

**“BORN THIS WAY” - A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE ON THE
INTERSECTIONALITY BETWEEN SAME-SEX ORIENTATION AND
THE *IMAGO DEI*: A CASE STUDY OF MEN WHO LOVE OTHER MEN
IN LUSAKA-ZAMBIA**

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DECLARATION

By submitting this research dissertation, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Signature 

Date: 03/03/2014

As the Supervisor, I acknowledge that this research dissertation is ready for examination.

Supervisor:

Signature..... Date.....

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents Mrs. Barbra M. Phiri and the late father Mr. Jackson H. Phiri who made me realize that every dream is only accomplished through prayer, focus, determination and hard work. Despite my dad being physically absent, he is spiritually present and keeps watch over me. Though this study would have made him cringe, he still would have encouraged me to go for it. To my mum for supporting me, amidst several warnings about this study being conducted in Zambia, thank you for still encouraging and praying for me. I dedicate this work to these two special people.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei* amidst the general teachings of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, Zambia Episcopal Conference and the Council of Churches in Zambia on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. A plethora of literature about same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* reveals that the heterosexism is generally regarded as the authentic image of God while same-sex orientation continues to be regarded as an affront to the image of God. Hence the need to merge the two terms “same-sex orientation” and “*imago Dei*” in order to deconstruct and reconstruct how sexuality and God are understood within prevailing theologies, using emerging theologies from *Zambian Christian Men who Love other Men*.

This study is framed within postcolonial and queer theories. Focus group discussions were audio-taped and transcribed and field notes taken. Themes are determined, analyzed and interpreted using recurring and unanimously held incipient voices of Christian MLM. Study participants’ views bring to fore that they understand their sexual orientation as being inborn and that they are wonderfully and fearfully created in the image of God. They also view themselves as being the image of God since they love other men, thereby, exhibiting God’s qualities which are love, justice and mercy. The study also found that Christian MLM do not feel welcome in affluent churches, unlike in churches on the outskirts, due to anti-same-sex messages preached in affluent churches. Furthermore, the study discovered that the churches use the Biblical creation accounts to condemn the practice of same-sex orientation and regard persons of same-sex orientation as sinful, satanic and sick. The study concludes that Christian MLM are created in the image of God, and hence recommends revisiting the theology of complementarity and an inculcation of hermeneutics of love in understanding sexuality and God.

ACRONYMS

CCZ - Council of Churches in Zambia

EFZ - Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia

FDG - Focus Group Discussion

LGBTI - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex

LGBTIQQA - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning and Ally

MLM - Men who Love other Men

MSM - Men who have Sex with other Men

ZEC - Zambia Episcopal Conference

Chapter one

Introducing the study

1.0. Introduction

The phrase “born this way” in the title of my dissertation is adopted from the emic language of Zambian Christian MLM, following the fieldwork research I conducted among them. This phrase depicts how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation as an inherent trait which they have no control over as they are born this way. The phrase is also used by Christian MLM in negotiating and reclaiming their space in an environment where their sexual orientation remains highly contested. Meanwhile, the term “Christian Men who Love other Men”¹ in this title is derived from the self-description of Christian men of same-sex orientation who were study participants in my study.

Same-sex orientation remains a much talked about issue in Zambia with many quarters of society terming it as unorthodox, unnatural,² unchristian, unconstitutional and a western funded project. The churches as important interlocutors on the Zambian front have expressed their views on same-sex orientation, thereby charting the terrain on how same-sex orientation is generally viewed. Evidently missing in these discourses are voices of persons of same-sex orientation. This study, broadly framed within postcolonial and queer theories, gives a gendered analysis of Christian Men who Love other Men’s (hereafter Christian MLM) understanding of their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God. It explores the general teachings of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, Zambia Episcopal Conference and Council of Churches in

¹ The term “Men who Love other Men” was used by study participants to describe themselves and I have adopted it in this work in order to respect this self-description. Whilst acknowledging some potential problems of such self-description such as men of same-sex orientation who forcefully have sexual intercourse with other men, I have still maintain this term in my work which aims to capture incipient theologies from the study participants.

² John Winkler stresses that “the word “unnatural” in contexts of human behaviour quite regularly means “seriously unconventional,” and is used like a Thin Ice sign to mark off the territory where it is dangerous to go” (1990:171). Same-sex orientation is regarded as unconventional while heterosexuality is viewed as the normative.

Zambia on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*.³ This chapter presents the study by outlining the background to the study, motivation, introduction to key terms and location of the study, introducing theory and methodology and my positioning within the study.

1.1. Background to the research

They want us to talk about men having sex with men, women having sex with women, they want us to talk about transgender - and they call these societies progressive (Joshua Banda quoted in van Klinken 2011:131).

This study emanated from prevailing debates in Zambia on whether to legalize homosexuality or not; “the above statement by a renowned pastor in Zambia clearly depicts the prevailing attitudes in Zambia regarding the legalization of homosexuality” (Phiri 2012:1). With the recent visit and calls for Zambia to uphold human rights by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon (Ndhlovu 2012:1) and subsequent counter arguments by the Zambian Government and the three church mother bodies, same-sex orientation in Zambia is viewed as “unnatural and un-African” (Rukweza 2006:[1]). This leaves men of same-sex orientation (hereafter MSM) on the periphery of the social strata, making it difficult for them to speak about their sexual orientation.

Meanwhile, the Zambian penal code act of 1995, section 158, as cited by Daniel Ottoson, asserts that “any person who- (a) has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature; or ... (c) permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for fourteen years” (2008:43). It is under such colonial inherited laws, which still inform and shape Zambia’s postcolonial laws, that Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia live. They contend with upholding the laws in public while at the same time expressing their sexual orientation (usually in private). Such discriminatory laws raise questions on whether Christian MLM are considered human enough to enjoy their sexual orientation.

³ I have chosen to look at these three church mother bodies because of their influence on both the Zambian society and Zambia government, especially on the rejection of the practice of same-sex orientation in both the Zambian society and the national constitution. These three church mother bodies are very influential in theological discourses around same-sex orientation and the image of God, although the literature survey I have conducted about them is not necessarily representative of the member churches or individuals within these churches.

The churches, for their part, have issued statements against same-sex orientation, especially in the wake of the United States of America's tying of donor aid to rights of persons of same-sex orientation and the on-going national constitution-making process. In relation to the USA tying aid to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual, Queer, Questioning and Ally (LGBTIQQA⁴) rights, the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC) spokesperson Father Paul Samasumo is quoted in LaVictoire stressing that "it would be wrong for the nation to accept lesbians and gays in order to get donor aid...donor aid should not be tied to promoting immorality" (LaVictoire 2011:1). Same-sex orientation is termed immoral and an unnatural way of being, therefore, unwelcome in Zambia.

Additionally, in arguing for the need to maintain the Christian nation clause in the Zambian constitution, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) spokesperson Bishop Paul Mususu is quoted in *Friends of Rainka* arguing that "it is not proper for us to get rid of what we have cherished over the years. We shall be sinking so low if we allow things like homosexuality and pornography in the name of freedom of expression" (*Friends of Rainka* 2010). The churches have continued to portray same-sex orientation as an imposition from the West and an affront to the image of God. According to the churches, by accepting homosexuality in the nation, Zambia would be deteriorating in morals and losing its value since same-sex orientation is a worthless form of sexuality. This statement implicitly means that persons of same-sex orientation are lower in human ranking when compared with heterosexuals, thus, should not be condoned in Zambia. Christian MLM's sexual orientation has been discussed with little or no input from them themselves, hence, there has been a failure to affirm, validate and make them visible in the whole debate.

Following the above arguments advanced by the churches in Zambia on same-sex orientation, my study is concerned with how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei* within the theological context of the general teachings of the three church mother bodies (Council of Churches in Zambia, Zambia Episcopal Conference and Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia) on the *imago Dei* and same-sex orientation.

⁴ Although the USA government uses Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) in challenging the Zambian government to uphold rights of sexual minorities, in my research I use LGBTIQQA to show that the population of sexual minorities in Zambia is broader than what is originally captured by the USA government.

While there are many teachings on what the *imago Dei* is, Shaun Lewis holds that “substantive views teach that the *imago* consists of certain parts or characteristics of man,⁵ such as his rationale or spirit. Relational views concern man's relationship with God or others as the divine image. Functional views maintain that God's image in man is some action he does, such as rule or take dominion over creation” (2012:14). In Zambia, Christian MLM who are part of humankind created in the *imago Dei* have only been accorded this divine likeness ontologically but not experientially on account of their sexual orientation. A critical question remains: how do Christian men of same-sex orientation in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei* amidst general teachings of the three church mother bodies on the *imago Dei* and same-sex orientation?

Given the resurgence of debates on same-sex orientation and subsequent exclusion of MSM's voice in these debates, in this study I have explored how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei* amidst the general teachings of the three church mother bodies on the *imago Dei* and same-sex orientation. Through the use of focus group discussions, I have brought together the terms “same-sex orientation” and the “*imago Dei*”, thereby opening up space for Christian MLM's incipient understandings of the relationship between these two terms to emerge. Similarly, the churches in Zambia may not have overtly dealt with MSM in terms of the *imago Dei*, but in this research, I have probed how Christian MLM understand the implied theology of the churches.

1.2. Motivation for the study

I chose this topic because of my work as a Minister of Religion in the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) in Chisamba. Having observed that the UCZ (which is part of the Christian Council of Zambia) has either been silent on same-sex orientation or not embraced MSM, I sought to explore more on how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*. Furthermore, the *imago Dei* in relation to Christian MLM's sexual orientation has not been

⁵ Whilst noting the sexist language used, in order for me to maintain the author's original work, I will not tamper with the quotation.

adequately engaged by the church, hence the need to create safe space through this study for Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia to convey their understanding of their sexual orientation in relation to the *imago Dei*.

This study is further motivated by the literature-based study I conducted during my Honours Degree entitled “Homosexuality and HIV and AIDS: A Queer Analysis of the Response of The United Church of Zambia to Same-Sex Relationships”. This work accorded me an opportunity to delve into issues of same-sex orientation but did not provide room for voices of persons of same-sex orientation. Hence, there was the need to further my studies on issues of same-sex orientation and, for this study, to allow the research to address voices of Christian MLM.

I further noted the gap in research on same-sex orientation in Zambia. Most of the work done in this area has either been from a Western perspective or other African contexts, but not much has been done from a Zambian context. Additionally, much of the work done on MSM has stemmed from dominant theologies which have not taken into account voices of Christian MLM. Not much research has been done on how Zambian Christian MLM themselves understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*.

1.3. Introducing key terms and locating the research

This study builds on existing scholarly work on same-sex orientation, the *imago Dei* and the already existing work done by a group of Christian MLM who were study participants for this research.⁶ The study used focus group discussions (FDGs) in dealing with how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*. The introduction of key terms is therefore divided as follows: same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*.

Using key scholarly work on same-sex orientation, I will establish what is meant by same-sex orientation. This preliminary analysis also shows how same-sex orientation is viewed in African contexts. The analysis will further show arguments on same-sex orientation in African contexts

⁶ I have used a carefully selected range of literature to situate my work. While I have read more widely, I have only cited the work that I have actually used.

and Zambia in particular, thus locating my study within the already existing body of work and literature on same-sex orientation.

Sexual orientation “refers to the individual’s physical sexual activity with, interpersonal affection for, and erotic fantasies about members of the same or opposite biological sex” (De Cecco 1981:61). Sexual orientation deals with issues of sexual attraction and fantasies for persons of the same or opposite sex which subsequently impacts interpersonal relations. Meanwhile, the American Psychological Association (2010) defines sexual orientation as “enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction towards others”. Same-sex orientation denotes predominate sexual, romantic and affectional attraction towards persons of the same gender, in this case, male to male.

To show how same-sex orientation is generally viewed in Africa, Lovemore Togarasei and Ezra Chitando contend that:

the subject of same-sex relationships has recently raised serious debates in Africa. For example, Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe, has accused people of the same sex orientation and who are in same sex relationships of being worse than pigs and dogs (2011:110).

This shows how politicians in predominantly heteronormative Africa view same-sex orientation as an unwelcome imposition from the West which Africa should resist and condemn. Denigration of MSM, picturing them as being lower than pigs and dogs on account of their sexual orientation, brings into question what same-sex orientation means for Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia. The authors set the context of the general political overview on same-sex orientation in Africa, hence their contribution is vital for my current study which is located in the Zambian context that criminalizes same-sex orientation.

Though deemed a Western imposition and an affront to Africanness and God, same-sex orientation does exist in Zambia. Kopano Ratele stresses that “the mere existence of male-to-male African sexuality makes those who swing that way objects of fear and hate within the dominant sexual system. Males who like penises rather than vaginas are made into outlaws”

(2011:408). Because males who engage in male-to-male sexuality do not conform to the heteronormative African understanding of sexuality, they are feared and outlawed. Since Christian MLM live in communities where their sexual orientation is continuously questioned and condemned, the church in Zambia has not sufficiently explained what the *imago Dei* means for and to Christian MLM in respect to their sexual orientation. This leaves Christian MLM in dire need of reclaiming their highly contested identity, as they seek to understand what it means to be created in the *imago Dei* when society and the church views them as “ungodly”. Ratele helps to establish why same-sex orientation is generally “unwelcome” in Africa by asserting that “the hostility towards homosexualities and bisexualities can only mean that such sexualities disturb the dominant shape of African masculinity and hence the need to suppress them” (:417). He informed my study on the need to understand the challenges that same-sex orientation poses to what is generally viewed as an ideal male in African contexts. Following Ratele’s in-depth work, in my study, I have created a link between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*.

