyles is when they defend themselves by saying that Europeans have eaten enough and it is now the time for Africans to eat. Others would argue that Europeans - who tend to write and reflect the most on issues of the impact of consumerism on the environment - have no right to do so because they are the ones who have caused the most destruction to the environment. Looking at this state of affairs, it does not seem that young women can be significantly influenced by the theological values of the vow

of poverty as well as those of African culture because they are of an opinion that it is time for Africans to come into power and enjoy the spoils like the Europeans did previously. This background certainly discourages the values of *Ubuntu* because such values seem to hinder the aspirations of the consumerist lifestyle.

### ***7.1.3. Theological Factors***

#### ***7.1.3.1. The Influence of the Prosperity Gospel***

Most young people in our society are likely to either be members or to have attended the so-called newer Pentecostal churches. These churches have a way of attracting young people because they seem to keep up with the styles of consumerism. This is discussed by Grady (2013) who gives the example of preachers who “boast about how much they paid for suits, shoes, necklaces and watches” -vivid symbols of the consumerist lifestyle which young people are attracted to. Is this not a cunning way to attract young people into the church, since their attraction is to external appearances, like fashion? In addition, these churches expose young people to what is commonly known as the “Prosperity Gospel” which holds false promises and some sorts of magical thinking in its practice. Jones (2013:1) exclaims that this gospel “teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy and personally happy.” But why should those who wish to be healed give money first so that they can be able to live longer? For example, people are told to buy healing water to cure HIV and AIDS at the cost of R10 a bottle.<sup>47</sup> Further there is also a belief that if you give R10.00, in return you will receive R100 (cf. Jones 2013). This sounds like commodification of Christianity (Conradie 2009). It is also irresponsible stewardship because this does not present the pastor as a leader accountable to his congregation, instead the pastor puts his interest first, then the congregation after (Block 2013).

As it is commonly known, the Gospel of prosperity is premised on the belief that those who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour will inherit all the treasures of this world. What this literally means is that those who are the children of God can have anything that they want and this is usually in terms of material belongings. As a result, it would seem that adherents to these churches equate opulence and excessive consumerism with being blessed.

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<sup>47</sup><http://www.enca.com/south-africa/hivaids-holy-water-cure-put-test>. Accessed 1/10/2014.

All this is alluring for young people, and much more attractive than the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality, to the extent that even if young people would know about them, the response would hardly be positive. Compared with the seductive promises of a glamorous life that consumerism exudes, there is not much attraction towards the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality.

### ***7.1.3.2. Theological Struggle***

There is hardly any influence of theological values on consumerism and the problems this new culture has easily brought into our communities in Africa. Theology tends to be academic, therefore its insights and calls for change still remain within academic circles. It also tends to be associated with clergy, thus ordinary people dissociate themselves from it. Bujo's (1992:70) assertions over two decades ago seem, in some respects, to be the case today: "it seems that this discipline has remained far too academic, and it is for the most part irrelevant to what is going on in African society today." Even though there has been a great deal of change within theology in Africa and its impact on social issues (such as African Women's theology, Black theology, theologies of inculturation for example), there are destructive phenomena invading our communities, such as consumerism, which seem to be untouched by such theological work.

Theologies that are liberative, such as those mentioned above, seek to deliver a message of deliverance to those who are captives in any form. It follows that theology in the African context should somehow have influence in liberating people from the vices of consumerism, and be able to do this while drawing on values that coincide with those of original cultures, such as simplicity of life. These should help to counteract the lure of the consumerist lifestyle. However, liberation theology has been ineffective in confronting and eliminating consumerist culture in our societies. Since consumerism and its culture of entitlement (Conradie 2009) have taken root in our society, it can be frankly said that there is minimal chance that young women would adhere to theological and cultural values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality. These have been swept away by consumerist culture, and living a consumerist lifestyle is becoming the norm today.

## ***7.2. Suggestions and Recommendations for Further Research***

The values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality seem to be hidden under the carpet of consumerism which makes it hard for them to be visible. This does not mean that it is the end of the story for these values, but it means there are new challenges for both religious people and theologians. Maybe it is the time to recall the original culture from which these values are derived and try to instill them once more into communities. Perhaps it is the time to lift the carpet of consumerism and expose what is underneath and let everybody see for themselves. This is a call to re-instill the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality into communities and bring back the concept of *Ubuntu*.

### ***7.2.1. The Value of Simplicity***

The value of simplicity features to a greater degree in the life of religious people than lay people because of their professed commitment to God. However, the value of simplicity is practiced widely in Africa - it goes beyond religious life, because it is part of *Ubuntu*. Both religious people and theologians can produce manuals that will show the beauty of a simple lifestyle in the face of consumerism. Young people, especially women, can learn that simplicity does not mean they should not find the perks of consumerism attractive, but it calls for a responsible lifestyle whereby everybody will feel at home in their communities, without feeling excluded because of their state of life. It is also necessary to make people aware that simplicity is not for the poor or for those who are backwards in life, but it is a rich culture that has kept community together. If young women particularly learn this at a tender age, they will, in turn, as adults, have positive teaching to pass on to their children. This will be a practical beginning to the process of combating consumerism other than only writing about it.

### ***7.2.2. The Value of Sharing***

There is no doubt that sharing features strongly in the values of *Ubuntu* in African culture, going beyond religious culture and theological teaching. As with the discussion of simplicity, sharing can be used as a tool to fight the negative effects of consumerism such as corruption, economic injustice and irresponsible stewardship. Recalling the value of sharing can encourage an even distribution of resources in South Africa, and teach those who take only for themselves to learn to share with those who have no access to resources they need to live.



Teaching young women about sharing will assist them in their future as it helps to maintain the bonds of community.

### ***7.2.3. The Value of Hospitality***

It is equally surprising that hospitality has become a problem in African community and that the spirit of *Ubuntu* has faded away. Consumerism, with all its positive contributions to our society, it is also hostile to communities. This is seen in increasing crime, particularly that of human trafficking. It is very hostile to steal, sell or buy a human being for one's profit or entertainment, and this is done under the umbrella of consumerism. All of humankind needs to address this hostility that is found in our communities. On the other hand religious and theologians should seriously get their feet dirty in attempting to re-instill this value of hospitality into society. It has become dangerous to be a woman due to the treatment that a woman receives in society. People, young and old, should be reintroduced to this important value of hospitality at schools, churches, in role play in community activities, including producing commercials and television shows that will promote hospitality whereby the notion of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Masango 2006), will again take precedence in our communities.

### ***7.3. Conclusion***

Consumerist lifestyles have proved to have enormous influence in African society today, to the extent that the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality which have been a guide to people in communities, no longer have an impact on how people view life. While consumerism has brought with many benefits it also introduced many of destructive features to culture, which has turn people into their own enemies. The theological values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality on the other hand only exist for a few minorities. They appear to be irrelevant to the youth, particularly the young women of rural of KwaZulu-Natal with whom this study is concerned, since these values are not as visible as consumerism. The struggle at this stage is how to retrieve the values of simplicity, sharing and hospitality in and emphasize their importance in society, thereby countering the negative practices that consumerism introduces in society. These suggestions might sound like a fantasy in the face of the consumerist lifestyle. Yet if implemented, they might bring about change and transform the society back to living what was of value for its well-being at one stage.

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