



**The Contribution of Catholic theologies on ‘*Imago Dei*’ to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own original work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. This dissertation is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Gender and Religion in the faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

16/03/2012

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Date



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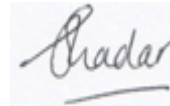
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As Supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation

16/03/2012

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Date



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Professor Sarojini Nadar

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to my older brother Ninsiima Dominic Savio who passed away in the middle of this year. May his soul rest in Eternal Peace. I also dedicate this work to my dear Parents, Brothers and Sisters for their unconditional love and support.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This is an exploratory study that seeks to establish the extent to which traditional theologies on '*imago Dei*' may contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV and AIDS. It employs a feminist framework of study to critically analyse how androcentric theologies on *imago Dei* informed by the Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and advanced by the Church fathers do contribute to the dehumanisation of women. Argued in this study, is that these teachings could be responsible for single women's vulnerability in the context of HIV and AIDS. Following extensive research done on women, HIV and AIDS, this study also presents cultural, social, economic and religious factors as players in women's susceptibility to HIV and AIDS. However, in a unique and particular way, this study seeks and presents a possible connection between the Catholic Church's teachings on *imago Dei* and the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV and AIDS.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.0. Background and Aim of the Study

This study assesses the extent to which traditional Catholic *Imago Dei* doctrines could contribute to single Catholic women's vulnerabilities in the context of HIV and AIDS. This is a qualitative philosophical exploratory study that examines the connection between *imago Dei* doctrines and the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV and AIDS. As a valid method of social scientific research, exploratory research endeavours to break new ground and usher in new insights based on a selected topic of research (Babbie & Mouton 2008:79). Considering that exploratory research as explained seeks to explore possible "hunches" and hypotheses that can be tested in more detailed empirical research later, this study seeks to test the links between Catholic teachings on the *Imago Dei* and Catholic single women's vulnerability in the context of HIV.

While some contemporary theologians and people of faith assume that women have always been included in the image of God in the Christian theological tradition, ecclesiastical authorities still position women differently when it comes to roles in the church and in society (Ruether, 1995:267). There has been a deep ambiguity within the *imago* doctrine throughout the Christian tradition. The Hellenistic gender dualism identified men with the mind, reason, and spirit while women represented the body, matter, and passions (Johnson, 1993:71). Hence, women became the symbol of evil and the "anti-image of God" (1993:71). This thinking is very evident in the writings of Augustine, Aquinas, Tertullian and other Church Fathers.

This kind of Church teaching and practice has promoted women's submission to male authority, and has persisted right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Africa has not been excluded and African women theologians have been noting the ways in which the church has internalised these views and subsequently made rules about women's conduct based on these ideas of female anthropology. This has been so particularly in the case of sexuality. For example, Ayanga (2008:41) points out that the church teaches that women are supposed to submit to their husbands both sexually and otherwise, and the Church even forbids divorce in cases of infidelity. Ayanga (2008:41) goes on to argue that women are not expected to openly express



sexual desires but should endeavour to satisfy the needs of the husband. A woman is barred from talking about "any problem related to sex (marital or otherwise) including any allusion to sexually transmitted infections" (2008:41). Masenya (2003:113) further attests to the fact that "women whose sexuality is not under the control of a particular man become easy prey to men to satisfy male lust".

Oduyoye (1995:213) argues that such views are not only oppressive to women but they underlie issues of power within the church showing women's exclusion from power structures and denying them full humanity. The main contention in this study is that the culture of silence and the negative perceptions about women's image and sexuality evident in the Catholic Church have contributed to women's vulnerability in the context of HIV. Single women in the context of HIV are facing a tough reality. Firstly, they are unmarried in an institution that upholds marriage as a sacrament, and secondly they are women in a Church that traditionally sees them as second class. Therefore, this research aims at identifying the extent to which these negative perceptions about women as informed by traditional Catholic theologies on the '*imago Dei*' may contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV.

### **1.1. Theoretical Framework**

My hypothesis as stated above is motivated by the call from Musa Dube for a 'gender-sensitive multi-sectoral approach' in the struggle against HIV and AIDS (Dube, 2004a:7). The main idea behind this approach is to make linkages between HIV and other social categories such as sexuality, religion, culture and gender. These linkages are made within the transformative agenda of seeking justice especially in the struggle against HIV and AIDS. One of the multi-sectoral factors as identified above has been gender injustice which is regarded as a contributing factor to the HIV and AIDS epidemic (2004a:7). However, not many sectors of society have incorporated such gender analysis and planning in their interventions (2004a:7). Religion is another "multi-sectoral factor" and so the ways in which it constructs gender is also significant in discerning the multiple factors which exacerbate the HIV pandemic (2004a:7). For this study I have chosen one aspect of Catholic religious thought and doctrine – the *imago Dei*. I wish to show how patriarchal interpretations which are rooted in the Catholic theologies on the '*Imago Dei*' can make single women vulnerable to HIV.

In addition to the multi-sectoral approach as defined by Dube above, a feminist theological

framework<sup>1</sup> of analysis is also useful for my study. Within this feminist theological framework a number of scholars have made valuable contributions. Ruether (1995:267) puts forward a feminist hermeneutical approach that calls for the recognition of equality between men and women even in attitudes and practice which always portray a different reality. At the heart of my study, is Young's (1990:14) 'reconstruction model' which seeks to reconstruct various doctrines that have traditionally contributed to women's subjugation. This model takes into account women's experiences of marginalization (1990:14) and seeks to "formulate new perspectives" (Rakoczy, 2004:17). Lastly, Ayanga's approach to HIV and AIDS which views women's sexuality in light of religion and culture is pertinent in analysing the extent to which Catholic theologies on the image of God can contribute to women's vulnerability to HIV.

## **1.2. Research Question and Objectives of the study**

To summarise, this study examines the following key research question: *To what extent do traditional Catholic theologies on the 'Imago Dei' contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV?*

### **1.2.1. Subsidiary Questions**

In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions are addressed:

1. What are the major Catholic theologies on the 'Imago Dei'?
2. How are single women vulnerable to HIV?
3. How do these theologies of 'Imago Dei' contribute specifically towards single women's vulnerability to HIV?
4. To what extent can these theologies be reconstructed bearing in mind the gendered nature of the HIV pandemic?

### **1.2.2. Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of the study are:

- a) To identify traditional Catholic Theologies on the 'Imago Dei'.
- b) To demonstrate that single women are more vulnerable to HIV.
- c) To assess the extent to which traditional Catholic theologies can contribute to the

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<sup>1</sup> Feminist theology belongs to the school of liberation theologies (Rakoczy, 2004:5). It aims at critiquing and 'formulating new perspectives from male cultural paradigms in theological thought' (2004:17). It involves challenging the exclusion and silencing of women in 'church history and theological tradition' as well as "searching for an alternative history and tradition that supports the inclusion of women as full human beings" (2004:18).

vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV.

d) To develop a theological model on *'Imago Dei'* that is based on mutuality rather than hierarchy.

### **1.3. Hypothesis**

My extended hypothesis is therefore: *The vulnerability of single women that has roots in traditional Catholic theologies which define women as not fully created in God's image, and asserts that a woman can only image God through her husband, can contribute to single women's further vulnerability in the context of HIV.*

### **1.4. Research design and methodology**

This study employs a qualitative non-empirical research design in order to achieve the set research objectives. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006:47), describe qualitative research as involving the collection of data in the form of written or spoken language, or in the form of observations that are recorded in language. Written materials in the form of official documents, books, articles in magazines, journals, unpublished and published resources and electronic sources were sourced from the various libraries. This research utilised exploratory method which is "mainly done to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding" towards an extended research on the topic of interest (Babbie & Mouton, 2008:79). This type of research also develops reliable methods for the relevant subsequent study. It is therefore characterised by its sense of the future (2008:79-80).

#### **1.4.1. Methods of Data collection**

Document study as one of the qualitative research methods is the main method used in this study. This research involves studying selected themes such as women's vulnerability, HIV and AIDS and the Catholic theologies on *'Imago Dei'* in depth. Therefore, this method assisted in identifying and understanding well the information obtained from the data at hand (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006:47). Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006:316) include materials such as letters, newspaper articles, official documents, and books as part of the necessary documents for study in library-based research.

#### **1.4.2. Methods of Data analysis**

The data collected through document study was then analysed using a feminist approach. This approach prioritizes women's experiences and tries to respond to situations that

discriminate and oppress women (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006:502). This approach is also critical and emancipatory (Sarantakos, 2005:54). This method therefore was crucial in the analysis of how traditional Catholic theologies on the image of God can contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV.

## **1.5. Preliminary Literature**

In order to ascertain the viability of this research, an extensive literature review was done on the topic. It is divided in two parts in respect of the two key areas that this study covers. The first part presents Catholic traditional theologies on the image of God and how they contribute to the dehumanisation and hence vulnerability of women. The second part reviews literature on the vulnerability of women to HIV with special reference to single women.

### **1.5.1. The contribution of Catholic theologies on the image of God to the dehumanisation of women**

Traditional theology is patriarchal. It was “written almost totally by men and has been formulated, despite claims to universality, as though maleness were the normative form of humanity, and thus, it has been about men” (Young, 1990:15). For this reason, the predicament of women in the Catholic Church leaves more questions than answers. The traditional theologies on the *Imago Dei* as will be argued have directly and indirectly contributed to the negative and dehumanizing perceptions about women regarding their sex and status.

This vulnerability has mainly been identified with biological, cultural and economic causes (Ayanga, 2008:34). This dissertation therefore hypothesises and argues that vulnerability which has roots in religious perceptions that define women as less of God's image can be equally dangerous in the context of HIV. Masenya (2003:123) concludes that Christian women who subscribe to the “men-friendly interpretations of the Bible *vis-a-vis* their sexuality may consequently find themselves in a dilemma”.

The Catholic theologies on the image of God have and still define women as less of God's image compared to men. Rakoczy, (2004:33) a feminist Catholic theologian, reflects on why men do not ask themselves on whether they are created in God's image, and yet women have to. The reason is because the construction of gender as entrenched in the Catholic teaching on the image of God presents women as less human and less of God's image than men (2004:33).

Ruether commenting on the contemporary Catholic documents reiterates that, “despite the egalitarian reading of the Bible ecclesiastical authorities still find a theological basis for assigning different unequal roles to women, in the church and in society” (1995:267). As a progressive theologian, John Paul II in *‘Mulieres Dignitatem’* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women) presents men and women as ‘equal in degree’ and that “both are created in God’s image” (MD, 6). During the Fourth World Conference of the United Nations on Women in Beijing, John Paul II re-affirmed the ‘inherent, inalienable dignity of women’ (Rakoczy, 2008:161) and further stressed men and women’s equality and capability to perceive and love God (MD, 7). However, since androcentric ideas are constituted in ‘language, mindset, imagery, and the distribution of value within the catholic church’ (Johnson, 1993:25), it is arguable that John Paul II’s ‘new and official teaching in the Catholic tradition’ (Rakoczy, 2008:161), though ground-breaking, still remains largely theoretical.

The basis for this entrenched gender biased approach to religious practice is both historical and doctrinal. In the Christian tradition women were regarded as the cause for sin and the corruption of man. Tertullian, for example, saw women as the 'Devil's gateway' and 'deserter of the divine Law' (The Book of Enoch, Vol.VI, Ch.1) while John Chrysostom (349-407) stresses that, “among all savage beasts none is found to be so harmful as women” (Rakoczy, 2004:31). Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, an applauded Church Father affirmed that:

The woman with her husband is the image of God in such a way that the whole of that substance is one image, but when she is assigned her function of being assistant, which is her concern alone, she is not the image of God, whereas in what concerns the man alone he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman is joined to him in one whole (*The Trinity*, 12:10, p.328).

This theology was confirmed and continued by Peter Abelard (1079-1142) who drew from 1Cor 11:7<sup>2</sup> to affirm that only men image God (quoted in Rakoczy, 2004:34).

Despite such ideas originating from Aristotelian Greek philosophy to which Thomas Aquinas was a proponent, he tries to reconcile the body and soul dualism that initially informed the theology of *‘Imago Dei’* (Rakoczy, 2004:34). However he still stresses the transcendental finality of the soul which was initially connected to the male while the body which referred to the female remained material, sexual, and emotional. Though he gives value to the body as he

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 11:7 states that, “A man should not wear anything on his head when worshipping for man is made in God’s image and reflects God’s glory. For the first man didn’t come from woman, but the first woman came from man.”

emphasizes the integrity of both the body and the soul, the ordering of the soul with God apparently leaves the man still superior to the woman (Rakoczy, 2004:34).