Jennifer Sistig (2009) in her Master’s thesis “Who’s in Charge in a Genderless Marriage? A Queer Analysis of the Marriage Opposition to Same-sex Marriage as Articulated by the Marriage Alliance of South Africa” provides an analysis of marriage opposition to same-sex marriage as articulated by the Marriage Alliance of South Africa (MASA). She exposes MASA’s patriarchal and heterosexist worldview, and aims to show that same-sex marriage poses a direct threat to their worldview. Using queer theory as her framework, she grapples with MASA’s views on same-sex marriage arguing that “same-sex marriage as a form of ‘genderless marriage’ challenges the gender roles and power dynamics within their traditional model of marriage” (2009:122). Although Sistig has throughout the study dealt with analysis of MASA’s views on same-sex marriage and therefore presents same-sex marriage as marriage contracted on an equal footing, she has not paid particular attention to how persons of same-sex orientation in the marriages understand their own sexual orientation and the *imago of Dei* which I have explored in my study.

Adriaan van Klinken (2013) shows the role religion has played in both public and political controversies on homosexuality in Africa. He uses public debates in Zambia as his case study, focusing on Christian discourse in this debate in which international pressure for national

recognition for LGBTIQ rights is considered a sign of end times. He argues that the homosexual debate in Zambia has become eschatologically enchanted, thus, he highlights the political significance of this discourse in a postcolonial African context. Van Klinken's work is significant for my research because he notes the evolution that the same-sex orientation debate has undergone in Zambia, which is the location of my study as I captured voices of Christian MLM on how they understand their sexual orientation.

My analysis of some key scholarly works on the *imago Dei* does not focus on the semantics of "likeness" and "image of God" but gives some general theological insights into the *imago Dei*, thereby establishing the importance of this doctrine within the churches.

Sibley Towner (2005) outlines some general theological arguments on the *imago Dei* before aligning the Priestly narrative of *imago Dei* to sexuality by arguing that the image of God is seen in the maleness and femaleness of humankind and not in their sexual conjunction per se. Male and female are created in the image of God and their sexuality is only one attribute which comes with the concept of dominion as per God's instruction. Following Towner's work, the *imago Dei*-sexuality connection was informative for my study because it gave impetus to study how Zambian Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*.

Dominic Robinson stresses that "the doctrine which states that the human being is created in the '*imago Dei*' has been the subject of much theological debates throughout the history of Christianity" (2011:1). These theological debates on the *imago Dei* show the importance of this doctrine for humanity's understanding of self and God-human relations. He uses insights from theological thinkers such as Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann to elucidate more on the *imago Dei* but emphasizes that the doctrine is a "doctrine of human identity" (:1) which is rooted in God as found in biblical creation story accounts. Though he highlights issues of human identity which is found in the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, he does not explicitly link the *imago Dei* to same-sex orientation except when he argues about human identity, which is in general terms. This work is vital for my study on how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand the image of God as it highlights issues of identity which are paramount in studies of same-sex orientation.

1.4. Introducing theory and methodology

My study is informed by postcolonial and queer theories. I have used postcolonial and queer as complementary theories because the former deals with identity of marginalized people in general while the latter fully captures Christian MLM's struggles for sexual identity.

Postcolonial theory is important because the Zambian context where I conducted my study is located within the postcolonial era and still grapples with issues of resistance of religious, cultural and political domination originating from the West. Issues of reclaiming identities of the marginalized are paramount in this theory. Susan Abraham stresses that postcolonial theory thrives on issues of "identity, ethics, and peaceable coexistence and non-violence" (2007:1). The theory has been used to highlight the struggles of Christian MLM in search of a much contested identity as part of marginalized people. In the quest for identity, Christian MLM engage in constant struggles with powers such as the church, culture, politics and patriarchy. I use postcolonial theory to help highlight the identity of Christian MLM amidst prevailing highly politicized sexual domination of men of same-sex orientation in predominantly heterosexual Zambia. Using postcolonial theory in this sense makes it possible for it to overtly dialogue with queer theory. I extensively draw insights from Jeremy Punt, an African scholar, who brings these two theories into dialogue.

Though arguing from a postcolonial *Imbokodo* hermeneutics in relation to women, Makhosazana Nzimande succinctly contends that this form of postcolonial approach "entails the relentless quest for self-definition, self-affirmation, self-identification, and self-restitution" (2009:224). Borrowing from her assertions, Christian MLM search for sexual identity in relation to the *imago Dei* amidst church and state powers that define them based on their sexual orientation. They therefore engage in defining and identifying themselves, affirming their sexual orientation and restituting themselves as persons made in the *imago Dei*.

Sherin Bickrum (1996) in her Doctoral thesis "Homosexuality among Black South Africans: A Psychosocial Ontological Perspective" discusses models of homosexual identity development in relation to race and sexual identity. She suggests that the integration and internalization of negative attitudes and values appears to undermine the self-valuing of gay persons, inflaming the

oppression of self-identity which in turn affects individual self-concept. Bickrum's study is informative to my study as I analyzed how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei* amidst general teachings of the three church mother bodies on the *imago Dei* and same-sex orientation.

The other theory which has informed my study is queer theory, which focuses “on deconstructing identity, heteronormativity and the sex/gender binary along with its search for alternative identity constructions” (Bendl and Fleischmann 2008:384). This theory helped in highlighting how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia challenge the widely held beliefs that males should automatically be sexually attracted to females, thereby, making heterosexual relations normative. There is a close link between Christian MLM's struggle for recovery of their sexual identity amidst theologically, culturally and politically distorted understandings of same-sex orientation and queer theory helped identify these struggles. “Queer perspectives take the non-normative alignments of sex, gender and sexuality as well as desire seriously, emphasise the dynamic character of identities, and disclose the mechanisms of exclusion implicit in heterosexual/homosexual, male/female opposition” (Bendl and Fleischmann 2008:384). Queer theory attaches seriousness to issues of same-sex orientation even as it brings to fore exclusion that comes with same-sex orientation especially in the Zambian context hence its usefulness for this study. Jeremy Punt asserts that:

the socially constructed nature of gender and sex in society generally is taken as the point of departure, rather than assuming a biological or physiological approach; in short, and (overly?) simple terms, gender and sex is “queered” through exposing of the (powerful) systems and structures of convention which require define and prescribe the form and function of sex and gender: gender and sex are manufactured entities! (2007:385).

Queer theory is vital in my study as it has enabled me ‘to queer’ the sexual orientation of Zambian Christian MLM, human sexuality and God.

Queer theory has helped me in establishing how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand being created in the image of God. Jane Grovijahn (2008) relates the *imago Dei*, as accounted for

in biblical creation stories, to issues of sexuality in general and same-sex orientation in particular. She draws from the Catholic Catechism, feminist theologies and queer studies, and thus offers:

a Creation-centered anthropological exposition of sexuality that is embedded in God's originating act of Eros in Creation...within this theological portrait of human sexuality as an expression of God's own self-revelation in Creation, a new articulation of queer sexuality emerges, providing distinct insights into the holiness of sex (2008:121).

Grovijahn traces sexuality back to creation accounts where God is presented as being interested in human sexual desires, therefore, God creates human sexual desires and is part of human sexuality.

1.5. Research design

This study has employed a mixed method approach by applying empirical and non-empirical methods grounded in incipient theologies (which will be explained in chapter four). The site for my empirical research is Lusaka-Zambia. Strydom asserts that "the choice of the problem is directly related to the particular field in which the inquiry is to be undertaken" (2005:282). I chose this site because it is where I had established contacts with Christian MLM and also because it is a cosmopolitan city which made it much easier to discuss issues of sexuality than in the substantially traditional contexts of Zambia.

In order for me to meet the aim for my study, which was to establish how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God amidst the general teachings of the three church mother bodies, I conducted empirical research which used four paired focus group discussions (FGDs) consisting of fifteen members of a group of Christian MLM. The study participants were from urban Lusaka, had formal education with some among them being university and college students and graduates. I observed that they were from middle income families based on the mobile phones they owned and clothes they wore. All of them except one were members of churches represented by three church mother bodies. The study participants were from diverse cultural backgrounds as they belonged to different ethnic groups of Zambia but all were brought up in cosmopolitan cities. I used FGDs because the group that

made up the study participants had already established formal group discussions which they self-described as focus group meetings, scheduled for every Thursday. For purposes of sampling, I used non-probability self-selection sampling. The group of study participants self-selected to allow for individuals to decide whether or not to participate in the study and also to maintain the structure of the “safe space”.⁷ Upon reaching my research site, the ‘gatekeeper’ (he does not use any distinct title as the groups does not adhere to any distinctive power structures and members relate on first name basis) informed me that the groups’ usual focus group meetings were no longer in session due to lack of funds but that he had informed the Christian MLM about my fieldwork research. The gatekeeper (who is usually in-charge of their usual focus group meetings as he acts as group administrator) and I then used mobile communication to ask all the twenty Christian to be part of my study. Fifteen Christian MLM volunteered to be part of the study. From initial contact with study participants, I observed their ages ranged from twenty to thirty-five years, thus the age of study participants was not considered as cardinal in this non-probability self-selection sampling.

The first set of FGDs looked at how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God, while the second set of FDGs looked at what Christian MLM hold as the church’s views about them and their sexual orientation. For the construction of the FGDs, I was guided by Cochrane (1999) who emphasizes the need to begin at the base, to begin where people are marginalized, to begin where centers of communion and participation offer practical, locally embodied hope of agency and a new life. Cochrane was useful for the process of data production and collection as this study dealt with Christian MLM who are marginalized in the church and community based on their sexual orientation. Cochrane’s approach to community-based work helped my study focus on the emic voices of Christian MLM, on how they interpreted their sexual orientation and the image of God amidst dominant church teachings in Zambia.

⁷ The “safe space” can be problematized considering how generally unwelcoming the Zambian community is towards issues of same-sex orientation. I still use “safe space” not in relation to the general Zambian populace but to show that in the midst of unsafe spaces, Christian MLM have created their own pockets of “safe spaces” away from the general public eye.

Cochrane (1999) was also useful as he guided me during data interpretation and analysis to understand Christian MLM as bodies that speak, and that their experiences are cardinal sources of the incipient theologies that this study aimed to identify. My study mainly centered on Christian MLM with the aim of learning how they understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God. Furthermore, in data interpretation Terre Blanche, Durreheim and Painter (1999) guided my study to stay close to the data collected and exercise an empathetic position to data captured from Christian MLM.

This study is also informed by my research fieldwork experience. Having entered the world of Christian MLM as a heterosexual female Minister of Religion conducting this research, the following was my experience during the FDGs. First, I was warmly welcomed by the study participants in all FDGs. The participants and I were on first name terms and bonded very well during the fieldwork such that they jokingly referred to each other as “Lilly’s person”. They were very free to express themselves due to our already established relations. Second, despite being friendly with the study participants, I became uncomfortable at two particular moments. One moment was when one participant became too open about his sexual encounters. Being the only female present in the group and having been brought up in a context where discussions around sexuality are veiled, I was uncomfortable, although I joined the rest of the group in laughing at the participant’s comment. I felt that this participant acted out for me, despite his experience being real. The other incident that made me uncomfortable was when Christian MLM discussed what they regard as the church’s views about them. Since the Christian MLM knew that I was a Minister of Religion, they put me in the spotlight by categorically stating that our preaching as pastors hurts them and that they felt unwelcome in the church. I felt responsible for their hurt and this proved traumatizing for me, such that I needed time to speak to someone about how affected I was by this statement. I then met up with Dr. Adriaan van Klinken,⁸ who too was conducting research in Zambia on LGBTI issues at the time my research was also taking place, and our meeting proved energizing for me to conduct the last set of the second paired FDGs. Last, the other significant experience was how my family feared for my safety as I conducted this study.

⁸ Dr. Adriaan van Klinken is a renowned scholar on issues of masculinities in African contexts and contemporary world Christianities. He is based at Leeds University and has conducted most of his work on LGBTI issues in Zambia. He was influential in connecting me to the group of Christian MLM who with time became my study participants for this study.

My family reminded me of the unwelcoming environment in which I was conducting my study. Despite the warnings, I took the opportunity to conscientize my friends and family on issues of same-sex orientation. This earned the Christian MLM a new name among my family and friends who now called them “my people”.⁹

The FGDs did not use the real names of the participants so as to protect their identities. Instead, they were asked to suggest their own pseudonyms, which I have then used consistently in my data analysis and data confirmation. The FGDs were conducted in English (the language used during the group’s usual focus group meetings) but in cases where either Bemba or Nyanja - two commonly used local languages in Lusaka - was used, I have offered a translation. Data was collected using a digital voice recorder, and also notes were taken with permission from the study participants. The ‘themes’ I identified as a starting point for my data interpretation were derived from recurring and unanimously expressed ‘themes’ that emerged from discussions with the Zambian Christian MLM, based on the data collected from the FGDs.

1.6. Researcher’s positioning

I come to this study as a heterosexual female Minister of Religion who has entered into solidarity with MSM both in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa and Lusaka, Zambia. Hence, I do not claim to know more than study participants but I position myself as one who is in critical solidarity with persons of same-sex orientation. In this study, I position myself as an outsider entering into Christian MLM’s space. My role in the data collection process was facilitative as an organic intellectual engaged in a wide range of social struggles affecting African communities. Kolakowski cites Antonio Gramsci who uses the term “organic intellectuals” to describe “intellectuals who did not simply describe social life from the outside in accordance with scientific rules, but who used the language of culture to ‘express’ the real experiences and feelings which the masses could not express for themselves. In order to understand those experiences, they must feel the same passions as the masses” (1978:240). Although Gramsci

⁹Probably, Christian MLM referred to each other as “Lilly’s person” because they felt that I did not judge them, hence, felt embraced by me. My family and friends might have referred to Christian MLM as “my people” because they still were not comfortable with the idea of me conducting research among persons of same-sex orientation. I also feel that they were uncomfortable to call them MSM, hence, opted to call them “my people”.

argues about the masses failing to express themselves, this research adopts a much ‘thinner’ understanding of hegemony, following the work of James Scott (1990), and so worked from the position that the study participants could speak for themselves, allowing them to freely express themselves, as I hold that Christian MLM have something to say about their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*.

1.7. Overview of the dissertation

My study comprises the following six chapters.

