

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**A critical study of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo  
Church's (EOTC) HIV and AIDS Prevention and  
Control Strategy: a gendered analysis**

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**A Critical study of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's (EOTC)  
HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy: A gendered analysis**

**By**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of  
Theology (Gender and Religion) in the School of Religion and Theology,  
Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences University of  
KwaZulu-Natal**

**Supervised by Professor *Sarojini Nadar***

**December 2011**

## **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, 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.

13 December, 2011

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Date

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As supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation

13 December, 2011

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Date

Professor Sarojini Nadar

## **ABSTRACT**

This research study is a qualitative appraisal of the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). It critically analyses the strategy in order to ascertain its gender consciousness or gender sensitivity in the context of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia. The basic motivation for this study is based on the idea that many if not most of the responses aimed at dealing effectively with the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Ethiopia have so far not addressed the underlying problems related to gender which are fuelling the spread of the HI virus. The study is guided by an overarching feminist ecclesiology, the gendered conceptual intervention to HIV and AIDS proposed by Geeta Rao Gupta, and Orthodox and feminist Trinitarian theology as a theoretical framework within feminist theology. These approaches were chosen because of their common focus on the unity and equality of humanity regardless of gender, social and religious differences.

One of the major highlights of this study is that it has succeeded in bringing forth links between gender issues and HIV and AIDS; poverty and HIV and AIDS, and economic, social and cultural factors that fuel the spread of the HI virus; as well the historical, philosophical and cultural influences that perpetuate the oppression of women. Another important highlight of this study is the identification of theologies within EOTC that can help diffuse the tension created by the above mentioned negative influences. These theologies include the Trinitarian theology for example, and are life affirming for women because they transform and empower women to ensure their full humanity and equality, giving them the means to avoid being infected by the HI virus, and/or allowing those who are already infected and affected to live with dignity.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my church - the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

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## **ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
DICAC	Development Inter Church Aid Commission
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
EOTC-DICAC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Development Inter Church Aid Commission
FBO	Faith Based Organization
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
OVC	Orphaned and vulnerable children
PLWHA	People living with HIV and AIDS

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCING THE STUDY**

### **1.1. Introduction**

In the last three decades the world has experienced the devastating social and economic effects that are the result of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Some of these effects include the disruption of the family unit, resulting in child-headed households (orphans) owing to the death of parents, as well as the decimation of both human and financial resources badly needed for economic development. This happens when economically active people are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, as well as when resources meant for social and economic development are concentrated in combating this pandemic. As a result, governments, churches, civil society and other agencies across the world have been forced to come up with a strategy of some sort to curb these devastating effects.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has also been drawn into this struggle. Hence it has come up with its own strategy known as the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy. One of the major problems with HIV and AIDS is that it is without doubt a gendered pandemic. In other words, it affects women more than men because of social, economic, cultural and religious factors. It is because of this last concern that the desire to embark upon a study of this nature was born. Hence, the topic: *A critical study of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's (EOTC) HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy: a gendered analysis.*

This study is a qualitative appraisal of the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). It seeks to critically analyze the strategy in order to ascertain its gender consciousness<sup>1</sup> or gender sensitivity in the context of HIV and AIDS.

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<sup>1</sup> Rao Gupta has developed an in-depth tool of analysis to ascertain levels of gender consciousness in HIV policies and programmes. My dissertation will rely heavily on this tool of analysis.

## **1.2. Background and identification of research problem**

Ethiopia is one of the least developed countries in the world. On top of this, its society remains under the grip of a patriarchal system based on cultural and traditional beliefs and practices. In relation to this, HIV and AIDS has become one of the biggest problems facing the country. HIV and AIDS is an inherently gendered pandemic which has intersecting problems associated with poverty, unemployment, lack of information, unequal distribution of resources and unequal power relations between women and men. It has been stated that women are more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. The inadequate social and economic integration of women as well as the patriarchal tendencies within the church and in society result in the gendered nature of the pandemic in Ethiopia, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (EOTC strategy document 2004).

Unequal social relations, for instance with respect to marriage, result in HIV and AIDS affecting women more than men since women's economic survival is essentially linked, through marriage, to men – who may or may not be faithful in their relationships. This puts women at risk of contracting the HI virus since they are unable to negotiate for safe sex within these marriages.

There is therefore a growing sense that HIV and AIDS is an issue which everyone in the country must grapple with. Given the widespread prevalence of HIV and AIDS within Ethiopia, especially among women, and given the causes of its transmission, a gendered response is clearly needed. This study therefore seeks to ascertain whether or not the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy is responding adequately to the gender challenges that fuel the spread of the HIV pandemic within Ethiopian society.

### **1.3. Motivation and rationale**

The main motivation for doing a study of this nature emerges from my own personal experience as an Ethiopian, and a deacon within the EOTC. This in turn has brought about two personal interests: firstly, my personal interest in promoting women's empowerment and full participation in the social, religious and economic spheres and, secondly, the need to learn and understand whether or not all the efforts being made by government, the church and civil society in Ethiopia aimed at dealing with the HIV and AIDS pandemic are actually gender conscious.

Many, if not most, of the responses aimed at dealing with the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Ethiopia have so far not addressed the problems related to gender which are fuelling the spread of the HI virus. Therefore, this study is important because addressing gender issues will go a long way to helping to reduce gender related factors contributing to the prevalence and spread of the virus.

### **1.4. Related literature review and location of the research**

In preparation for this literature survey I have attempted to read widely in the area of HIV and AIDS using sources from related research studies and responses from government and civil society including churches. Eric Goosby in his book *Living with HIV and AIDS: The black person's guide to survival* concludes by stating that:

HIV and AIDS has been in our community, for a long time. We can start changing this situation today by combining our efforts to stop the spread of this epidemic and by removing the barriers that keep our brothers and sisters from finding and getting the care [they] deserve (2004: 214).

Although Goosby's concern here is for the context of the USA, his sentiment is equally relevant for people all over the world, including the people of Ethiopia. Goosby further describes HIV and AIDS responses as involving combating "...a national health crisis [which] is most effective at community and individual level"; hence the need for combined efforts by all stakeholders (2004: 223).

A number of authors agree with Goosby's view that HIV and AIDS is not only a communal or societal issue but that it has also become a human rights issue - a justice issue. This is evident in the works of scholars such as Chitando and Hadebe (2009), Parry (2008), and Phiri and Nadar (2006). It is this understanding of HIV and AIDS as a human rights issue which prompted the World Council of Churches (*Facing AIDS* 1997: 16) to state that "economic, social and cultural factors which perpetuate the subordination of women are contributing to the spread of HIV and AIDS. In many societies the position of women limits their control over their bodies and their power to make decisions about reproduction".

The USAID HIV/AIDS' health profile points out that "heterosexual contact is the primary mode of HIV transmission in Ethiopia, and [that] young women are at particularly high risk" (USAID 2010). It indicates that "physical abuse of women also is common throughout the country; ... women experience sexual and/or physical abuse by their partners, [thus] increasing their vulnerability to HIV" (USAID 2010). Chirongoma also has this to say with respect to heterosexual contacts: "pervasive gender inequality, poverty and violation of women's rights is promoting the spread of HIV and AIDS among women" (2006: 49)<sup>2</sup>.

USAID outlines the country's recent national response as follows: "...[A] policy was adopted by the government ... guided by the second multisectoral strategic plan... which

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<sup>2</sup> "Traditional practices and violence ... [impacts on women's] ability to enjoy a healthy, safe and stress free existence ... [while] a social system of patriarchy continues to deny women their rights under customary law ... (Chirongoma 2006: 49);

focuses on creating an enabling environment for capacity building [and] community involvement" (USAID 2010: 2). The Ethiopian government's national response to HIV and AIDS (2010: 6) discloses that "Ethiopia's 2009 HIV prevalence is higher in women than in men", but the implications of the gendered nature of the pandemic are not exposed. According to the Ethiopian Herald News Agency, the Ethiopian government's response can produce the desired results if the churches in Ethiopia join hands with the government to fight together against the HIV pandemic. It is in this light then that Girma Woldegiorgis, a former president of the country, is quoted as having stated that "the church could make immense contributions toward the prevention and control of the [HIV] epidemic since church services are available to every urban and rural area" (*Ethiopian Herald, November 18, 2005*). Whether or not this also includes dealing with challenges related to the gendered nature of the pandemic is not clear.

Tizita Mulugeta Yimam (2005), in her article on HIV and AIDS and women in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, begins by locating the issue of HIV and AIDS at a global level, before focusing her attention on Ethiopia. When Yimam shifts her focus to Ethiopia specifically, the facts she presents about the situation of HIV and AIDS in the country are alarming. Yiman further argues that "poverty and gender are highly correlated ... [and] the relationship between gender and HIV and AIDS is based on the vulnerability of women to contracting the disease [sic], owing to biological, economic, social and cultural factors" (2005: 14). According to Yimam (2005: 20), behaving morally by

... abiding by the rule of God is the best mechanism to mitigate the spread of HIV and AIDS. One of the mechanisms that can help people to abide by the rule of God is the law of Holy matrimony that demands one to one marriage. Thus, abiding by the principle of one to one marriage could help in exercising self discipline and in developing a sense of responsibility.

For Yimam, the church needs not limit its response to the above-mentioned principle, because the severity of the impact of HIV and AIDS demands a multi-dimensional approach (2005: 21). For instance "the existing culture and custom can be used by the

church as one of the important ways of checking the spread of the virus”. In this way, once again “moral education” can play a significant role in preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Yimam further identifies culture and Orthodox Christianity together with its patriarchal biblical interpretation as contributing factors to the gendered nature of the pandemic (2005: 19)<sup>3</sup>. She presents the EOTC as “an influential religious organization” with the largest number of followers in the country as well as a reasonable number of trained individuals who could drive the church’s response on HIV and AIDS. This view is supported by Jacob who asserts that “churches have strength, they have credibility and they are grounded in the community. This offers them an opportunity to make a real difference in combating HIV and AIDS” (Jacob in Thokozile 2009: 8).

The EOTC’s HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy program is based on the conviction that “... the church as a nationwide community based organization has a special link of trust with the Ethiopian people” (2004: 1). It is for this reason, therefore, that the church’s plan “... relies on the extensive structure that the EOTC possesses throughout the country” (2004: 2), namely, “an estimated 40 million followers, 500,000 clergy, 40,000 churches and monasteries spread throughout the country over 40 dioceses, and 35,000 parishes” (2004: 2). This is an ambitious plan, with clearly stated expected outcomes. Thus, the strategy planners state that their targets are: 100% of the nation having a basic awareness about HIV and AIDS; 80% of the population being endowed with in-depth knowledge; 60% of people undergoing behavioral change; the prevalence rates being reduced to 2.2%; and 200,000 orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and 200,000 PLWHA being supported (2004: 5). However the EOTC’s structure is patriarchal and oppressive for women and there is no clarity from the strategy planners about addressing the gendered nature of the pandemic. Beverley Haddad suggests that “Given that the dominant theological paradigm of retribution is the default mode within the

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<sup>3</sup> See also Chitando (2007:26) on insensitivity to gender issues.

church operates [when it comes to HIV and AIDS]; theologians need to find creative ways of breaking with this tradition” (2006: 88). Not only does the approach have to move away from the sin/punishment understanding of the disease, but Haddad also says that “the church has to intervene in this cultural context and re-appropriate cultural symbols for the benefit of both men and women” (2006: 89)<sup>4</sup>.

Besides the EOTC, other church organizations are also participating in the fight against the pandemic. Among those is the Catholic Church, whose response is based on the understanding that African people view the church as a source of care and support in the face of socio-economic and other hardships, in this case, as the primary care giver for people living with HIV and AIDS. This view is based on the belief that God weeps with the suffering church community. Many Africans thus view the church in this way:

The church was with us before AIDS. The church is now generously with us during AIDS and the church will be with us after AIDS. In this sense the church is not seen so much as a provider of projects or as a service provider but as that reality which we call mother. The mother who is there and has always been there and will be there as long as she is needed (Czerny 2010).<sup>5</sup>

This means that the Catholic Church deals with HIV and AIDS as a family, in such a way that everyone feels part of that family. The emphasis on the church as a family seems to go beyond the reality of the abuse of women and children as well as their vulnerability; it in fact points to the church itself being vulnerable, and being abused.

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<sup>4</sup> Haddad (2006: 89) explains that “this means seeking to allow women’s theological voices to be heard on these matters as African women themselves endeavor to reflect a theology that is both African and liberating”.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Czerny is the author of “Africa: The Catholic Church is Africa’s Primary care giver for AIDS victims”; <http://www.wherегodweeps.org/breaking-news/africa-the-catholic-church-in-africa-as-primary-care-giver-for-aids-Victims/> Accessed on 28 March, 2011.

The above literature review indicates that a large amount of research on the role of the church in HIV prevention has been conducted. However, much of the research seems to ignore critical gender issues which are closely linked with the pandemic. These gender issues are raised by African women theologians. Indeed a significant portion of the research done by African women theologians deals with the links between HIV and AIDS and gender, culture, religion and stigma, which according to Materu, “are core factors that reinforce the spread of HIV” (2010: 6).

African women’s theologies suggest that religion and culture have been used to oppress and dehumanize women (Materu 2010: 6). HIV in sub-Saharan Africa is “transmitted through heterosexual relations, with marriage being the major context in which African women contract the virus” (Phiri 2003: 8). The main cause of the higher rate of HIV infections among married African women “is the sexual and economic subordination of women … reinforced by the patriarchal socio-cultural system” (Phiri 2003: 10). In addition, young women are regularly subjected to sexual violence (Phiri 2003: 11). “Cultural practices and norms which contribute to the spread of HIV and AIDS include female genital mutilations, widow inheritance, polygamy and multiple sexual partners” (Phiri 2003: 12). A further factor is that young girls are often forced to withdraw from school and to seek employment in order to care for their sick relatives and/or to earn an income for the family, a situation which usually exposes them to sexual abuse and HIV infection (Phiri 2003: 15). Unequal power relations between women and men thus generally promote the spread of HIV (Dube 2004: 10). For example, women’s inferior gender roles (in the areas of leadership, decision making and the right to own property) contribute to their susceptibility to HIV infection since they are disadvantaged and disempowered.

Furthermore women in Africa cannot abstain from sexual intercourse even if they want to because of the existence of sexual violence (Dube 2004: 8). Again, women's inferior status in society does not accord them the power to insist on fidelity or safe sex for fear of being abused or abandoned (Dube 2004: 8). Further still, since women have no say in sexual matters, condom use has not been an appropriate preventative measure in tackling the HIV and AIDS pandemic (Dube 2004: 10). HIV and AIDS stigma is also associated with gender. For example, certain interpretations of the Bible in many African cultures relate women's bodies with uncleanliness and disease, including HIV and AIDS, and thus women are blamed for infecting their spouses (Dube 2004: 11).

The most significant and most recent work that has been done in the area of HIV policies from a gendered perspective in an African church has been the PhD thesis by Rose Materu. One of the issues highlighted and examined in Materu's study is that heterosexual relationships have been identified as one of the major modes of HIV transmission (Materu 2010: 4).

Rose Materu's research focuses on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, analyzing whether or not the prevailing HIV and AIDS programmes and policies of the Lutheran church in Tanzania have adequately responded to the gendered challenges that reinforce the spread of HIV and AIDS (2010: 184). One marked similarity between my study and that of Materu is that we are both analyzing church based policy documents on HIV and AIDS with respect to their gender sensitivity. The differences are that Materu is analyzing the Lutheran church in the context of Tanzania while I am focusing on the perspective of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the context of Ethiopia and that Materu's methodology is based partly on the theology of Luther, while mine is based on the Oriental Orthodox Trinitarian theology.

## **1.5. Research problem and questions**

This study investigates whether the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy of the EOTC is underpinned by the awareness that HIV is a gendered pandemic. It seeks to answer the following key questions:

1.5.1. Do the theologies that underpin the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy assist or hinder the recognition of the gendered nature of the HIV pandemic?

1.5.2. Key sub-questions to be addressed are as follows:

- What are the theologies which underpin the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy?
- Do the EOTC's HIV and AIDS prevention and control programmes show an awareness of the gendered nature of the HIV pandemic?
- How do the theologies which underpin the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy assist or hinder the recognition of the gendered nature of the pandemic?

**What theologies can be developed for progressive HIV and AIDS programmes which will consider HIV and AIDS as a gendered pandemic?**

### **1.6. Research objectives**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the theologies which underpin the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy.
- To investigate whether there are gender-gaps in the HIV and AIDS Prevention Control Strategy document.
- To examine whether the theologies which underpin the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy assist or hinder the recognition of the gendered nature of the pandemic.
- To develop theologies to assist the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy to be gender sensitive.