Informed by Augustine, Aquinas continues to stress that:

The male possesses the image of God in a different way from woman, and that his image is superior to that of woman. Her sexuality, which is identified as her essence as a woman, involves a weaker and more imperfect body, which in turn affects the intelligence upon which moral discernment is based. Thus a woman, like a child or a fool, is incapable of taking an oath, and since she is naturally subordinate to men, cannot teach (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 70, a 3. p. 270).

*The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1912) also describes women as “inferior to the male sex, both as regards body and soul” (Isherwood & McEwan, 2001:40). In the document *Gaudium et Spes* 60, in Vatican II (1962-1965) the Bishops presented women as having their own nature (Rakoczy, 2004:35). The Israelite society whose tradition informs the Bible and Catholic tradition presents “three classes of women whose sexual function did not belong to any man and hence could be used as men pleased” and these classes included “widows, divorced women and adult single women” (Wegner, 1992:41-42).

One of the contemporary Catholic theologians Hans Urs von Balthasar (1990:365) stresses the sexual, experiential and self-awareness differences between the male and female which he believes should provide a ‘neutral ground for mutual understanding’. Luce Irigaray, a feminist counterpart too believes that though ‘women’s exploitation is based upon sexual difference’; the same ground could provide a solution (1993:12). These theologians however still do not address the cause for women’s exploitation as having roots in the Church’s teachings on the *‘Imago Dei’*. While the Vatican II bishops deplored cultural discrimination based on sex, race colour, social conditions, language or religion (Flannery, 1996:194), again they did so without recognising that it is the church’s very own teachings which contribute in part to such discrimination.

Hence such theologizing doesn’t seem to address the plight of Catholic single women who continue to be seen even “more” as second class than their married counterparts, since according to Church teachings such as Augustine’s, only married women have the “possibility” to image God through their husbands (*The Trinity*, 12:10, p. 328; Gareth, 2002:97). Therefore for single women, this feeling of inadequacy coupled with the culture of silence about issues of sexuality and submissiveness perpetuated by the Church (Ayanga, 2008:41), leaves them at risk of male lust (Masenya, 2003:122) and causes them to seek

alliances with men at whatever cost, thereby making them susceptible to HIV infection.

### **1.5.2. The vulnerability of women to HIV**

The World Health Organisation estimates that women make up over 50% of the global population living with HIV (WHO, 2008). In Sub-Saharan Africa the number of women living with HIV is estimated to be more than 76% and the main reason for the increasing numbers has been attributed to gender inequality (UNAIDS, 2010:132).

Research by UNAIDS (2011) on the “*Vulnerability of women to HIV infection*” presents three main ways through which women are vulnerable to HIV. It identifies biological, economic, as well as social and cultural ways through which women are vulnerable to HIV and these are as follows:

Biologically, the larger mucosal surface and small cuts that occur during intercourse make especially young women more vulnerable to HIV. The presence of more viruses in the sperm than in the vaginal fluids as well as forced sex, also increase women’s vulnerability to HIV (UNAIDS, 2011).

Economically, this report cited the financial and material dependence of women on men which in turn gives them less control when it comes to making decisions about sex. Socially and culturally, this report identified that women are sometimes not expected to make decisions about sexuality, cannot negotiate condom use and risk abuse if they insist. Such violence has been seen to contribute to forced sex hence increasing chances for HIV infection. The phenomenon of older men having sex with young unmarried girls was also identified with vulnerability to male dominance (UNAIDS, 2011).

Research has also identified that women who have multiple partners are more vulnerable to HIV. A study carried out at the University of Texas in 2004 on the “*Factors that influence vulnerability to STD’s and HIV/AIDS among women*” found that 49% of single women reported more than one sexual partner in a period of one year (Chambers, 2004). This trend further indicates that women’s sexual behaviour to some extent aggravates their vulnerability in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Ruether (2007:96) agrees to some extent that women’s behaviour contributes to their vulnerability in the context of HIV and AIDS. However, she goes ahead and recognises the positive patterns of transformation in women’s roles and their agency to act in social, cultural and political domains which she believes has empowered them to respond positively to the

epidemic (2007:96). Notable though, is that religious and cultural stereotypes continue to play a big role in defining inequalities between sexes and the persistent subordination of women (Cosgrave, 2010:41). Ackermann (2004:37) also identify the nature of culture and Christian tradition as contributing factors to the marginalisation and dehumanisation of women making them vulnerable to HIV.

This literature review has shown that much research has been done in the area of Catholic theologies on *'Imago Dei'* and the vulnerability of women<sup>3</sup> to HIV. What this research does in particular is that it makes a direct link between single women's lesser status accorded in religion (Catholicism) and the ways in which this makes them seek out attachment to men, a situation that makes them susceptible to HIV.

Having established, in this introductory chapter, the rationale and motivation for doing my study through a detailed literature review, the theoretical underpinnings of my study as well as my research methodology, what remains is to describe the structure of the rest of the dissertation.

## **1.6. Structure of Dissertation**

### ***Chapter One: Introduction***

This chapter includes an introduction to the research, an extended review of literature that expounds on the previous research done on this topic while presenting the gaps that this research intends to address. An elaborate background of this research, the theoretical framework on which this research is based, as well as the main objectives are also included in this chapter. The research design and the methods employed to collect and analyse the data serve to guide the readers on how this research came to be.

### ***Chapter Two: The traditional Catholic Theologies on the 'Imago Dei':***

This chapter expounds on the philosophical and theological background of the traditional Catholic theologies on the image of God and how they portray women in general.

### ***Chapter Three: Women's vulnerability in the context of HIV and AIDS***

This chapter succinctly presents the vulnerabilities of women to HIV in general with emphasis on the predicament of single women in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that cultural and religious patriarchal norms that contribute to the vulnerability of women in general and single women in particular do not exclude Catholic single women.



***Chapter Four: The contribution of the Catholic theologies on the 'imago Dei' to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV:***

In this chapter, I critically analyse the impact of the traditional Catholic theologies on the image of God to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV. This analysis incorporates the theological contributions of some Catholic Church Fathers like Tertullian, Augustine and Aquinas, and how they inform the Catholic theologies on the image of God that are detrimental to single women in the context of HIV.

***Chapter Five: Reconstructing the traditional Catholic theologies on the 'Imago Dei' towards a theological model of mutuality:***

In this chapter, I utilise Ruether's 'egalitarian and mutuality' model which emphasizes "an egalitarian, mutual and partnership oriented mind for both men and women" (1995:267) and Young's 'reconstruction' model which stresses on "the reconstruction of various doctrines from how they have been traditionally interpreted to suit women's experience", (1990:14) will also assist in the development of a theological model that is based on mutuality and not hierarchy.

***Chapter six: General Conclusion:***

This chapter discusses the key findings of this study and presents some recommendations that may inspire further research in this area.

## Chapter Two

### The Traditional Catholic theologies on the *'Imago Dei'*

#### 2.0. Introduction

Chapter one has introduced the rationale and systematic structure for this research. This chapter presents the philosophies that inform traditional Catholic theologies on the image of God and further discusses the theologies themselves, their proponents and how they envisage women in particular.

#### 2.1. Philosophical foundations to the *'Imago Dei'* theologies

The origins of the *'image Dei'* theologies can be traced back to Greek philosophies of dualism which later informed the Judeo-Christian tradition.

##### 2.1.1. Plato<sup>4</sup>

Plato's philosophy of the 'body' and 'mind' found in his *'Phaedo'* presents the 'body' and 'mind' as two unequal and distinct realities. He argues that "true substances are not physical bodies, which are ephemeral, but the eternal Forms of which bodies are imperfect copies" (Robinson, 2011). In defence of this dualistic pre-existence, Plato concludes that "Forms (εἶδος) or ideas (ἰδέα) are the grounds of intelligibility" and that the intellect perceives the Forms in the course of comprehension (Vlastos, 1973:83). So, intelligible things cannot be perceived unless they have been formed. Plato deduces that "each of the Forms exists and it is in virtue of participating in them that other things are named after them," "*υποτημενοσ ειναι τι καλον αυτο κατη αυτο και αγατηον και μεγα και ταλλα παντα*" (1973:83).

For Plato, the Forms are of higher being and value than the material body. The soul which is also associated with the intellect belongs to the world of the Forms whereas the body which is lesser in being belongs to the material world. Plato emphasizes that the soul is always in the struggle "to leave the body in which it is imprisoned" in order to go back to the world of the Forms (Robinson, 2011). He emphasises that the relationship between the soul and the body is not of equals. The soul is the master while the body is the servant. He further stresses that "it is for the divine to command and rule, for the mortal to serve and obey." The soul

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<sup>4</sup> Plato (427-347 B.C.) was a prominent Greek philosopher whose chief contribution consists of the observable world/material world as an imperfect image of a realm of unobservable and unchanging "Forms". He was born in the Greek city of Athens (Kraut, 1999:709).

therefore is the divine in humanity and the body only plays a mortal function (Taylor, 1926:190).

This philosophy presents an anthropology that regards the material world and basically the body as imperfect and lesser in quality. Deducing from this premise, Plato concludes that the soul is permanent and divine while the body is perishable, human and mutable (Taylor, 1926:191). The immaterial world or world of Forms which incorporates the soul and the intellect as presented is considered superior. Plato considers Forms are also considered causal agents in the world of space and time. They are “a sufficient *aitiai* of generation” (Vlastos, 1973:88).

The *aitiai* of generation as expounded in the *Phaedo* denotes both being and becoming. For this reason the participants of the existing Forms cannot come into being unless there is mover. This prime mover facilitates the formation process of matter (Vlastos, 1973:88). Hence Forms are higher in being and quality while matter is deficient and only waiting to be qualified.

In his ‘*Dialogues*’ Plato further speaks of the:

Primal unformed matter as the receptacle and ‘nurse’ and imagines a “disembodied male mind as divine architect... shaping this matter into the cosmos by fashioning it after the intellectual blueprint of the Eternal ideas” (Ruether, 1993b:17). .

In this way, Plato uses gender markers by separating the material and the immaterial based on constructed gender stereotypes. This dualism puts females and natural phenomena at the same level while males are identified with the mind which is also the “divine architect” (Rakoczy, 2004:308). Since matter is qualified by form, women have been considered as less human unless qualified in this case by a man.

Plato’s philosophy influenced early Christian thought. His dualistic philosophy presented the soul and mind as male and divine oriented and hence belonging to the world of Forms while the body/matter also female, was presented as unpleasant and useless unless given a form – which would also imply being given a human form/dignity/identity etc. Considering that the soul is in constant search for freedom from the body in which it was considered imprisoned (Rees, 1967:320), emancipation from such ideas is undeniably important. It is evident that these ideas were later adopted by St. Augustine in his theological teaching. Notably,

Aristotle's ideas gained prominence over Plato's within Christian thought.

### 2.1.2. Aristotle<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle's dualism deviates slightly from Plato's dualism which separates the body and soul. For Aristotle, matter (or the body) and substantial form (soul) are not separate entities but do exist together. In his philosophy, Aristotle defines matter and form as "co-principles of which all real or actual things (substances) are composed" (Charles, 2005:57). This philosophy presupposes that the form gives things their essential characteristics while matter is the "ultimate substrate" from which material things are made (2005:57).

In Aristotle's metaphysics the form is considered more important than matter. This is because matter alone is nothing unless it possesses a form. He argues that matter in this sense is "pure potentiality, rather than actuality, implying that there is no existence of matter without the form (Charles, 2005:57). He further explains that the Matter of a substance is what that substance is made of (the *ex quo*) and Form on the other hand is the "principle by virtue of which (through the agency of an efficient cause) that which the substance is made *out of* comes to be" (Kosman, (1987:361). He concludes that:

The priority of form, as well as the origin of the differentiation process, is found in the prime mover (or the "unmoved mover"). The prime mover is the pure form, entirely separate from all matter, and it is eternal and unchangeable. It is its own activity and so is both the efficient (or moving) cause which moves all things, as well the final cause (*telos*) to which all things are directed (New World Encyclopedia, 2011).