In chapter one, I introduce my study, as I outline the background to the study, motivation, offer an introduction to key terms and location of the study, and introduce the theory, methodology, research design and my positioning within the study. After this introductory chapter, I then move in chapter two to explore the teachings of three church mother bodies in Zambia on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. Having explored the teachings of three church mother bodies, I then proceed to establish the intersection between the terms “same-sex orientation” and “*imago Dei*” in chapter three. Chapter three also discusses identity formation among Christian MLM, where I intersect “same-sex orientation” and “*imago Dei*” before offering an analysis on why the same-sex debate is going on in Zambia. Chapter four presents fieldwork findings of the study, categorized thematically arising from focus group discussions with Christian MLM. This chapter explores how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei* based on research findings. Having established how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*, chapter five develops from chapter four and looks at what Christian MLM regard as the churches’ views about them and their sexual orientation. Themes used in this chapter arise from recurring views during the focus group discussions with Christian MLM. Chapter six offers a general conclusion and questions for future research.

Chapter two

General teachings of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, Council of Churches in Zambia on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

2.0. Introduction

This chapter presents a brief outline of the general teachings of the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) and the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*.¹⁰ Many of the churches in Zambia are either affiliated to the ZEC, the CCZ or the EFZ depending on which particular church tradition they fall under. Unlike the ZEC which derives its teachings from the worldwide Roman Catholic Church's teachings, the EFZ and the CCZ have no explicitly stipulated teachings on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*, thus they usually issue national statements and pastoral letters based on the theological underpinnings of the churches they represent. These statements, whether issued individually or collectively, influence the understanding of Zambians in general and Zambian Christians in particular on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. There are limited written resources from these three church mother bodies, hence, selected statements and pastoral letters they have issued on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* will be used to inform this study. The three church mother bodies are drawn into this study because they are important interlocutors in Zambia.

Despite the concept of the *imago Dei* being pivotal in the three church mother bodies as it helps humans understand their identity as being God's unique creation, the understanding of the *imago Dei* has been restricted to issues of sexuality, with heterosexuality assumed as the right image of God. The *imago Dei* continues to be understood and explained by the three church mother bodies in relation to male-female sexual relations, to the negation of male-male or female-female sexual relations. By limiting the *imago*

¹⁰ As noted earlier, the three church mother bodies are not necessarily representative of their member churches nor the general membership of these churches. Nonetheless, I have still drawn them into my study as they are very influential in Zambia, through the public statements they make which have contributed to render the practice of same-sex orientation unwelcome and illegal.

Dei to male-female sexual relations, the three church mother bodies have implicitly removed Christian MLM from the *imago Dei* bracket.

2.1. General teachings of the three church mother bodies on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

2.1.1. The Zambia Episcopal Conference

2.1.1.2. Brief background of the ZEC

The Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), which is the umbrella body of all Roman Catholic churches in Zambia, “was established in 1965 and the statutes of the Conference were approved by the Holy See on April 2, 1984”.¹¹ Following its long history and large Christian membership base in Zambia, the ZEC continues to be an important part of the Zambian society.

2.1.1.3. General teachings of the ZEC on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

The ZEC being a part of the worldwide Roman Catholic Church (hereafter RCC) draws its general teachings on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* from the Holy See’s teachings. Thus, the ZEC’s teachings will be outlined concurrently with those of the Holy See.

The RCC holds that,

being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He¹² is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his [her] stead (The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994:111).

¹¹ Symposium of Episcopal Conferences and of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). <http://catholiczambia.org.zm/>. Accessed on 8th April, 2013, 10:11hrs.

¹² Acknowledging the sexist language used by the author, I have opted to leave this quotation as it is.

This deeply theological anthropological argument denotes that all persons are created in the image of God and therefore possess inherent human dignity, freedom to commune with others and God and are subsequently capable of knowing themselves. This teaching could imply that all persons (by virtue of being created in the image of God) regardless of their sexual orientation, inherently have dignity which leads them to commune with other humans and God. “We humans, says the *Catechism*, are created in the image of God, established in God’s friendship, and given a unique place in creation. In our nature we unite the spiritual and material worlds” (Daly 1994:92). This argument presents an anthropocentric emphasis on humans uniting the spiritual and material: presenting humans as intermediaries between God and other created order.

Furthermore, the RCC argues that:

God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning “male and female he created them” (Gen.1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.¹³

The image of God is further portrayed by being created as male and female which should ultimately lead to male and female sexual relations that are meant to knit humanity into community and promote individual and communal development. “The Catholic Church believes that God would not have considered the Adam being sexually attracted to another man to be good”.¹⁴ This portrays same-sex relations as an affront to the image of God which is only “complete” and “good” when it entails sexual attraction between male and female.

Meanwhile, the RCC in general and the ZEC in particular has maintained a clear stance on issues of same-sex orientation. In emphasizing its preference for heterosexual relations, the RCC argues that:

¹³http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html. Accessed on 8th April, 2013.

¹⁴<http://www.catholic.com/tracts/homosexuality>, accessed on 9th April, 2013.

God created man and woman together and willed each for the other¹⁵...in marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming “one flesh,” they can transmit human life: “be fruitful and multiply, and till the earth.” By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents cooperate in a unique way in the Creator’s work (Catechism 1994:113-114).

Preference for heterosexual relations is based on procreative elements that accompany such relations, once realized through marriage. In this regard, man is meant for woman as woman is meant for man: for the sake of human multiplication and being co-creators.

Having established the RCC’s stance on heterosexuality, it is vital to establish its position on same-sex orientation or homosexuality. In reference to homosexuality the argument is that: its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.” They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved (Catechism 1994:544).

Basing its argument on Sacred Scripture, the RCC depicts the practice of same-sex orientation as a grave form of depravity, a disorder which does not conform to heterosexual complementarity, and thus cannot be approved. The RCC condemns the act of homosexuality and not the homosexual person as stated below.

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of

¹⁵ Gareth Moore argues that “God seeks for each of us, not the partner that pleases God, but the partner that pleases us, for it is only thus that he can fulfill us as the needy creatures he has made us, and only thus that he can succeed in his own project of providing us with a companion. We are here far from the ‘compulsory heterosexuality; interpretation of this story, the interpretation that says that God made Eve, not Steve, for Adam, and that is how it must be. Yes, Adam ends up with a woman for his partner, but not because God imposes a woman on him. Adam has a woman, not because that is how God wants it, but because that is how Adam wants it, and God is at the service of Adam’s delight” (2003:143). Moore refutes the heterosexual motif which is prevalent within the RCC and is used in discussions around the practice of same-sex orientation.

the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition (Catechism 1994:544).

The RCC acknowledges the existence of persons of same-sex orientation but terms same-sex orientation as a "condition" that a homosexual has to bear. Because of their "condition", "homosexual persons are called to chastity. By virtue of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by support of disinterested friendships, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (Catechism 1994:544). The RCC condemns the act of homosexuality and not the homosexual person, hence prescribing chastity for persons of same-sex orientation as a way of attaining Christian perfection. It can be argued that the RCC contradicts itself by embracing the homosexual persons, yet at the same time does not allow them to practice their sexuality in totality through sexual practices. It denies the true identity of homosexual persons who may wish to enter into faithful and monogamous relations with one another.

The ZEC through its spokesperson Father Samasumo argues that "the Catholic Church's constant and firm teaching on homosexuality acts is unequivocal. Basing itself on the Bible, the Catholic doctrine in the Catechism of the Catholic Church declares that homosexual acts are contrary to natural law" (as quoted by Sichone 2011:2). The argument espoused by ZEC is that the act of homosexuality is not natural. Natural in this regard means any sexual relations that take place between a male and female: thus, male to male, or female to female sexual relations are termed as unnatural.

The ZEC (as shown below) stresses that although persons of same-sex orientation assert that their sexual orientation is genetic, there is not much scientific proof to validate these claims. In its continued acceptance of the existence of persons of same-sex orientation in Zambia, the ZEC affirms that despite the numbers of persons of same-sex orientation being small, their sexual orientation still remains a challenge for them. The ZEC contends that:

several homosexual persons argue that they are born that way, but studies to establish whether certain persons have a genetic disposition to homosexuality are inconclusive...the number of men and women, even within Zambia, who have deep-

seated homosexual tendencies, though small, is not negligible...this constitutes a major trial in their lives (:2).

The ZEC in line with the teachings of the RCC acknowledges the existence of persons of same-sex orientation but terms their orientation as a trial that they live with. Additionally, ZEC asserts that “homosexuality and lesbianism are seriously wrong and sinful acts which should not be allowed” (:2). For the ZEC, the practice of same-sex sexuality is seriously wrong and sinful and should not be allowed in Zambia.

2.2. The Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia

2.2.1. Brief background of the EFZ

“The Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia was established in 1964 for the purpose of providing fellowship among the evangelical missionaries serving in Zambia”.¹⁶ Though initially established as a fellowship for only missionaries of the evangelical tradition, the body has over the years evolved to cater for churches of the evangelical tradition in Zambia. This expansion has enabled the EFZ become one of the three biggest church mother bodies in Zambia, thus, an important interlocutor in shaping people’s understandings on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*.

2.2.1.2. General teachings of the EFZ on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

As already mentioned, the EFZ’s does not hold its own specific teachings on the *imago Dei* but conforms to teachings of the churches it represents which generally deem all persons as being created in the image of God. However, it is renowned for its position on issues of same-sex orientation in Zambia.

In its pastoral statement on the State of the Nation issued on the 4th of March, 2012, the EFZ condemns same-sex relationships, basing its standpoint on the Bible and Zambian societal norms.

¹⁶ <http://efzsecretariat.org/>. Accessed on 6th June, 2013.

Zambia being a Christian nation and also having a rich African and traditional heritage, requires a consistent upholding of highest moral and family values. Therefore, we re-affirm our stand for hetero-sexual marriages only, as in the current constitution. Same sex relationships are condemned in the Bible and are widely unacceptable in our society. We note the strong prohibitions of same-sex relationships in the following Holy Bible passages: Lev18:22, Rom 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9 (EFZ 2012:8).

According to the EFZ, if Zambia, as a Christian nation were to embrace same-sex orientation, then it would be slipping in both Christian and African moral standards and neglecting family values. Thus, African tradition and the Bible are pivotal in the EFZ's position on same-sex issues.

The EFZ, in its pastoral letter addressing the Head of Delegation of European Union on the call to support homosexuality in Zambia, argues that “we take a very firm and uncompromising stand in rejecting the promotion of homosexuality, lesbian and transgender practices in our country” (EFZ 2013:1). From this argument, undertones of homosexuality being a western imposition on the Zambian populace are discernible; hence, the EFZ firmly rejects the “promotion” of same-sex orientation.

We firmly support the position that has been taken by the Zambian government in rejecting this inhuman and unnatural practice. It is unlawful in Zambia to engage in homosexual acts and therefore you are promoting a way of behavior that is at variance with the law of this country and unacceptable to our society... In a democracy, the interest of the majority must be respected. The interests of the minority groups to pursue unacceptable practice and behavior cannot supersede the interests of the majority (EFZ 2013:2).

The EFZ agrees with the position that the Zambian government has taken to criminalize the practice of same-sex orientation which is regarded as an unnatural form of sexuality. In its argument, it raises issues of why persons of same-sex orientation should not be allowed to practice their sexuality, based on the tenets of democracy which dictate that the majority groups'

wishes supersede those of the minority. The EFZ in its teachings on the practice of same-sex orientation terms it as inhuman which implicitly negates persons of same-sex orientation who practice their sexual orientation as being inhuman. This argument carries a loaded message on what the EFZ then holds as being “human”, thus having a bearing on its understanding on what the *imago Dei* means in respect to persons of same-sex orientation. Additionally, the EFZ terms the practice of same-sex orientation as unnatural, unlawful and unacceptable in the Zambian society.

2.3. The Council of Churches in Zambia

2.3.1. Brief background of the CCZ

The Council of Churches in Zambia has been in existence since 1914. It was first called the General Missionary Conference and its main responsibility was to promote cooperation between the missionary societies in areas such as education, health and religious broadcasting. The name was later changed to the Christian Council of Northern Rhodesia in 1944. At the eve of independence in 1963, there was pressing need for the Council to begin responding to the growing social demands of the people. Upon independence in 1964, the CCNR changed its name to Christian Council of Zambia. At the 26th General Conference, the current name, Council of Churches in Zambia, was adopted to conform to the current duties and composition of the member churches belonging to CCZ.¹⁷

The CCZ is an important factor in Zambia as it represents a large number of non-evangelical protestant churches in the country. The CCZ and EFZ are the two main bodies that represent protestant churches in Zambia and most of the protestant churches are affiliated to either of these two, depending on the church tradition. Meanwhile, the ZEC only represents churches in Zambia which fall under the RCC. The CCZ like the ZEC and the EFZ remains influential in Zambia because of its long history and also large membership base.

¹⁷ <http://www.ccz.org.zm/?q=node/1>. Accessed on 6th May, 2013, 15:00hrs.

2.3.2. Teachings of the CCZ on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

Like the EFZ, the CCZ has no self-stipulated teachings on the *imago Dei* as it conforms to the teachings of the churches it represents. But it has issued some statements on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* as outlined below.

In its pastoral letter on the State of the Nation in 2011, the CCZ argues that its pursuit for social justice is premised on “the biblical teachings that all human beings are created in the image of God and thus are equal and valuable in the eyes of God” (CCZ 2011:3). Basing its teachings on the Bible,¹⁸ the CCZ acknowledges that all humans are created in the image of God which thus renders them equal and valuable. This statement though issued in the spirit of social justice does not explicitly address persons of same-sex orientation as being equal to heterosexual persons and as being valuable in eyes of God. The use of “all human beings” then implies that persons of same-sex orientation are regarded by the CCZ as being created in the image of God, thus are equal and valuable in God’s sight.

In yet another Pastoral letter dated 5th March, 2012, under the caption “the foundation of a strong nation” the CCZ argues that:

the Council of Churches wishes to reiterate their stand on family values. Marriage is between male and female and no other way. We believe homosexual relationships are contrary to the order of nature as designed by God the Creator. We therefore wish to state categorically that we are opposed to legalization of homosexuality and all its forms of derivatives. We believe in strong family units because they are the basis of a strong and orderly community (2012:5).