### **1.7. Theoretical framework**

The study is guided by an overarching feminist theoretical framework. The three sub-theories that are employed are feminist ecclesiology, the gendered conceptual intervention to HIV and AIDS proposed by Geeta Rao Gupta and Trinitarian theology. The relevance of these three frameworks is based on their common focus on the unity and equality of humanity or human beings regardless of gender, social and religious differences.

### **1.7.1. Feminist ecclesiology**

Rosemary R. Ruether defines one of the critical principles of feminist liberation theology as “the promotion of the full humanity of women” (1983: 88). She further says that:

Feminist theology takes feminist critique and reconstruction of gender paradigms into the theological realm. [Feminist theologians] ... question patterns of theology that justify male dominance and female subordination, such as exclusive male language for God, the view that males are more like God than females, that only males can represent God as leaders in church and society, or that women are created by God to be subordinate to males and thus sin by rejecting this subordination (2002: 3).

Feminist ecclesiology is “a theological discipline [which] was born out of a historical need, a situation which made it necessary for the church to [re-]define itself” (Watson 2002: 4). Furthermore, feminist ecclesiology aims “to transform [the church] into an open space where justice is found” (2002: 14). Russell defines feminist ecclesiology as a “methodology of action and reflection [which] is connected to those who have been marginalized in the church...”, (1993: 14) exposing the gender inequalities in terms of women’s position in society and the church. With respect to women’s equality, Rakoczy (2004: 223) states: “Since women are truly created in the image and likeness of God, they too share in the life of the Trinity and are called to make that life real in both church and society... women’s call for justice, participation and mutuality and inclusiveness is a ‘cry’ to remind the church to be church”.

The main reason for using feminist ecclesiology as a framework in this study is because feminist ecclesiology interrogates the structures of the church – its policies, doctrines and theologies which may not be life-affirming for women.

### **1.7.2. Gupta's gendered conceptual intervention framework**

Geeta Rao Gupta, a former president of the International Center for Research on Women, and a leader on gender and women's issues, especially as regards HIV and AIDS, suggests that, "It is clear that the sensitive, transformative and empowering approaches to gender and sexuality ... are not mutually exclusive" (2000: 6). To achieve transformation and empowerment through sensitive means, she proposes the gendered conceptual intervention framework within which to tackle the issue of gender and HIV and AIDS. Gupta shows how the gender power imbalance contributes to the transmission of HIV and AIDS. She points out that: "The unequal power balance in gender relations that favors men, translates into an unequal power balance in heterosexual interactions, in which male pleasure supercedes female pleasure and men have greater control than women over when, where, and how sex takes place" (2000: 2). She further highlights that "HIV positive women bear a double burden: they are infected and they are also affected as women who are also care givers" (2000: 3). As part of a solution Gupta promotes, in contrast to most interventions in the pandemic, "gender-sensitive programming that recognizes and responds to the differential needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality" (2000: 5). Gupta's approach is based around four possible approaches to gender: stereotyping of women and men; gender neutrality; gender sensitivity; and empowering and transformational approach. Following Materu, I will use the same categories to ascertain whether the theologies which underpin the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy assist or hinder the recognition of the gendered nature of the pandemic.

### **1.7.3. Orthodox and feminist Trinitarian theology**

Feminist theologians have argued for the importance of "reimaging and renaming God..." away from the emphasis on the masculinity of Fatherhood. In addition, they argue that just as "the persons of the Trinity are mutually related, so male and female humans are to live

as co-equals” (Karkkainen (ed.) 2007: 907) and that “the persons of the Trinity are of identical invisible being, equal in power and glory, and with a certain order in their relations” (2007: 907). Clifford also asserts, “The image of the divine perichoresis invites everyone, especially Christians, to join in the Trinitarian harmony. To enter into this harmony is to experience the grace of communion with the divine three” (2005: 114). She further says that this harmony and communion is on the one hand undermined by the projection of maleness onto the triune God of Christian revelation, while a Trinitarian theology that relates to feminist values has on the other hand, the potential to bring to the fore solidarity in diversity, the value of equal and mutual partnerships, and the importance of communion to being a fully human person (2005: 111).

In order for me to do justice to the factors that influence me in the choice of this study; that is, my personal interest in contributing to the cause of women’s equality and empowerment in Ethiopia, and my viewpoint that – in the context of Ethiopia, and particularly of the EOTC – orthodox and feminist Trinitarian theology needs to form part of the theoretical framework underpinning this study; I need here to point out that it is encouraging to note that Trinitarian theology and feminist Trinitarian theology do not appear to be in contradiction to each other. According to Clifford “because feminism emphasizes equality, interrelatedness, and mutuality as the basis of the world as it ought to be, feminist theology can be greatly enriched by the image of the Trinity as three equal persons dancing together in perfect harmony” (2005: 116). Rakoczy (2004: 52) too highlights this when she sees “the Trinity as possibly providing us with a model of the integrity of persons within community and their interrelatedness”.

In Orthodox Trinitarian theology, there is fundamental equality in the Trinity (Mekarios et al. 1996: 25). Therefore, since humanity is created in the image of the Trinity, there must be equality within humanity also.<sup>6</sup> This realisation can empower women to play an equal

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<sup>6</sup> Boff (1988:2) “We are image and likeness of the Trinity”.

role in all decision making: in sexual matters, as well as in economic and social issues with regard to HIV and AIDS. This idea is supported by Nyengele when he says that “gender injustice [is] a pastoral theological concern for the church in Africa and... the theological image of perichoresis can provide the norms for gender relations and insights for pastoral care giving that is sensitive to the suffering caused by gender injustice” (2002: 59).

Thomas Ninan, an Orthodox priest, in his Honours research project stresses that “we need to look deeper into the ‘image of God’ in us ... [so that] upholding human dignity becomes a shared responsibility ... and the reality and call for the church to live a Trinitarian community life ... can be realized” (Ninan 2010: 37). He further points out that since “human beings [are] made in the image of God ... the mutual relationships among the three co-equal persons within the Godhead have been argued to provide a model both for human relationships within the communities and for Christian political and social theorizing” (Ninan 2010: 11). The doctrine of Trinity is one of the most important doctrines of the Orthodox Church.<sup>7</sup> By using Trinitarian theories of equality, the analysis of the EOTC’s strategy for preventing and combating HIV and AIDS will make sense within the Orthodox Church’s understandings of life-affirming theologies. Through exploring the Orthodox Trinitarian theology, we want to ascertain whether or not the Trinitarian theology as understood and taught in the EOTC has informed the formulation and implementing of the HIV and AIDS prevention and control strategy.

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<sup>8</sup> Even though in practice the EOTC doesn’t follow what is taught by its own Trinitarian theology to bring about equality between men and women, the Trinitarian theology itself is the core of the faith in the EOTC, and thus, by suggesting that theology and practice need to be aligned, transformation and empowerment can begin to be achieved.

### **1.8. Research methodology**

Sarantakos (1993: 113) states that an understanding of the methodology employed, as it is engaged in “explaining the bases of the project, offers a better understanding of the research, and allows a clear, just and valid interpretation and assessment of the findings”. This study is a non-empirical qualitative study, using the EOTC’s HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy as the main data to analyze. Feminist ecclesiology, the conceptual HIV and AIDS gendered intervention framework as developed by Geeta Rao Gupta, and feminist and Orthodox Trinitarian theology are used as tools of analysis.

Both books and electronic resources have been consulted. My own personal observation also has been used in the thesis. The design of the study is based on the tri-polar approach which follows the pattern: context, text and appropriation. The context of the study is HIV and AIDS as a gendered pandemic (women are particularly vulnerable to HIV) in Ethiopia, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. The focus of this study, the text, is to analyze the EOTC’s HIV and AIDS prevention and control strategy in terms of its gender sensitivity, by using the feminist theoretical frameworks mentioned above. The appropriation aspect is encapsulated in the study’s aim which is to formulate a theology underpinning the strategy which could be appropriate for the EOTC to carry out its struggle against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The study will make recommendations which will serve as guidelines for the future of the EOTC’s HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy, to allow it to take into consideration the full equality of women in social and in religious participation, and to enable it to respond more effectively to the factors driving the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the impacts thereof.

### **1.9. Structure of dissertation:**

The current chapter presents the background and motivation of the study, the research problem, objectives, literature review and structure of the study.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, the prevailing situation in terms of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia, a brief history of the EOTC as regards its socio-cultural context and the EOTC beliefs on the Trinity are explored.

The third chapter attempts to identify beliefs which might be preventing the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy program from being gender sensitive.

Chapter Four critically analyzes the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document, highlights the achievements and limitations of the program, and discusses ways of reclaiming theology of the Trinity which is life-affirming for women.

Chapter Five discusses in a summary form the findings of the study and suggests some recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE CONTEXT OF HIV AND AIDS IN ETHIOPIA**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter the focus is on the context of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia. We begin by outlining the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia, basically through the presentation of the most recent statistics related to the pandemic. The second issue addressed relates to the correlation of gender, culture and HIV and AIDS with respect to the vulnerability of women to the disease. Thirdly, we explore a brief history of the EOTC with reference to its influence on Ethiopian society and on Ethiopian culture. Finally, we look at the EOTC's approach to women's participation in all spheres of life, including spiritual life.

#### **2.2. HIV and AIDS prevalence in Ethiopia**

Ethiopia remains one of the most traditional societies in Africa<sup>8</sup>. The issue of patriarchy is still dominant and gender insensitivity is visibly prevalent in Ethiopian society. It is the only African country to have escaped western colonization. Although this has benefited the country with respect to the preservation of its cultural heritage; its down side is that Ethiopia has been left behind in terms of advancing women's issues in the new millennium. In this sense Ethiopia's ancient patriarchal system is still largely intact.

According to the Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia (Zekaria 2010), the Ethiopian population is estimated to be about 82 101 998.<sup>9</sup> Alemu et. al. (2007: 1) state that eighty-

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<sup>8</sup> <[http://afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/ethiopia\\_women.htm](http://afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/ethiopia_women.htm)> Accessed on 23 August, 2011.

<sup>9</sup><[http://www.csa.gov.et/index.php?option=com\\_rubberdoc&view=category&id=75&Itemid=561](http://www.csa.gov.et/index.php?option=com_rubberdoc&view=category&id=75&Itemid=561)>  
Accessed on 23 August, 2011.

five percent of the population is engaged in rural, agricultural-based economic activities. The country has been challenged by periodic droughts, soil degradation, deforestation and its high density population that affects agricultural production. Women are badly affected by the negative impacts of these socio-economic conditions. Because the situation is further complicated by deep traditional, social, religious and economic forces, powerful constraints are placed on the rights of women and on their opportunities to direct their own lives (Dejene et al. 2008: 70).

Traditionally, labour has been divided according to gender in Ethiopia. The responsibilities allocated to women in the family as well as in society are related to natural and human made factors. For instance, droughts place the burden of searching for water and food for their families on women (Alemu et al. 2007: 1). Human made problems include sexual and economic abuse. This denies women the opportunity to advance in education and to take part in economic development, because all their time and effort is reserved for survival strategies. Due to these problems many women in Ethiopia lack the knowledge and power to deal effectively with the issues related to HIV and AIDS.

Recent statistics indicate that HIV and AIDS is widespread in Ethiopia: according to USAID (2010) statistics, there are approximately 1.1 million people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) (out of a total population of about 82 million) and sexual abuse makes between 40% and 60% of women vulnerable to contracting HIV. The Ethiopian national governmental report (2009) also shows that 855,720 children have been orphaned due to AIDS. Similarly the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document indicates that 5000 people are newly infected each week, with 91% HIV and AIDS infections found among economically active and productive adults aged 15-49 years and that 75% of new HIV infections are the result of sexual contact among multiple partners (EOTC strategy document 2004: 21).

### **2.3. Gender, culture and HIV and AIDS**

Gender is a socially constructed understanding of people through which to determine the role of male and female in a society. According to Popenoe et al., “Gender …is in a large part socially and culturally determined, and so is subject to extensive variation” (1998: 247). Woldeyes (2004: 4) defines gender as a concept that “refers to the roles and responsibilities of women (girls) and men (boys) that are created in the families, societies and cultures”. She contends that this classification is social, not biological. Again Popenoe et al. reiterate that “a gender role is a social role associated with being male or female” (1998:247). Gender understanding differs from one culture to another in Ethiopia, but it is generally unfavourable to women across all cultures.

Femininity by tradition and as a norm, is associated with an inferior status. This understanding has been received from tradition and is transmitted via the beliefs (objective) and the feelings (subjective) of the people (Merhahi 1988: 1). Due to these understandings of male and female, like many other issues, HIV and AIDS has become a gendered matter in Ethiopia. This is confirmed by Dube: “One of the major issues in the fight against HIV/AIDS is gender.... Gender inequalities are a major driving force behind the AIDS epidemic” (2003: 84). Again, according to Dube (2003:84), “All of us sons and daughters of Africa have to take our place in the battle against HIV and AIDS”. One of the key roles that each of us have to play is connected with gender and culture.

Popenoe et.al., (1998: 24) states that sociologists and anthropologists commonly define culture as “the shared products of a human group or society. These … include not only values, language and knowledge but also material objects. Thus, nonmaterial culture includes abstract and intangible human creations such as definitions of right and wrong, what men and women can do or cannot do or what they can have or cannot have etc.”

It is this aspect of culture that is especially relevant to this study because it is the main cause of gender biases which make women subordinate to men in all aspects of life. Therefore, the issue of culture is directly or indirectly connected with vulnerability to the HI virus. One of the central gender issues fuelling HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia is the unequal distribution of power between women and men. This happens economically, socially, politically, culturally and also religiously. “HIV/AIDS research holds that gender-based inequalities overlap with other social, cultural, economic and political inequalities” (Dube 2003: 84). All of these contribute to making the HIV and AIDS epidemic gendered in Ethiopia.

This situation is reflected in the life of Ethiopian women in various ways. The unequal distribution of power based on the gender stereotype has created economic dependency of women on men, in the sense that all economic resources are owned and controlled exclusively by men.

Land ownership is among the economic gendered issues which contributes to women's economic dependency (Thomas and Daly 2007: 22). In Ethiopia 85% of the population live in rural agricultural areas. Since land is in the hands of men, women are economically dependent and this in turn leads to their greater exposure to HIV and AIDS (Dejene et al. 2008: 70). This economic dependency usually leads women to unsafe sexual relations, including failure to negotiate for the use of acceptable protective measures within those relations.

Politically, first and foremost the laws in most nations including Ethiopia are made by men (Dejene et al. 2008: 73). This means that the existing legal system favours men more

than women, for example in matters of rape and other sexual abuses, as well as in terms of property ownership.

The issue of war also affects women more than men. War has significantly contributed to the spread of the virus in Ethiopia. Many soldiers contracted HIV during the civil war in the 1980s by having contact with multiple sex partners. When the war ended in 1991, thousands of infected soldiers and prostitutes returned home, thereby contributing to the spread of HIV in their villages (Thomas and Daly 2007: 24).

A central issue which is fuelling HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia are harmful traditional cultural practices. According to Yimam (2005: 16) “Ethiopian women, like women living elsewhere, are the most affected section of society and suffer more from HIV/AIDS ... [and] the threat to women including married women and young girls who are subject to harmful traditional cultural practices is higher than men”. Some of the cultural practices which fuel the epidemic are as follows:

### **2.3.1. Early marriage**

In Ethiopia high value is attached to virginity to the extent that pre-marital pregnancy is culturally unacceptable. Hence young girls are forced into early marriage amongst many cultural groups in Ethiopia (Dejene et al. 2008: 172) as most parents prefer that their daughters marry at a young age while they are still virgins. These marriages are mostly arranged by parents who are often not motivated by the economic security (financial benefits) that they themselves and their daughters are expected to gain from such a marriage. The divorce rate is high as is the engagement in multiple partnerships as well as in commercial sex, leading to the increased prevalence of HIV infections (Dejene et al. 2008: 182). Parents often are unaware of the problematic matter of the anatomical and

physiological differences between a young woman and an older man, which further fuels the spread of HIV and AIDS (Karim and Karim 2010: 288).