In a Christian worldview, the unmoved mover and cause of all things is God the creator. Aristotle argues that, "all substances are in-formed matter – except God, the prime mover. He is 'in essence actuality', pure and unadulterated form" (Nussbaum & Rorty, 1992:126).

Therefore, God is the active principle that Aquinas identifies with the male in the procreative process. He defines matter as a female receptacle of the male seed (form) which forms and hence actualises the matter (Hartel, 1993:107). In this case, the identification of the female with matter and the male with form which is also found in the prime mover (God) indicates that the male participates in Godliness while the female (identified with matter) which is

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) is a celebrated Greek philosopher. He was born in Stagira, also known as Stagirite. In Athens, he studied under Plato grooming within the Academy until Plato's death in 347. He later founded his own philosophical school in Athens in the Lyceum (335) (Wedin, 1999:44).

actualised, is denied this quality. It can be argued, according to this thinking, that the male is considered to image God while the female does not. Johnson (1993:174) assesses that the identification of matter as “an inferior and passive principle, obviously cannot provide a suitable metaphor for the mystery of God who is the active source of all creation”.

## **2.2. The Church fathers’ views on women and the Image of God**

### **2.2.1. Tertullian<sup>6</sup>**

Tertullian in his treatise on the “*Modesty in apparel becoming to women, in memory of the introduction of sin into the world through woman*” openly blames women for the introduction of sin into the world. He regards women as the cause of human perdition and in addition calls each of them an Eve. For him women’s birth pains and anxieties of childbirth are part of their condemnation for causing man to sin (The Book of Enoch, Vol.VI, Ch. 1). Referring to women, Tertullian therefore concludes that:

The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil’s gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man (The Book of Enoch, Vol.VI, Ch. 1).

Evidently Tertullian sees women as temptresses of man, evil and thus they do not possess the image of God. His contributions to early Christian thought have influenced the Church’s teaching on the image of God up to today. His dehumanising ideas have led to the negative perceptions about women in the Church. Rakoczy (2004:199) concludes that such ideas entrenched in Christian tradition are responsible for denying women the image of God, equality with men and full participation within the Church.

### **2.2.2. Augustine<sup>7</sup>**

Augustine’s theological framework is informed by Plato’s philosophy of body and soul. He defines the human person as “a rational soul using a mortal and earthly body” while the soul is “a substance endowed with reason and fitted to rule a body” (Apocryphile, 2011). The fact that the soul has capacity to comprehend and love God makes it superior to the body.

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<sup>6</sup> Tertullian (ca. 150–225), was a Latin theologian, and early father of the Christian Church. He is applauded for laying conceptual and linguistic foundations for the doctrine of the Trinity (Lewis, 1999:908).

<sup>7</sup> “Aurelius Augustinus or St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 C.E.), was a Christian philosopher and Church father. His influence on Christian thought was immense especially in the West (Jordan, 1999:60).

Therefore, the soul rules the body (Apocryphile, 2011).

This philosophy has influenced Augustine's views on women. Drawing from Plato's philosophy which puts the soul, the male mind and the divine architect (also presumed male) at the higher level of Forms and women with nature at a lower level of matter, Augustine presents women as lesser beings to men (Gareth, 2002:97). He states that "nothing so casts down the manly mind from its heavenly heights as the fondling of women and those bodily contacts"... "women do not bear the image of God unless joined to a man and should in all ways submit to him" (The Trinity, 12:10, p.328). He continues to highlight that:

The woman with her husband is the image of God in such a way that the whole of that substance is one image, but when she is assigned her function of being assistant, which is her concern alone, she is not the image of God, whereas in what concerns the man alone he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman is joined to him in one whole" (*The Trinity*, 12:10, p.328).

As stated, the man on his own images God who created him and shares in the rational mind and knowledge of God (Gareth, 2002:91). This leaves the woman subordinate and socially unidentified unless attached to a man. More than in its teaching, the Church continues to manifest this understanding of women in the attitudes of its leaders. Women are not accorded equal responsibilities with men within the Church and their ability to exercise their gifts is hindered (Ruether, 1993:193-194). Oduyoye thus concludes that the Church "...accepts the material services of women but (does not) listen to their voices, seek their leadership, or welcome their initiatives" (1995:172-173).

### **2.2.3. Thomas Aquinas<sup>8</sup>**

St. Thomas Aquinas incorporates Aristotle's philosophy of matter and form into his theology. He presents women as made up of both matter and substantial form (Hartel, 1993:60). He further emphasises that matter does not exist in God since God is pure act and hence cannot be actualised as a perfect being. Men and women do have matter because they are material but they "own their goodness and perfection from their form" (Kreeft, 1990:77).

Until now Thomas Aquinas' argument is soundly gender inclusive. However, his

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was a Catholic Priest in the Dominican Order and one of the most important medieval philosophers and theologians. He is known for his unrivalled synthesis that "combined Aristotolian and Neo-platonic elements within a Christian context in an original and ingenious way" (Wippel, 1999:40).

identification of the male as the active principle in generation and the female as the passive principle, raises new questions regarding the equality of men and women and the inherent image of God in both (Wijngaards, 2011). He argues that “the female only supplies the matter or passive element” while the “male seed as an active principle supplies the form” which actualises the matter through generation (Hartel, 1993:107). Notably, Christian thought presents God as the actualising agent through creation. Therefore, the male participation in the actualisation process of the passive female matter puts the male in the very creative act of God of which the female is considered to remain passive.

This theology presents masculinity as superior and more perfect than femininity, since pure act, the God-male supersedes passivity or the female which only receives (Knight, 2008). In this case, the active participation in God’s image becomes a role ascribed to the male as opposed to the female. Aquinas continues to assert that “men as possessors of the superior quality, are superior to women who lack this masculine active quality and are merely passive”(sed mulier naturaliter est minoris virtutis et dignitatis quam vir: semper enim honorabilis est agens patiente...) (*Summa Theologiae*, 1, q. 92, a 1).

Also borrowed by Aquinas, is Aristotle’s “*femina est mas occasionatus*” translated as “*the female is unfinished and caused accidentally*” (Hartel, 1993:108-110). This assertion presents woman as less human and hence unworthy of participating fully in God’s image. In further support of this argument, Aquinas stresses that:

Since the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex, the production of a female must arise because of something going wrong in generation, and hence she is defective, accidentally begotten, a misbegotten male (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 92, a 1).

Arguably, this would mean that God who is male created one like him, another male who in turn is supposed to generate another like him, a male offspring. The generation of a female in his argument means she is a defective male without an own identity but only to be called female. Aquinas affirms this when he asserts that “man is in the likeness of God and is the principle of the whole human race” (Knight, 2008). He concludes that man should “love woman... since she was fashioned for him” (Wijngaards, 2011). By simple logic this means women are not truly made in the image of God.<sup>9</sup> In fact he points out that even the direction

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<sup>9</sup> “... But in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman: for man is the beginning

of the wind could interfere with the natural course of generating a male and result in a female who is an imperfectly generated offspring (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 70, a 3. p. 270).

In summary, the attitudes and teachings of some of the Church Fathers highlighted in this study have shown that Plato and Aristotle's philosophies on dualism influenced their gender perceptions throughout their theological discourse on the image of God. These gender biased philosophical ideas have continued to inform Catholic Church teaching on the image of God thereby contributing to the Church's dehumanisation of women.

### **2.3. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented and discussed the philosophies that informed the traditional Catholic theologies on the Image of God. It has shown that the Greek philosophies of dualism from Plato and Aristotle on 'Body and soul' and 'Matter and Form' respectively contributed enormously towards the traditional Catholic theologies on the Image of God. This chapter has shown the extent to which the theologies on the Image of God as advanced by Tertullian, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have informed Church teaching thereby contributing to the progressive dehumanisation and oppression of women. The following chapter will now show how other factors (biological, economic, cultural and religious) have also contributed directly and indirectly to the vulnerability of women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

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*and end of woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature.* That is why the Apostle (Paul) said that "man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. He adds: "For man is not of woman, but woman of man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man." (*Summa Theologica* I, qu. 93, art. 4 ad 1; Website: <<http://www.womenpriests.org/theology/aqui-inf.asp>> accessed on 28/11/2011).



## **Chapter Three**

### **Women's vulnerability in the context of HIV and AIDS**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

The previous chapter has assessed the extent to which traditional theologies on the Image of God as informed by the Greek philosophies on dualism have led to the dehumanisation of women in the Church. This chapter will continue to analytically present the biological, economic, cultural and religious factors that have perpetuated the vulnerability of women. This vulnerability, as research has shown, is detrimental in the context of HIV and AIDS. The chapter concludes with an in-depth discussion on the predicament of single women in the context of the HIV and AIDS.

#### **3.1. Definition of vulnerability**

Vulnerability emanates from the adjective 'vulnerable'. To be vulnerable, according to the *Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary* is defined as being "weak and easily hurt physically or emotionally" (Wehmeier, 2000:1450). Vulnerability also relates to being at risk of abuse, attack or illness (2000:1450).

#### **3.2. Assessing the vulnerability of women in the context of HIV and AIDS**

Research done in the area of gender and HIV and AIDS has demonstrated that women are more vulnerable to HIV than men. The UNAIDS global report for 2010 recorded that women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are particularly vulnerable to HIV and the incidence figures remain at an all time high. The report also states that 76% of all women living positively in the world today are in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2010:132). Various reasons have been given for this predicament and they range from biological to economic, cultural and religious ones. Dube (2004b:135) advises that this phenomenon should be analysed as a justice issue. She argues that "any community or group of people who are denied their human rights become more vulnerable to infection" (2004b:135). This section will therefore elucidate the various factors that undergird women's vulnerability to HIV.

### **3.2.1. The biological factors**

Research in the field of HIV and AIDS and human anatomy has established that women are more likely to contract HIV than men due to some biological reasons. An online article by ‘MEDDICC Review’ has established this fact and hence presents various biological factors that contribute to women’s vulnerability to HIV infection.

Firstly, the presence of more viruses in the sperm than in the vaginal fluids due to higher numbers of cells in the sperm than in the vaginal fluids, increases chances of infection in women than in men. Also semen stays longer in the vaginal and rectal tracts than on the penis, a situation that increases the level of HIV infection in women. During heterosexual sex, the woman is exposed to infection for a longer time than the man (MEDDICC Review, 2009).

Secondly, the vaginal mucous in adolescents and post-menopausal women is lighter and more permeable than is in younger women. This is because the vaginal mucous of adolescents is not yet mature and thick enough to prevent viral entry. In post-menopausal women the vaginal mucous gets ‘thinner and weaker’ as they grow making it less capable of creating some resistance (MEDDICC Review, 2011). This increases chances of HIV infection. This is because during sexual intercourse the vaginal fluids lubricate and also form a sheath that protects the vagina from abrasions caused by friction due to the rubbing of the penis. In this case, the lack of sufficient lubrication in vagina during intercourse renders one more vulnerable to HIV infection.

Thirdly, the occurrence of abrasions during intercourse which is more common in women than men increases their chances of getting infected. In most cases, the level of infection is increased if there has been “traumatic coitus, rape, menstruation or microscopic fissures” (MEDDICC Review, 2006).

Lastly, the fact that women take longer to detect sexually transmitted infections makes them even more vulnerable to HIV infection. STI’s normally cause some wounds within the vaginal canal which take long to notice. These wounds serve as easy entry points for the HIV virus during intercourse (MEDDICC Review, 2006).

### 3.2.2. Economic factors

Economic factors mostly relating to poverty<sup>10</sup> have been identified as some of the major drivers of the epidemic. Okure has called poverty with its global economic strings, a second virus (cited in Ackermann, 2008:109). She argues that the HI-virus “does not act alone” but in “synergy with viruses of sexism, economic injustice and denial” (2008:111). In her conclusion, poverty has contributed immensely to the pandemic especially in the developing world (2008:111). In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, more than 60% of the people live below the poverty line (US \$1 per day) according to United Nations poverty indicators (Mbirimtengerenji, 2007:605). 62% of the world’s HIV cases are also in this region with more than 14,000 people getting infected everyday and over 11,000 dying due to AIDS related illnesses (2007:605). Mbirimtengerenji (2007:606) identifies four main poverty-related factors that have led to the spread of HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa and these he says are sex trade, migration, polygamy and teenage marriages.