The CCZ in its position against same-sex orientation brings forth the need to maintain a strong nation through the upholding of family values where marriage is between male and female as per

¹⁸ Gerald West argues that the “Bible has been used, over and over again, as the ideological justification not only for excluding gay men and lesbians, but also for blaming the victims in the AIDS health crisis” (2008:206). The Bible has been used as a determinant for right and wrong sexuality.

divine ordnance. Same-sex orientation in this regard is viewed as unnatural and contrary to God's plans because it does not contribute to family values of procreation, which in turn serves the purpose of building a strong nation through increase in population, and subsequently, the nation's economy.

2.4. Summary

This chapter has presented a brief outline of the general teachings of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia and the Council of Churches in Zambia on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. I have established that the three church mother bodies do not approve of same-sex relationships and same-sex sex, despite acknowledging that all persons are created in the image of God. I have also established that the Bible, church tradition, African culture and the national constitution play a pivotal role in shaping the positions of these three institutions on issues of same-sex orientation. I have also established that the terms "same-sex orientation" and "*imago Dei*" have not been explicitly linked by the three church mother bodies in their general teachings. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will create and present the intersectionality between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*.

Chapter three

Intersectionality between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

3.0. Introduction

This chapter looks at the intersection between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. As I try to create the intersection between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*, I acknowledge that creating the intersection between these two terms is not generally explicit; hence I will explore this correlation in relation to Christian MLM. The intersection of same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* highlights Christian MLM's identity as sexual beings created in God's image. Issues of sexuality bring to the fore individual identification based on one's sexual orientation. General ecclesiastical theological anthropological teachings based on sexual orientation tend to exclude Christian MLM from the bracket of the *imago Dei*, thus, once more raising identity issues for Christian MLM.

The *imago Dei* is the focus of this study because it remains paramount in how Christians in the three church mother bodies (as shown above) under their identity as God's unique creation. Whilst acknowledging diversities in understandings around the *imago Dei*, in this work, by focusing on creation-the essence of the *imago Dei* theology, rather than on redemption, I try to address the fundamental problem of Christian identity, that is, how are human beings related to God.

This chapter starts by addressing issues of identity which are usually born when Christian MLM are identified by whom they choose to love and have sexual relations with. I will go on to analyze some factors that contribute for Christian MLM's identity formation. Central to this chapter is the intersection between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* as these two terms are fundamental to the identity of Christian MLM. I further show that creating the intersection between these two terms is only possible once both human sexuality and God are queered, to allow for a non-heteronormative understanding of the aforementioned. As a way of bringing same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* closer to the Zambian context, I begin by providing an analysis of why the same-sex debate is taking place.

3.1. “Who is Doing Who?” a question of identity for Christian MLM

In Zambia, issues of sexuality in general and sexual orientation in particular usually raise the question of who is having sexual relations with whom. The question “Who is Doing Who?” is used as a determinant of what is considered as acceptable forms of sexuality and which ones are not: in this case, male to female sexual orientation is acceptable and not male to male or female to female. The question “Who is Doing Who?” is used to spotlight the genders of the persons involved in the sexual act: with the heteronormative being central to this understanding. “Who is Doing Who?” is generally a prominent question in Zambia especially where issues of sexual activities between two males are concerned. Male to male sexual practices are viewed as causing an imbalance in power dynamics prevalent in male to female sexual relations. Heteronormative portrays the male as the active partner (the one doing) while the women is regarded as the passive one (the one being done).¹⁹ These power dynamics in male to male sexual practices are regarded as missing, hence the question “Who is Doing Who?” which highlights the following issues.

First, “Who is Doing Who?” denotes both the silence and euphemism attached to issues of sexuality from a Zambian perspective. In traditional Zambia, “sexuality is viewed as a cultural taboo” (Motswapong 2010:104), thus it is hardly a subject in the public domain as it is “largely a private and personal affair” (Nyanzi 2011:477). Sexuality carries with it cultural taboos, as it is not a subject that one openly delves into without repercussions. Meanwhile, Yanyi Djamba highlights complexities in African contexts where sexuality, despite being embedded with taboos, is still revered, asserting that “in these societies sex is held to have magical potency, and the supernatural dangers associated with it can only be avoided if the appropriate taboos are observed and the prescribed rituals properly performed” (1997:70). Sexuality and sex are believed to hold magical properties, hence are attached with prescriptive ritual underpinnings to avert supernatural dangers. “Most traditional African societies view sexuality as a mystery. Sexuality in traditional African setting is not discussed in public but in privacy, among certain age-groups of people, under certain circumstances” (Kamaara 2005:9). In cases where it is

¹⁹ David Halperin in his analysis of sex in classical Athens notes that “sexual activity more over is thematized as domination: the relation between the “active” and the ‘passive’ sexual partner is thought of as the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior” (1990:30). Sexual activities in Athens were not gender aligned but depicted power dynamics between passive and active partners.

discussed, it is veiled in euphemisms. Although it is a tabooed topic, one's sexuality has a bearing on the entire community to which the individual belongs, as culture and tradition still dictate what is termed as right forms of sexuality and which ones are viewed as deviant. Sexuality is used to ensure social order, thus, "to ensure that sexual relationships contribute positively to social order, human societies have various restrictions on who should have sex with who, how, where and when" (:11). Traditional understanding of sexuality takes precedence because Zambia, like many other African countries, holds notions of communal living and community as paramount for common wellbeing. In this regard, sexual practices that individuals engage in are believed to have a bearing on the welfare of the entire community as the individual is accountable to the community.

Second, the question "Who is Doing Who?" is used to show how Christian MLM face a self-identity crisis of who they are due to their sexual orientation amidst the general teachings of the three church mother bodies in Zambia on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. The question "who am I?", among many others, is born as part of the process of self-identification among Christian MLM amidst messages from the churches, community and state which make them question their own identity. In a context where same-sex orientation is deemed unwelcome, "homosexuality involves a distance and discrepancy between what one is and what one pretends, a dishonesty *vis-à-vis* the world that rebounds on oneself as uncertainty about who one really is" (Bech 1997:94). The Zambian context is predominately heterosexual due to the churches' teachings, political stance and communal expectations, hence, Christian MLM live two separate lives, one in the public eye and the other in their private safe spaces. These two separately lived lives compound the identity crisis for Christian MLM. Since their sexual orientation is constantly questioned and condemned, Christian MLM may sometimes try to maintain some semblance of heterosexuality in their public lives, but privately maintain same-sex relationships.

Lastly, because humans are defined by relations they keep, the question "Who is Doing Who?" raises issues regarding who one has sexual relations with (as noted above). Questions of the person "doing" and the one being "done" determine who is "acceptable" and who is not in society, church and state. Gunda argues that "this question essentially asks: who is being

penetrated? Penetration becomes the central core of sexual relationships” (2011:98).²⁰ Christian MLM are judged by the state, church and community based on who they have sexual relationships with. Sexual relations become fundamental to the identity of Christian MLM, both at individual and societal levels.

“Identity has been conceptualized as governed by the principle of belonging and not belonging, inclusion and exclusion, and a logic of limits and borders” (Harding 1998:49). Sexual orientation is used as a means of exclusion of Christian MLM; they are viewed as living outside sexual borders prescribed by the Zambian society and churches, thus they live lonely lives. Having established that same-sex orientation is surrounded with individual quests for a much contested identity, I will now look at factors that contribute to identity formation of Christian MLM.

3.2. Identity formation for Zambian Christian MLM

As gay people wrestle with their specific gay identity, they are also struggling with experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the social and religious environments in which they move (Rogers 2002:96).

Whether same-sex orientation is a matter of choice, biology or socialization, it still leads to issues of identity formation or individuation of Christian MLM, justifying the use of postcolonial and queer theories in this study. Sexual identity for Christian MLM remains a continuous struggle amidst church authorities, communal ethos and state laws that aim to prescribe right sexual behaviour.

Homosexual identity can be described as a tripartite process. Firstly, the individual has to deal with his (or her) biological inheritance and come to terms with the masculine (or feminine) gender...the second process is the person’s internal dialogue with himself/herself...the third process, and perhaps the most powerful, is that of sub-

²⁰ Relating sexual activity in ancient Greece, Halperin asserts that Greeks sex was “non-relations” in character; it is because sex was closely tied to differentials in the personal status of sexual actors rather than to the expressive capacities of individual human subjects. It would be advisable not to speak of it as a sexuality at all but to describe it, rather, as a more generalized ethos of penetration and domination” (1990:33-35). Penetration reflected who had power to dominate the other and who did not. The passive partner was mostly the effeminate one of the two, hence, was regarded as the dominated one.

cultural identity, which manifests at larger stage of psycho-social development (usually late adolescence onward) (Isaacs and McKendrick 1992:7).

Identity formation for Christian MLM starts with biological inheritance and is further shaped by one's acceptance of self, leading to belonging to the sub-culture of persons of same-sex orientation. "When particular forms of sexuality and human bonding are determined deviant, they give rise to social groupings and sub-cultures. Homosexual people organize themselves socially, to begin with, around a common sexual orientation" (McLean and Ngcobo 1994:159). This is true of the Zambian context where MSM are regarded as sexual dissidents and part of the subaltern strata. In a bid to self-identify and also to feel a sense of belonging, Christian MLM in particular form groups based on their sexual orientation. The following are some of factors that contribute to formation of Christian MLM's identity in Zambia.

3.3. Contributing factors to identity formation of Zambian Christian MLM

Many factors can be cited for identity formation of Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia but this study highlights religio-cultural, gender and national identities as cardinal contributors.

3.3.1. Religio-cultural identity

"Religion has not only been the matrix of cultures and civilizations, but it structures reality - all reality, including that of gender - and encompasses the deepest level of what it means to be human" (King 1995:4). Religion encompasses human relations with the divine, others, nature and self, hence shapes the identity of Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia. Meanwhile, culture

is a history of tradition, both accurate and romantic. It is a defined system of folklore, imagery, and experience. Law, custom, and social behavior impose themselves on private collective beliefs which ultimately affect or change the attitudes and behaviours of a diffuse community (Isaacs and McKendricks 1992:67).

Both religion and culture are embedded with myths and morals that govern one's sexuality. Beth Ahlberg cites Caldwell *et al* who argue that "sexual activity in Africa is free and has no moral values" (1994:220). These assertions do not hold true in the Zambian context which this study addresses: sexuality is governed by religio-cultural underpinnings. Like in many other African

contexts, in Zambia, religion and culture are intertwined; hence, the use of “religio-culture” to denote this symbiotic relationship which has an important role to play in determining which sexual orientation is “right”. Religio-culture is used to maintain the status quo by upholding taboos on what is perceived to be the right form of sexuality, especially in the Zambian context.

Ruth Meena (1992:156) contends that:

sexuality is the socio-cultural construction of sex, shaped and defined by the physical, language and social character of each society. All human beings exhibit sexuality, a learned form of behavior which is related both to the instinctive need to reproduce the species, as well as to the desire for sensual pleasure....Sexuality, like everything else, is gendered by reproductive, social, economic, political, cultural and religious roles at play as women and men in each of our societies.

Sexuality is mostly considered to serve the purpose of reproduction in many contexts. Violet Kimani argues that “African societies place a high premium on fertility, and a family endowed with many offsprings is indeed privileged. Other functions of sex include accomplishment of religious, ritual and social obligations” (2004:404). Sexuality in the Zambian context is surrounded with individual responsibility to reproduce. It is viewed as every adult’s obligation to his or her community to participate in procreation. Eunice Kamaara succinctly asserts that “sexuality more than anything else facilitates human existence through the procreation of children” (2005:10). In Zambia, culture, religion, society, economy and politics have roles in emphasizing the need for a form of sexuality that caters for reproduction.

Based on the above, most Zambians hold that only heterosexuality is the right form of sexuality as prescribed by cultural, religious, economic, political and reproductive terrains. This proves problematic for same-sex orientation to be considered as another form of sexuality, as religio-culture, among other interlocutors on issues of sexuality has rendered Christian MLM as pernicious. I now turn to gender identity as another contributor to identity formation of Christian MLM.

3.3.2. Gender identity

Gender identity is a social construct which “refers to the individual’s basic conviction of being female or male” (De Cecco 1981:60). Isaacs and McKendrick add that “it is also about the integration of a person’s sexual impulses and urges into this role. It must therefore necessarily include a person’s self-awareness and self-acceptance of sexual orientation, and an inability to express this meaningfully with others” (1992:22). For Christian MLM, identity entails more than being male, it encompasses self-awareness and self-acceptance of sexual orientation; the ability to express their sexual orientation with others. Expression of same-sex orientation as an integral part of Christian MLM’s identity formation is rendered impossible due to gender constructs on how a male should be and whom a male should be sexually attracted to. Ursula King cites Sandra Lipstiz Bem who argues that prescriptive understanding of what a male should be is “gender polarization, which provides mutually exclusive scripts for being male and female, and defines any person or behavior deviating from this script as problematic” (1995:8). Christian MLM are viewed by the Zambian society as having departed from the script of being male because they are sexually attracted to males and not females. Additionally, gender identity of Christian MLM is hampered by criminalization and condemnation encountered from state, church and community. Isaacs and McKendrick further argue that:

gender identity is usually verified through the medium of ongoing sexual thought (internal dialogue) with accompanying behaviour expression. If behaviour outlets are denied, forbidden, or ‘taken away’, the individual might regress. But the conflicted might resurface at any moment during his life, with a distorted and painful crisis identity (:23).

Since Christian MLM are denied outlets to express their gender identity, this affects their individual identity and thus has possible future repercussions. “Gay men are almost universally seen as ‘other’” (McLean and Ngcobo 1994:159), thus are not afforded the opportunity to freely express their gender identity as MLM. Their “otherness” causes discomfort in the churches, community and state, hence they are expected not to exercise their sexual orientation either publicly and privately. Having established how gender identity is an integral factor Christian MLM’s identity formation, I will now look at national identity.