### **2.3.2. Polygamy and widow inheritance**

Polygamy is also among the culturally based practices in Ethiopia and is another factor in the spread of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia. According to Adow (2005: 1)<sup>10</sup> “an Ethiopian man with 11 wives and 77 children has been urging people not to follow his example and gave advice on family planning and contraception”.<sup>11</sup> Most men when they have power, especially economic power, are however more likely to take on as many wives as they wish, regardless of the fact that this makes it possible to infect many more women with HIV, if the man is infected. Widow inheritance is also an important contributing factor in spreading HIV and AIDS; if the living partner has been infected, the virus can easily be transmitted to the new partner. In widowhood inheritance male relatives of the deceased man usually use his death as way to inherit the deceased man’s assets, including his wife. Wife sharing also exists as part of the culture in some communities in Ethiopia, which too can fuel the spread of HIV since the virus can spread between the various partners (Thomas and Daly 2007: 9).

### **2.3.3. Patriarchy**

The cultural practice and ideology of patriarchy is another central factor that contributes to the spread HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in the culture of gender stereotypes in Ethiopian society as well as in the church. Because of the systemic nature of culture which pervades all aspects of life, and which privileges men, women’s voices are generally not heard. As Karim asserts:

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<sup>10</sup> Adow (2005:1).<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4720457.stm>> Accessed on, 21 November, 2011

Consistency in the role difference between men and women, particularly in access to resources and in decision-making authority [brings about a pervasive imbalance] ... This imbalance in access to, and control of, productive forces and resources translates into an unequal balance in sexual relations in favour of men (2010: 288).

This situation makes women more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. For example, Dejene et al. describe some of the negative consequences of patriarchy in this way:

Gender inequality and discrimination harm girls' and women's health directly and indirectly, throughout the life cycle... Unequal power relations between men and women often limit women's control over sexual activity and their ability to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS; adolescent girls are [especially] vulnerable (2008: 65).

The status of women as described above is reflected also in language used mostly by men (in the form of proverbs) to illustrate their attitude towards women in Ethiopia.<sup>12</sup> These proverbs also contribute to gender related problems. They undermine women's dignity and lead to various kinds of abuse including unsafe sexual relationships and rape.

An associated socio-cultural feature is androcentrism or the socially accepted norm of placing male human beings or the masculine point of view at the centre of life. Such anthropomorphism manifests itself in religious, economic, social and cultural values that promote the subordination of women in all spheres of life.

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<sup>12</sup> 'To bear a girl is to bear a problem' (indicating misogyny); 'A woman's saliva is thick, she does not feel hungry' (meaning that if there is not enough food, then the woman does not get a share); 'A woman and a priest cannot be considered as guests' (implying that women should not rest, but serve at all times); 'A woman like a donkey loves to be beaten' (claiming that a women must be beaten to make her obedient); and 'Women make suggestions; men make decisions' (indicating the women cannot be in positions of any authority) (Dejene et al 2008: 71).

### **2.3.4. Masculinity**

Just as with femininity, masculinity is also a social construct with various associated meanings, and is an issue which contributes to the fuelling of the HI virus too. According to Van Klinken “women’s vulnerability is reinforced by the behaviour of men and by norms related to masculinity which, in the end, also put men themselves at risk” (2011: 5). For example, for a man to have a child out of wedlock is seen as confirmation of the man’s strength in some cultures in Ethiopia. Thus, many men pursue actions which will show off – in society’s eyes - how strong and capable they are regardless of whether or not their sexual behaviour is safe for their women partners.

### **2.3.5. Female genital mutilation**

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is another cultural norm that is problematic for women in Ethiopian communities. Many Ethiopians hold beliefs about FGM that are based on sociological, mythical and religious reasons (Norwegian Church Aid 2009: 5, 67). Sociological reasons include “identification with the cultural heritage, initiation of girls into womanhood, social integration and the maintenance of social cohesion to avoid ostracization and stigmatization” (Dejene et al. 2008: 106). Myth-related reasons include entertaining beliefs about “the enhancement of fertility and promotion of child survival,... [destroying] hard hymen tissue” (Dejene et al. 2008: 106). Among the religious reasons is the fact that “some Muslim communities practice FGM in the belief that it is demanded by the Islamic faith. The practice, however, not only predates but is not a requirement of Islam” (Dejene et al. 2008: 107). The use of unhygienic and therefore unsafe circumcision materials in carrying out FGM is likely to fuel the spread of HIV among women.

### **2.3.6. Abduction**

Abduction is another cultural practice which is accompanied by forced sexual intercourse without consensus from the abducted party, usually a young woman. This again

contributes to the spread of HIV, if one or both parties are infected (Dejene .et al. 2008: 179).

### **2.3.7. Important religious festivals**

Important religious festivals such as the holiday of Epiphany and the True-Cross feast, as well as wedding parties have become occasions for meeting new partners and possibly engaging in unsafe sex.<sup>13</sup> The Epiphany and the True-Cross feasts have become international events in Ethiopia, which attract a large number of tourists from all over the world. Although most of the tourists are attracted by the religious uniqueness of these feasts, some are drawn by the easy availability of sexual partners. Again, this situation easily leads to the spread of HIV infection.

## **2.4. A brief history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church**

Ethiopian Church historians divide the history of the EOTC into three periods: the pre-Christian period (before the Law of Moses and the period of paganism), the period of the introduction of Judaism and the period of the introduction of Christianity (Melaku 2008: 14, 16, 42). The EOTC is one of the few pre-colonial indigenous Christian churches in Africa. Wasse (2004: 1) notes that the EOTC more than 45 million members, 35 000 churches and monasteries, and about 400, 000 clergymen, mainly in Ethiopia. It has been the dominant church in Ethiopia since the 4<sup>th</sup> century and is also the largest Oriental Orthodox church in the world.

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<sup>13</sup><<http://www.ipmsethiopia.org/content/files/Documents/publications/ifpri%20book%20chapter%202013.pdf>>

Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2011.

The EOTC has a long history. According to the beliefs of the Ethiopians there are many links between the Old Testament and Ethiopian history. For example, it is believed that the wife of Moses was an Ethiopian, and that the Ark of the Covenant is to be found in the city of Axum, Ethiopia's ancient capital (Graham Hancock: 1992: 450)<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore it is believed that upon the return to her nation from Jerusalem, the Queen of Sheba bore a child to King Solomon and this son, who later became Emperor Menelik I, founded the dynasty that ruled Ethiopia for most of its history, up to the 1970's.<sup>15</sup> From the New Testament we learn that an Ethiopian eunuch was the first "foreign" person baptized into the Christian faith. Historians believe that he was in the service of the Ethiopian Queen Candace (Hindake as she is called locally). He was baptized by Philip and thereafter introduced the Christian faith to his country (Acts 8:38).<sup>16</sup> It is also thought that before Christianity, Judaism was the religion of the country. The vast majority of Ethiopians practiced elements of Judaism such as its dietary laws and circumcision in their spiritual and social lives (Gebre Emmanuel et al. 2000: 16). Although Orthodox Christianity became the official religion of Ethiopia in the fourth century, there had been a Christian presence there from the first century CE (Acts 8: 26-40). Ethiopian tradition also contains the legend that the Apostle Matthew evangelized Ethiopia (Chaillot 2002: 17).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Christians are strongly devoted to their faith. They have even hewn stones to build churches for their faith, excavating these structures from solid rock. In addition, they are strongly traditional (Cruickshank 2005: 177)<sup>17</sup>, so that their faith and

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<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/ethiopia/axum-ark-of-covenant>> Accessed 24 November, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> <<http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html#2intro>> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> <<http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html#2intro>> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> See also: Lule Melaku. 2010. *History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: From the Reign of Emperor Caleb to the end of the Zagwe Dynasty and from the Classical (Golden) Age to the Present: Part two & three.*

tradition have continued unbroken for many centuries. However, this also means that it is not easy to introduce any changes into the church, including the establishment of equality for both men and women in terms of leadership and decision making, so that women may also have full control of their lives.

Besides its spiritual work, the church has contributed immensely in addressing the socio-economic problems of Ethiopia. For instance, education was solely the responsibility of the church for centuries (Chaillot 2002: 83). However, the involvement of women in this traditionally church-based education remains minimal even today. With the historical background in mind, the study now considers how the EOTC understands gender related issues.

### **2.5. The EOTC approach to women's participation**

The EOTC is the oldest sub-Saharan African church and a dominant church in Ethiopia, which has taken it upon itself to contribute in the fight against the spread of HIV and AIDS. Within the EOTC there is a development wing known as the Development Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC), operating at national, diocesan and district levels. Most of the decision making positions in the structures are occupied by men and almost all low level positions are occupied by women. The structures deal with various social matters, and include the national HIV and AIDS secretariat office which is linked with the regional, provincial and district offices also responsible for HIV and AIDS related issues.

Like other patriarchal churches, the EOTC has been criticized for a lack of women's involvement and for the low status of women at all levels and especially in higher positions. "Religious patriarchy is the systematic exclusion of women from roles of

religious authority”<sup>18</sup>. However, there is a noticeable contrast between church practice and church doctrine when it comes to gender issues. The systematic exclusion of women does not fit in well with the fact that the EOTC accepts and follows the teaching of Jesus Christ which implies a belief in the equality of women and men. An Orthodox priest, Merahi, the only gender activist within EOTC, tries to highlight this dichotomy by arguing in Amharic (the national language, used by most people) that “መማርም ሆነ ማስተማር በርታና እንዲቻል የታኑ አይመስከትም” (1988: 34), the literal translation of which is, “Learning as well as teaching only needs courage, and should not be differentiated by gender”. He is here critiquing the contrast between church teaching and church practice. For him, women’s involvement in all activities is the norm and is not a new concept, since our teacher Jesus sent women disciples to tell of his resurrection (“መምህራኑ ክርክሩ ስቶ ደቀመኩና፡ ሙሉና ታንሸሳኑን ገዢ በጥቃዋና ማረጋገጫ ይሰጣል”)(1988: 34).

Another point is that the EOTC venerates women saints in the same manner that it venerates male saints. For example, St. Kirtos Semra is highly venerated throughout the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity because she prayed that Jesus would forgive the devil and that he would reconcile with Jesus and thus end evil in the world and bring about global peace (1988: 34). Venerating women saints is appropriate and commendable. However, this begs the question why women are not recognized and treated as equals to men while they are still alive. At the same time it is also true that the EOTC has made some strides along this path. For instance, women do participate in the life of the church in the following three ways:

- Women participate in church prayers equally with men.
- Women are involved in Sunday school youth programmes teaching and leading the youth.

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<sup>18</sup> Solidarity and Sustainability: A News letter on the socio-Ecological Impacts of religious patriarchy. <<http://www.pelicanweb.org/solisust01.html>> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2011.

- Women may also be members of the executive committees. Chaillot indicates that “the district parish general assembly consists of members who represent the clergy, laity (men, women and youth members)... [and] in the parish administration council, women can be chair person in some committees or sections” (2002: 41).



Figure 1: Women and men as part of the youth group perform the traditional religious dance called “woreb” at Durban St. Mary’s EOTC parish day, 15 May, 2011 in the presence of the diocesan bishop Abuna Yacob.

As noted above, the EOTC has done much in terms of providing educational opportunities, but these have been delivered for a large number of men and for very few women. According to Dejene et al, “Ethiopia has a long history of traditional education,

mostly religion-oriented” (2008: 28). At the well-known traditional school, a school of poetry (*qene*), both women and men attended, and some of them have become professors. Merahi mentions Professor Emhoy Gelanesh, whom he describes as “an Ethiopian Homer” (1992: 35). He also mentions women scholars such as Professors Askalewoin, Mebrat and others. Today some women also attend theological courses in the biggest theological seminary in Ethiopia (Holy Trinity University College, in Addis Ababa). Such an education is an avenue for empowering women and for helping them to become aware of and to claim their rightful place in the church.

The points mentioned above suggest that the church allows women to participate equally with men in most of the programs of the church. As Russell argues, “many contemporary theologians assert that the... church needs to include the perspective of people on the periphery or margins” (1993: 135). In the local parishes more and more women are taking part in activities which were historically reserved for men. Thus, while the majority of positions as Sunday school teachers and choir members continue to be filled by women, we now also find women who have been sanctioned as readers and chanters in the liturgies and as youth directors (Merahi 1992: 47).

However, it cannot be denied that the EOTC remains a patriarchal church, which does not give equal opportunity to both genders with regard to the ordination of women. Although women participate in parish executive committees, study theology, and are active in other social and spiritual activities, the clerical authority to conduct the liturgy, and the sanctification associated with this position, is still firmly held by men.

The position of women within the EOTC and whatever role women or men are allowed or not allowed to play depends on the prerogative of men (male bishops) who are the only decision-makers in the Holy Synod.



Figure 2 : EOTC Bishops (all male), who are decision makers at Holy Synod.

## **2.6. Women's participation in the socio-economic sphere in the EOTC**

Women have actively participated in the social and economic sphere of the EOTC, for example by producing various crafts to supplement the income of the church. The vestments and other cloths used in the church are also mainly made by women in Ethiopia. This is an income generating initiative by women themselves which provides jobs for women and helps them to support not only their own families, but the church as well. One of the best examples of such an initiative within EOTC is Sebeta Convent or Nunnery (Sebeta Betedenagel), which is engaged in various agricultural activities carried out by the nuns to provide a sustainable income for the convent and to empower them to study in order to qualify for various professional careers. Their produce also helps to supply the poor in the area and orphaned children with food and with other basic necessities.

HIV/AIDS, civil wars, displacement and famines have been the major causes for the increased number of orphaned children in Ethiopia. The Nunnery has responded to this by working to bring together children from various parts of the country and provide them with food, shelter, clothing, basic education and skills training to help them become productive citizens. Sebeta Nunnery also has a school and health centre. One of the main activities of the Nunnery is assisting and teaching children who have lost their parents to HIV and AIDS.

## **2.7. The EOTC belief in the Trinity (the Trinitarian theology of the EOTC)**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is one of six Oriental Orthodox Churches (the others are the Coptic, Syrian, Indian, Armenian, and Eritrean Churches) also known as the non-Chalcedonian Churches (Melaku 2008:11). These churches do not accept the Council of Chalcedon of 451, which decreed that Christ had two distinct natures, the Divine and the Human. These churches believe that Christ has only one nature that is both Divine and Human, and that this union was achieved in the Womb of the Virgin, and is inseparable and indivisible. Christ is completely Divine and Human at all times and in all actions, being fully God and fully Human at the same time (Melaku 2008: 12-13).<sup>19</sup>

The Trinitarian understanding of the EOTC is that “Trinity are three in name, in deed and in person; the three are one in essence, in divinity, in existence and in will; we do not mean three Gods but one God. While the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit exist in their own perfect person, they are one in existence” (Mekarios et al. 1996: 25). The doctrine of the Trinity as presented by Fulford, (2007: 1) is “an enduring doctrine in Christianity”. Fulford asserts that the Trinitarian doctrine “has been used in Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox (including the EOTC) and Protestant churches as a central

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<sup>19</sup> The Amharic word *Tewahedo* refers to the belief in the one single unified nature of Christ; i.e. a belief that a complete, natural union of the Divine and Human natures into One is self-evidently in order to accomplish the divine salvation of humankind (Melaku 2008: 12).

teaching since the fourth century” (2007: 1). Citing William Placher, another theologian, Fulford says: “Theologians have developed a variety of ways to express the belief that the persons of the Trinity ‘are utterly equal, one to another’” (2007: 1). Reflecting on the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (4<sup>th</sup> century) on the Trinity, William Placher, says Fulford (2007: 1), has suggested that: “The members of the Trinity (God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit) do not compete with but glorify each other”. The model used by the EOTC in its teaching of the Trinitarian doctrine is the Anaphora of St. Mary. One of the key beliefs in the anaphora is that “The divine Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God - three names, but one God” (Daoud 1959: 137) and therefore, there is no tritheism.