In addition, Ayanga (2008:42) discusses “ignorance, poverty and education” as an indubitable HIV-driving trio. She stresses that poverty as the lack of knowledge leads to ignorance and exacerbates economic dependence. Low levels of education especially among women have immensely contributed to risky behaviour. Women who have no education may either get infected due to ignorance about prevention measures or the lack of viable economic means for survival. They basically rely on men for sustenance and in most cases this involves relinquishing their right to negotiate for safe sex. It is undeniable from such circumstances of vulnerability that sex work starts, further increasing chances for infection (2008:42).

Research carried out by Weiss and Rao Gupta (1998:27) indicates that women who are economically deprived are more likely “to exchange sex for money or favours, less likely that they will succeed in negotiating protection, and less likely to leave a relationship that they perceive to be risky.” A similar research carried out among poor women in Tanzania by Boestan and Poku too revealed similar results. They noted that:

Women’s economic dependence on men pushes them into sexual relationships over which they have limited control. Fear of violence and lack of vital economic support discourages women to disclose their HIV status to sexual

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<sup>10</sup> The term poverty in this section is used comprehensively to mean “deprivation, constrained choices, and unfulfilled capacities, and refers to interrelated features of well-being that impact upon the standard of living and the quality of life” (Mbirimtengerenji, 2007:606; Website: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2205968/>) accessed on 12/11/2011).

partners, perpetuating the cycle of gender inequality, poverty and HIV transmission (Boestan and Poku, 2009:17).

How can women attain economic independence if religion and culture continue to teach them that they are “nothing without a man?” Further Kgalemang (2004:141) advises that unless women are trained or educated for “greater economic opportunity, their position will be one of economic disadvantage and underdevelopment.” The extensive body of research clearly indicates that women who are deprived economically are highly vulnerable to HIV infection.

### **3.2.3. Cultural factors**

Cultural factors that contribute to women’s vulnerability are not very different despite the diversity of contexts. In the African context, most communities do not allow women to communicate freely especially on matters of sexuality (Ayanga, 2008:40). This is a result of patriarchal cultural constructs that uphold the voice of the man over a woman’s. Ayanga (2008:38) gives an example of the institution of marriage within which roles and behavioural practices have been defined by men to maintain control. She stresses that gender role controls “embedded in cultural beliefs and attitudes towards women” are disempowering and a risk area in the context of HIV (2008:38).

Masenya asserts that African culture has impacted negatively on the institution of marriage by affirming male authority. She argues that the ‘identity’ of married women and their ‘sexuality,’ are placed under the control of the husband and this leaves them vulnerable to abuse and possibly of HIV (2003:113). She argues that in most cultures where dowry is given to the girl’s family (citing ‘lobola’ in Northern Sotho), “the husband unilaterally controls the sexuality of married women” (2003:121). Such practices, she affirms are supported by the cultural belief that an “ideal womanhood is linked to her marital status” (2003:124).

Expounding further, Ayanga (2008:38) concludes that women’s role in the African marriage context is specifically to bring forth children. Therefore, the inability of a woman to fulfil this role has dire consequences on her part. In most cases she is regarded as an “outcast or misfit” in the community (2008:38). This gives the husband some legitimacy to seek out another woman or other women, a situation that may lead to HIV infection. As has been discussed, the consequences of such life denying cultural practices could be lethal in the current context of HIV and AIDS.

### 3.2.4. Religious factors

Religious factors that contribute to women's vulnerability to HIV are rooted in patriarchal religious traditions and teaching. This section expounds on the Church's teaching on the image of God, and sexuality, discussing how in practice they dehumanise women contributing their vulnerability to HIV. Challenging the religious tradition on the image of God, Ruether (1995:267) stresses the rooted vagueness "within the doctrine on the image of God as understood throughout the Christian tradition." She points to the Hellenistic gender dualism which identifies men with the mind, reason, and the spirit and women with the body, matter, and passions, as responsible for the imposed inferior status of women in the Church (1995:267). This teaching in practice categorises women as inherently evil and hence the "anti-image of God" (Johnson, 1993:71).

From the Church Fathers (See chapter two) down to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (21<sup>st</sup> century teaching), we find similar traces of the same teaching that dehumanises women. Augustine and Aquinas affirmed that:

The male possesses the image of God in a different way from woman. Her sexuality, which is identified as her essence as a woman, involves a weaker and more imperfect body, which in turn affects the intelligence upon which moral discernment is based (quoted in Rakoczy, 2004:35).

Similarly, I also argue that the exclusive language used in church teaching found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, epitomises the Church's patriarchal nature inherent in its tradition and teaching that presents women as second class. It is stated in the *Catechism* that:

Of all visible creatures only 'man' is 'able to know and love 'his' creator. 'He' is 'the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake', and 'he' alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that 'he' was created, and this is the fundamental reason for 'his' dignity (CCC, 356).

Philip Sheldrake, a Catholic Jesuit priest in his article "*Spirituality and sexism*" stresses that, "the concern for inclusive language witnesses to the power of words to evoke feelings and experience" (1991:89). Therefore, the continual usage of exclusive language entrenched in church teaching shows the church's slowness in responding to women's feelings and experiences of emancipation.

Ruether (1993b:80) argues that traditional orthodox Christianity with its patriarchal nature suppressed women asceticism which portrayed spiritual equality between men and women but chose to emphasise doctrines that uphold patriarchal norms as indubitable truth. She argues that:

Women's capacities for spiritual equality are postponed until they reach heaven and are to be earned only by the strictest subjugation to male power in Church and in society. Spiritual femininity, symbolized by the Virgin Mary, becomes increasingly out of the reach of ordinary women. Women, even nuns, are seen primarily as sexual dangers to men, carrying in their physical beings the threat of a debased subjugation to corruptibility and death (1993b:80-81).

The tradition of misogyny within the Church has continued to see a woman's body "with violent disgust as the image of decay." This is based on the assertion that the physical presence of a woman is capable of dragging "down the souls of men to carnal lust and thus to eternal damnation" (Ruether, 1993b:81). Such is also evident in the writings of a respected Dominican preacher John Broomyard (14<sup>th</sup> Century) who regarded women "as a painted tombstone that conceals a rotting corpse" (Ruether, 1993b:81). In our current age the church's attitudes towards women have not changed much. Ayanga (2008:45) points out that despite the church's profound responsibility to promote equality between men and women as has been its message, it continues to shy away from "making decisive statements or adequately showing practical examples of how this equality ought to work". She reiterates on the ardent need for change which the church may not carry on to neglect (2008:44).

Oduyoye (1995:213) challenges church teaching and attitudes that are pejorative to women. She deplores their oppressive and excluding nature which keeps women as doormats within Church functionality (1995:213). Such teaching continues to promote women's submission to male authority and to hold women's sexuality in contempt. This leaves women vulnerable to abuse. Church teaching that designates women to submit to their husbands both sexually and otherwise, forbidding divorce even in cases of infidelity, has been found to contribute to women's vulnerability due to domination, abuse and the risk of HIV infection<sup>11</sup> (Haddad, 2003:155; Ayanga, 2008:41).

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<sup>11</sup> A research carried out by a research-based organisation, '2know myself' found out that both boys and girls are equally intelligent from childhood, however the inferiority for women springs from the way they are "taught directly and indirectly that they are inferior to men resulting into feelings of insecurity" (Radwan, 2011).

Further, the culture of silence and the negative perceptions about women's image and sexuality evident in the Church continue to make women vulnerable both within and outside the Church (Ayanga, 2008:41). Evidence has shown that denying women the right of expression over their sexual desires while restricting them to satisfy the conjugal needs of their husbands even in infidelity (2008:41) has increased despondency leading to more infidelity and a greater risk of HIV infection.

For example, a recent study carried out in Uganda revealed that HIV prevalence among married couples (not necessarily Catholic) stood at more than 28% compared to that of single women/girls which was at 15% in an age group of 15 to 30 years (Advocates for youth, 2011) This fact reveals that marriage itself is not a safe institution in the current HIV and AIDS context. Therefore, Church teaching that stigmatises women for openly talking about sex, sexuality and sexually transmitted infections (Ayanga, 2008:41) should be questioned in this context of HIV and AIDS.

### **3.3. The vulnerability of single women to HIV**

Before delving into the content of this section, it is pertinent to first and foremost explain the term 'single woman' as used in this study. The term 'single woman' refers to a woman who is of age (an adult)<sup>12</sup> but is not yet married either by choice or by circumstance. The other category of 'single women', the celibate will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Single women are mostly presumed to have higher chances of contracting HIV just because they are not married and could possibly have multiple partners.<sup>13</sup> Further, Byamugisha (2010:17) in his wide research has established that, women in general (both single and married) lack a voice when it comes to "matters of sexual consent and whether or under what conditions, sexual intercourse should occur". This research presents a situation that could jeopardise single women's power to negotiate for safe sex. In male dominated cultures where single women are always seen as possible marriage or just sexual partners, having sex with a man would be tolerated as long as he appears as a prospective husband. Among the Ankore

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<sup>12</sup> The age of consent for marriage in most countries as well as South Africa is eighteen and above (See Meumann White attorneys; Website: < <http://www.meumannwhite.co.za/family-law/>> accessed on 12/11/2011). According to the Catholic Canon Law, Canon 1058 states that, "All can contract marriage who are not prohibited by Law" (CCL, 1058; Website: <<http://www.catholicdoors.com/misc/marriage/canonlaw.htm>> accessed on 12/11/2011). This law respects the age clause of each country since the Catholic Church cannot dictate on this matter.

<sup>13</sup> A research done at the University of Texas among Hispanic single women found out that more than 49% of them reported more than sexual partner in a period of one year (Chambers, 2004).

people of Uganda to whom I belong, there is an adage that '*omusheija tayangwa*' translated as 'a man cannot be refused sex'. Single women in such circumstances find themselves vulnerable to men's sexual demands increasing their vulnerability to infection.

In fact, Masenya (2003:122) affirms that such dynamics of sexuality are not limited to marriage and this reveals the existing vulnerabilities of single women to HIV. She stresses that "women who are not under the legitimate control of a particular man (husband or father)" are not immune to male sexual 'lust' (2003:122). She concludes that both married and single women are vulnerable to male abuse and the risk of HIV. She highlights women's single status particularly because single women are often discriminated against by the society due to cultural and religious beliefs.

It is also important to note that, some circumstances that contribute to the vulnerability of women in general, do affect single women as well. As outlined above, single women still face cultural and religious stigmatization relating to their single status in communities that uphold marriage as a norm or a divine instituted sacrament. Ayanga (2008:38) found out that in most African cultures, it is a conditional requirement for a woman to get married and have children. This expectation leaves single women under constant pressure to either get married or at least to have a child. Such circumstances may further increase single women's vulnerability to HIV.

Further, Christian teaching on marriage that requires a woman to be attached to a man indissolubly (CC, 32) must be probed. This teaching though emphasised in faith puts pressure upon single women to attach to men for the good intention of marriage. However this act in the current context of HIV and AIDS could be detrimental. Research has shown that most HIV contraction rates among women today are a result of their men or unfaithful husbands being promiscuous (Byamugisha, 2010:42).

The other factor adding pressure on single women to attach to a man in hope of getting married is the Church's policy that despises children born out of wedlock. Entrenched in its Canon Law the Church states that children born out of wedlock though recognised by the Church are still regarded as illegitimate.<sup>14</sup> Argued however, is that the pain of having one's child regarded as illegitimate just because one is not married, adds to the already existing

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<sup>14</sup> See '*Legitimation*' in Catholic Canon Law: Online version. Website: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09131e.htm> accessed on 10/11/2011.



pressure for single Catholic women to desperately seek for men or rather prospective marriage partners.<sup>15</sup> Much as this is the desire for most women, the main concern arises within the context of HIV and AIDS where such vulnerability could increase chances of being infected.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

This chapter's aim was to ascertain the vulnerability of women to HIV and further discuss factors that may contribute to the vulnerability of single women in particular, to HIV. Biological, economic, cultural and religious factors for women's vulnerability in the HIV and AIDS context have been discussed and they do affect single women as well. However, as research has shown single women bear harder circumstances than their married counterparts. The stigma attached to being a single woman culturally and religiously and the intense economic stress, as I have discussed, together may increase single women's vulnerability to HIV.