3.3.3. National identity

National identity cannot be separated from historical identity; for Zambia, it must be noted that the penal code used to criminalize same-sex orientation is inherited from Britain. “Like many other African countries, Zambia has inherited the ‘sodomy laws’ from its former coloniser, Britain. Thus, same-sex sexual activity (or ‘unnatural offences’, as the Penal Code has it) is illegal” (van Klinken 2013:6). Though Christian MLM are Zambians by citizenship, this penal code only allows this ontologically and not experientially, due to criminalization based on same-sex orientation. Christian MLM are legally but not essentially Zambian citizens based on their sexual orientation and discrimination thereof. Hence, the search for a recognized and respected identity for Christian MLM’s continues in the absence of a national identity which affirms them as MLM. The nation holds that “same sex sexuality is a ‘Western cultural perversion’ that is being pushed down the throats of Africans” (Gunda 2011:114). Meanwhile, van Klinken contends that:

though little historical and anthropological research has been conducted on the subject, it can be assumed that same-sex practices are not alien to Zambia but did and do exist in Zambian societies. This assumption is supported by some anthropological findings, for example among the Tonga people in Southern Zambia (Colson 2006:148–169) (2013:6).

Same-sex orientation has existed among the Tonga people of Zambia. Hence, by the nation maintaining this discriminatory penal code, it fails to acknowledge the existence of MLM generally and Christian MLM in particular.

The above arguments have shown how identity remains crucial for Christian MLM as they continue to be rendered deviant by both the church and community based on their sexual orientation, and subsequently, whom they choose to love. To emphasize the gravity of identity for Christian MLM, I now will look at same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* as two paramount avenues of Christian MLM’s identity. I offer the analysis below in dialogue with theological thinkers.

3.4. The intersectionality between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

As noted above, the intersection between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* is not generally explicit despite the two terms being imperative to the identity of Christian MLM. Thus, I create this intersection in dialogue with other theological thinkers whilst asserting that creating this intersection “also means a willingness to accept a certain measure of healthy ambiguity with respect to both terminology and theoretical content” (Boisvert 2007:32). In creating this intersection, I also argue for queering of both human sexuality and God (as will be shown below). I begin by establishing the source of the *imago Dei* doctrine and show its importance in the Christian traditional. Using arguments advanced by theologians, I bring out two contending voices on what the image of God means in relation to same-sex orientation.

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* is mainly based on biblical creation accounts and remains pivotal in the Christian tradition due to its contributions in shaping understandings on human identity. Although many theological thinkers have over the years made connections between the *imago Dei* and same-sex orientation, Karl Barth’s insights as cited by Gerard Loughlin, among many other thinkers, will be used. Barth is used to inform this study because he is a key theologian who shapes the theologies prevalent in the CCZ and the EFZ. Taking cognizance of the fact that this study does not employ systematic theology tools, it will cautiously draw on Barth’s assertions as a means of making connections between the *imago Dei* and same-sex orientation. Barth is chosen for this task because he does make a clear connection between the two concepts being discussed and hence presents a God who is pre-occupied with human sexuality.

Barth²¹ as quoted in Loughlin stresses “the non-negotiable sexual difference of man and woman. Each one of us is either male *or* female, while at the same time being oriented to the sex we are not” (2004:59). The *imago Dei* is only fulfilled through being male or female and being sexually attracted to the opposite gender.

²¹ Barth’s anthropocentric account of the creation stories and restriction of the *imago Dei* to human beings is countered by Hans Urs von Balthasar (as cited by Oakes and Moss 2004) who highlights the importance of every creation’s relation to God. For von Balthasar, all creation bears an imprint of being God’s image.

[S]ince man has been created by God as male or female, and stands before God in this Either-Or, everything that God wills and requires of him is contained by implication in this situation, and the question of good and evil in his conduct is measured by it . . . We remember that the ‘male *or* female’ is immediately to be completed by the ‘male *and* female’. Rightly understood, the ‘and’ is already contained in the ‘or’ . . . For how is it possible to characterize man except in his distinctive relation to woman, or woman except in her distinctive relation to man? But just because in the being of both it is so deeply a question of being in relation to the other, of duality rather than unity, the first principle must be stated independently that, in obedience to God, man will be male or female (:59).

Based on these assertions, males are to relate to females in accordance with God’s plan; male to male sexual relations are not welcomed. Anything outside this is an affront to God’s intentions of creating male and female for duality purposes.

Of course for Barth there is a sense in which the call to be man or woman before God is a call to be what one is always already, a call to realize an underlying and essential self. But for Barth this self is not known other than in our response to the call of God to become what we are already; the self is realized only through a process of becoming (:186).

The *imago Dei* in this case entails being a male and acting like one through sexual attraction for a female, according to God’s plan, as only then can one have identity as self. Failure to be the self that God intended a male to be leaves one with distorted identity of self.

“For Barth, homosexuality is that ‘physical, psychological and social sickness, the phenomenon of perversion, decadence and decay’ (Ruse 1988:197), arising from the refusal to adhere to God’s fundamental demands for human sexuality. Based on this assertion, homosexuality is synonymous to ill-health as it is a detachment from God’s intended purposes for humanity. Thus, “the homosexual fails to recognize that as a man he can only be genuinely human with woman, or as a woman with man” (Loughlin quoting Barth 2004:188). Based on this argument, Christian MLM are viewed as semi-human because they are sexually attracted to their own gender and not

females. This argument poses questions on whether the *imago Dei* is lost on account of one's same-sex orientation and if the *imago Dei* is only embedded in one's sexual orientation.

In countering traditional understanding of the *imago Dei* in respect to same-sex orientation, Richard Cleaver asserts that:

taken as a whole, the creation myth tells us that people need one another in order to become the image of God, to become fully human...taken in its parts, this myth teaches about a human species that is collectively an image of God (Genesis 1), in need of companionship and variety (Genesis 2), and always attracted to other human beings. It claims to explain why human beings come in two varieties and to use that to explain sexual attraction. It makes no particular claim that sexual attraction comes in only one form (1995:65).

The image of God in this regard is attained through intra-personal relations manifest in human communities. The *imago Dei* is experienced through collective existence of humanity, having no bearing on one's sexual orientation. Humans are created as male and female but sexual attraction is not a given; thus, paramount to the image of God is human relations and not sexual attraction or individual sexuality.

Furthermore, Ragies Gunda argues that:

the creator God is too powerful to be limited to human opinions. What this implies is that all human being are created by God, irrespective of their sexual identity; they carry within them the image of God...if all human beings inherently possess the image of God, why do we fail to show respect to the image of God when discussing same-sex relationships? (2011:104).

The image of God as per the above assertion dwells within each human being irrespective of sexual orientation. The *imago Dei* is inborn, cuts across sexual orientation and is a reference point for upholding human dignity. Having shown the intersection between same-sex and the image of God, I now will queer human sexuality in a bid to disentangle sexuality from a predominantly heterosexual understanding.

3.4.1. Queering human sexuality

Michel Foucault plays a pivotal role in queering human sexuality as he argues for “the social construction of sexual identity through discourse and constant redefinition” (Foucault as cited by Stuart 2003:8). Sexual identity is a social construct that thrives on discourses that people engage in and is always dynamic. The discourse on sexuality is usually shaped by heterosexuality which is usually a dominant form of sexuality, thereby, showing how heterosexuality is a powerful determinant of what is considered as the right form of sexuality. Foucault aligns issues of power with issues of sexuality and argues that “the idea of power is something held by dominant groups and used against others who had less power, for example, women, gay people, the poor” (cited by Stuart 2003:8). The two notions respectively highlight the fluidity in sexual identity and power dynamics present in Christian MLM’s existence in predominately heterosexual Zambia.

Queer is “a radical destabilising of identities and resistance to the naturalising of any identity” (:10). Queering human sexuality entails resisting understanding any form of sexuality as a given, in this case, heteronormative is questioned by Zambian Christian MLM. Queering brings to the fore the fluidity present in both gender and sexuality. Christian MLM in this regard “offer a different understanding of maleness and of human sexual relationships based on mutuality and equality” (:15). Christian MLM challenge maleness, human sexual relations and the power dynamics thereof, hence, destabilising the normative in Zambian understandings of maleness and sexuality.

Based on the above argument, queer sexuality is “an expression of God’s own self revelation in Creation with particular emphasis given to queer expression of sexuality as holy” (Althaus-Reid as cited by Grovinjhan 2008:122). Christian MLM’s sexual orientation can thus be termed holy as it is a reflection of God’s own self in human kind. Additionally, queer sexuality can be interlinked with God’s image “as all sexed beings, whether queer or conforming have their origin in God” (:122). Again, Grovinjhan asserts that “sexuality is located in our God-given and perhaps even God-driven capacity to go out of ourselves and radically connect (well) with others” (:125). Christian MLM’s sexuality creates bonds between persons of same-sex orientation and when these relationships are life-affirming, then they are God-driven and God-given. Having established the fluidity of human sexuality and shown that same-sex orientation is

God-given and God-driven, I will now queer God so as to present a God outside the heteronormative box.

3.4.2. Queering God

God cannot be Queered unless theologians have the courage to come out from their homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transvestite or (ideal) heterosexual closets (Althaus-Reid 2000:88)

In the quest to queer God, one's sexual orientation, whether queer or "straight", plays an important role in allowing God to come out of God's own closet or not. "Any metaphor of intimacy with God is a metaphor of mutuality, pleasurable activity and freedom after which neither we nor God are meant to remain the same" (Althaus-Reid 2004:100). Queering of God does not only change one's perception of self but also challenges the individual's understanding of God and subsequently, God's self.

Queering God is about:

re-discovery of God outside the heterosexual ideology which has been prevalent in the history of Christianity and theology. In order to for that, it is necessary to facilitate the coming out of the closet of God by a process of theological queering. By theological queering, we mean the deliberate questioning of heterosexual experience and thinking which has shaped our understanding of theology, the role of the theologian and hermeneutics (Althaus-Reid 2003:2).

Queering God destabilizes the heterosexual God presented by Christianity and theology. It questions the heterosexual male God handed down in the Christian tradition amidst Christian motifs of an ideal male. "The Queer God is present in every group or individual who still dares to believe that God is fully present among the marginalized, exceeding the narrow confines of sexual and political ideologies" (Althaus-Reid 2004:176). In this study, queering God entails understanding God from marginalized Christian MLM's vantage point. Queering God is incomplete without queering the trinity which remains foundational to the Christian faith; thus, below, I present the queer trinitarian orgy.

3.4.2.1. The Queer Trinitarian orgy

The threesome of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who make up the trinity poses questions on the relations exhibited in the Godhead. This requires critical “reflection on the sexual relationship manifested in the Trinity and to consider how God in the Trinity may come out in a relationship outside the heterosexuality” (Althaus-Reid 2003:46). Since the heteronormative holds that intimate relations have to occur between male and female in a monogamous setup, the trinitarian God where the gender and sexuality of the three persons remains controversial, through the threesome orgy challenges heterosexuality as the Godhead is depicted as being mutual and equal in relation and power. The trinitarian orgy presents a queer God who does not conform to a heterosexual ethos but enjoys existing within the gender ambiguous threesome. “The Queer God is not only non-habitual but also omnisexual” (:52). The trinitarian God is not confined to heteronormative sexual borders but is engaged in multiple and concurrent relationships within the Godhead.

Despite showing how vital issues of identity formation are for Christian MLM in Zambia and also having created the intersection between same-sex orientation and the image of God, I acknowledge that the terms “same-sex orientation” and the “*imago Dei*” are fundamental to the identity of Christian MLM, the question still remains: why the same-sex debate is going on in Zambia. In answering this question, I now return to the Zambian context as shown below.

3.5. Why the same-sex orientation debate?

The question therefore remains, if God created Christian MLM good, why the same-sex orientation debate in Zambia? The Christian MLM’s sexual orientation is spotlighted because all adult males are expected to participate in procreation. “Their production of children, especially eligible heirs, and the maintenance of a conventional image of married life” (Murray and Roscoe 1998: 273) is determinant in issues of male sexuality. The debate is not necessarily about wrong or right forms of sexuality, it hinges on continuity of the human race through procreation. “Through sex, the human race preserves, perpetuates and rejuvenates itself” (Kamaara 2005:11). In traditional Zambia, Christian MLM are viewed as willfully refusing to contribute to the

preservation of the Zambian populace through their “unfruitful” sexual orientation, thereby, counteract patriarchy and heterosexuality and the traditional Zambian worldview.

3.5.1. Christian MLM’s sexual orientation as a counteraction to patriarchy and heterosexuality

Heterosexuality is inextricably linked to the institutionalized social forms of the family, religion and the state. The domination of men over women; the oppression of youth by elders; the construction of masculinity; and the rule of the father are all elements that constitute patriarchy. Patriarchal rule stigmatizes and represses homosexuality and whatever else it considers ‘deviant desire’ (McLean and Ngcobo 1994:159).

Heterosexuality is considered as normative in Zambian society, hence, rendering homosexuality as pernicious. Homosexuality challenges the rule of the father which among other things constructs what an ideal male should be and how he should behave. The rule of the father demands continuity of family lineage through procreation, which Christian MLM are viewed as not participating in.

Ratele contends that “men who are attracted to men...by mere fact of their existence question and potentially mess up the power (besides the apparent universality and naturalness) of ruling heterosexual masculinity” (2011:416). Since sexual orientation deals with issues of power, the status quo is challenged by Christian MLM’s attraction for other men. He stresses that “men who love other men end up as objects of homophobic rage because such love disturbs a cornerstone of patriarchal heterosexual power in that it shows that men are not of one mind and feeling when it comes to sexuality”(408). Patriarchy and heterosexual powers are challenged through Christian MLM being in sexual relations with other men, bringing to fore many forms of masculinities and sexualities existing among men. Not only do Christian MLM counteract patriarchy and heterosexuality, but their sexuality also challenges the traditional Zambian understanding of sexuality as will be discussed below.

3.5.2. Christian MLM's sexual orientation as a challenge to traditional Zambian understanding of sexuality

Ratele (:399) stresses that “in many parts, if not all, of post-colonial Africa, a significant theme of being a man resolves around sex”. In traditional Zambia, being a “man” entails the ability to have sexual intercourse with a female and being able to sire children. Failure to have sex with a female or even give her children leaves one subject to ridicule from other members of the community. Like many other African countries that thrive on African ethos, in Zambia

in everyday life, people live within a certain duality that implies a threesome. In other words, masculinity necessarily relates to femininity, and both imply in turn a third dimension, the child. The human being is a whole, only as man and woman summoned by the unborn child (Bujo 2010:81).