There are some key elements which suggest a practical value of the doctrine of the Trinity model for social relations. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are the one God who gives authority, advises, cleanses, strengthens, encourages, teaches, clothes, examines and judges. Humanity is not only men but is men and women (Daoud 1959: 139). The anaphora is designed as a liturgical mass celebrated during the feast of St. Mary and it is used by the EOTC to teach all the believers (men and women) about the importance of the Trinity in their lives. The fact that the EOTC engages in this during the feast of St. Mary, suggests that the recognition of women in the life of the church and society could be harnessed to transform gender relations between women and men. “Scripture declares that all people are equal in the sight of God, and that all are equally in need of the redemption achieved through the saving death of Jesus Christ. All believers [men and women] have equal status before God, despite differences in their social standing and background” (Manser 2009: 1).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Manser (2009:1) <<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/5308-equality/dictionary-of-bible-themes>> Accessed on 21 October, 2011.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter has been first, to present the context of HIV and AIDS and the context of gender in Ethiopia. The disease and the gender relations that drive its spread do not exist in a vacuum. It is for this reason that these contexts have been discussed in terms of five main fields. First, an attempt was made to understand HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia from a gender and cultural perspective by highlighting aspects fuelling the spread of HIV such as early marriage, polygamy and widow-inheritance, patriarchy, masculinity, female genital mutilation, abduction and important religious festivals; second, a presentation of the EOTC's approach to women's participation was presented; third, women's participation in the socio-economic sphere in the EOTC was discussed; and fourth, the Trinitarian theology of the EOTC and its implications in terms of gender was outlined. In the next chapter we will consider theological beliefs which hinder the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy from being gender sensitive.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEOLOGICAL BELIEFS WHICH HINDER THE EOTC'S HIV AND AIDS PREVENTION AND CONTROL STRATEGY FROM BEING GENDER SENSITIVE**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The EOTC is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world. This suggests that the chances of it being influenced by its own Christian tradition in its approach to overcoming a controversial issue like gender sensitivity in dealing with HIV and AIDS, are high. It is with this thought in mind that the discussion in this chapter begins with an overview of theological beliefs based on this Christian tradition. This is meant to give an indication as to why policy documents like the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy were drafted and presented in a manner that they are today.

#### **3.2. Christian tradition as a source of gender insensitivity**

Christian tradition has contributed a great deal in perpetuating the unequal treatment of women within the EOTC and Ethiopian society in general. In order to understand the influence of Christian tradition on the EOTC with respect to gender related issues we will look at Scripture, Greek philosophy, the early Church Fathers, dualism and Jewish tradition as key elements which have had a tremendous influence on this tradition..

### **3.2.1. Scripture**

One of the scriptural stories which has been used by some philosophers, theologians, church Fathers and churches to justify the subordination of women in all spheres of life, is that of the Fall. Contemporary theological writers like Anderson (2004) have taken up the discussion about the meaning of the story. He makes this comment about the manner in which Christianity has presented the story to support women's subordination: "In classical Christianity, the subordination of women was based, among other things, on their supposedly 'improper bodies'... justified on the basis of Eve's action in Genesis 3" (2004: 103). Anderson (2004: 103) goes on to state that: "traditional Christian theology adopted this reading of the Fall story, so that Eve was disproportionately responsible for sin". In other words, Eve was seen as an entry point for sin into the world. This led to the conclusion that as Eve was a representative of all women after her, they were also the cause of sin. Women's subjugation is further justified by the interpretation of the creation story, an interpretation which posits men as superior to women in all respects.

Thus, it has been emphasized that God created only man in God's image and that God had literally stated that Adam (a man) will rule over Eve (a woman) and that this will be the case for all men and women (Genesis 3:16). Ruether (1993: 97) gives the significance (for women) of this understanding of the story of the Fall in this way: "woman through the Fall and in punishment for the Fall, lost her original equality and became inferior in the mind and body". In the Hebrew Bible we also find this perception by men about all women: (in Ecclesiastes 7:26) "I found something more bitter than death - women... The love she offers you will catch you like a trap or like a net; and her arms around you will hold you like a chain. A man who pleases God can get away; but she will catch the sinner" (Phipps 1989: 44). All the above Scripture references indicate male bias.

### **3.2.2. Greek philosophy on the inferiority of women**

Greek philosophy has played its part in the subjugation of women. “The two most influential philosophers, both in the Greco-Roman world into which Christianity was born and in the world of Christian theology of the Middle Ages, were Plato and Aristotle”.<sup>21</sup> An overview of their ideas (although they differ in some respects) on the position of women in society suggest a strong support for the subjugation of women – a notion which is also found in the early biblical interpretations. It is therefore, not surprising to learn from Plato (427-347 BC) that:

It is only males who are created directly by gods and are given souls. Those who live rightly return to the stars, but those who are cowards or lead unrighteous lives may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation. This downward progress may continue through successive reincarnations unless reversed. In this situation, obviously it is only men who are complete human beings and can hope for ultimate fulfillment; the best a woman can hope for is to become a man.<sup>22</sup>

This idea is further stated by McCulloch, when he says: “Plato’s thought, influenced by the earlier Greek attitudes to matter, conceived the material world as evil and ‘feminine’ on the one hand, and the spiritual as good and ‘masculine’ on the other” (2002: 1). This influence is seen in the fact, pointed out by Clifford, that many early theologians “treated women not only as a ‘dissimilar species’, but also a defective one” (2005: 30).

In Aristotle’s (384-322 BC) view, “women are defective in nature”, because they cannot reproduce semen which contains a full human being. When a man and a woman have

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<sup>21</sup> Greek Philosophy on the Inferiority of Women.

[http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe\\_gre.asp](http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe_gre.asp) Accessed on 12 August, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Greek Philosophy on the Inferiority of Women

<[http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe\\_gre.asp](http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe_gre.asp)>

Accessed on 12 August, 2011.

intercourse, the man supplies the substance of a human being (the soul, i.e. the form), [while] the woman only the nourishment (the matter)".<sup>23</sup> He further says that "man rightly takes charge over woman, because he commands superior intelligence".<sup>24</sup>

These views expressed by Plato and Aristotle had a powerful and lasting impact on the Greco-Roman and Medieval world, and were taken up by the Church Fathers and incorporated into early Christian doctrine in such a way that they eventually became the backbone of the church's teaching on the position of women and the way in which men should relate to them. For example, according to Clifford "Thomas Aquinas [a 13<sup>th</sup> century Church Father], influenced by Aristotle, spoke of women as 'defective' and 'misbegotten'" (2005: 30).

### 3.2.3. Early Church Fathers

Following Aristotelian philosophy, Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274 AD) argued for the exclusion of women from all key positions within the church. His argument was based mainly on two scriptural texts namely, 1 Corinthians 11:1-11 and 1 Timothy 2:12, in connection with which Aquinas believed that "Scripture forbids women to teach in church or exercise authority over men. The woman deacons in the Early Church were not sacramentally ordained [as] the female sex cannot represent Christ because women are incomplete human beings" (Wijngaards 2000: 1)<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, Aquinas describes women as "misbegotten males" (Rakoczy 2004: 101).

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<sup>23</sup>Greek Philosophy on the Inferiority of Women

<[http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe\\_gre.asp](http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe_gre.asp)>

Accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011.

<sup>24</sup>Greek Philosophy on the Inferiority of Women

<[http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe\\_gre.asp](http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/infe_gre.asp)>

Accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Wijngaards, J. 2000:1. Aquinas on Women <<http://www.womenpriests.org/wijngaards/aquinas.asp>>, accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), the most important of the Western Fathers of the church, was a great supporter of Platonic philosophy. He is presented by Rakoczy as having, “asserted that only the male is created in the image of God and that women is the image of God when she is joined to her husband” (2004: 34).

Tertullian (160-225 AD), one of the earliest theologians of Latin Christianity, in his denunciation of women stated:

Do you not know that each of you is an Eve? God’s sentence on your gender lives even in our times and so it is necessary that the guilt must also continue. You are [the] one who opened the devil’s door; you unsealed the forbidden tree; you first betrayed the divine law; you are the one who enticed him whom the devil was too weak to attack. How easily you destroyed man, the image of God: Because of the death which you brought upon us, even the son of God had to die (cited in Phipps 1989: 46).

Tertullian implores Christian women to deface their beauty in order to avoid stimulating male sexual desire. Not only must cosmetics and attractive clothing be abhorred but even natural grace must be obliterated by concealment and negligence. Wearing a veil when going into a public place helps to mortify (humiliate) the flesh. Tertullian asks: “who will have the audacity to intrude with his eyes upon a shrouded face? A face without feeling? A face, so to say, morose?” (Phipps 1989: 46). He says that men’s virtue is least threatened if women stay secluded. “Busy your hands with spinning” and “keep your feet at home” is his admonition to women (Phipps 1989: 46).

Not only the Western Fathers, but also the Church Fathers who are recognized by the Oriental Orthodox like Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil the Great were also influenced

by Greek philosophy. John Chrysostom (349-407) therefore, had this view about women: “among all the savage beasts none is found to be so harmful as women” (Rakoczy 2004: 31). Chrysostom further lamented: “How often do we, from beholding a woman, suffer a thousand evils... The beauty of women is the greatest snare... Let us then discern the snares, and walk far off from them! Let us discern the precipices, and not even approach them” (Phipps 1989: 46).

### **3.2.4. Dualism**

One of the most pervasive ideas that has been used since the time of the Greek philosophers to perpetuate the inferior status of women in society is the concept of dualism. It is the opposition of spirit to matter. Dualistic thinking is often present in theological discourse; even unconsciously. A number of authors agree with the view that the use of the concept of dualism has contributed towards inferior status given to women in most societies. For instance, Rakoczy has this to say about dualism:

The significant influence on the development of the early church’s view of woman was the mind-body dualism inherited from Greek thought.... Spiritual reality is one, but dualism appeared with matter. The spirit is good while matter is evil and dangerous. The male is identified with the spirit which is higher and [superior]; while the female is lower because she is linked with the matter (2004: 33).

Ruether recognizes this problem when she says that: “the patriarchal God of the Hebrew Bible, outside and over against the material world as its Creator and Lord, fused with Greek philosophical dualism of spirit and matter, is seen as a prime identity myth of the Western ruling class male” (1996: 29)

### **3.2.5. Jewish tradition**

It is believed that before Christianity, Judaism was the religion of Ethiopia.<sup>26</sup> The vast majority of Ethiopians practiced elements of Judaism such as its dietary laws, circumcision, the idea of uncleanness of women, and others in their spiritual and social lives.<sup>27</sup>

Rakoczy explains the negative impact of some of the elements of the Jewish tradition, which have also been adopted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church<sup>28</sup>: “only men were full members of the covenant through circumcision. Women were the legal property of men, first of their fathers, then of their husbands. They were totally excluded from the religious offices of Israel” (2004: 32).<sup>29</sup> Elements of Jewish worship were incorporated into the life of the church and society at large.

### **3.2.6. Practical examples of male bias today within the EOTC based on the Christian tradition**

In my observation as an Ethiopian and a deacon in the EOTC, the gender imbalances in the church and the consequent inequalities among women and men have clearly been greatly influenced by the way in which the EOTC has embraced some of the views

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<sup>26</sup> Lule Melaku (2008: 16). History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church. Part one. Addis Ababa.

<sup>27</sup> Lule Melaku (2008: 38-41). History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church. Part one. Addis Ababa

<sup>28</sup> Some of these elements are androcentrism and patriarchy.

<sup>29</sup> See also: <http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?1004> Accessed on 25 October, 2011.

articulated above based on Scripture, the early Church Fathers, Greek philosophy and Jewish tradition.

One of the most commonly noticed male biases within the EOTC which has its roots in both Scripture and Jewish tradition has to do with the period of menstruation. It is common practice that during the menstruation period women in the EOTC are not allowed to enter the church for worship or any other purpose including receiving Holy Communion. This is because women at this time are deemed unclean and therefore not worthy to participate with men in church activities. Talking about reproductive health and menstruation is also a taboo subject because it is considered part of the Fall of Eve into sin and the consequences of the curse. Girls cannot discuss with anyone, either their peers or elders, matters related to their sexuality. The Fall story is used as a basis for such prohibitions.

The Jewish tradition which taught that women are not clean after giving birth, has been adopted and accepted as standard practice, and this therefore promotes male superiority over women. For instance, if a woman gives birth to a boy, she is regarded as unclean for forty days. On the other hand, if she gives birth to a girl, she becomes unclean for eighty days. Another EOTC practice which originates in Jewish tradition is male circumcision which must take place on the eighth day after a baby boy is born. A female equivalent of male circumcision has also been adopted for females but it seems more likely to have been influenced by African traditions.

When it comes to leadership roles within the EOTC, only men are leaders in all areas of church life. The justification for this is that Jesus himself chose only men to be his apostles. In addition, the injunction of St. Paul on the issue of the teaching authority has

been interpreted in such a way that women are not allowed to teach within the EOTC even to this day (1 Timothy 2:12).

The dualistic understanding which suggests that only men have a soul and that women are made of matter only has marginalized women in many ways within the EOTC. This understanding has resulted in the practice of separating men from women from the moment they enter the church's premises. Thus, women do not use the same gate as men to enter church premises, and inside the church building, men and women do not sit together - there is a place strictly reserved for men and another reserved for women. During Communion as well, all men must receive Communion before women. Furthermore, women are expected to dress in long attire and cover their heads. Women are not allowed to wear jeans when they come to church so as not to tempt men or arouse their sexual desires and feelings. All these practices take place because men see themselves as pure while women are viewed as a necessary evil in their lives.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

As was stated at the end of the previous chapter, the concern of this chapter has mainly been the theological beliefs which hinder the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy from being gender sensitive. Christian tradition has been identified as a source of gender insensitivity with specific reference to Scripture, Greek philosophy, and the pronouncements of the early Church Fathers, the concept of dualism, and Jewish tradition. Finally, practical examples of male bias within the EOTC today based on Christian tradition have been presented. The focus of the next chapter shifts to gender-gaps in the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy, and attempts at reclaiming a theology of the Trinity which is life-affirming for women.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **GENDER–GAPS IN THE EOTC HIV AND AIDS PREVENTION AND CONTROL STRATEGY, AND RECLAIMING A THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY WHICH IS LIFE-AFFIRMING FOR WOMEN**

### **4.1. Introduction**

It is assumed (for the purposes of this dissertation), that the advent of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy in Ethiopia was precipitated by a number of factors. Firstly, there was the realization that the EOTC has been active in the struggle against HIV and AIDS since its emergence in the 1980s (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2). However it had also become clear that “despite the efforts of government, donors, NGOs including the EOTC and community organizations, the HIV infection rate was continuing to grow, and the situation had become critical” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 1). These realizations in turn led to the conclusion that “unless there is a breakthrough in the next five years, AIDS threatens to destroy the capacity of Ethiopia to combat poverty and achieve even a reasonable level of economic development” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2). This was a correct reflection on the situation considering the fact that the most infected members of the population are those who have the potential to contribute much to the economic development of the country. Our discussion in this chapter begins with a brief outline of the factors which led to the origin of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Strategy from a historical perspective.

### **4.2. Brief history of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document**

In 1972 the EOTC established DICAC (the Development Inter Church Aid Commission) as a development wing of the church. One of the functions of this department became HIV

and AIDS prevention and control, when the pandemic emerged. In 2001 DICAC established the Orthodox HIV and AIDS Campaign Centre. The Campaign Centre became a department in its own right. In October 2004 the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control department unveiled the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy to try to combat the increasing spread of HIV in Ethiopia.

In the light of this historical background the following discussion centres on a critical analysis of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy.

#### **4.3. A critical analysis of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy**

It has been stated in Chapter One that the theoretical framework of this study is guided by an overarching feminist theology theoretical framework which has three pillars, namely: feminist ecclesiology, gendered conceptual intervention in HIV and AIDS, and feminist Trinitarian theology. These three theories have been selected because of their common focus which is the unity and equality of human beings regardless of gender, social, economic and religious differences. Our critical analysis of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy below is therefore guided by these three chosen pillars of a feminist theoretical framework. Feminist ecclesiology promotes full humanity of women; it seeks to transform the church into an open space where justice is found; it promotes the cause of those who are marginalized in the church and it ensures that gender inequalities are exposed by interrogating structures of the church – its polices, doctrines and theologies which may not be life-affirming for women (Ruether 1983; Watson 2002; Russell 1993; and Rakoczy 2004). The gendered conceptual intervention is characterized by the insistence on focusing on gender sensitive approaches, transformative approaches and approaches that will empower women

through recognizing and responding to the different needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality (Gupta 2000). Lastly, the Trinitarian theology provides a model for the integrity of persons within community and their interrelatedness and/or the theological image of perichoresis which can provide norms and insights for gender relations (Rakoczy 2004; Nyengele 2002). Our critical analysis of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy therefore is shaped by all these insights.

The basic aims of our critical analysis of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy are (1) to ascertain whether or not the strategy itself, or some parts of it, are in fact life-affirming for women in Ethiopia; (2) to find out whether or not the church doctrines found in the strategy document are life-affirming for women; and (3) to discover whether or not the theologies found within the strategy document are also life-affirming for women. This will help us answer the key questions mentioned in Chapter One of this study.

#### **4.3.1. Understanding gender**

We begin our critical analysis of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document by revisiting our understanding of gender. In a plenary address delivered during the 13<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa in July 2000, Geeta Rao Gupta (2000: 1) affirms that gender:

refers to the widely shared expectations and norms within a society about appropriate male and female behaviours, characteristics and roles. It is a social and cultural construct that differentiates women from men and defines the ways in which women and men interact with each other.