Having assessed the vulnerability of women in general and single women in particular in the HIV and AIDS context, the next chapter will continue to deeply analyse the extent to which the traditional Catholic theologies of the image of God may contribute both directly and indirectly to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV.

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<sup>15</sup> As stipulated in the Encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI "*Casti Connubii*", procreation is pertinent to marriage as, presented by Paul the Apostle and later Augustine. According to him (Augustine), "younger women should marry... so that they may bear children and become mothers of families" (CC, 12). The Church still emphasises procreation within marriage.

## Chapter Four

### **The contribution of Catholic theologies on the image of God to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV**

#### **4.0. Introduction**

In chapter three I have extensively discussed the cultural, social, economic and religious factors for the vulnerability of women and single women in particular to HIV. What has not been addressed however is the connection between the Catholic single women's vulnerability to HIV and the Church's traditional theologies on the image of God. In this chapter therefore, I intend to critically analyse the extent to which these theologies dehumanise and put pressure on single women thereby making them vulnerable in the HIV and AIDS context.

In addition, I will also discuss the institution of marriage and religious life for women within the Catholic Church. This will define the place of Catholic single women within this institutional equation.

#### **4.1. Marriage in the Catholic Church**

The Church is very clear on its teaching on marriage and evidently unclear on the position of lay Catholic single women. As we will realise, the dynamics of social change within the wider society where being single is now by choice rather than a lack of a man or a woman, the Church is yet to find a viable way or teaching that joyfully embraces this new reality.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which is also part of the church's teaching presents marriage as a covenant "by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life" (CCC, 1601). It further emphasises that marriage is by "nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and procreation and the education of offspring" (CCC, 1601). Marriage as a sacrament was raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of being a sacrament and must be "between two baptised persons" (CCC, 1601). In this case, unbaptised persons may not be allowed to contract a marriage within the Catholic Church since marriage as sacrament comes after baptism unless in circumstances where all the sacraments of initiation are given at the same time followed by holy matrimony/marriage. It is also important to note that lay Catholics who choose or do remain unmarried are not under any sacramental ordering unmarried. In other words there is no sacrament called 'single life' but marriage is. It can be argued therefore that married Catholics feel more privileged than

their single counterparts. Theologically, since marriage is dignified by Christ and is given such exaltation, it is apparent that single persons may be feeling second class within the church.

Notably, the Synod of Bishops during the Special Assembly for Africa reiterated on the fundamental importance of marriage. In their replies to the *Lineamenta*, they considered marriage and family life essential to the existence of the Church (*Relatio ante disceptationem*, 1994:17). Pope John Paul II further stressed that “the future of the world and the Church passes through the family” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981:75). Marriage is therefore a fundamental vital force for the continuity and dignity of the Church.

The couple who contracts this marriage is subject to the ‘terms and conditions’ of this sacrament. Pope Pius XI in his encyclical “*Casti Connubi*”, states that Christian marriage in its sacramental nature and dignity is divinely instituted, it calls for perpetual stability, is immutable, inviolable and is part of the fundamental truth of the Church<sup>16</sup> (CC, 5). This is because marriage is “the intimate community of life and love,” and was “established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws...” and hence “God himself is the author of marriage” (CCC, 1603). Marriage therefore occupies a special place within the Catholic faith and practice. It is considered part of:

The constant and universal Tradition of the Church; it is the solemnly defined doctrine of the Council of Trent, which uses the words of Holy Scripture to proclaim and establish that the perpetual indissolubility of the marriage bond, its unity and its stability, derive from God Himself (CC, 5).

The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, ‘*Lumen Gentium*’ (1964), confirms that the virtue of the sacrament of matrimony shared by the married couple signifies the “faithful love between Christ and the Church” (Dupuis, 2001:775). Hence, Christian married couples are expected to lead each other towards holiness and the rearing of children (2001:775). The Apostolic exhortation ‘*Familiaris Consortio*’ (22 November, 1981), concludes that:

It is a fundamental duty of the Church to reaffirm strongly...the indissolubility of marriage. To all those in our times, consider it difficult, or indeed impossible, to be bound to one person for the whole of life, and to those caught up in a culture that rejects the indissolubility of marriage and openly mocks the commitment of

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<sup>16</sup> Marriage is part of the fundamental truth of the Church because it is part of the Sacramental nature of the Church.

spouses to fidelity, it is necessary to reaffirm the good news of the definitive nature of that conjugal love that has its foundation and strength in Christ (Dupuis, 2001:780).

Considering the Church's perspective on marriage as has been discussed, I argue that this position may create an impression that marriage is more important than being single in the Catholic context. Therefore, single persons and specifically single women may find it challenging to fit within a community that is informed by such a teaching, and one that is dominated by mostly married couples. Apparently, such circumstances may contribute to the pressure for single Catholic women to seek out male companionship with a hope for marriage.

In this discussion, I have highlighted the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage in its strength. To note however is that the Catholic Church gives no exquisite theology/teaching in support of lay Catholic single women despite their active existence within the Church. I therefore argue that the lack of a viable teaching in support of single women also points to the lack of interest in single women within the Catholic Church generally.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter on the dignity and vocation of women '*Mulieris Dignitatem*' expounds further on the mutuality of the married couples and the institution of marriage as a place for them to discover their humanity (*MD*, 24). This could also be argued that the realisation of the human quality in this sense lies irrevocably within the institution of marriage. So then, could single women within the Church ever realise such a sacred quality of being human? It follows in this case that a Catholic single woman would find it impelling to seek attachment to a man in view of attaining the esteemed marriage sacrament.

Having discussed the significance of marriage within the Catholic Church, the following section will explore the phenomenon of being a single Catholic woman in an institution that generally considers women as second class<sup>17</sup> and further upholds marriage as doctrinal and a necessary sacrament for those who do not wish to live in consecrated celibacy.

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<sup>17</sup> The following Canon presents one out the many examples that highlight women's position in the Church on some matters. Canon 1024 classifies women as legally *incapable of ordination*. It emphasises that, 'only a baptized male validly receives sacred ordination.' Women, even if they believe and are baptized, are *a priori* excluded from the offices of deacon, priest and bishop" (Raming, 2011).

## 4.2. Being 'single' in the Catholic Church: Exploring the trend

Marriage as expounded in the previous section is part of the sacramental nature of the Church in which all baptised men and women, unless under the vow of celibacy are called to participate. However, as research has shown, not all women in the Catholic Church are married or do choose to get married. The following section will expound on the reality of consecrated life for women within the Church. Sub-divided in two parts, the first will concentrate on Consecrated Virgins and second on Women Religious life in general. The aim of this informative section is to show that consecrated women are basically not single per se and hence may not be categorised as such. This keeps into perspective lay Catholic single women as far as this research is concerned.

### 4.2.1. Consecrated Virgins

Consecrated Virgins/Order of virgins<sup>18</sup>, are mainly young women who having not had any sexual relations choose to serve the Church of Christ as perpetual virgins. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Virgins, who are committed to the holy plan of following Christ more closely, are consecrated to God by the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite, are betrothed mystically to Christ, the Son of God, and are dedicated to the service of the Church." By this solemn rite (*Consecratio virginum*), the virgin is "constituted . . . a sacred person, a transcendent sign of the Church's love for Christ, and an eschatological image of this heavenly Bride of Christ and of the life to come (CCC, 923).

Through this rite, the young woman is consecrated to the Church as the bride of Christ and she is dressed in a white robe. In a special way she is offered as a bride for Christ in the service of the Church. In this case, it just presumed but it holds that Consecrated Virgins are spiritually married to Christ and his Church. Canon 604 paragraph one of the Code of Canon Law, emphasises that:

Virgins who, expressing the holy resolution of following Christ more closely, are consecrated to God by the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite, are mystically betrothed to Christ, the Son of God, and are dedicated to the service

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<sup>18</sup> "Virginity is not only chastity dedicated to God but is also a precious gift given by God to some people." It incorporates "consecrating oneself more easily and without any division of heart (*facilius indiviso corde*) to God alone." "It presumes celibacy, perfect continence and the chastity proper to this state" (Latourelle, 1989:68).

of the Church (*CCL*, 604).

The Canon law adds that women who are to be Consecrated Virgins should never have been married or “lived in public or flagrant violation of chastity” (*CCL*, 604). It may be concluded in this case that Consecrated Virgins are by virtue of their vocation not really single. Also considering that they stay in community sharing and supporting each other, being single *per se* may not be extensively relevant to them in this regard. Paragraph two of Canon 604, clarifies that “in order to observe their own resolution more faithfully and to perform by mutual assistance service to the Church in harmony with their proper state, virgins can be associated together” (Beal, Coriden, & Green, 2007:768-9). Therefore, it is possible that some experiences related to being and living as a single woman, definitely are not shared by Consecrated Virgins. This in a way lessens their level of vulnerability compared to single women who have to face economic, social, religious and cultural pressures in a society that upholds marriage and breeds patriarchy-driven sexual vices that regard single women as easy targets for sexual exploitation.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.2.2. Religious Women**

Religious women live a consecrated life or a life of seclusion and service for the Kingdom of God.<sup>20</sup> These can be women who have not been married before but not necessarily virgins or those who have been widowed and still feel the call to serve God in this special way. Being consecrated, involves an obligation to publicly embrace religious vows/evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience (Bianchini, 2011; Latourelle, 1989:68-9). The public profession of the evangelical Counsels is in itself a sign “which can and ought to attract all members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfilment of the duties of their Christian vocation” (*LG*, 44). The pronouncement of these counsels is in accordance with the constitution of each religious order. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (*LG* 44) presents evangelical counsels as:

The precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt. 19:11; 1 Cor. 7:7) to devote themselves to God alone more easily with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of

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<sup>19</sup> Research carried out among women in Kwa-Zulu Natal, found that unmarried women and teenagers had the highest HIV incidents and sexual activity within these groups was found to be mostly consensual (Rakoczy, 2001:48; Bruce, 2003:45).

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II refers to religious life as one of specially consecrated persons to God in Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Church. This consecration grants them a special place within the vast community of the Church (*RD*, 7).

the Kingdom of heaven has always been held in high esteem by the Church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world (LG, 42).

Notably, women religious in their consecrated way of life are not alienated from the rest of society. Despite having no or less direct relations with the outside world, in a more profound way they relate to other people present with them in the heart of Christ and do work with them spiritually, in order to bring God's reign to fruition (LG, 46).

Regarding being single or not, Nuns/contemplatives and Sisters/in active ministry, despite living a celibate lifestyle, in their devotion to the Church are actually Christ's bride. They "adorn the bride of Christ by the steadfast and humble fidelity of their consecrated lives and give generous service of the most varied kinds to all people" ( LG, 46). Therefore, Religious women are spiritually married to Christ through his Church and do live in caring and supportive communities that foster God's reign on earth. Pope Pius XII in his memorable encyclical letter '*Sacra virginitas*' refers to religious women as "... angelic legions who have offered their chastity to the Lord and who through prayer and sacrifice obtain prodigies of divine mercy for the errant in propitiation for the sins of individuals and nations" (Daughters of St. Paul, 1974:23).

In view of how the Church understands consecrated women religious, it is therefore arguable that women religious are not single as such. Schneiders (2001:119) assess that the vocation to Religious life in general is not forced but is rather freely chosen and the individual who chooses to become a Religious offers oneself freely and totally to Christ forfeiting "primary life commitments, including marriage." She further argues that:

The concern of both Religious themselves and the Church to protect Religious from any attempt to violate their virginity or to coerce them into marriage was also a logical result of the understanding of celibacy as a particular relationship with Jesus Christ (Schneiders, 2001:142).

This understanding of Religious life led to the enclosing of women Religious in order to protect them from circumstances and things that could lead to the violation of their state. Such circumstances included staying away from men since "commitment to Jesus Christ was intrinsically perpetual, just as marriage to earthly spouse was perpetual" (Schneiders, 2001:142).

Lay Catholic single women share a unique life experience within the Church. Since the scope of a coursework-dissertation does not allow much time or space for face to face interviews with single Catholic women, information based on a few narrative experiences of some single Catholic women drawn from credible websites was used.

#### **4.2.3. Single women in the Catholic Church**

Being a single woman in the Catholic Church means you are not a religious and you are not officially married. Living in concubinage or pre-marital relationship is unacceptable under Catholic moral law and is against the sacrament of marriage.<sup>21</sup> It is from this basis that the situation of single women in the Catholic Church is presented.