This traditional heterosexual motif holds that it is the duty of every man and woman to contribute to procreation thus furthering communal life. Failure by either male or female to procreate is deemed unwelcome and attracts a lot of name calling from one's own kin and community.

Thus, having established that heterosexual relationships come with great deal of expectations and responsibility to one's community, it can be understood why same-sex sexuality is unwelcomed in Zambia. Same-sex relationships are regarded as being contrary to the intended purpose of sex, which is reproduction to promote furthering of community life and for the good of community. Hence, Christian MLM are traditionally termed social misfits as they engage in “unnatural” and “unproductive” forms of sexuality which are contrary to what a sexual male should be. As Ratele asserts that “the mere existence of male-male African sexuality makes those who swing that way objects of fear and hate within the dominant sexual system. Males who like penises rather than vaginas are made into outlaws” (:408-409). Since such sexual disgust towards MLM arises from heterosexual inclinations propelled by community demands for all male adults to participate in procreation, this leads to the further discrimination and vulnerability of males of same-sex orientation.

Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, Richard Tiemoko *et al* (2007:1) strongly agree with the above argument and assert that “the traditional perspective stems from the importance accorded the

life-creating potential of sexuality to the near exclusions of other personal and social benefits”. Thus, the traditional insistences on heterosexuality as the only “right” and “acceptable” form of sexuality as it propagates life, unlike homosexuality.

3.6. Summary

This chapter has presented the intersection between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. I acknowledged that creating the intersection between these two terms is not generally explicit; hence I explored this correlation in relation to Christian MLM. I highlighted issues of Christian MLM’s much contested identity, and thus, brought to fore factors that contribute to identity formation of Christian MLM. I also noted how general theological anthropological teachings based on sexual orientation tend to exclude Christian MLM from the bracket of the *imago Dei*, thus, once more raising identity issues for Christian MLM.

This chapter began by addressing issues of identity which are usually born when Christian MLM are identified by whom they choose to love and have sexual relations with, before I analyzed some factors that contribute for Christian MLM’s identity formation. Central to this chapter was where I created the intersection between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* as these two terms are fundamental to the identity of Christian MLM. I argued that creating the intersection between these two terms is only possible once both human sexuality and God are queered, to allow for a non-heteronormative understanding of the aforementioned. As a way of bringing same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* closer to the Zambian context, I provided an analysis of why the same-sex debate is taking place; arguing that same-sex orientation challenges patriarchy, heterosexuality and the traditional Zambia understanding of sexuality.

Chapter four

Survey of findings from the fieldwork on Christian MLM's understanding of their same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*

4.0. Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the intersectionality between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei*. Taking cognizance of that, this chapter presents fieldwork research findings of the study, categorized thematically, arising from an analysis of the data gathered from paired focus group discussions with Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia. This chapter discusses how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*, based on the research findings. Themes arising from the data collected during paired focus group discussions with Christian MLM on their understanding of their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God have been critically analyzed in this chapter. Since Christian MLM in Zambia continue to live on the margins of society, this study sought to capture these voices from the margins. Thus, I have utilized the notion of incipient theologies as a tool that takes into account the embodied experiences of Christian MLM and makes these marginal voices a starting point in discussions on same-sex orientation and the image of God.

As explained in the first chapter, fifteen Zambian Christian MLM volunteered to participate in the focus group discussions on how they understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God, and their views were recorded. These men were chosen because they are Zambian, Christian and also members of the already existing safe space same-sex focus group in Lusaka-Zambia which volunteered to be part of the study.²²

Before heading to the research site, I communicated with the gatekeeper and arranged to meet him a day after my arrival. On 18th June, 2013, the gatekeeper and I met and I once more briefed him on the nature of my study. He explained to me that due to lack of funding, the usual focus group meetings were no longer being held, but that he has still communicated with the group

²² Since the study participants were from urban Lusaka but have had some exposure to peri-urban Lusaka (outskirts or shanty compounds of Lusaka) and not so much exposure to rural Zambia, they offered opinions on their sexual orientation based on their urban experiences.

members about my research and arranged tentative dates for meetings. The gatekeeper and I then agreed that he would phone all the group members, asking them to be part of the study. This proved to be helpful in self-selection as members who wanted to be part of my study showed up for the FGDs. The first set of FGDs were held on 27th June and 4th of July, 2013 respectively. The FGD held on the 27th of June enabled participants to discuss how they understood their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God, while the second FGD held on 4th July was for purposes of making follow-up on ideas that were not very clear in the first FGD. The second FGD also allowed participants to clarify their views expressed in the first FGD and also to add what they felt they had left out during the first FGD. It also gave me an opportunity to ask participants to clarify some views that were expressed during the first FGD. To allow for a smooth transition from FGD one to FGD two, I and the participants did a brief ten minute recap of our first discussion before I asked them to clarify what we had discussed earlier, or to add anything they might have come up with following the first FGD. After that, I asked them to shed more light on views that were unclear to me.

During the first set of paired FGDs, fifteen study participants who had confirmed participation via mobile communication met in their usual meeting place in Lusaka-Zambia. The introductions were given by the gatekeeper who gave the group an overview of what my research was about (which he was privy to as we had gone through it during our pre-FGDs meeting). I then asked for permission from study participants for me to conduct audio recording of the discussions and also to take notes during the discussions. After that, I gave the study participants the research consent letters which we then went through together, allowing them to ask questions where they needed clarity. Afterwards, they were asked to sign the consent forms as a sign that they had agreed to be part of this study. The study participants were then assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the study, and they were asked to provide pseudonyms which they maintained throughout all the FGDs.

The next step was for me to introduce the main question to be discussed during the first set of FGDs, which was how they understood their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God. The question was broken into two parts: how they understood their sexual orientation and what they understood as the meaning of “being created in the image of God”. Having posed the

first question, the study participants then took over the discussion by giving their views as I recorded them and sought clarity as discussions went on. The FGDs were meant to take an hour each, but went on for over two hours as Christian MLM noted that they loved speaking to me. Having asked them how they understood their sexual orientation, the discussion went on for close to an hour before we moved on to discuss what they understood as the meaning of “being created in the image of God”, which took over thirty minutes. After a short break, in order to make this study participatory, I allowed the gatekeeper to facilitate in line with the sub-questions (see appendix three) which I had laid down and we once more went on to discuss how study participants understood their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God. This process of the gatekeeper facilitating the second part of our FGDs after the short break, whilst I facilitated the first part of discussions, was maintained for both sets of paired FGDs.

Following the above description of the nature of the first set of paired FGDs, in presenting the findings in this chapter, I am guided by Cochrane and Terre Blanche, Durreheim and Painter who respectively assert that “bodies speak, persons speak, and these persons are located socially and economically in multiple matrices of power, each of which constrains and affects their speech” (Cochrane 1999:xx), and that “the key principle of interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data, to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding” (1999:139). This chapter presents themes which were recurring and unanimously held by study participants during the first set of paired focus group discussions, thereby, reflecting understandings of Christian MLM’s on their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God. In the analysis and interpretative task, I will seek to be empathetic to the lived experiences of Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia.

This set of FGDs was made up of fifteen Christian MLM based in Lusaka-Zambia and who volunteered to be part of the study. I decided to use of FGDs in my study following the already existing focus group meetings which the Christian MLM already belong to, thus maintaining the structure that the group is already used to. I also used the group’s usual meeting place. My role was to ask the Christian MLM a few directive questions and let them be in charge of the discussions thereafter. As explained above, by asking Christian MLM to speak about how they

understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God, I sought to learn their own understanding and also to give them space to speak for themselves.

In this chapter, using the emic language of Christian MLM, I will present three salient themes (emerging from recurring and unanimously held views)²³ of how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God. I use the emic language of Christian MLM as I adopt Cochrane's (1999) understanding of incipient theology which he argues are born

whenever Christian groups meet and discuss their problems on the basis of a text or anything analogous (sermon, ritual, performance, confession, and so on), wherever they do so reflectively-accepting, rejecting, reinterpreting, and retelling its message- and wherever they do so in relation to the concrete conditions of their existence, aware of the human being as the other and as suffering, there one may discern an incipient theology worth talking about (:151).

Incipient theology is born in communal contexts that allow for Christians to discuss their lived experiences, hence in my study I used FGDs which were made up of a community of Christian MLM. Since incipient theology is fostered through a process that allows for re-interpretation, re-telling and rejection of some dominantly held theologies, this study brought this process to life as Christian MLM gave their own accounts of their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*, refuting what has been said about them by the three church mother bodies. The process of re-telling and rejection requires the agency of the particular Christians involved in particular moments of dialogue. "What plots our perceptions and perspectives at any one time depends upon our location in the grand narratives unto which we are born and by which we are brought up, as well as our embodiment in a narrative of the self for which we are in part responsible" (:161). I note that Christian MLM in this study recounted their experiences as active agents owning their embodied theology.

²³ Since study participants live in the same city, have interaction outside their usual focus group discussions and some within the group were friends, some statements they unanimously agreed to may be understood that they more or less have similar experiences or they have shared these experiences before in their focus group discussions.

Furthermore, Gerald West (2005) borrowing from Cochrane's (1999) incipient theologies, asserts that for many Christians, especially those in the margins of society, there is a dislocation between their embodied or lived theology and the public theology of the church. He contends that what makes matters worse is that the embodied theology of Christians is seldom given expression as it remains inchoate and incipient, waiting to be articulated. Therefore, he shows how Contextual Bible Study (CBS) can be a tool that allows Christians to speak about their lived experiences, thereby, expressing their incipient theologies. By using CBS as a vehicle which enables Christians to express themselves, he calls for the agency of persons who have within them theologies which need to be brought to forth. This is exactly what I have done in this study as I have captured embodied theologies of Christian MLM through the use of FGDs, acknowledging their agency in the process of articulation of their lived experiences which in turn form and inform their theologies. Theologians have a role in journeying with such marginalized Christians as they articulate their experiences, hence, West challenges "theologians and biblical scholars to come alongside them and to do theology with them, by serving with their time and resources" (:25). Having realized this, I gave my time and resources to journey with Christian MLM as they brought forth theologies about their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*. In this process of articulation, my role was facilitative.

As this study aims to uphold the voices of Christian MLM, for each theme, I will aim to give prominence to the voices of Christian MLM by first and foremost highlighting their views and according them their rightful place in my work before I offer my own analysis, followed by brief insights from other thinkers who support Christian MLM's views. By giving prominence to voices of Christian MLM in this analysis, I try not to overshadow their understanding of their sexual orientation and the image of God - hence reiterating that my study aims to capture embodied theologies of Christian MLM.

4.1. Born this way

Christian MLM who participated in the paired focus group discussions belong to the already existing focus group meeting that offered to be part of this study, thus they were either known to be or suspected to be of same-sex orientation by their churches. When asked to explain how they

understand their sexual orientation, the entire group agreed that they did not choose to be born as persons of same-sex orientation, as they are who they are by birth. Chizo²⁴ pointed out that:

Before I was born, God knew me! I did not wake up one day and decide to start being sexually attracted to other men. *Ndiye vamene nina badwa naine, sininasankhe kunkhala so* (that is the way I was born, I did not choose to be like this). It just happened, I started having weird feelings for other men, and it was scary at first because I did not know why I was not like some of my friends who would be attracted to girls, *kupisha tuma gelo* (chasing after girls). What I know is that I was born this way. When people call me a sinner because of my sexual orientation, I then question why God could not have just terminated me before I was born instead of me coming to disturb people who call themselves holy.

Same-sex orientation is regarded by this group as being beyond human control and choice. This participant discovered his sexual orientation at a tender age by noticing how he was not sexually attracted to girls but was instead sexually attracted to boys. Same-sex orientation was attributed to God's desire for an individual, hence, an emphasis on Christian MLM being born into their sexual orientation. The process of acclimatizing to one's same-sex orientation especially in a predominately heterosexual environment was described as scary, especially in its initial stages.

I argue that acclimatization to being a person of same-sex orientation could be scary because a Christian MLM would seem to be the odd one out, the sense of being different and "the other" would therefore make one self-conscious. Therefore, by stating that they are born this way, Christian MLM try to negotiate and reclaim their space in an environment where their sexual orientation remains highly contested. Nonetheless, if same-sex orientation is God's desire, the question is: what end is this desire of God supposed to serve? I ask this question because it helps in understanding the role that Christian MLM's love plays in the absence of procreation (as will be discussed below). Based on the response above, I contend that in trying to understand their sexual orientation, Christian MLM struggle with issues of identity, especially when their sexual orientation is constantly questioned in heterosexual communities. In their quest to understand their sexuality and come to terms with it, Christian MLM direct their questions on what their

²⁴ Pseudonym used by one of the Christian MLM who volunteered to be a study participant.

purpose in life is to God, especially when the heterosexual community views their sexual orientation as a sin.

Dirk Schubotz and Helen McNamee, analyzing the process of adjusting to same-sex orientation, stress that “a young LGB person must deal with social stigmatization, which more often than not always comes from significant others such as family members, friends, peers, teachers and service providers: that is, the very agencies whose support and acceptance young people need to successfully embark on their journey through adolescence to adulthood” (2009:193). Fear of and actual stigmatization from avenues that ought to help one understand his or her same-sex orientation is a challenge in the acclimatization process of Christian MLM. “Some youths fear the negative consequences of identifying as gay, especially if they live in secluded conservative regions of the country. They might personally accept their sexuality but realize that it is unwise or imprudent to come out at least until they are living among peers who accept diverse sexualities” (Savin-Williams 2005:16). Acclimatization to same-sex orientation is made much more bearable in contexts that are more embracing of sexual diversity.