A clear understanding of what is meant by gender is necessary in the context of this thesis because it seeks to ascertain whether or not the EOTC HIV and AIDS strategy is gender sensitive. Gupta (2000: 1) further explains that:

Gender is a culture specific construct; [so] there are significant differences in what women and men can or cannot do in one culture as compared to another. But what is fairly consistent across cultures is that there is always a distinct difference between women's and men's roles, access to productive resources, and decision-making authority.

A well documented example of the lack of decision-making authority for women is that “women still find it difficult to negotiate safer sex with their partners. The problem is even more prevalent among women who are economically dependent on men. Some institutionalized social and cultural norms also fuel [this situation]” (Stuurman 2011: 7).

It is important to note at this stage that the EOTC itself is a socio-religious institution with its own values and norms, and that it also operates within Ethiopian cultural norms. It is because of this that the church (not only the EOTC but the church in Africa as a whole), finds itself in a contradictory position. Thus, while the church teaches equality between women and men, Fulgance Nyengele is of the opinion that:

One of the serious indictments directed at the church in Africa is that it has not yet recognized gender injustice as a pressing theological and pastoral issue. As a consequence, it has failed to uphold the fundamental values of human dignity and justice in relation to women's experiences (2002: 61).

#### **4.3.2. The EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy - church structure**

The EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy is a policy document and also one of the structures within the church. “The Orthodox HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Department (HAPCD) is the department within DICAC that focuses especially on HIV and AIDS, but integrates its activities with the other development programmes of DICAC” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2). This study is interrogating the strategy document (and the church structure linked to it) in terms of the above mentioned three pronged feminist theoretical framework.

The starting point in this strategy is that the HIV and AIDS pandemic has indeed become a problem which is affecting national developmental goals aimed at combating poverty (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2). The reason behind this is that the pandemic affects the most productive members of the Ethiopian society in terms of age-groups. According to Dube (2003: 84) “gender inequalities are a major driving force behind the AIDS epidemic... gender based inequalities overlap with other social, cultural, economic and political inequalities and affect more women than men” across all these areas.

Due to gender based inequalities women became more and more economically dependent on men. This economic dependency has become one of the direct factors driving HIV and AIDS because “women who have been constructed as powerless cannot insist on safer sex. They can hardly abstain, nor does faithfulness to their partner help” (Dube 2003: 88).

However the most fundamental teachings of the church based on the Trinity allow for women’s equality in and outside the church. Boff affirms this when he says: “trinity is inclusive because it unites what is separated and excluded” (1986: 3). Women’s participation in the economic arena on an equal basis as found in the creation account has been one of the major teachings of the church for a long time. Thus, Scripture says that

God gave the following rights to male and female: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28).

In addition, it is acknowledged in the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy that "women constituted more than 55 % of all those infected by the HI virus in 1999 and that this number has been increasing ever since; abduction and female genital mutilation, economic and social pressure which drive women to commercial sex work and the death rate of women is increasing" (EOTC strategy document 2004:32).

Nevertheless, there is no concrete plan to deal with the underlying factors that are fuelling the pandemic (including those within the church itself), for example the patriarchal and the androcentric nature of Ethiopian society. According to the strategy document: "the church has, in recent years, made many statements about the importance of improving the position and treatment of women in Ethiopia's economy and social life" (EOTC strategy document 2004: 17) and moreover, the claim is that "women are seen as allies of the church in changing the behaviour of men who are involved with commercial sex workers" (EOTC strategy document 2004: 55).

While such statements and stances may be seen by the EOTC as important steps towards addressing the issues of economic dependency and poverty reduction for women and tackling issues that fuel the spread of HIV, for the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy to be truly life-affirming for women, it will take more than the above mentioned efforts. Specifically, the EOTC will need to tackle the problems associated with gender based inequalities with the seriousness that they deserve. Furthermore, patriarchy (the bias in all spheres of life in favour of males) and androcentrism (the assumption that the male is the "norm") need to be recognized as crucial and critical issues that need urgent attention in all efforts of prevention and control of HIV and AIDS.

### **4.3.3. The EOTC teachings found in the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document**

The main teachings of the EOTC that are readily recognizable in the church's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy are: the teachings of abstinence from sex before marriage and fidelity in marriage (which has its foundations in laws of purity as expressed by the Church Fathers and Judaism); the doctrines of love, acceptance, care and compassion especially for those who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS and the teaching of social justice; and the doctrine of retribution and moral teaching. Feminist ecclesiology again calls us to interrogate these doctrines by asking this question: are these doctrines life-affirming for women? If yes, how? And if not, in what ways?

Following Gupta's gendered conceptual intervention framework, 'life-affirming' for women with respect to the above teachings would mean that the teachings are gender sensitive in that they recognize and respond to the differential needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality; that they are not focused on stereotypes of women and men; and that they thus aim at transforming and empowering women (2000: 6).

Another core pillar of the feminist theoretical framework mentioned at the beginning of this section – Trinitarian theology – requires that we remember that “women as followers are welcomed by Jesus into a discipleship of equals. They were included in the earliest congregation and also became local leaders and travelling evangelists” (Russell 1993: 60). This inclusive attitude of Jesus, prompted Nadar to expect the same from the church which has Jesus as its head. She says that: “An inclusive church provides space for children, women and men to express their gifts and live out their calling to the full” (2005: 19).

We can arguably say that the doctrine of “abstinence before marriage and fidelity within marriage” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 24) is the main EOTC teaching behind its efforts of prevention and control of the pandemic, and has its foundations in the laws of purity. The laws of purity which govern such thinking are in essence in contrast to the non-Chalcedonian teachings on Trinity within Orthodox tradition. This is because one of the key defining features of non-Chalcedonian teachings is precisely that Jesus possessed both human and divine natures simultaneously. It does not separate between the divine and the human, making one higher than the other. However, in teachings that draw on laws of purity, “matter” is considered less valuable in the hierarchy of spirituality. Hence “bodily matters” are relegated to issues of purity whereas in actual fact if one had to draw on the full benefit of an Orthodox, non-Chalcedonian doctrine of Trinity, not only does it speak about concepts of mutuality and inter-dependence, but moreover it recognises the “fluidity” between the divine and the human, between, material and spiritual. By “spiritualising” sexual issues, the doctrine of the Trinity becomes dualistic rather than holistic.

Trinitarian theology requires a more holistic approach than just “purity”. It encourages us to consider the many existing, constraining social, economic, cultural and political factors that put women to at a disadvantage. For instance, because women generally are economically dependent on men it is usually not easy for a woman to insist that her partner also adhere to abstinence before marriage and/ or fidelity within marriage. In other words, this doctrine does not stand up to the challenges posed by the Trinitarian theology as stated by Clifford above – that is, “to be responsive to social and other injustices that undermine inclusive community built on equality, mutuality, solidarity, empathy and compassion” (2005: 111). It is true that “through the accounts of creation and justification in the Christian tradition, all human beings are seen as the images of God and as children of God with equal dignity” (Haspel 2004: 486).

The same applies to the doctrine of love, compassion and social justice, which is often sidelined by focusing on a retributive doctrine of sin and punishment for “immorality”. There are always cultural, social, economical and political factors which prevent those who have power on their side from accepting that women are also created and made in the image of the same God who created men and that they need to be treated with respect and dignity in the same way as men.

#### **4.3.4. Theologies within the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy**

Although the theologies mentioned below are not explicitly stated in the EOTC HIV and AIDS prevention and control strategy, their presence is beyond doubt. Thus, we have identified a theology of HIV and AIDS; a theology of love, caring and compassion; a theology of work; a theology of hope, a theology of service and a theology of social justice. There may be other theologies that may be identified besides these, but for the purpose of this section the above theologies will be sufficient. The most important question is not whether or not theologies are present or not – it is this: are these theologies life-affirming for women, or are they not.? If they are, then how are they, and if they are not life affirming for women then why not?

Beginning by looking at the theology of hope, it cannot be denied that the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy, just by its very existence, brings hope not just to women in Ethiopia but to all who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS in that country. But hope has positive as well as negative aspects. One of the positive aspects is that people are empowered by hope or inspired by it to change their behaviour, if necessary, for the better. On the flip side a negative aspect would arise due (in the context of the EOTC as a church organization) to for instance, “the moral status of the church which is more likely to drive or tempt women to go into commercial sex work because of the church’s retribution teaching” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 55). This manifests

itself through some of the church's teachings which suggest that those who are infected by the HI virus are sinners in the eyes of God and within the church and that therefore, they deserve to be punished. Such teaching cannot be life-affirming for women, because it is judgemental and is lacking in mercy and compassion which are undoubtedly, among the most crucial values of Christian religion. What is needed then is not condemnation, but an understanding by the church that: "God's Trinitarian activity on behalf of the whole world calls the church to structure its life for participation in God's mission and especially for those who are marginalized, oppressed, and denied their human dignity in that world" (Russell 1993: 90).

The EOTC HIV and AIDS prevention and control strategy also has included love, care and compassion. These underlying approaches have led the strategy document to be formulated in order to protect people from HIV and AIDS and its associated problems. Because God loves and cares about all of life, this the strategy document also has embraced the idea of care, love and compassion in its context. This document also shows that there is a need for work, in order to serve people in their well being. Poverty has contributed significantly to the prevalence of HIV, and work or employment is obviously the best way to alleviate poverty. To achieve this, women and men should work and share the resources equally, but women have not been given equal opportunities in this regard in the context of Ethiopia. This is one of the reasons for poverty which leads women into risky situations. Thus, the strategy document lacks the aspect of social justice because it is not gender sensitive. Socially and culturally women's rights are not exercised in the society and the document should focus on how to empower women both generally and specifically in the prevention and control of HIV.

#### **4.3.5. The strengths of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy**

One strength that is readily identified in the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy is that of experience in tackling the problem. This experience is clearly revealed in the following words: "the EOTC has been active in the struggle against HIV and AIDS since its identification in the 1980s" (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2). Here, experience

means a better understanding of the problem and a possibility of finding solutions to it. However, experience can also hamper progress by rigid, institutionalized social and cultural norms and reluctance to proceed further. In this matter first the EOTC as a patriarchal church, and second the existing gender injustice and its influence, need also to be recognized so that the struggle against HIV and AIDS as a pressing theological, and pastoral issue, can be engaged in more effectively. In this way the efforts of the EOTC to prevent and control HIV and AIDS may be more relevant to those affected most by this pandemic. Cimperman argues that: “we cannot be a church and do theology without meeting the faces of HIV/AIDS and responding with our personal, social and global resources” (2005: 23).

The second strength of the EOTC HIV and AIDS strategy lies in an indisputable fact that “the EOTC has from its inception, been a community based institution” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 8). This suggests that the EOTC is close to the people, their life struggles and achievements, in their ordinary everyday management of life. Being a community based organization also suggests that the EOTC has been exposed to the possibility of understanding the culture(s) of the Ethiopian people(s), their language(s), their norms and values, and the impact of the adherence to those norms and values in the life of the Ethiopian people. Being community based further suggests that any strategy meant for the betterment of people ought to reflect the true concerns of those groups affected the most by a particular issue.

The third strength of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy identifiable in the document is that the strategy:

... relies on the extensive structure that the EOTC possesses throughout the country: an estimated 40 million followers; 500,000 clergy; 40,000 churches and monasteries spread throughout the country over 40 dioceses and 35,000 parishes... The EOTC is also able

to mobilize thousands of voluntary community workers, activists, HIV and AIDS educators, women leaders and youth advocates (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2).

All these are considered therefore, by the EOTC as: “a huge army of committed people available for the fight against [HIV and] AIDS” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2). There is no doubt that without enough human and infrastructural resources, the role of the EOTC in the struggle against HIV and AIDS would be severely hampered. However, it is also true that the organizational and motivational tasks as well as the will to adhere to the goals, objectives and practices could be daunting. Ensuring that everybody in this large number of equipped people embraces the same agenda of prevention and control of HIV and AIDS might not be an easy task at all. There is always a possibility of some people creating and pursuing their own agendas.

The fourth identifiable strength of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy lies in the idea that: “the conceptual foundation for EOTC’s programme is a seamless blend between spiritual values drawn from the faith... and the practical, everyday realities of community life...” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 1). Again, there is no doubt that faith and what is happening on the ground, at grass-roots level, need to be blended together in conceptual formulations of a strategy against HIV and AIDS. However, it is also important to ask this question regarding faith – what kind of faith are we talking about here? For instance, are we talking about a rigid, inflexible faith in as far as gender issues are concerned? In other words, a faith that excludes groups normally considered inferior by distorted understandings of equality in humanity. Or is it based on equality in humanity and inclusiveness?

Alternatively, we could be talking about faith that favours approaches that do not harm anyone – faith that is in harmony with gender sensitive approaches, transformative approaches and faith in harmony with approaches that empower all people infected and

affected by HIV and its consequences. The EOTC already has a good example of this kind of faith in its Trinitarian teaching, since according to Boff “the blessed Trinity is... a mystery of inclusion. Such inclusion prevents us from... understanding one person without the other” (1988: 15). Gender sensitive approaches meant to empower women are in perfect harmony with this Trinitarian inclusion.

A fifth strength has to do with the fact that the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy is shaped in such a way that: “It integrated its activities with the other development programmes... in order to strengthen the socio-economic status of the community, alongside implementation of AIDS programme components” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 2). This strength would be futile, however, if the integrated programmes do not address issues related to the existing socio-economic inequalities that perpetuate poverty and dependency among the most vulnerable persons, including women, and that thus contribute to fuelling the spread of HIV.

Finally, the sixth strength of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control strategy lies in the fact its “comprehensive five year financing plan” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 4) which will drive a programme of this scope and importance. Thus, it is stated in the document that “the total amount of money (value) to execute this five years programme is estimated to be 592,336,955 USD, out of which the EOTC’s contribution will cover 75% (442,336,955), while 25% (150,000,000) is expected to come from local and international partners” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 5). There is no doubt that without adequate financial support, the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy will remain an unreachable goal. Nevertheless, any financial intervention that does not take seriously gender sensitive approaches, transformative approaches as well as approaches that empower individuals and groups infected and affected the most by HIV and AIDS is more likely to render the stated goals of the programme less effective.

#### **4.3.6. Limitations of the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy**

It is important to note first and foremost that the EOTC is a Christian religious organization which has been greatly influenced in both its teaching and practice by Judaism, Christianity and by the Ethiopian social, cultural and economic landscape. It is also important to note that the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy recognizes somehow the link between HIV and AIDS and gender inequality, but that the most fundamental aspects of this link are not articulated in a way that will ensure that the prevalent gender injustice will be tackled and that the rights of women and girls in particular will be protected once and for all. Gupta recognizes this problem, saying that “the progress in the public health discourse on gender and sexuality is not matched by progress in action... how to address these issues in a way that has an impact on the epidemic” (2000: 4). Thus, failure to recognize inequality and gender injustice prevents serious practical and pressing theological, ethical, social, economic and pastoral issues from being effectively addressed by the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy.

Everywhere in the world different organizations and governments are attempting to deal with the effects of HIV and AIDS. These efforts are somewhat limited by the failure to recognize that social problems like HIV and AIDS need both simple and complex solutions. The common tendency in most cases is to stick to simple solutions alone and then hope that the problem will go away, or at least be minimized. This is evident in the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy. For instance, one of its simplistic solutions which is a serious limitation, is the assertion to the effect that: “the EOTC has a simple message in the battle against HIV and AIDS – abstinence before marriage and fidelity within marriage” (EOTC strategy document 2004: 17).

Abstinence and fidelity are excellent and wonderful values in as far as efforts aimed at the prevention and control of HIV and AIDS are concerned. They are necessary values for any church organization, given the fact that they are based on biblical teaching and Christian practice. However, a simplistic understanding and teaching of such values poses the danger of a failure to recognize the existence of social and economic power imbalances between women and men in many societies. Wilkins and Williams state that, “Women’s lack of economic rights and consequent economic dependency on men can also increase their risk of HIV infection” (2008:38). Policy makers must recognize that abstinence and fidelity are themselves vulnerable values that are difficult or impossible to adhere to for many people, in particular women. Therefore, “an important first step is to recognize, understand, and publicly discuss the ways in which the power imbalance in gender and sexuality fuels the epidemic” (Gupta 2000: 4). Female partners in sexual relationships are usually socially, economically and culturally dependent on their male counterparts. This means that dependant partners in sexual relations have no power to insist on and negotiate the application of abstinence and fidelity as taught by the church. In addition to this, the issue of rape and abduction within the context should be considered. The church itself has no practical steps in place to deal with sexually active people – usually males since they have the liberty to take decisions in this regard – who may disregard these values at will.