On the website “*Catholic answers forum*”<sup>22</sup>, Jane, a single Catholic woman posted that she felt her place as a single woman within the church was non-existent. She expressed that the women’s club at her church is only for married women or those yet-to-get-married. She further grapples with the teaching that emphasises marriage as a condition for a true Christian vocation intended for the generation of children. With this she stresses that:

It seems women are only expected to wait around to be married so they can start reproducing. As I near the age of 30, I have yet to be “asked out” or go on a date with a man, so I am not holding my breath for marriage. I feel that I can better serve the Lord by using my gifts to help save lives. If I can’t, I don’t think any Catholic man would willingly marry me (Catholic answers forums, 2011).

Apparently this may indicate how desperate single women may become especially when marriage seems not to be a foreseeable possibility. Jane concludes with a question, “Do unmarried, or infertile women have any place in the Catholic Church?” (Catholic answers forums, 2011). Surely many other Catholic single women must be asking the same question in their various contexts. More so, she indicates the pressure that she has to go through as a single woman within a community of married or yet-to-get married people. She also feels the pressure to get attached to a man which because of her age, she finds compelling.

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<sup>21</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states that, “the sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion” (CCC, 2390).

<sup>22</sup> “*Catholic answers forums*” is a Catholic website opened by Catholic single women to air out their concerns as single women within the Catholic Church. With more than 200,000 members, it serves as evidence to Catholic single women’s lack of a voice within the Church (Website: <<http://forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=3647>> accessed on 28/11/2011).



Secondly, Trudelle Thomas<sup>23</sup> in her ground-breaking article “*Single Catholics - making them feel at Home*” gives an experience-based presentation of single womanhood in the Catholic Church. This experience is also research-based and it incorporates views from various single women. To begin with, Trudelle sets two fundamental questions:

1. Is there a place for single women in the church?
2. What needs to happen to make room for single women?

Based on research done in the American context, Trudelle broadly presents an ear-to-the-ground experience of single catholic women. She incorporates experiences of the unmarried, widowed, divorced and separated women. She informs us that in the present American population of ages between 18 and 39, one half is single. She believes “single life has become a vocation unlike in the past when it was just a short transitional time before marriage” (Trudelle, 2011).

Father James Young, C.S.P, who is also the founder of the North American Conference of Divorced and Separated Catholics emphasises that the increase in number of single persons is linked to radical changes in the nature of marriage. He warns that contemporary marriage expectations are higher than ever before in history and so it has become more demanding. It must therefore be acceptable not to marry or “marriage must be a free choice” (Trudelle, 2011). Father Young’s vision is yet to be realised. For the moment single women still have to bear derogatory stereotypes like being called “lonely loser” or “swinging single” (2011). As will be argued such stereotypes put a lot of pressure on single women to attach to men in order to suit within the conventional norm of marriage.

Jane a 30 year-old teacher and single woman confessed that:

The toughest thing for me is never feeling like I fit in anywhere. I recently started seriously dating a man and I was amazed at how relieved all my friends and family were to have me coupled up. Suddenly, I belonged. I was easier to introduce, easier to relate to, no longer a threat (Trudelle, 2011).

Jane’s story further shows how difficult it is to be single in Catholic community. There is always a demand for one to get married. Such a situation puts the single woman in a

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<sup>23</sup> Trudelle Thomas is a single adult woman active in the Catholic community of Cincinnati. She also teaches writing at the University of Cincinnati and is a free-lance author. This work (as quoted) was published with ecclesiastical approval (Website: <<http://www.americancatholic.org/newsletters/cu/ac0684.asp>> accessed on 22/11/2011). Trudelle’s personal and work experience as a single Catholic woman makes her work highly credible. This justifies its extensive usage in this research.

compromising situation especially when the need for a man becomes a priority.

In addition to marriage pressure, loneliness was also identified as an enormous challenge in the life of single women. Mary, a young single woman, recalls that, “being single also makes you an easier target for loneliness. Despite the various social networks for single people, loneliness remains a tough experience” (Trudelle, 2011). Marty, a 34 year-old single woman argues that sex is highly silenced within the church. In her experience, she finds it tough to be a faithful Christian in a hyper sexed society. She narrates:

I went to confession and told a priest about the struggles I was having with my sexuality. He gave me a lecture and asked me to promise never to see my boyfriend again (Trudelle, 2011).

As an astute single woman who wishes to express her sexuality freely in her beloved Church, such behaviour from clergy leaves her silenced and powerless. She thus questions: “Where is a person supposed to get guidance if not from the Church?” (Trudelle, 2011). Marty’s experience in this sense shows how the Church stigmatises women who try to share openly about their sexuality. This in turn perpetuates the culture of silence on matters of sexuality for fear of being judged.<sup>24</sup> In summary, Trudelle (2011) advises that finding inclusive ways to “support single life as a valid path to God would prevent single women from entering unwise marriages or relationships or even abandoning the Church for not being valued.” Such pressure as will be argued could lead to ‘unwise’ relationships thereby increasing single women’s chances of contracting HIV.

#### **4.2.4. Single women in the African context**

Single women in the African context too face cultural and religious challenges. In the *Ankore* culture of South Western Uganda, single/unmarried women are known as ‘*eepa*’ (meaning being dry or barren) or witches or the cursed (*abarogo*). They receive little or no respect since they have not been able to attract a man and worse if they have not been able to generate life through giving birth to children. Oduyoye (1999:111) expresses how important it is to have children in her culture (Asante). She states that among her people a woman must get married and have children (1999:110). Therefore, being single and not having children in an African

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<sup>24</sup> Ayanga (2008:41) seriously warns on how the church perpetuates the culture of silence rendering women even more vulnerable. She discusses this in view of women not being able to freely share matters that concern their sexuality, “negotiate safe sex or make appropriate decisions about their own lives, even when such decisions concern their very survival”.

culture carries huge repercussions. Culturally, such women are barred from participating in some ceremonies like going to the grave yard during burial or the welcoming of the newly born into the family even when a priest is present to bless the ritual. They are considered to have bad luck that could cause the child to die or prevent the dead person from joining the ancestral family.

Single women are also constantly accused of trying to snatch other women's husbands. For example the *Banyankore*<sup>25</sup> have a saying that “*otashweirwe tomweyiririza*” translated as “do not let an unmarried woman close to your family.” Such cultural constructs exert pressure upon single women to attach to men a situation that may be risky in the context of HIV and AIDS. Similarly, the Catholic Church's policy on marriage subscribes to cultural practices in many parts of Africa. In this case, marriage is a cultural and religious requirement.

Among the *Banyankore* of Uganda, one cannot be married within the church unless all cultural processes leading to a marriage have been fulfilled. These include the presentation of the dowry, consent of parents and the finalisation of the introduction ceremony (*okwanjura*). Hastings (1974:98) in his research on customary and church marriages in Africa highlights that bride wealth as well as parental consent are essential before a woman is legally married. He stresses that the church also preaches on its importance highlighting that it may “even be legally enforceable as a contractual obligation” (1974:98). This shows how both culture and religion still control issues of sexuality and marriage while upholding norms that are disempowering to women. Also considering the discussion presented in the previous chapter in which culture and religion were found to put pressure on single women to get married, it is therefore arguable that these two do further contribute to single women's vulnerability which could be detrimental in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Further, in many African societies the attitude against single women is very negative. As Mtombeni (1990:129) discusses:

The Society is not happy to see lonely women. A woman may want to lead her life outside the confines of married life but this would be taken as an irresponsible way of reasoning which results in the misery of Children living without paternal control and developing problems of a divided personality. The home may become a place of activity with the child seeing different men coming for the mother. Growing up

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<sup>25</sup> The *Banyankore* are one of the Great lakes Bantu-speaking tribal groups. They are mainly found in the Western and South-western parts of Uganda.

under such conditions does not contribute to the future social status of the child (1990:129).

Such attitudes also affect single women within the Church in Africa. Despite the respect accorded to single women who are consecrated to God, their lay counterparts are often maltreated. Though they can attend Services and share in some Church activities, they are still denied significant duties within the Church structure and some roles cannot be granted to them (Mtombeni, 1990:129). Fiorenza (1996:161) a Catholic feminist theologian pins the Catholic Church for the continued silencing of women (single women inclusive). She argues that:

Women in the Church are invisible neither by accident nor by their own default but by patriarchal law that excludes (women) from office on the basis of sex (i.e., sexism)... The present policy and official theology of the Roman hierarchy still enforces the New Testament injunction... that women should be silenced in all the Churches and seeks to reinforce that policy theologically (1996:161).

Similarly, in most African cultures women are not allowed space to express themselves. For example a myth among the *Kwotto* of Nigeria stresses “God made the husband first and when he had become tired, he then created the women who turned out to be weaker than her husband” (Mbiti, 1988:68). The Lugbara of Uganda also have a saying that “the woman is the rib of a man” (1988:69). This parallels Genesis 2:21-22 on which the Church bases to justify women’s subordination. The *Akamba* saying which states that “he/she who eats alone dies alone” warns against remaining unmarried (1988:80). Just as the Catholic Church emphasises marriage, many African cultures too value this institution. Marriage in most African cultures means progeny and wealth. Therefore, being unmarried carries with it a lot of stigma and shame especially for women. Considering the effect of being stigmatised, it is arguable that in the context of HIV and AIDS, these cultural and religious practices could lead to risky behaviour. Linking stigma to social identity Erving Goffman concludes that:

Historically, stigmas were imposed on individuals in the form of physical marking or branding to disgrace them. In modern societies, however, stigmas arise through social processes of interaction whereby individuals are marked or segregated because of an attribute they possess or because of something discrediting known about them. Hence stigmatised identities emerge through interpersonal interactions rather than as a psychological reaction of events.... The mere existence of stigma

ensures that social interactions between stigmatised and non stigmatised persons are usually uncomfortable, tense, and frustrating (Eiesland 1994:59-60).

In Africa, religion and culture as discussed are still stereotyping and stigmatising single women. Since stigma arises from social interactions which largely define African cultures and especially the Catholic Church, single women find it hard to define their identity within these communities. Facing the dilemma, they end up trying to attach to men in order to assume the conventional identity.

Women have also been denied identity as leaders within the Catholic Church. Most of the roles given are out of the Church's hierarchical structure and the few allocated are for married women. Single women in this case are still left out (Mtombeni, 1990:129). Most African cultures both pre and post Christianity still disregard single women and they are not taken seriously. Commenting on the role of women in the Catholic Church, Rakoczy a Catholic theologian and missionary in Africa argues that:

The exclusion of women from ministry and decision-making in the Roman Catholic Church... represents the power of the Christian tradition's teaching that women are not fully the image of God, lack true equality with men, are seductive and dangerous, weak in intellect and will (Rakoczy, 2004:199).

In her experience as a missionary in Africa, she found out that such teachings have led to the systematic denial of women's gifts culturally and religiously (2004:199). This false anthropology still informs Church and cultural practice in Africa fuelling factors that undergird women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS (2004:199). In summary, culture and religion seem to act together to facilitate the oppression of single women in Africa. Therefore, as Stephen Lewis, the United Nation's special envoy on HIV and AIDS in Africa stated:

The toll on women and girls is beyond human imagining; it presents Africa and the world with a practical and moral challenge which places gender at the centre of the human condition. The practice of ignoring a gender analysis has turned out to be lethal... For the women and girls of Africa, it's a matter of life or death (cited in Bongmba, 2007:35).

The need for a multi-faceted response to HIV and AIDS is therefore imperative. Challenging cultural and Church teachings and practices that are life denying to women in general and single women in particular could help reduce the chances of HIV infection in this sub-group.

Having discussed the implications of religion and culture *vis-a-vis* single women with a special consideration to the Catholic Church and some cultures in Africa, the following section will focus on analysing the extent to which Catholic theologies on the image of God may contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV.

### **4.3. Analysing the contribution of Catholic teaching on the Image of God to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV**

This section presents the extent to which Catholic traditional theologies on the image of God dehumanise women. Women are presented as deformed men and less human, and this could contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV and AIDS. The vulnerability of single women presented in the third chapter reveals how Catholic women and in particular single women are dehumanised, alienated from full participation in the Church and pressurised on account of being single. This situation as will be argued translates into single women seeking male companionship and this as has been argued increases chances of HIV infection.