Another participant commented on how being born a person of same-sex orientation was a “secret of the womb” because a mother cannot predict what kind of child she would bear. Kapande²⁵ stressed that:

All I know is that *munda nimuchabu* (a womb is like a bridge - one cannot tell what the child in the womb will be after it is born). I don't think even my mother can understand what happened in her womb for me to be gay. It is something beyond my own mother's explanation and also my own explanation. Being gay is a secret of the womb. I am the only gay in my family, my own brothers and sisters are straight, only the womb knows what happened for me to be gay.

This participant used a Bemba²⁶ adage *munda nimuchabu* (a womb is like a bridge as one cannot tell what the child in the womb will be after it is born) to emphasize that he had no control over being born as a person of same-sex orientation. In the notion of the womb being likened to a

²⁵ Study participant's pseudonym.

²⁶ Bemba is one of the seven major local languages in Zambia.

bridge, one is never sure what lies beyond the bridge unless it is crossed. Hence for Kapande, even his own mother could not have predicted that he would turn out to be a man who loves other men. Based on this response, I note that the choice of whether one is born as a person of same-sex orientation or not lies within the womb and no external factors can change that. The notion that same-sex orientation is beyond human understanding and control was rife among participants.

Duke²⁷ commented that he did not know about his sexual orientation until his grandmother (who was his guardian) pointed it out to him. He had this to say:

What is funny for me is that before I even knew my own sexual orientation, as a little boy, my grandmother knew, before I even realized I was gay. She had her own sons, my uncles who are not married up to now. For her, it was not strange that I am what I am. Since she knew about me being gay before I did, she ended up protecting me from family pressures to find a girlfriend and the like.

The response shows that the discovery of sexual orientation for Christian MLM is an on-going process which is made much easier with the help of understanding and supportive family units. Duke's grandmother is presented as being pivotal in her grandson's understanding and discovery of his sexual orientation. The grandmother, through her own experiences with her biological sons was able to understand her grandchild's sexual orientation. In this instance, the participant's grandmother played the role of both educator and protector on issues of his sexual orientation. Most of the participants agreed that their families have been instrumental in their own understanding of their sexual orientation, though acknowledging that such understanding does not come easily.

Participants' responses revealed that Christian MLM in Zambia believe that their sexual orientation is genetic and not a matter of choice. These claims made by Christian MLM about being born that way have been used by many same-sex proponents. LeVay has argued that "homosexuality runs in families. Many gay men and lesbian women have at least one brother or

²⁷ Study participant's pseudonym.

sister or other close relative who is also homosexual” (LeVay 1995:62). Christian MLM believe that same-sex orientation is hereditary and inborn, thus seeing a succession of persons of same-sex orientation in specific families. As in the case of Duke who explained that his uncles too are persons of same-sex orientation, the “born this way” argument support is based on scientific evidence presented (as per LeVay’s assertions above) and on lived experiences of persons of same-sex orientation. Bailey and Pillard support notions of same-sex being innate and consisting of elements of psychological variations by stressing that “our own research has shown that male sexual orientation is substantially genetic” (1995:83). The participants expressed that they did not have any control over their sexual orientation but attributed it to the work of God or nature (Kapande’s *munda nimuchabu*). Arising from assertions by study participants (while taking cognizance of arguments advanced above) who embrace their sexual orientation as an innate part of who they are, it can be argued that same-sex orientation is inborn and thus remains an uncontrollable entity in Christian MLM. Bearing this in mind, the next theme looks at same-sex love.

4.2. Men who Love other Men (MLM)

In many discussions on men of same-sex orientation, the use of terms like ‘gay’, ‘homosexual’ and ‘men who have sex other men’ are common. These terms are usually used loosely without in-depth analysis of what they mean to persons of same-sex orientation. During the first set of focus group discussions, when Christian MLM were asked how they understand their sexual orientation, one study participant highlighted how the terms used to describe persons of same-sex orientation do not fully capture what goes on in most of the stable and fulfilling same-sex relationships. Lolo²⁸ had this to say about how he understands his sexual orientation as a man who is sexually attracted to other men:

For starters, people call us men who have sex with other men, homosexuals, gays and whatever; I am not a homosexual but a man who loves other men. I hate being called a homosexual because it is not who I am. I am just a man who loves other men. Even when they say men who have sex with other men, they make it appear as though all we do is have sex with other men, *monga nima hit and run chabe lyonse* (sexual

²⁸ Study participant’s pseudonym.

intercourse with no strings attached) and that we are not able to love other men. I take myself as a man who loves other men.

Issues of identity are evident in this assertion, as being termed 'gay', 'MSM' and 'homosexual' has negative connotations for men of same-sex orientation who hold that there is more to their orientation than mere sexual activities. Lolo highlighted his hate for being called homosexual, opting to be called a man who loves other men. Being homosexual based on this participant's response erodes Christian MLM's self-identity as men who share love among themselves. What can be deciphered from this is a need to shift focus from what happens in same-sex relationship to what necessitates same-sex relationships. Love is a cornerstone in many of the fulfilling same-sex relationships as pointed out by Lolo.

Embracing of one's sexual orientation and capability to love another man were emphasized with MeLove²⁹ adding that:

Being MSM is not an identity, MSM is just an act of having sexual intercourse with another man. I also call myself a Man who Loves other Men (MLM). Because love involves care, sharing and other good things, I love my partner because I share with him, I care for him and it is not just about having sex with him.

For MeLove, being a man who has sex with other men is not an identity as the sexual act is only a fraction of what happens in fulfilling MLM relationships. Same-sex relationships are not only about sexual acts but entail care for each other. The participant highlighted how he cares for his partner; shares his being whilst placing emphasis that his relationship is not primarily sexual. Having sex with other men is only a small part of same-sex orientation which encompasses much more than the act of sex.

Since their sexual orientation involves positive elements apart from the act of sex, Christian MLM were in agreement on same-sex orientation being right and moral. Bob Spinks³⁰ pointed out that:

²⁹ Study participant's pseudonym.

³⁰ Study participant's pseudonym.

I am a man who finds other men attractive; there is nothing wrong with who I am. Even the bible says it is good for two people to keep each other warm. It does not say these two people have to be a man and woman. It just says two people; those two people keeping each other warm might as well be men.

This response from Bob Spinks brought out the beauty of same-sex love which is pivotal in Christian MLM's understanding of their sexual orientation and he affirmed that there is nothing wrong with him being a man who loves other men.³¹ Bob Spinks challenged notions of sexual relations only taking place between male and female, asserting that the biblical "warm" does not even speak of any sexual intercourse let alone which gender should be involved in the sharing of warmth. The biblical "warmth" that Bob Spinks spoke about was in reference to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, but he did not offer an in-depth analysis of the text he cited.

In respect to same-sex orientation and based on the above responses, Christian MLM regard their sexual orientation as an avenue through which love can be shared between men. By stressing the need to be addressed as MLM, participants employed a hermeneutics of love. As Hammer rightly argues:

A hermeneutics of love opens to same-sex unions and marriages without children needs to preserve this material groundings of love and take part in the search for sustainable life-styles...heterosexual and homosexual love with and without procreation or adoption of children might flourish more vividly in a network of relationships caring for life, searching for just and sustainable communities (2004: 455-456).

A hermeneutics of love among persons of same-sex orientation renders possible arenas for love and advances a search for sustainable life-styles. This shifts focus from seeing Christian MLM as persons who only engaged in meaningless and loose sexual relations which have no bearing on their personal growth, to seeing them as persons capable of giving and receiving love. Their relations as persons of same-sex orientation are not based on the ability to reproduce but on

³¹ This is an indirect challenge to the laws of Zambia that criminalize the practice of same-sex love. The Christian MLM unintentionally brought to life Jesus' concept of human dignity that arises from love which supersedes human laws.

foundations of love and promotion of just communities. It can be argued that same-sex love is lived on grounds of mutuality between two men. David Russell succinctly adds that “the gift of human sexuality is for loving-building relationship nurturing companionship, and expressing intimate joy and tenderness” (2011:19). Christian MLM’s sexuality, exercised within the confines of growth enhancing relationships imbued with the elements cited above, are in congruency with loving relationships. This “love can take the form of consciously open relationships, built on mutual esteem and respect for the other’s freedom and responsibility” (Bech 1997:141). This resonates with how Christian MLM regard themselves as engaging in empowering relationships with other men as their relationships consist of care, love, promotion of individual freedom and self-esteem. Only in loving relations can one find life affirming attributes as discussed above. This leads to the last theme on how Christian MLM understand being created in the image of God.

4.3. Wonderfully and fearfully made in the image of God

When Christian MLM were asked to discuss how they understand the image of God in relation to their sexual orientation, what was evident is that they do not view their sexual orientation as a hindrance to them being the *imago Dei*. In fact, their sexual orientation was understood as having been bestowed on them by God, hence making them the image of God. Blackson³² asserted that:

I take myself as being wonderfully and fearfully created in the image of God. Being created in God’s image means I have justice and love in me that reflect God. Since God is full of love and justice and since I am fearfully created by this same God, then it is only normal that I am his image, an image full of love and justice. There is also a certain level of power stemming from being created by God, for example, domination on other creation.

From this participant’s response, Christian MLM view themselves as being wonderfully and fearfully created in the image of God; regardless of their sexual orientation. God is understood as being full of love and justice and that these elements trickle down to God’s image; Christian MLM. Being created in the image of God, they take the quest for justice for self and others as an important responsibility. They also understand love for humanity as justice distributed hence

³² Study participant’s pseudonym.

exhibiting these life-affirming elements as part of what it means to be created in the image of the justice loving God.

Another participant, Ken,³³ linked his understanding of being created in the image of God to his sexual orientation by commenting that:

Before we even speak about the image of God, as Christians, we need to understand who God truly is. God is love, so, a man who loves another man is practicing Christianity and being like God because he is loving another person. The image of God in us requires that we love each other, our own maker is love.

For this participant, discussing the image of God as understood by men who love other men would only be fruitful once Christians in general understood that God is love. Through realizing that Christian MLM were fulfilling one component of what it means to be created in the image of God (that is love), then they would be taken as the image of God by other Christians. The participants stressed that they are created in the image of God because they are lovers of humanity in general and other men in particular just like God.

Kapande further pointed out that:

The image of God is complete when you reflect characteristics of God, whether MSM or heterosexual, it is what many Christians do not understand. God does things out of love and exercises justice, mercy and long suffering, being God's image as a person then requires that you become a living example of things God does. Forgive others, love them unconditionally, be of long suffering, then you reflect the image of God.

For Kapande, one's sexual orientation is not a factor in who is and who is not created in the image of God. The image of God is only complete when a person exhibits traits of love, justice, mercy and long suffering as is evident of God. Based on this response, the image of God is understood as a Christian responsibility to exercise mercy, justice and love in our human relations, thus, refuting the confining of the image of God to one's sexual orientation.

³³ Study participant's pseudonym.

Based on the responses above, Christian MLM stated that they are wonderfully and fearfully created in the image of God and their sexual orientation had no bearing on how they view themselves as being the *imago Dei*. Russell cites Alison who agrees with these assertions and contends that:

It is becoming clearer that it is not all that helpful to make too significant a distinction between the orientation and the expression of it. How can a person be and yet not be, who they are. We must be who we are in the expression of our sexual orientation. The implication of the traditional position is that God is in effect saying to people of homosexual orientation: “You are not. I didn’t create you. I only create heterosexual people. You are a defective heterosexual. Agree to be a defect, and I’ll rescue you. But if you claim to be, then your very being is constructed over and against me, and you are lost (2011:31).

By acknowledging that they are created in the image of God, Christian MLM affirmed that their sexual orientation is sanctioned by God, thus, they are only being who they are. By claiming to be created in the image of God regardless of their sexual orientation, Christian MLM challenged the heterosexual privatization of the God who only creates heterosexual persons.

Christian MLM hold that being created in the image of God entails exhibition of love and justice in relation to others. Gennedios agrees with assertions made by the participants on the importance of them being the sources of justice and succinctly points out that:

in the depths of their hearts, all people long for justice and peace...human beings want justice and have every right to demand it, to the greatest possible extent that it can be attained on this earth. Christians must bear witness to this fact and must serve the cause of justice in human life in all its forms (2013:214-216).

Christian MLM believe that the image of God is inherent in them regardless of their sexual orientation as they uphold love, justice and mercy just like God who created them. From the assertions above, love, justice and mercy are inseparable components that make up being created in the image of God. This correlates with Gennedios’ argument that “peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and sisterhood, love between peoples...are bound together” (:211). In seeking to

live lives reflective of the image of God innate in them, Christian MLM exercise love and justice towards other human beings in general and other men in particular. This is in a bid to be examples of what God desires and what God's image entails.

4.4. Summary

This chapter has presented Christian MLM's understanding of their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei* according to my research fieldwork findings conducted among fifteen Zambian Christian MLM. Themes (based on recurring and unanimous participants' understanding) that have been presented in this chapter arose from the first set of paired focus group discussions where Christian MLM were asked to discuss how they understand their sexual orientation and the image of God. The understanding that their sexual orientation is genetic and that they do not have any control over their sexual orientation was unanimous. I have also established the importance of a supportive family system in helping Christian MLM understand their same-sex orientation. As one participant pointed out, his grandmother realized he was a person of same-sex orientation before he personally did. This chapter has also established that Christian MLM understand that their same-sex orientation has no bearing on them being created in the *imago Dei*. In fact, they understand themselves as being reflections of what it means to be created in the image of God through loving other men. Based on the understanding of Christian MLM, I have established in this chapter how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*. The next chapter will look at what Christian MLM regard as the church's views about them and their sexual orientation.

Chapter five

Survey on the findings from fieldwork on what Christian MLM hold as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation

5.0. Introduction

This chapter is related to chapter four and will look at what Christian MLM regard as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation. Taking cognizance of the fact that the churches' general teachings have already been established in chapter two, this chapter will capture how Christian MLM (based on discussions with fifteen study participants) experience their sexual orientation in the churches, and therefore establish what they hold as the churches' views about them. As explained in chapter four, fifteen Zambian Christian MLM volunteered to participate in the focus group discussions on what they hold as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation. These men were chosen because they are Zambian, Christian and also members of the already existing safe space same-sex focus group in Lusaka, Zambia who volunteered to be part of the study.