Furthermore, the values of Trinity – equality, communiterianism, Incarnation, the combination of the human and divine (therefore, spiritual and matter all blended into one) – are missing from the EOTC HIV and AIDS strategy document. This strategy document separates spirit and body, by setting unrealistic “spiritual” goals of abstinence without recognizing that in the embodied sense, this is not realistic. For instance, matters of sexuality are seldom discussed within church structures because they are considered to be unspiritual and/or impure. Any person who may discuss sexuality or suggests such discussion can easily be perceived as impure and thus a sinner – a slave to bodily desires. This is in stark contrast to the EOTC teaching of one undivided human and divine nature

which came about as a result of the Incarnation, teaching which simply means there is no separation between the body and the spirit in each and every one of us.

Again many research reports have indicated that Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) have highlighted that there are other limitations present in church-based HIV and AIDS prevention and control strategies (including the EOTC's strategy). These limitations are to do with: "resistance of religious leaders to condom use; the stigmatization of AIDS as an immoral disease; and the way in which the religious limits open discussion on sexuality, gender relations and intergenerational relations" (EOTC strategy document 2004: 3). Thus, although the EOTC's HIV and AIDS prevention and control strategy is silent on the issue of condom use, the primacy it gives to the values of abstinence and fidelity suggests that condom use – the third component of HIV and AIDS prevention and control strategy for the most secular organizations – is unacceptable and not even worthy to be considered and discussed. Perhaps Nadar's words might be helpful for church leaders, when she emphasizes that issues of "sexuality, cultural practice and sexual orientation need to be engaged within the broader framework of the HIV/AIDS pandemic" (2005: 22).

At another level, cultural perceptions and practices with respect to gender relation issues also present formidable restrictions for the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy. In an article edited by Elizabeth Amoah et al., titled 'Cultural practices and HIV and AIDS: African women's voices', it is pointed out that "in Africa... [culturally defined] gender roles have relegated women and girls to subordinate status; which limits their ability to protect themselves from infection by the HIV/AIDS virus" (2005: 15). What this suggests in the context of the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy is that no matter how good the intentions of the EOTC or any church organization for that matter may be; as long as the female group is relegated to a subordinate, inferior status, nothing profound will come out of its efforts. Gupta confirms that the inferior status allotted to women and girls creates "increased women's economic

dependency and the most disturbing form of male power-violence against women” (2000: 3).

Although there are indications in the EOTC’s HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document that measures have been put in place to minimize or reduce economic dependency; the important thing to note is that economic and social power will continue to rest with male groups more than female groups in all communities. This is true because the fundamental aspects of patriarchy and cultural perceptions and stereotypes of what women can or cannot do have not been addressed. This then will in turn limit the scope of success that the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy might have on the Ethiopian people as a whole.

The EOTC’s HIV and AIDS strategy is further limited by the fact that it appears to be a top-down strategy; that is, a strategy designed, planned and executed from the ivory towers of the EOTC organization. This means that the extent to which the views, opinions and concerns of those most affected and infected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic (women and the poor masses) have not been seriously taken into account. As Gupta (2000: 3) puts it: “HIV positive women bear the double burden: they are infected [and affected] and they are women” and are hence already marginalized. It is then difficult to see how the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy will achieve its goals without overcoming gender inequality and gender injustice. In this regard, Gupta puts forward some interesting suggestions that can help eliminate HIV and AIDS related limitations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Three suggestions are made by Gupta:

- “[A] gender-sensitive approach that recognizes and responds to the differential needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality” (Gupta 2000: 3).
- “Transformative approaches that seek to transform gender roles and create more gender equitable relationships by, for example, reducing the imbalances in power between women and men in policies that are designed to empower women” (2000: 3).

Studies show that there has been a long history of the suppression and devaluation of sexuality in Christianity (Haspel 2004: 480). The church marginalizes the subject of sexuality in public discourse (Schmid 2005:5). It avoids talking or discussing sexuality with its members as an integral part of their lives and seeing it as God's gift that needs to be appreciated. This is so because the church has limited its thinking about sexuality only to the sexual act. This is a very serious limitation because the church has a responsibility to deliver a full understanding of sexuality, especially to the youth, who are kept away from such an understanding for fear that it will "tempt" them. However, "research has shown that educating young people about sex, HIV/AIDS and health in general actually leads to a decrease in adolescent sex, unwanted pregnancy and STIs" (Schmid 2005: 6). Part of the solution then is that "there is a need to transmit a proper, accurate and scientific knowledge to young people as part of their defence in the fight against the AIDS scourge" (Amanze 2010: 90). Suggestions show that "the prevention strategies of the churches for young people should not be simply advocating for abstaining from sex, but should also encompass providing knowledge about human sexuality and sexual health."<sup>31</sup>

All the above suggestions appear to be either lacking or not clearly articulated in the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy. Thus, an improvement in this regard will go a long way in transforming the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control strategy into a truly gender-sensitive strategy document, that is life-affirming for women.

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- "Programmes that seek to empower women or free women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms, programmes allowing women to improve their access to information, skills, services, technologies and participation in decision making" (2000:4).

<sup>31</sup> [www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p4/background-e.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p4/background-e.pdf) Accessed on 10 November, 2011.

#### **4.4. Women, equality and the Trinity**

In Chapter Two the basic understanding and teaching of the EOTC about the Trinity has been stated. As a means of enhancing this understanding of the Trinity, we now consider views from other sources. According to the book *Faith of the Fathers*, which contains the basic teaching of the EOTC on the Trinitarian doctrine: “the Trinity are three in person. The three are one in essence, in existence, will etc. We don’t mean three Gods, but One God. The Father, and the Son and Holy Spirit exist in their own perfect person and in one existence. The one Godhead is shared equally and eternally by the three persons” (Mekarios et al. 1996: 25).

The question is: what does this have to do with persons of flesh and blood? Boff presents us with an interesting observation in this regard when he says:

There is a fundamental human yearning for sharing, equality, respect for differences, and communion of all and with God. The communion of the divine. Three offers a source of inspiration for achieving these age-old yearnings of all people and all societies. Each divine Person shares fully in the other two: in life, love, and communion. Each is equal in eternity, majesty, and dignity; none is superior or inferior to the others (1988: 64).

In an earlier book, *Trinity and Society*, Boff expresses this same sentiment when he states that: “the sort of society that would emerge from inspiration by the Trinitarian model would be one of fellowship, equality of opportunity, generosity in the space available for personal and group expression” (1986: 151).

With this understanding of the Trinity in mind, we now need to relate it to the human person (male/female) as the image of the Trinity. In the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, Sistig in her Masters Degree puts forward some thoughts on the relationship between the doctrine of Trinity and marriage. She states: “The Trinity presents us with a

community of equals, and offers a powerful image for the theology of marriage as being a partnership of equals" (2009: 107). Following along the same line of thinking but in the context of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia, I also believe that the EOTC Trinitarian theology presents us with the same opportunity to develop ideas of the Trinity which promote the notion of a community of equals and offers a powerful image for developing a theology of the Trinity that empowers women economically, socially, culturally and spiritually in order to help them to counter dependencies that make them powerless against factors that fuel the spread of the HIV pandemic. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity who through the Incarnation was born and lived as a human being, has been used by the church as a model of how the dignity of women can be respected and how equality between male and female is to be upheld. "Christianity has consistently taught that women and men are equally redeemed by Jesus Christ, equally incorporated into the Christian community when baptized. In the rite of baptism the communitarian nature of divine love is affirmed" (Clifford 2005: 125).

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

Gender-gaps in the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy have been identified in this chapter by means of, firstly, looking at the history of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy and, secondly, by means of a critical analysis of this strategy. This analysis involved understanding the following: gender; the fact that the strategy is embodied in a church structure; the main teachings of the EOTC found in the strategy document; the theologies embedded within the strategy; and the strengths and limitations of the strategy. The chapter concluded by making attempts at reclaiming a theology of the Trinity which is life-affirming for women. The final chapter of this dissertation (chapter five) involves presenting a general conclusion and issues for further consideration.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

#### **5.1. Summary of the study**

Chapter One introduced the HIV and AIDS context in Ethiopia and the economic, social, cultural and traditional beliefs which makes women vulnerable to the HIV pandemic. It also explored the challenges women face in a predominantly patriarchal society. In addition, the chapter described the structural context of the EOTC and its attempt to combat the spread of HIV and AIDS. It showed why the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy needs to be gender sensitive.

Chapter Two discussed the prevalent situation of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia, dealing with its correlation with gender and culture, and how it makes women vulnerable to the virus. Harmful traditional practices such as early marriage, polygamy, widow-inheritance, and female genital mutilation as contributing factors to the contraction of HIV and AIDS by women were discussed. It was also argued in this chapter that these factors affect women in their social, economic, and spiritual life, making them highly vulnerable to HIV and AIDS.

Chapter Three traced the ways in which the EOTC has been influenced by early Christian traditions in its approach to issues like gender sensitivity in dealing with HIV and AIDS. The chapter discussed the theological beliefs based on Christian tradition. It examined in-depth why the EOTC HIV and AIDS policy or strategy document exists in its present form. The chapter further discussed how women's inferiority and male dominance came to

exist in the EOTC. The influence of dualism and Jewish tradition were also outlined. In addition, the chapter explored the beliefs of the EOTC with regard to the Trinity – which means the understanding of unity in Trinity in the perspective of equality in the Trinity. Humanity was, it is argued, created in the image of the Trinity.

Chapter Four began by briefly presenting the historical developments which led to the advent of the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document. One of the key sections in this chapter was a critical analysis of the EOTC's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy from the perspective of gender. This was followed by an examination of the EOTC's structure, the document, and theologies within it, through the use of the feminist ecclesiology, gendered sensitive intervention on HIV and AIDS and feminist and Orthodox Trinitarian theology as an overarching framework. This chapter also involved an identification and analysis of the strengths and weaknesses within the strategy document in view of the EOTC's teachings, theologies, and practices. Finally in this chapter women's equality was assessed in the light of the Trinity together with its values.

The current chapter (chapter five) discusses the summary of the thesis, research findings and recommendations for further study. The totality of this research thesis is a journey of searching, discovery, learning and understanding of gender related issues and their link with HIV and AIDS.

## **5.2. Study assessment**

The main concern of this study has been to investigate whether or not the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control strategy is underpinned by a full awareness that HIV is a gendered pandemic. This investigation took the form of a critical analysis of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy in order to ascertain this strategy's gender sensitivity status in the context of HIV and AIDS in

Ethiopia. It is well known that Ethiopia is one of the most under-developed countries in the world; and that HIV and AIDS and its devastating effects have become a major problem which is threatening national economic, and social developmental goals, as well as the hopes of a better life for all Ethiopian people. As stated above, this study has been a journey of learning and understanding many issues. Amongst these, have been the following: recognizing the gender challenges that fuel the spread of the HI virus within Ethiopian society; discovering whether or not the theologies (if any) that underpin the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy assist or hinder the recognition of the gendered nature of the HIV pandemic; and finally ascertaining the kinds of theologies that can be developed for the progressive HIV and AIDS programmes – that is, theologies that will adopt gender transformative approaches, gender sensitive approaches and gender empowering approaches.

This study has succeeded in its small way to achieve its initial aims and objectives. The study has been able to bring forth links between gender issues and HIV and AIDS; and the links between economic and social cultural dependency on the one hand and HIV and AIDS on the other. The church (EOTC) which has been trying to counter the pandemic since its inception, has been hampered by traditional influences that perpetuate the oppression of women. Some church teachings or theologies have foundations in negative historical, philosophical and cultural influences and these need to be addressed by EOTC.

### **5.3. Recommendations for Further Research**

The study has been able to raise a number of questions that will be useful for further study. Some of those research questions include the following:

- Does the EOTC today in fact practice the theologies that promote the equality of all its members – such as the Trinitarian theology – and/or some of the key aspects of the church's faith which promote full acceptance of those who are marginalized and

suffer (especially through stigmatization and discrimination as a result of HIV and AIDS) – such as through the theology suffering on the cross, women’s theology and/or feminist theologies.

- Does the EOTC integrate the policies and strategies intended to empower women in order to prevent and control the spread of HIV, thus ensuring that women also live a complete and meaningful life as real human beings who are created and made in the image of God?
- Is it possible for the EOTC to have amongst its structures, one structure that will focus all its energies and resources in addressing gender related issues and concerns, including HIV and AIDS and women’s empowerment?
- Has the EOTC examined the wider question of economic, social, religious and/or cultural issues and concerns that perpetuate gender injustice and inequalities between men and women?

#### **5.4. Concluding remarks**

The EOTC as any other Christian religious formation, uses the Holy Scriptures: “as main source for Christians... [to uphold] the superiority of men – [thus], according to the Bible, starting from the day of creation, women are supposed to be helpers of men” (Yimam 2005: 19). It is necessary, therefore, that in order to realize the suggestions stated above, and in order to overcome the limitations of the strategy document, that a transformation in thinking and action must take place so as to emphasise the role of women in decision making, in other words, a shift from an understanding of “helper” as inferior to men to one of “helper” as an equal partner. This is derived from the notion that “the problem is not in the Holy Script itself; rather it emanates from misinterpreting the script of the word” (Yamim 2005: 19). Sugirtharajah also (2001: 240) agrees, saying that “the problem is not the Bible itself, but the way it has been interpreted”.

Therefore, damaging gender and sexual stereotypes ought to be re-read in the light of contemporary knowledge and understanding. Nadar argues that “more holistic, liberating ways of engaging with Scripture must be developed if the church is to become a place for gender justice and equality” (2005: 21). It is, therefore, necessary that strategies like the EOTC’s HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control strategy are formulated in such a way that they show without any shadow of doubt are fully gender sensitive, gender transformative and gender empowering. The starting point in this regard could be by (1) “finding ways to influence the socialization of young boys to foster gender equitable attitudes and behaviours; (2)... reducing imbalances between women and men through policies that are designed to empower women” (Gupta 2000: 5); (3) creating and fostering an enabling environment to end the limits on an “open discussion on sexuality, gender relations and intergenerational relations” (Tiendrebeogo and Buykx 2004: 5); (4) the EOTC taking a lead in the African church to recognize gender inequality and gender injustices as serious practical, pressing theological, ethical and pastoral issues that require urgent attention. In this way, the prevention and control of HIV and AIDS and the attainment of the economic developmental goals in Ethiopia could be more easily achieved in the long term.

The significance of all these factors is that women will be empowered in the same way that most men are empowered. Kathindi suggests that: “Empowering women in the church is of crucial importance, because it is one of the ways in which the conditions of women in society can be improved” (1991: 258). This however cannot be achieved overnight. To expect otherwise would indeed be unrealistic because empowerment is a systematic process in the same way that the existing disempowerment has been. When we consider that the latter has been entrenched in the Ethiopian society for a long period, it is safe to expect that the journey towards empowering women will also be a long one. Nevertheless, there are encouraging signs on the horizon. The first of these signs is that the EOTC already has a structure in place – the EOTC HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy document – geared towards the empowerment goal. Although this structure cannot be said to be perfect, it is nevertheless something that can be improved. The second sign is that the EOTC has a number of partners at both national and international levels

including government, civil society organizations and USAID, all working together with the church. Working in partnership with other organizations towards the same goal provides opportunities of gaining insights that may help the EOTC overcome some of its shortcomings. Finally, the third sign has to do with the EOTC's preparedness to learn from the everyday experiences of the Ethiopian communities to deal effectively with the problem of HIV and AIDS. This suggests a willingness to listen and take into account views and opinions of all stakeholders, including those who are infected and affected by the pandemic.