This discussion alludes to the Catholic teachings on the image of God in their androgynous form and how they could make Catholic single women vulnerable in the HIV and AIDS context. The following section will be divided into two sub-sections; the first will expound on the marriage argument and the second on the sexuality argument.

#### **4.3.1. The marriage argument**

Research done on women and the traditional Catholic theologies on the image of God has established how women are considered not to image God unless attached to a man. Further women have been categorised as less human and deformed males.<sup>26</sup> Discussed in the second chapter was Augustine's view on women that presents them as not imaging God unless attached to a man. In his argument a man images God on his own but a woman does not (*The Trinity*, 12:10, p. 328).

This theological perspective has impacted negatively on how women are regarded and treated within the Church. They cannot participate equally as men within the Church functionality and much less if they are not married. As articulated in the previous sections, single women specifically feel pressured to get married since marriage is regarded as a necessity for all lay Christians within the Catholic Church. Single women find themselves vulnerable to men as

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<sup>26</sup> Refer to chapter two on the Church fathers.

they try to find prospective marriage partners.

Further, this teaching has greatly influenced the Catholic Church's doctrine on marriage. Marriage is held in high esteem by the Church, meaning that all women unless consecrated to the Church should be married. Marriage is seen as part of the fundamental truth (CC, 5) and under the authorship of God himself (CCC, 1603). Therefore, single women within the Catholic Church are under constant pressure to belong in an institution that upholds marriage as divinely instituted and constantly sees them as second class because of their gender. Catholic single women expressed that their place in the Church is unclear unless identified as married or religious (Trudelle, 2011) and this increases their vulnerability. Such vulnerability in a Church where being identified with a man provides an identity and reduces social stigma is detrimental in the HIV and AIDS context. Considering that in the Catholic Church marriage is sacred and indissoluble (CC, 32), single women may find themselves entangled in risky and HIV-prone relationships.

#### **4.3.2. The sexuality argument**

Tertullian teaches that women, because of their sex have been condemned to perpetual guilt since they were easily tempted and provided a way for the devil to destroy the God's Image in man (The Book of Enoch, Vol.VI, Ch. 1). Augustine and Aquinas too teach that the male possesses the image of God in a different way from woman, and that his image is superior to that of woman. They emphasise that a woman's sexuality, also identified as her essence involves a weaker and more imperfect body (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 70, a 3. p. 270).

This teaching presents women as sexually deviant and capable of destroying the image of God in man. Catholic moral standards in this case have negatively impacted on women's sexuality reducing it to sex and its underlying consequences. In order to overcome the stigma and shame of being seen as temptresses, single women feel pressured to attach to a man in the hope of marriage as highlighted in chapter four. Catholic single women in such a space find themselves cornered and labelled. They feel coerced to get married and are made to feel ashamed of their sexuality<sup>27</sup> and status as single women.

Sexuality is very important in determining human behaviour. Beya (1992:155) describes it as

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<sup>27</sup> Ayanga (2008:44) warns that "talking about sex and sex-related issues is not 'dirty talk'" and hence churches and religious bodies must discourage the culture of silence that has become detrimental to women. They should accept that "sexuality is a God-given" gift and people should not be "ashamed or embarrassed" by sharing about it.

the “ensemble of activities by which human beings seek and attain satisfaction of their sexual inclinations”. Therefore, the neglect of sexuality by the Church fuels silence about HIV and AIDS (Ackermann, 2008:119). This culture of silence which denies women the right to express their sexuality has been found to increase the risk of HIV infection (Ayanga, 2008:41). Research done in the area of HIV and AIDS has proven that not knowing one’s status or keeping silent about it increases chances of infecting others or getting infected, and the Church is not providing Catholic single women this forum.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, the theologies on *imago Dei* that reinforce stigma and condemnation by demonising women and their sexuality, could be lethal in the context of HIV and AIDS.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the situation of Catholic single women was presented together with marriage and religious life as understood in the Catholic Church. As portrayed, Catholic single women are pressurised and feel alienated from the community due to Church teaching that emphasises marriage. Such teaching has contributed to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV. In the following chapter, Ruether’s ‘egalitarian and mutuality’ model and Young’s ‘reconstruction’ model are utilised to develop a theological model of mutuality that promotes the equality of both men and women in the Church. This theological model of mutuality promotes Christ’s dignifying and inclusive approach to people. It therefore challenges the exclusivist approach of traditional theologies on the *imago Dei* that denies women to be fully the image of God.

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<sup>28</sup> The lack of forums for women to express “their fears and stresses occasioned by HIV infection often translates into a reluctance to use various means of protection available to them” (Ayanga, 2008:42) hence increasing chances of infection or being infected.



## Chapter Five

### Reconstructing the traditional Catholic theologies on the image of God towards a theological model of mutuality

#### 5.0. Introduction

In the last chapter an analysis on how Catholic theologies on the *imago Dei* do contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV was presented. In this chapter a viable theological model that promotes mutuality rather than hierarchy will be constructed. This theological model is aimed at challenging the traditional theologies on the image of God that are not life affirming to women.

#### 5.1. Ruether's 'egalitarian and mutuality' model

This model challenges Christian traditions that enforce men's superiority over women. Such traditions include the Catholic Church's Aquinas and Augustine based theological traditions which portray women as less human and 'misbegotten males' where the 'superior rules the inferior', the Lutheran tradition that sees 'women's loss of equality with men as a result of the fall and punishment' and the Calvinist's tradition that places male domination in 'legal order of creation dissociated from women's innate inferiority' (Ruether, 1993b:98-99). Explaining the praxis of these traditions, Ruether (1995:274-275) reveals that:

The male (head of the household) was the image of God, for he was the one who exercised domination, both over his non-human property and over the other members of his household: his wife, children and slaves. Since male slaves and male children could be emancipated or grow up and become heads of households, it was only women who, 'by nature,' were seen as excluded from exercising domination and hence from the divine image.

Derived from this background, this model focuses on establishing "mutuality" between men and women and an equal relationship before God (1995:267). This model also aims at breaking down the philosophical and religious patriarchal constructs that lead to the subjugation of women by men within the Church. It therefore taps into theological resources that present "woman's original equality with man, restored in Christ" (Ruether, 1993b:99).

This Christological approach presents a theology that seeks to redress the socialised gender stereotypes within the Church. The traditional patriarchal God imaged as a male sexist offers

humanity the real image of God-self through Jesus Christ. Jesus, though male, he shows that God's image is beyond physical traits and hence God dwells in both men and women alike. He goes ahead to challenge patriarchy in his own society by embarking on a mission of equality and empowerment for both women and men. As De Gruchy (1997:252-262) suggests in order to live as the image of Christ the way he images God, women and men are challenged to humanness in faith, hope and love. These virtues as sought by this model transcend all that divides humanity.

## **5.2. Young's 'reconstruction' model**

The reconstruction of theology emanates from the concern by feminist theologians to respond to the disempowering ideas images found in Christian tradition and Scripture. Christian tradition and Scripture always portrayed women negatively or classified them to male subservience. For this reason, women were systematically denied the life-giving message that could promote their liberation. As Young (1990:12) points out:

Feminists began the necessary documentation of the roles and images of women in the history of Christian tradition. They identified how few women were seen as important to the Christian tradition and how the few women who were portrayed in tradition were often seen as negative images or examples (like Eve). They also pointed to the fact that women, not as specific characters, but as group, were portrayed as dangerous and evil (1990:12).

In addition to the divinized male images in tradition and Scripture, the absence of women in theological thinking sparked progressive waves of questioning and dissatisfaction. Feminist theologians felt that socially constructed patriarchy had relegated them from the Church and further denied them full humanity (Young, 1990:13). In order to break this historical odd, feminist historians and theologians initiated the 'reconstruction model' as a tool for unearthing the sexist ideologies that are deeply entrenched in Christian tradition in view of critiquing them and coming up with new, empowering and life-giving theologies.

Therefore, the 'reconstruction model' takes into account women's experiences that have been neglected or given a derogatory connotation in traditional doctrines. It challenges and seeks an egalitarian approach to doctrines which through patriarchal socialisation have become oppressive to women (Young, 1990:14). This approach analyses "religious history, history of councils, important leaders and that of everyday men and women in view of challenging

socialised injustices” (1990:14). It revises doctrines in order to prevent further dehumanisation of women. In this model God is not envisioned as an all-male God but through a variety of images embracing either gender-neutral terms or gender inclusive approaches (Young, 1990:14).

This model seeks to challenge the patriarchal nature of traditional theology, which as Young (1990:15) argues “has been written almost totally by men and has been formulated, despite claims to universality, as though maleness were the normative form of humanity, and thus, is about men.” The overarching reality is that theology has often presented men in more human terms and women in derogatory and life denying ones (Young, 1990:15). For this reason, the reconstruction model aims at breaking the *status quo* by affirming women’s equality with men and defining theologies that are life affirming to women.

### **5.3. Towards a theological model of mutuality**

The two theological models as presented by Young and Ruether respectively will be used as viable frameworks to reconstruct Christian teachings on the *Imago Dei* towards mutuality. The *Imago Dei* theologies have been found to dehumanise women and they could also be responsible for the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV. Therefore, the theology of mutuality will reconstruct these theologies towards an egalitarian Christian praxis. The theological model of mutuality will assist in addressing “the masculine/feminine dualism and its offspring the public/private dualism that preceded the Church” (Gudorf, 1992:74). Addressing these dualisms will in turn respond to the various social and religious challenges such as the perception of single women within the Church. This may in turn translate into reduced vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV infection.

#### **5.3.1. A theological model of mutuality**

The above background has provided a basis from which to engage and develop a theological model that will reconstruct the traditional theologies on the *Imago Dei* towards mutuality. Christ’s approach to both men and women in his ministry will serve as the framework in the formulation of a viable theological model of mutuality. This model will take two approaches, the ontological<sup>29</sup> and the missiological.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>‘Ontological’ in this section is being used in reference to God as a being in higher existence. This is argued by Anselm (St.) who defines God “as being than which nothing greater can be conceived” (Crystal, 2004:1127). In this case, the ontological approach implies the derivation of the image quality from God at a vertical level.

<sup>30</sup>‘Missiological’ is derived from mission, which means the work of teaching people about Christianity (Wehmeier, 2000:816). In the context of this study, the missiological approach means being like Christ in one’s approach to mission. As

### 5.3.1.1. The Ontological approach

Jesus Christ as the begotten one of God on earth challenged the socially constructed ideas of patriarchy and portrayed that both men and women are equal before God.<sup>31</sup> This ontological equality uplifted both men and women as children of God in Christ. Groothuis (1997:20) argues that God willed through creation that men and women be equal. She deduces that:

The truth of the equality of all persons under God is grounded in creation. Genesis 1:26-27 and 5:1-2 state that both male and female humans bear God's image equally and without distinction. Both have been commanded equally and without distinction to take dominion, not one over the other but both together, over the rest of God's creation for the glory of the Creator (1997:20).

This divine will was fulfilled in Christ who as the son of God and being God himself saw both women and men as his sisters and brothers sharing in the same image of the Father. This message challenges human beings to be God/Christ-like. Possessing the image of God is not a physical attribute but rather a spiritual one. It is embedded in humanity's spiritual nature and it seeks to transform negative perceptions about self and other. Evidently, human society ascribes to practices where women are required to submit to their husbands and act outside public space (Groothuis, 1997:23). In this way, it is undisputed that "the idea of gender equality emanates not from society, but from the Gospel of Jesus Christ – wherein there is 'no longer male and female' but all are (heirs) of God in Christ (1997:23).

Therefore, as Oduyoye (2001:72) affirms it would actually be absurd for humanity to live as though Christ never existed for it is through Christ that an anthropology that promotes women equality and dignity emanates. She stresses that "the understanding of Christ as the *imago Dei* (cf Jn 1:18, Col 1:15) challenges the Christian tradition" that regarded men as only imaging God (2001:72). In Christ's worldview not only men image God but also women. This instils equal value to both men and women theologically and ontologically. The value of humanity as Lisa Sowle Cahill elucidates (see Hilkert, 1995:194), derives from the 'primary Christian category and symbol' which is the image of God. For this reason, the image of God in Christ encompasses and seeks to empower all people both male and female.

Johnson (1992:70) emphasizes that "all members of the species are equally favoured with the theological identity of the *imago Dei*". She challenges theological arguments that seek to

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expounded in this section, Jesus embraced the image of God in each person irrespective of class, gender or race.

<sup>31</sup> Refer to Mark 10:5-9.

exclude women from the *imago Dei* bracket by asserting the physicality of Jesus as the son of God and hence the true image of God. Such a theological marker reduces Jesus into the bodily form and is hence erroneous. Therefore, as Johnson suggests:

Through baptism the Christian is ontologically identified with the death and resurrection of Christ. As a consequence, the baptized are recreated in every dimension of their existence. "If anyone is in Christ, that one is a new creature" (2 Cor 5:17). Destined for the fullness of participation in Christ in eschatological glory, the Jews Greeks, slaves, free persons, males and females of the body of Christ are even now equally united with Christ in a union that connotes one flesh: "Don't you know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (Cor 6:15a) (1992:72).

### **5.3.1.2. The Missiological approach**

The missiological approach to the *imago Dei* is envisaged in Jesus' 'all inclusive' *modus operandi* for mission evident in the Gospels. It is realised in Jesus' show of love to all persons, denouncing injustice and finally giving himself completely for the salvation of humanity (Rakoczy, 2004:44). Therefore, sharing in God's image in a Christian way is not only ontological; it also extends to others at a horizontal and relational level.<sup>32</sup> It involves extending God's kingdom of justice, peace and equality on earth. Jesus' central mission was and still is to bring this kingdom to realisation. Schreiter (1984:137) explains that for Jesus the kingdom means "proximity of God's unconditional will to salvation, or reconciling clemency and sufficing graciousness and along with them opposition to all forms of evil: suffering and sin".

Sin in the Church and wider society would entail all forms of oppression that are life denying to others. In this way, social and religious structures or teachings that categorise women as lesser to men and not possessing God's image should be deconstructed in praxis. Christ's call for humanity to be like him not in his physical manhood but in doing God's will challenges humanity to grow in humaneness through faith, hope and love (de Gruchy, 1997:252). Being like Christ in this case transcends the male and female in physical terms. It involves partaking in Christ's mission of selfless and non-sexist service that respects and values the image of God inherent in women. In the gospel of Matthew (19:3-5), Jesus challenges the Pharisees on divorce stressing the equality of both men and women from creation. He argues against the

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<sup>32</sup> The image of God calls for a vertical and horizontal communion to be extended to others inclusively (Bongmba, 2007:46).

right of a man to divorce his wife and vehemently upholds their equality in marriage and society at large.

This vision is progressively presented by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) in the document “*Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church*” released on May 2004 and published on 31 July 2004, by the then Cardinal Ratzinger (current Pope Benedict XVI) and was forwarded by John Paul II (Beattie, 2006:20). The overarching message within this highly regarded document is an invitation to:

...address certain currents of thought which are often at variance with the authentic advancement of women. It sets out a Biblical theology of sexual difference in which man and woman are described as equal persons made in the image and likeness of God; it affirms the body – soul unity of the person, and it represents the conflict between the sexes as a consequence of original sin which might be healed through the rediscovery of the spousal love between man and woman, understood in the context of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Beattie, 2006:20).

This document recognises the sour ingredient within the scriptural approach to the equality of men and women. The original sin argument by far has posed a challenge to this progressive theology of equality of sexes because of its negative ‘Eve’ imagery. It is therefore impressive to see top Catholic leaders identifying it as a pathology that requires healing through mutual love drawn from Christ within the Church.

To summarise, the theological model of mutuality in its two perspectives as described above serves well in addressing the gender biases of traditional theologies on the *imago Dei* that are still derailing the Catholic Church in its move to address current cultural, social, economic and religious challenges like the looming HIV and AIDS pandemic.

### **5.3.2. Challenging tradition: Lessons from John Paul II**

In his apostolic letter “*Mulieris Dignitatem*,” John Paul II presents the inherent presence of the image of God in both men and women. He uses Genesis 1:27, which states that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” as revealing the “fundamental anthropological truth” of Christianity. This ‘truth’ he argues incorporates man and woman as created equal and in God’s image (MD, 6). In this assertion John Paul II uses scripture as a tool to reconstruct the image of God in the

woman that has been denied to her throughout theological history. In this case, the Pope struggles to bridge the equality gap within theology using a mutuality perspective. The challenge he faces in this reconstruction process relates to the androcentric language of the Bible.

Young (1990:15) reveals that the patriarchal nature of traditional theology and the scriptural maleness continue to present women in mostly derogatory terms. Traditional theology has systematically “ignored or caricatured women” and their experiences (1990:15). Therefore, her critical approach to scripture challenges the Pope’s equality approach. The Pope, though he recognises the inadequacy of traditional theology and tries to offer a new gender-balanced approach to theology, still falls into the male exclusivity trap of the scriptures. The ‘male’ language that adds woman when it seems suitable freezes his critical approach to scripture especially the reliance on Gen. 1:27 for his argument.

The Pope however takes the *Imago Dei* discourse to a relational level. This is more of a missiological perspective. He teaches that the “unity of the two” that is, both man and woman is “a sign of interpersonal communion” and this communion definitely has a divine orientation (MD, 6). This communion between humanity and its creator at a vertical level, is also “a call and task” for communion at a horizontal level.<sup>33</sup> John Paul II calls this “a human ‘ethos’ rooted in the image and likeness of God” (MD, 6). As presented in the ‘theological model of mutuality’, the image of God in humanity commands social responsibility. It reflects a Christ-like character which as John Paul II stresses calls for an ‘ethos’ that climaxes into love (MD, 6). This kind of love yearns for justice in and outside the Church and deconstructs patriarchal doctrines and attitudes which disfigure the image of God in women. It also transcends stereotypes that inform the allocation of lesser roles to women within the Church while pressurising and alienating single women to lethal vulnerability.

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<sup>33</sup> The *imago Dei* reveals “a divine-human relationship as a model for personal and communal relationships”. It brings people together as the heart of the community. The community becomes a place where the love of God is expressed through inter-personal relationships. The community further offers a forum for critiquing culture especially when “it falls short of standards of decency” (Bongmba, 2007:52).

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

This chapter focused on constructing a workable theological model of mutuality which entails embracing a Christ-centred approach to men and women. Christ promoted both men and women throughout his ministry and affirmed the image of God in all. This model challenges the Catholic Church's approach to women over and above the androcentric traditional approach based on the Church fathers' teaching on the *imago Dei*. The following final chapter tables some conclusions, recommendations and questions for further research.



## Chapter Six

### Conclusions and recommendations

#### 6.0. Introduction

This chapter includes some general conclusions based on the findings of this study. The conclusions will assist in formulating feasible recommendations that may be helpful to the Catholic Church and the wider community in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The study identified that single women in the Catholic Church are vulnerable, seen as second class and their participation in the Church is limited. The origins of this vulnerability are rooted in the traditional theologies on the image of God. Church teachings in this case have promoted dehumanising attitudes and stereotypes especially about single women that continue to fuel their vulnerability in the context of HIV and AIDS. In view of finding out the extent to which the theologies on the *imago Dei* have further contributed to Catholic single women's vulnerability to HIV, the following question guided the study: To what extent do traditional Catholic theologies on the '*Imago Dei*' contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV?

#### 6.1. Conclusions reached from the Study

This study has established the extent to which traditional theologies on the *imago Dei* may further contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women in the context of HIV and AIDS. Drawing from Catholic tradition and teaching, it was realised that the negative perceptions about women entrenched within the theologies on the *imago Dei* continue to perpetuate the oppression of women within the Church. Using a feminist framework of analysis, it was argued that such androcentric theologies in practice have further contributed to the vulnerability of single women to HIV and AIDS.

In the introductory chapter, I presented the rationale of this study, an extended literature review, an elaborate background of the study, the theoretical framework and the underlying aims and objectives. The research design, the methods of data collection and analysis as well as the structure of this dissertation were also highlighted. In chapter two I analysed the philosophical background to the traditional theologies on the image of God as propounded by the Church fathers (Thomas Aquinas, Augustine and Tertullian) and how they dehumanise women.

In chapter three I relied on viable research to show that women are more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Through an assessment of biological, economic, cultural and religious factors, I came to the conclusion that women and single women in particular are vulnerable to HIV infection. Considering the vulnerabilities related to women's biological structure, the economic circumstances of poverty and deprivation and the patriarchy-driven cultural and religious norms and teachings, I argued further that single women are more vulnerable to infection in the current context of HIV and AIDS.

In chapter four, I discussed marriage and religious life in the Catholic Church at length in order to ascertain the realistic place and identity of Catholic single women. I went further to present some grounded Catholic single women's narratives within the Church. In my analysis I discovered that Catholic single women may not only be seen as second class 'misbegotten men' with a temptuous and evil sexuality but are also under immense pressure to attain a marriage identity – by attaching to a man. These pressures, as I argued could be responsible for the vulnerability of Catholic single women in the context of HIV and AIDS.

In chapter five I focused on developing a theological model of mutuality rather than hierarchy. Using a Christ-centred approach, this theological model has served to reconstruct the traditional theologies on the *imago Dei* that exalt men and dehumanise women. I utilised Ruether's 'equality and mutuality' model and Young's 'reconstruction' model as underlying frameworks for a gender neutral but uplifting theological model of mutuality. Progressive theological insights of John Paul II, not being exclusive to the theological model of mutuality, have presented the Catholic Church's progress in promoting equality between men and women. Intrinsic in this chapter however is the prevailing challenge 'to read the signs of the times' (Paul VI) and continually imbibe mutually building theological insights towards a transformative praxis.

## **6.2. Recommendations**

The following few recommendations might assist the Catholic Church and probably other Churches in their efforts to combat the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Firstly, I recognise the enormous contribution that the Church has played in responding to the devastating effects of the pandemic. To mention but a few, the Church has excelled in advocacy programmes as well as offering medical, spiritual and psychological care. Most of these are responses to the effects rather than the underlying factors that perpetuate the spread of the virus. This study has highlighted one important underlying factor that requires the Church to revisit its own

teaching. The Catholic Church's own traditional theologies on the image of God according to this study have been found to promote women's subjugation evident in Church practice. For this reason, I recommend that the Catholic Church revisits its doctrine on the *imago Dei* towards more inclusive and empowering theologies. For example, instead of relying on the highly patriarchal tradition to define its teaching on the *imago Dei*, the Church could utilise Christological approaches that are gender-inclusive such as those presented in chapter five of this study in order to be more Christ-like in its teaching and mission. The Church should also revise the exclusive language used in its teaching. I find it discomforting to read or pronounce 'man', 'men', 'he', 'him' on sections that actually imply the whole of humanity. I have no doubt it is a perpetuation of the patriarchal tradition.

The Church should also develop theologies that are life-giving to single women. As noted in the study, single persons are increasing in the Church. The continual emphasis on teachings that sideline them from the rest of the flock or that put enormous pressure on them like offering privileges only to married members could be detrimental. Considering the findings of this study pressure to fit within a community that upholds marriage as a sacrament may well increase Catholic single women's vulnerability in the current context of HIV and AIDS.

The Church should invest in programmes that support single women's initiatives and talents within the Church. As noted in chapter four of this study, single women feel alienated from the Church and their contribution is seemingly unwelcome. Therefore, the Church as the body of Christ should provide a forum where single, married and religious persons will work together and feel mutually loved and accepted as children of God.

This study has revealed to some extent that traditional theologies on *imago Dei* as well as other factors such as economic, social, cultural and biological ones may possibly contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV. However, in the course of this study, I realised that in order to upgrade this study to the next level, field research would be necessary to attain first hand contextual information on the experiences of Catholic single women within the Church.

### **6.3. Limitations**

The information for this study was mainly attained through document study and library sources. The challenge however was the access to extensive literature on single Catholic women in Africa. Only limited material could be accessed. Most of the available information

was based on the single Catholic women in the American context. This therefore may affect the generalisability of the findings.

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

This research has achieved its objective which was to find out whether the traditional Catholic theologies on the *imago Dei* could contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV. My findings resulting from chapters two to five have affirmed my overall conclusions as stipulated in this final chapter. Despite the need for more research in this area, traditional Catholic theologies on *imago Dei* as argued, could further contribute to the vulnerability of Catholic single women to HIV and AIDS.

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