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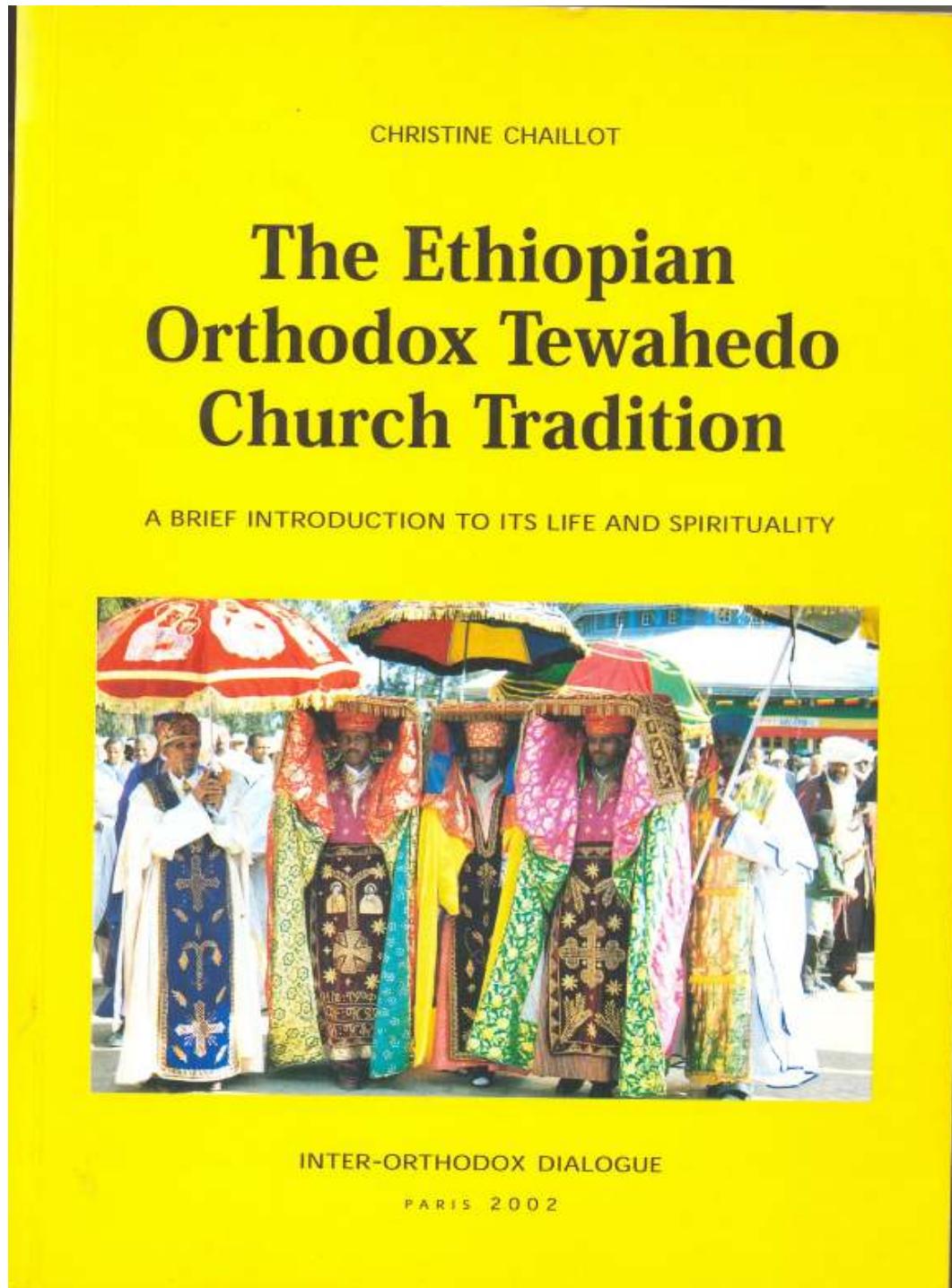
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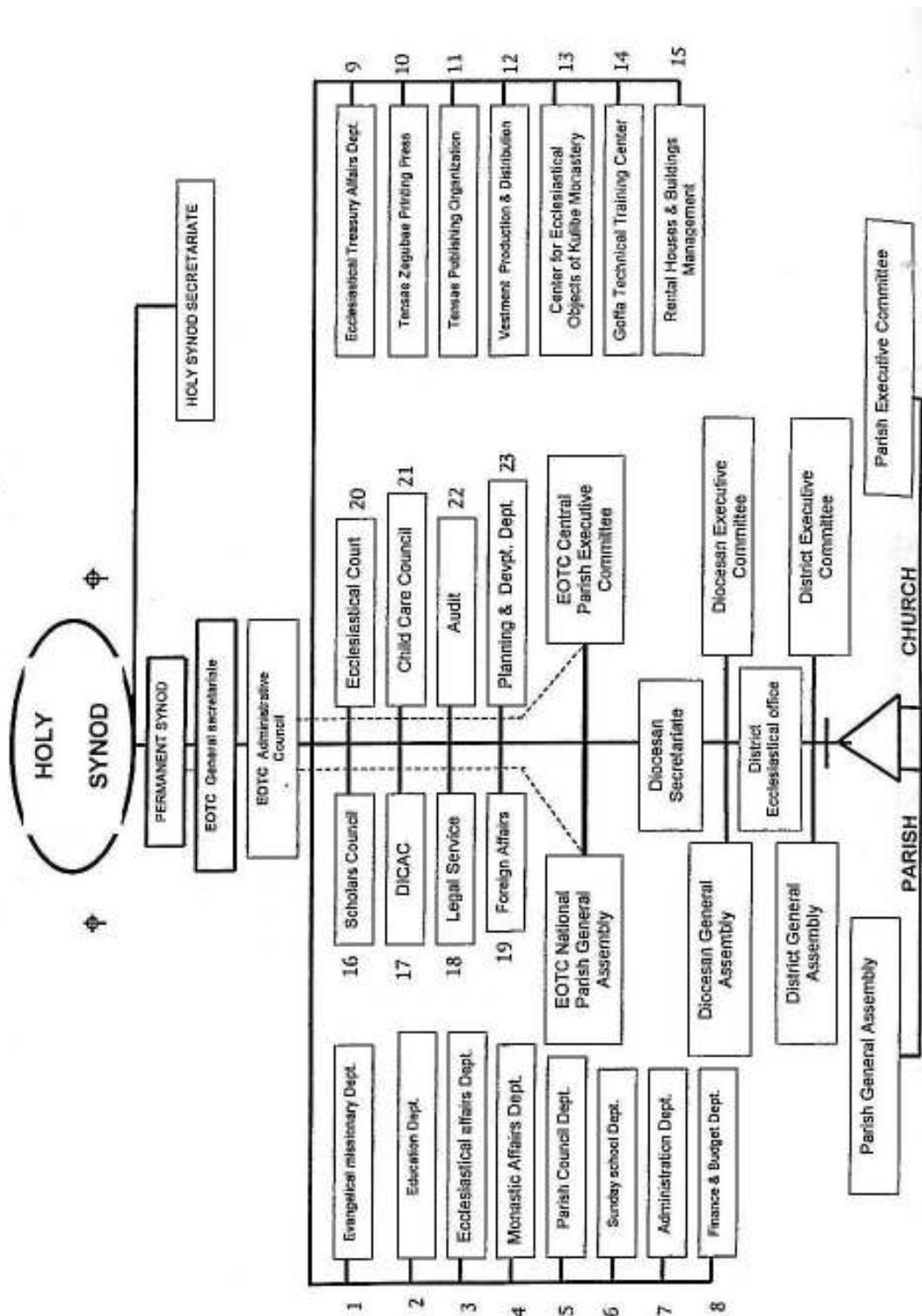
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## Appendix I: The Judio-Christian Tradition of the EOTC

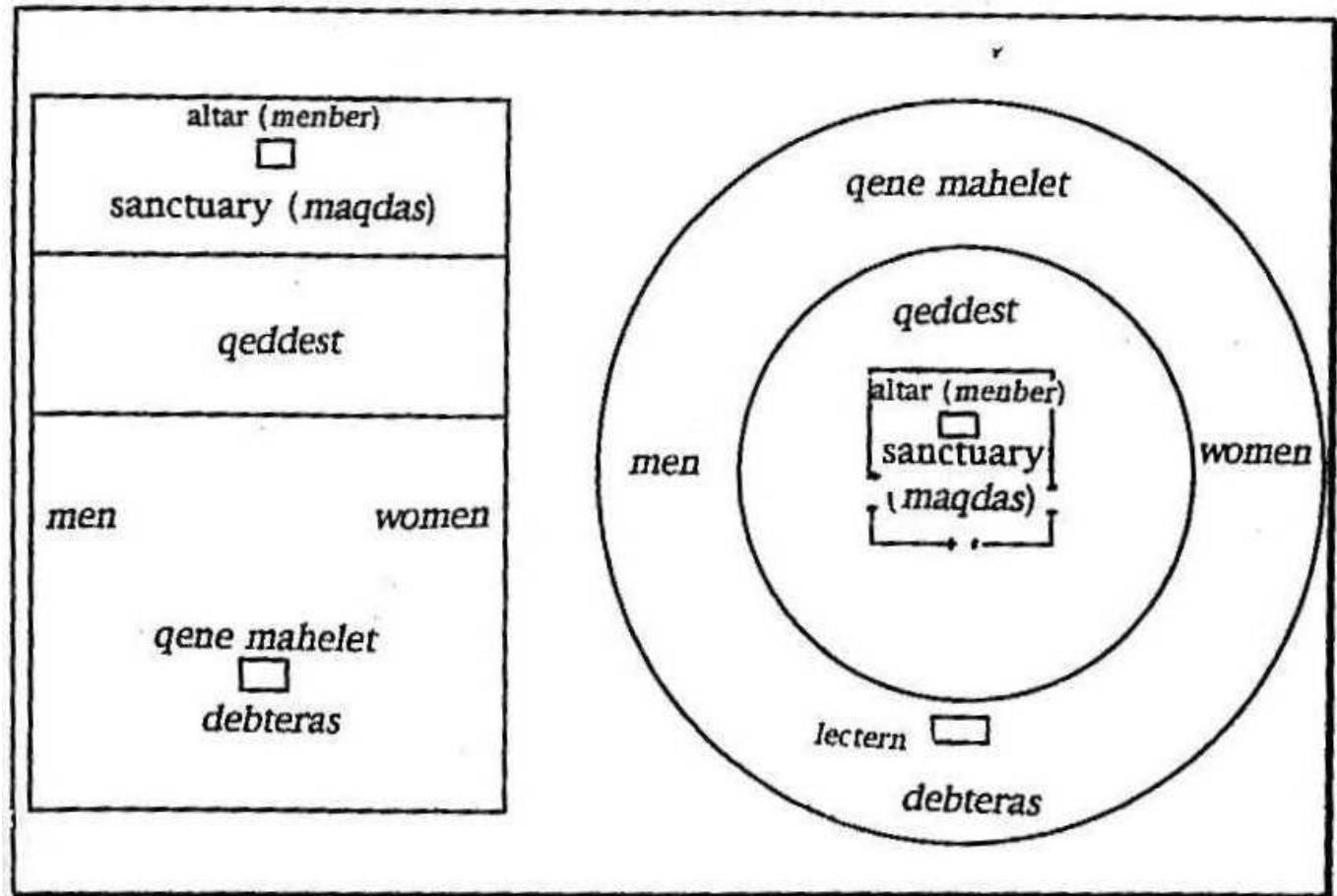


## Appendix II: Structure of the EOTC

**Chart of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Organization**



**Appendix III: Shemas of rectangular and round shaped  
Ethiopian Churches**



## **Appendix IV: Parts of the strategy document used for analysis in the thesis**

**The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOC)**

**HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Strategy**

**Five Years Program (2004/5 - 2008/9)**

*October 2004*

## ***Executive Summary***

(i) EOC has been active in the struggle against AIDS since its first discovery in the 1980s. Despite the efforts of government, donors, NGOs and community organizations, the HIV infection rate continues to grow, and the situation is now critical. Unless there is a breakthrough in the next few years, AIDS threatens to destroy the capacity of Ethiopia to combat poverty and achieve even a reasonable level of economic development. EOC has carried out an in-depth and candid analysis of the various strategies that have been used to combat AIDS in Ethiopia and elsewhere, and concluded that some new directions are vital. At the same time, EOC analyzed the special advantages that the Church possesses as a nationwide community-based organization with a special link of trust with the Ethiopian people. That analysis has resulted in the production of an EOC Five Year Program to Combat AIDS, which builds on the successes we have experienced, and the strengths we possess. EOC can reach a larger number of vulnerable Ethiopians in their community setting than any other organization in Ethiopia, and therefore it is our historic mission to launch a nationwide program that aims to break new ground and establish a firmer basis for sustainability.

## **The EOC Approach**

(ii) The Five Year Plan relies on the extensive structure that EOC possesses throughout the country: an estimated 40 million followers, 500,000 clergy, 40,000 churches and monasteries spread throughout the country over 40 diocese, and 35,000 parishes. In addition to its thousands of priests who live as part of the communities they serve, EOC is also able to mobilize thousands of voluntary community workers, activists, HIV/AIDS educators, women leaders, and youth advocates. **There is therefore a huge army of committed people available for the fight against AIDS.**

(iii) The conceptual foundation for EOC's Program is a seamless blend between spiritual values drawn from the Faith (behaviors that uphold principles of abstinence,

fidelity, and love and acceptance of others) and the practical, everyday realities of community life (the continued struggle to reduce poverty and build community structures, behaviors that minimize the risk of HIV transmission, and responding to the terrible consequences of the AIDS epidemic). While the majority of those living in communities have a strong belief in the Faith represented by EOC's teachings, EOC also recognizes that many who are at greatest risk are less convinced, and will find ways of reaching these persons through approaches that are acceptable to all. The program will apply to people of all faiths.

(iv) As has been the case up until now, EOC's approach is to respond to AIDS in the broader context of community social and economic development. Since 1974, the EOC has managed its community development projects through a special professional wing known as the Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC). The Orthodox HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Department (HAPCD) is the department within DICAC that focuses especially on HIV/AIDS but integrates its activities with the other development programs of DICAC. The foundation of the EOC Five Year Program stress the effectiveness of both preventive and responsive activities implemented through community groups, which need to be helped to develop accountability and self-reliance in managing these programs. EOC recognizes that poor and struggling communities are unable to shoulder such responsibilities, and are especially susceptible to HIV infection. Therefore, one of the key strategies underpinning the EOC approach is to strengthen the socio-economic status of the community (through sector DICAC projects), alongside implementation of AIDS Program components.

### [Page 3](#)

(v) **Capacity building** is the life-blood of the EOC approach, which will be human-transaction intensive. EOC will establish two tiers of trainers, the first responsible for training trainers, and the latter, to deliver training, coaching, and support to the priests and community activists that will implement the program. This training will upgrade the essential knowledge of HIV/AIDS, its transmission, symptoms, manifest disease, treatment and consequences; build skills in counseling and support for AIDS victims and orphans; and provide both the techniques and systems needed to manage and report on project implementation. This training will be incremental and continuous, delivered

mainly within community settings, and will be based on the cultural values and customs of communities rather than using imported materials. Formal training will be limited and emphasis will be given to on location coaching, the use of self-leaning materials (in the form of series of cassette tapes and videos), and frequent forums of priests and community activists to compare experiences and identify gaps. At any time there is a need, tailor-made training will be designed to respond to the special circumstances of one or more communities.

(vi) While there are many educational and advocacy components that are important to deliver to the communities as a whole, the EOC program recognizes the need to go beyond this, and identify some strategic leverage points for focused intervention. For example, it is clear that there are effective self-managed behavioral patterns within all communities that limit the transmission of HIV; otherwise, the infection rates would be much higher. EOC will establish what these natural mechanisms are, and which groups are resistant to both community norms and HIV/AIDS information and education and their reasons. This will allow the development of more accurate targeted approaches instead of simply relying on blanket coverage. EOC will also work to improve understanding of the conditions and incentives that drive young girls and women into pre-marital sex, and in many circumstances commercial sex work (CSW). This understanding will form the basis for comprehensive programs of support to provide alternative life-styles for these young women. In addition, EOC will also work to understand how the market of male procurers of extra-marital sex can be influenced away from this behavior. EOC will also take on the complex and controversial issue of FGM and other harmful traditional practices that help transmit HIV infection.

(vii) These and other strategic insights will emerge from a rigorous research program that will test current assumptions about HIV infection profiles and trends; carry out intensive base-line assessments of communities, their capacities, and attitudes; identify the most dangerous points of HIV transmission (CSWs, bars and places of entertainment and recreation, resettlement and refugee camps, and groups such as truckers and the military); and monitor and document various types of intervention to establish models of best practice as well as improving anticipation of problems and unintended consequences. This research program will be integrated with monitoring and evaluation, and seek to establish a more reliable information base compared to those currently existing.

(viii) Another vital aspect of the EOC approach will be its incremental nature. Unlike other HIV/AIDS programs which aim to deliver fully prepared packages, EOC will implement its program in phases: ***introductory***, in communities where EOC has not been active and where little other support has been available; ***expansion***, in communities where the basic components have been established, and which can be improved by additional refinements and broader coverage, with an emphasis on building community self-reliance; and ***maintenance***, in communities in which program components have reached a level of successful maturity, and where the emphasis will be ensuring a continued flow of necessary inputs and support, as well as understanding and acting on the factors essential to sustainability. This incremental approach will allow for pilots, learning by doing, and the flexibility to adjust to feedback and changing needs.

### **Page 5**

The total amount of money (value) to execute this five years program is estimated to be **592,336,955 USD**. Out of which EOC's contribution cover 75% (442,336,955), and the rest 25%(150,000,000 USD) expected from local and international partners.

## **Expected Out Put**

At the end of the fifth year the following results are expected :

1. 100 % awareness about HIV/AIDS
2. 80% in-depth knowledge
3. 60% behavioral change
4. Prevalence rate reduced to 2.2 %
5. 200,000 OVC supported
6. 200,000 PLWHA supported

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Included alongside biblical exegesis, patristic literature, and church music, EOC has, for much of Ethiopia's existence, been the main teacher of arithmetic, literature, astronomy, crafts and skills, literacy, and all forms of art. This role continues today. Not only does EOC support schools and higher education institutions, but also its traditional teaching role continues through the monasteries and the courtyards of local churches. This ancient tradition is confirmed by the Church's ability to embrace, absorb, and transmit secular and scientific knowledge alongside its faith-based teaching. The two are not at odds but complement one another. A famous Church scholar, expresses this unity in the following terms: "The growing together of science and theology is important for human development. Man by his nature is both soul and body. The twenty-first century theologian must be well equipped not only in theology but also in modern philosophy and psychology; (and quoting Martin Luther King)...."Both Science and Religion can grow together in harmony...science investigates, religion interprets...science keeps religion from sinking into crippling irrationalism, religion prevents science from falling into the marsh of materialism and moral nihilism"<sup>32</sup>.

8. EOC has also, from its inception, been a community-based institution. EOC priests are not regarded as separate from the community, but are special members of their communities, working and living in these communities like any other, but with a special role to play. "The priest, who is a farmer and a teacher in the same community, is nevertheless respected for learning and wisdom, esteemed for his spiritual leadership, looked upon as an arbiter and judge, and sought as a friend for every individual and family." <sup>33</sup> The communities have always accepted the multi-faceted role of the Church, no less in the past than today. Not only has the Church

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<sup>32</sup> Merahi, K.. 2003. Peace and reconciliation, pp.30-32

<sup>33</sup> Merahi, K.. 2003. Peace and reconciliation, p.47

been able to combine its spiritual and secular roles, but also it has always stood firmly for social justice and fought against poverty; so it is perceived as a champion of poor communities. In addition to its understanding of community needs and its commitment to its followers, the Church has also proven its competence in delivering the community care and support needed, both spiritual and material. It is upon these foundations that community trust in the church is built.

9. Developmental activities are therefore in no way new to EOC. In recent times, EOC has absorbed all of the major technical, managerial, and analytical disciplines that are essential to effective program design and project implementation, and EOC has a staff of highly professional developmental practitioners specialized in every sector of importance to Ethiopia's developmental challenges. The community development role is an integral part of the Church. In the context of Ethiopia's current development challenges, EOC is a significant vehicle for development, especially at the community level where HIV/AIDS will ultimately be defeated.

10. ***Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission.*** In 1974, the EOC established the Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC) as the development agency of the church. This was an urgent response to the endemic mass poverty, and the food shortages sparked by periodic droughts and crop failure to which Ethiopia is especially prone. In the early years, the Commission focused mainly on emergency food relief distribution, supported by small, parish-based income-generation projects. In 1994, the policies and structures were put in place to enable the Commission to launch diocese-based development programs (DDPs) and integrated rural development programs (IRDPS), in the framework of a five-year plan, focused on the themes of emergency preparedness, gender and development, and human resources development.

39. The problem described above is underlined by a very significant finding from the first Behavioral Surveillance Study in Ethiopia, which identified a significant disparity between a fairly high level of awareness about HIV/AIDS, and a low level of individual risk perception and a low perceived need for individual behavioral change. (“It’s very dangerous but it happens to other people; not to me”).

**D. The Special Role and Contribution of EOC in the Future Battle Against HIV/AIDS**

40. ***The Comparative Advantages of EOC.*** AIDS in Ethiopia (as elsewhere) is more than a disease caused by viral infection and weakened immune systems. It is the consequence of high-risk behaviors, which even when the risk is understood, continue to persist. This is rooted in part in the poverty and gender problems that have plagued Ethiopia’s development throughout modern times. It is multiplied by factors of high mobility among many groups, the sex worker industry, and traditional male behaviors that encourage promiscuity. The EOC has a simple message: one of abstinence outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage. This message is powerful in the way many moral messages may not be. Although it is a fundamental expression of the Faith, it is not simply dated and rooted in history. It is a living, present reality, witnessed by millions of Ethiopians on an everyday basis as they observe their own lives, lives of others around them, families, communities, and the nation, being ravaged by a scourge that depends almost entirely on behaviors that are contrary to the message. It is a living, current reality. This gives the church and its message an intimate association with the well-being of the communities it serves, and a potential persuasiveness that is one of the most powerful assets in the national battle against AIDS.

41. The efforts of the EOC will be both consistent with the National Response, as well as utilizing the special benefits and advantages EOC offers as an

implementation agency. The following paragraphs provide some of the key facts that underpin EOC's Five Year HIV/AIDS Prevention and Protection Program, which are the basis for substantial, sustained funding support for EOC's efforts.

42. EOC is by far the nation's largest non-governmental organization, with an estimated 40 million followers, 500,000 clergy, 40,000 churches and monasteries spread throughout the country over 40 diocese and 35,000 parishes. Its community outreach is immense, its influence is unchallenged, and every priest combines the role of spiritual father and community developer. This outreach and access capacity is a major asset in the national program, and working with other partners (schools, health centers, local officials, NGOs, and community groups) it is a significant mechanism for carrying the essential information and messages about the epidemic, its causes, impact, and preventive options.

43. The EOC is naturally a community-based organization. It does not have to establish such associations and ties, although it can do much to strengthen and deepen them. The Church, like community organizations, operates locally, with high degrees of voluntarism, dialogue, interaction, reciprocation, all the essential ingredients for a campaign against AIDS, which must effectively be implemented at the grass roots. The Church has, in recent years, made many statements about the importance of improving the position and treatment of women in Ethiopia's economy and social life. There are many traditional practices that demean and hold back the progress of women, and the church has spoken loudly against these.

#### [Page 24](#)

**(a) Baseline and Needs Assessments.** As indicated above, assessments will be launched in each project area to determine the current level of AIDS awareness and its implications for behavioral change, the current status of community attitudes towards PLWHA, the potential for communities to take responsibility for orphans and PLWHA, the current levels of advocacy, the strength of community organizations, the general socio-economic condition of the community together

with the prime social indicators, income generating possibilities and current levels of unemployment, the capacity building needs both at the church and community levels, and as much anecdotal evidence as possible (in areas in which EOC or other agencies have been working on the HIV/AIDS problem) of what kinds of interventions have worked and failed, and the reasons. This will provide three important outputs: firstly, a needs assessment and analysis on which to plan the HIV program for that community; secondly, a baseline against which to set targets and measure results; and finally, a rich store of lessons learned from the experience of implementing the various IE/BCC components in areas where EOC has been active.

**(b) Project Advisory Committees (PACs).** PACs, which exist in areas in which EOC has been active, will be extended to areas where they have not yet been set up, so that the Program will eventually have PACs at each of three levels: diocese, Woreda, and parish community. The responsibility of the PACs is to manage and guide the implementation of all components of the EOC Aids Program, including the IE/BCC components. The PACs therefore represent community ownership and leadership at the local level. A senior representative of the clergy acts as Chair of the PACs, whose membership includes community representatives, members from specialized units within the church, and frequently representatives from local government departments concerned with activities essential to the work of the PAC. In summary, the role of the PACs in the EOC Five Year Program, will be to:

- Translate the broader goals of program components into the specific objectives and targets that relate to the needs and conditions of the communities
- Collect the information needed to monitor and report on progress, and carry out periodic assessments with beneficiaries of the progress being made, obstacles experienced, and new ideas for better achieving the component goals

- Identify and solve problems and bring to the attention of regional and central EOC managers the need for resources, assistance, policy clarification, authority, whatever is required to facilitate implementation
- Ensure that beneficiaries and community stakeholders are directly involved at each stage of the implementation cycle, are able to influence both directions and modalities, and participate in the evaluation of components
- Document for the EOC Research function, information, data, insights, and case studies essential for the analysis of best practice, key trends, and identification of factors facilitating or inhibiting the achievement of goals.

60. Because of the central role played by the PACs, top priority will be given to all the measures needed to facilitate their work. Most important will be training (initial in the case of new PACs, and refresher training for existing PACs). They will also be provided with the essential manuals,

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69. It is a vital part of the EOC approach to AIDS to present an approach that is optimistic and hopeful. But that does not entail avoiding the task of confronting all the hard questions about “why this approach should work (beyond hope and common sense) in very complex situations, and “factors that may well undermine this approach” if we do not anticipate them, and remain continually vigilant to them during every stage of implementation. This is why community leadership, adaptation to local conditions, continual feedback, action-research, and learning, and an open atmosphere of intellectual curiosity and questioning are essential to the EOC approach. The goal is to ensure that the Five Year EOC AIDS program

does not repeat the many errors and disappointments of scores of similar HIV/AIDS programs implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa, which have suffered from untested assumptions, use of inappropriate materials and methods imported from outside rather than having been developed based on a proper understanding of local needs and culture (adaptation and validation processes almost always produce some degree of false adaptation and validation, especially when done by the authors); mass implementation without sufficient adjustment to special groups; failure to measure impact (capturing “applause” rather than objective identification of desired outcomes in behavioral terms); over-use of specialists and under-use of community expertise and experience; over-reliance on “models”; and a lack of critical thinking that could identify and anticipate the many ways in which an intervention can go wrong or lead to unintended consequences.

70. The issues described below are far from exhaustive. They include the thinking that has been associated with the preparation of this Program, and are provided as examples of the approach that will inform every phase of future implementation.

### **Improving the Operational Definitions of Raising Awareness and Behavioral Change.**

71. The EOC IE/BCC component will include all of the necessary ingredients to ensure that the population understands the nature of the HIV/Virus, AIDS, and the other associated illnesses it produces. These include the various ways in which infection occurs; the types of behavior that bring about infection and those that guard against infection; the way in which infection is detected and the testing procedures available; the available treatment options, their efficacy, and the development of the disease; the consequences of AIDS to individuals infected, their families, and the community at large; the personal and community values that

guard against AIDS, and those that encourage the spread of the epidemic. Much of this information is standard and applies to all individuals and social contexts.

However, EOC will go beyond this level, and will constantly be examining two critical questions. The first is how can IE/BCC be more effectively adjusted to the reality of the lives of individuals and the culture and values of the communities in which they live. That will require continual feedback from the recipients of IE/BCC messages, and based on these, improvements can be made in the materials and methods of delivery. In this context, special attention will be given to ways of most effectively reaching particular groups, for example, pre-teens, young women vulnerable to the possibility of pre-marital sex or seduction into commercial sex work, older men who routinely seek sex outside of marriage, often with teenage girls, and the like.

72. The second question is how can EOC tackle a range of problems that are bound to occur in the process of transmission and communication: disbelief, confusion, minimizing personal implications and applicability; continued reliance on myths of invulnerability and unsound concepts of protection; or local mythologies concerning AIDS. Most important among these are the stubborn or resistant categories, the minority who know and understand the risks and continue to behave in ways that risk both themselves and others.

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phenomenon, it will be less likely that the IEC/BCC programs can succeed in achieving their goals. The phenomenon probably can, in part, be ascribed to “human nature”, but it also clearly has a range of social and cultural dimensions. It is imperative to understand these, and also the most effective mechanisms for closing that gap. The insight lies in part with the communities themselves. But there also needs to be some experimentation, within a range of settings, to see which initiatives are most effective in ensuring that understanding translates

rapidly into realistic implications for the individual, and then leads to actual, sustained behavioral change. This type of social/psychological/cultural study has effective precedents and models in terms of another type of voluntary but highly harmful individual behavior, namely that of smoking tobacco. The goal for this special study is for EOC specialists to team up with a select group of Ethiopian social scientists known to be close to and familiar with communities through their work for government or NGOS. Added to this team will be a group of social scientists drawn from a major social research institute (such as the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague, University of Cape Town, or a similar group in the US), who will work with EOC research specialists on the research design and standards, and help manage and document the study. The results of this study will be widely presented, among the EOC leaders and clergy, within Ethiopian academia and research groups focused on AIDS, and among government agencies, NGOs, and community groups prominent in the battle against AIDS. The main findings of this research will be incorporated into a special capacity building and training program for all AIDS activists operating within the EOC Program.

### **Focus on Special Groups.**

75. In addition to the benefits of the IE/BCC programs, there are special groups in the country that have additional needs and will therefore require special treatment. One such group, commercial sex workers, is analyzed in greater depth later in this presentation. Another are refugees and displaced people going through a process of resettlement. Such people gathered in close proximity, will carry a special risk of infection, and their dispersal from camps or holding areas into the community is a way of distributing and transmitting that infection. IE/BCC (as well as VCT) is essential for these groups. Research is needed into the dynamics of the way infection occurs in these settings. It is not, at present, well understood, because refugees and displaced people are living (until resettled) in artificial and temporary social structures, separated from the support and influence of their communities. This research can help facilitate understanding of the most effective

ways in which IE/BCC (as well as VCT) can best reach these groups. Another special group, this time within the community, are pregnant mothers who are HIV-positive. This is a sensitive, complex, and tragic situation requiring great compassion and support. The educational processes to influence the behavior of pregnant mothers, and help them prepare for the consequences of positive HIV diagnosis, will need to be designed with great care. There are many other high-risk groups, such as the military, truckers, and others, for whom there are already special programs in place or proposed. However, to the extent that such groups are integrated into the communities with whom EOC will be interacting, it will be important that their special needs or situations are accommodated within the IE/BCC Program. Young girls at risk of contracting HIV through FGM (female genital mutilation) or female circumcision, is discussed below.

### **The Role of Harmful Traditional Practices in HIV Transmission.**

It is important to better understand the role that various harmful traditional practices play in the transmission of HIV. Many of these are highly controversial because they are culture-bound.

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Nonetheless, goals will be set at the beginning of the expansion phase for improving the quality of the material and spiritual care for PLWHA, and increasing the involvement and self-reliance of the community. During the expansion phase there will be continued in-depth consultation, training as needed, improvements to management structures, and improved resource transfer to the communities to help them shoulder an increasing part of the burden.

135. Finally, the maintenance phase will focus on three elements: identifying ways in which relatively successful arrangements can be fine-tuned and made more cost-effective; analyzing and acting upon the factors that promote and may undermine sustainability; and documenting the range of different arrangements

that have evolved in different communities, the concrete ways in which “effectiveness” can be defined and observed, the factors that have most strongly contributed to success, and the main problems that were experienced together with their solutions. This will help increase understanding, both within EOC, and the nation as a whole, as to how effective community-based approaches to caring for PLWHA can be implemented in Ethiopia.

#### F. Focus on Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs)

136. ***Introduction.*** Given the high rate of infection among CSWs and the rate at which these can multiply the infection rate, this group is one of the most important to target in the EOC program. EOC has strong comparative advantages in focusing on CSW:

- The moral status of the Church, which provides a strong persuasive foundation among three groups at the center of this problem: young girls and women who may be tempted or pressured into commercial sex work (or paid occasional sex); those who are already CSWs; and the market of men who purchase their services
- The problem of prostitution has to be understood within the framework of the community, so that solutions can be found that work within this framework. This is the most fragile of interventions, and if mishandled, will simply drive the practice underground, where its harm cannot even be observed. The EOC lives with and operates strictly within this community framework, and therefore has a good chance of being able to get close to the problem
- A significant proportion of the decisions by young girls and women to take up CSW derives from economic and social pressures. The EOC

AIDS program is part of an integrated approach that focuses on strengthening the socio-economic conditions of the community and its individual members. Therefore, EOC can directly impact the incentive structure that gives rise to decisions to go into commercial sex work, and provide sustainable alternatives

- The EOC has a natural group of allies in the shape of the women in the community who are at risk of being infected by those men-folk who visit prostitutes. The EOC's strong emphasis on the family and familial fidelity, is a powerful weapon in the efforts to reduce the CSW phenomenon

137. In this EOC component, efforts will be made, in conjunction with a special research program relating to CSWs, to improve understanding of the motivations, pressures, and circumstances that drive young women into commercial sex work; and the alternatives that they may find attractive and sufficient to change that behavior.