The second set of paired FGDs took place on the 11th and 18th of July, 2013, with the same fifteen Christian MLM that made up the first set of FDGs. They both started with the Christian MLM and once more going through the consent letter, I sought permission to conduct an audio recording of the proceeding and also take filed work notes before asking study participants to sign consent forms if they agreed to be part of my study. After this, I then asked the second question that I set out to explore: what do they regard as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation? Having asked this question, I let them lead the discussions which once more took another two hours. In between the two hours, we had a break and after the break, the gatekeeper led the discussion by asking the Christian MLM what they hold to be the churches' view of them and their sexual orientation, as him and I had discussed. The next FGD in this second set of FGDs was conducted in order for me to seek clarity on issues I was unclear about and also to allow Christian MLM once more to discuss the question addressed in this FGD.

As in chapter four, I am guided by Cochrane (1999) and Terre Blanche, Durreheim and Painter (1999) in presenting study findings that bear an empathetic stance towards the views of Christian

MLM. This chapter presents themes which were recurring and unanimously held by study participants during the second set of paired focus group discussions, hence reflecting understandings of what Christian MLM hold as the church's views about them and their sexual orientation. By asking Christian MLM to speak about what they hold as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation, I sought to learn their lived experiences in the churches. In this chapter, using emic language of Christian MLM, I will present three salient themes (born from recurring and unanimously held views) of what Christian MLM hold as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation. Since in this study I aim to uphold the voices of Christian MLM, for each theme, I will give prominence to voices of Christian MLM, analyze their views before offering my own analysis and brief insights from other thinkers who support Christian MLM's views. In my analysis, I try to give prominence to voices of Christian MLM, thus, I will not overshadow how they experience their sexual orientation in the church with views of other thinkers and my own voice.

Three themes (based on recurring and unanimous³⁴ views of study participants) arising from data collected during the second set of paired focus group discussions with Christian MLM on how they experience their sexual orientation and what they hold as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation will be analyzed in this chapter.

5.1. Location of the churches as a determinant of reaction to same-sex orientation

In the second set of focus group discussions, participants were asked how they experience their sexual orientation as Christian MLM in the churches. This was asked bearing in the mind the general teachings of the three church mother bodies in Zambia and realizing that the churches have influence on how persons of same-sex orientation experience their own sexual orientation. Bob Spinks³⁵ said that:

What I have experienced is that churches based in the outskirts of Lusaka do not bother speaking about us as gays. Their business seems to be directed to other issues

³⁴ Since study participants live in the same city, have interaction outside their usual focus group discussions and some within the group were friends, some statements they unanimously agreed to may be understood that they more or less have similar experiences or they have shared these experiences before in their focus group discussions.

³⁵ Study participant's pseudonym.

like poverty, they will not tell you to stop coming to church because you are gay. It is churches located in neighborhoods where these “some of us” (the affluent) live that make it a big deal, to even preach that homosexuality is evil. What is strange is that in our outings, when we go clubbing, we meet these same “some of us” (affluent) Christians and their Pastors who also take part in same-sex intercourse. The same *papa* (father - in reference to a pastor) who was preaching anti-gay *muchurch* (in church) is the same *papa* (father - in reference to a pastor) who hits on you in the club. They hit on you and then you as a gay person thinks, but *mwenzeli kunikondema mu sermon papa* (you were condemning me in your sermon father - in reference to a pastor).

From the participant’s response, it seems priorities which determine sermons preached in affluent and outskirts-based churches in Lusaka differ. The affluent churches that Bob Spinks speaks about are churches located within the urban city of Lusaka and usually are attended by educated and financially well-to-do members. Churches located on the outskirts, in the peri-urban areas of Lusaka, are usually attended by persons who are not financially well-to-do. I argue that since churches on the outskirts have to contend with people’s physical suffering, this then shapes their sermons, making same-sex orientation and the presence of Christian MLM in these churches a non-issue. Chances are that being located on outskirts of the city and not within the heart of Lusaka, these churches use a traditional Zambian worldview where discussions on issues of sexuality are taboo, making their silence on issues of sexuality understandable. This implies that Christian MLM may be more comfortable in outskirts churches that do not make them the target for sermons and do not seem to be bothered about their sexual orientation. The participant also pointed out that affluent churches located within the city of Lusaka make it a point to preach about same-sex orientation. The question would be: is there a correlation between being affluent (educated and rich) and openness to speak about same-sex orientation in churches? This question is cardinal because the participant highlighted that most of the sermons preached in affluent churches are different from what churches on the outskirts of the city preach. Considering the context of my study, it could also be possible that affluent churches’ openness in discussing issues of same-sex orientation often lead to anti-same-sex messages which in turn make Christian MLM feel unwelcome in affluent churches. Furthermore, the participant pointed out how some affluent Christians (pastors included) do secretly have sex with

other men. It can therefore be assumed that emphasis on preaching against same-sex orientation in some of the affluent churches would be a denial of the reality on the ground and that some of the Christian men who secretly participate in same-sex are too ashamed to come out in the open. The notion that some affluent Christians and pastors also participate in “after dark” same-sex intercourse was met with unanimous agreement and excitement from the participants. The question I raise is: why these affluent “straight Christian men” engage in same-sex sex under the cover of darkness? It could be because they wish to maintain the status quo as some of them may be married to women but still have sex with other men either out of sexual attraction or because they are financially capable of paying for same-sex sex.

Cheeczy Babz³⁶ added that:

You can question the agenda that these “some of us” (affluent) churches have because they are just too anti-homosexual in their preaching. As if homosexuality is the only sin. In this country we have corruption, raping of infants and adultery which they do not preach about but emphasize on homosexuality. So what is their interest in their preaching, if not to promote homophobia? It’s not like there are no gays in *komboni* (shanty compounds), they are there and am sure they are not bothered even in churches because it is rare that you will hear a pastor in *komboni* (shanty compounds) preach about this, it is not their business.

The participant echoed sentiments that Christian MLM felt unwelcome in affluent churches because of the anti-homosexual sermons preached in these churches; this does not seem to be the case in churches located on the outskirts of the city. Though the homophobia may not be physical, it is still verbally expressed in emotionally charged ways that make Christian MLM uncomfortable in the affluent churches. A paramount question is: do affluent churches also influence their surrounding communities or communities they are located in to be intolerant of Christian MLM? This was not addressed by responses from focus group discussions. This would then help in understanding which communities in Zambia would be termed more embracing of persons of same-sex orientation and which ones are not. It could also show how influential the affluent churches in Zambia are in discourses around same-sex orientation. Cheeczy Babz makes

³⁶ Study participant’s pseudonym.

an assumption that since churches located on the outskirts of the city do not preach about same-sex orientation, then the communities on the outskirts are more embracing towards Christian MLM.

To show that what Christian MLM expressed is a reality in Zambia, van Klinken analyzed sermons in one of the affluent churches in Zambia as preached by Banda, and asserts that:

in various sermons, Banda expresses his astonishment that in a same-sex relationship, as he sees it, one of the partners does not behave as he or she is supposed to do, but tries to perform an alternative role. For him, it is an obvious “distortion of God’s order” when a man or a woman deliberately ignores the role he or she is to play according to his or her biological sex (2011:134)

Based on heterosexual assumptions of what goes on in same-sex relationships, sermons are preached on how same-sex orientation is an affront to God’s order. Sermons preached in affluent churches are cited as a source of homophobia by Christian MLM. Meanwhile, Russell highlights the general inhuman treatment of homosexual people, especially in the church, arguing that “it is surely true to say that in the tradition of the Church, the attitude of the Christians towards homosexuality has been largely cruelly rejecting. The Church has made outcasts of these sisters and brothers in Christ, in a demeaning and judgmental way” (2011:30). The churches which ought to be welcoming to all persons and places of solace are instead cited as places that hurt Christian MLM through exclusion and judgmental attitudes. Though Christian MLM expressed how unwelcome they felt in affluent churches because of some homophobic sermons, the vital question is why do they still remain committed members of churches which do not welcome them? This question is important because it would provide us with answers on the paradox of how Christian MLM may in fact be alien but still at home in these churches.

Having established how Christian MLM experience their sexual orientation in the churches, the next two themes will look at what Christian MLM regard as the churches’ views about them and their sexual orientation.

5.2. God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve

The biblical creation accounts have been used by the churches in some instances to maintain their stance on male-female relations. This renders same-sex orientation deviant because God is believed to have created Adam (male) and Eve (female) and not Adam (male) and Steve (male). When Christian MLM were asked to discuss what they hold as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation, thereby offer their experiential realities, the Adam and Steve teaching from the churches was met with a lot of group excitement and acknowledgement. This response came up in the discussions as one participant commented that the church regards their same-sex orientation as being contrary to the divine plan for human sexuality. Duke³⁷ had this to say:

At one time, I challenged my pastor³⁸ on his Adam and Steve teachings because he insisted that the image of God comes packaged as Adam and Eve. He asked me if I was one of them. I did not answer him because I felt that was immaterial. The church will condemn our sexual orientation and make us feel less than the so-called straight people but when they need our services or even finances, then we are welcome. When they want you to play the keyboard, they will forget you are gay; they use us as they wish. In my church, I have been given the position as youth leader by my pastor, but I feel it is one way of him trying to stop me from being gay.

From this response, the participant felt that the churches regard Christian MLM as lesser human beings in comparison to heterosexuals. Because they choose to engage in Adam and Steve love, then they are understood by the churches as losing some elements needed for one to be fully human, which are only attained through Adam and Eve relations. This implies that the churches hold that Christian MLM, on account of their sexual orientation, do not possess all the qualities needed for them to be understood as the *imago Dei* because they are not heterosexual. Duke also pointed out that the churches condemn Christian MLM's sexual orientation. The implication of this statement would be that the churches do not accept Christian MLM's sexual orientation because sexual attraction for another male is viewed as unnatural. Another point raised by this participant is that the churches deliberately forget about Christian MLM's sexual orientation in

³⁷ Study participant's pseudonym.

³⁸ The scope of my study did not involve getting views from this pastor mentioned by the study participant.

times when they require Christian MLM to make financial contributions and to use their skills in the churches. The question then is: why this inconsistency in the churches' treatment of Christian MLM? It would be expected that since the churches are not comfortable about Christian MLM loving other men, then it would only be right not to use their skills as well. From the above response, the churches embrace Christian MLM only when they stand to benefit from them but do not necessarily care about their welfare.

To show how deep-rooted the "Adam and Eve" teachings are in the churches, Angelic³⁹ had this to say:

I keep being asked by people in my church when I am getting married. Some married women have even introduced me to single women in church, out of fear that *ningabapampule* (I might snatch their husbands). They tell me, as a man, it is not right for me to live alone, that I must marry and that when I marry, I will be fulfilling the will of God for my life. These are the same people who know that I am into men, for them, a man and another man, it's not possible. Those with the courage tell *mbeu yabwino so nionoga* (I am wasting such a good seed). If they had their way, they would force these single women on me.

This participant's response not only pointed out the Adam and Eve position that the churches hold with regards to issues of same-sex orientation, but also the traditional Zambian worldview in which the Zambia churches are located, where every adult male is expected to marry an adult female and sire children. The notion that Christian MLM engage in fruitless sexual relations where "the good seed" is wasted on another male is expressed in this response. It is assumed by a majority of Christians and churches that instead of procreating, Adam and Steve sexual relations result in wasted good seed. This raises questions on the purpose of sexual relations, why they have to be restricted only to procreation and if it is a given that all sexual unions between male and female should result in procreation. Thus, as a Christian MLM, Angelic is viewed by his fellow Christians (who are shaped by the churches' teachings on same-sex orientation) as abrogating the will of God for his life, which is only attained through male to female relations.

³⁹ Study participant's pseudonym.

From the above responses, Christian MLM are viewed by the churches as going against God's plan of creating male and female. Van Klinken once more agrees with the assertions made by these Christian MLM by citing sermons by Bishop Joshua Banda who contends that "in creation God made them male and female. It is Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. In creation, we see a man and a woman in their respective roles" (Banda as quoted by van Klinken 2011:137). Salient in this insistence on God creating male and female is an assumption of the fulfillment of divinely sanctioned prescriptive gender roles. Since Christian MLM love other males and not females, they are assumed not to be fulfilling their role as males, which is to have sexual unions with females and bear children.

Tongarasei and Chitando agree with both observations made by Christian MLM and van Klinken and thus add that this teaching is upheld "on the basis of the creation stories, the fact that God created Adam (male) and Eve (female) has been used to argue that heterosexual relationships are normative. Because God created man and woman, natural sex is therefore heterosexual while homosexual is unnatural" (2011:112). The literal interpretation of Adam to mean male and Eve to mean female is what the churches have used to view same-sex orientation as unnatural, thus, condemning Christian MLM as negating their roles as males. Teachings of a male and female being created as complementary entities is countered when a male is sexually attracted to another male and engages in loving and growth enhancing relations. This shows that heterosexual relations are not a given and need not be pictured as the ideal especially where the churches have Christian MLM within their walls. Since the teaching that male and female are created for each other has been very influential in how churches regard persons of same-sex orientation, the next theme will look at how the churches views Christian MLM as sinful, satanic and abnormal.

5.3. Christian MLM as sinful, satanic and sick

Christian MLM have continued to be condemned, neglected and questioned by the church on account of their sexual orientation. As noted above (5.1), Christian MLM do not feel welcome in the churches due to homophobic sermons preached about them. When participants were asked on what they hold as the churches' views about them, Blackson⁴⁰ had this to say:

⁴⁰ Study participant's pseudonym.

The church mistreats us as gays. I don't feel any peace when I am in church because I am on guard to hear what the pastor will preach, what the elder might or what other church-mates will say about me. Usually, preaching on homosexuality insists that men who love other men are sinful and immoral but what is the standard for morality? Is it the laws of Zambia or the Bible? Sodomy is what is criminal but the church pulls this sodomy law to support its stance. When they use the Bible,⁴¹ they use Leviticus that you shall not lie with another man and the famous creation of Adam and Eve. They do not read these scriptures in their contexts and that is where the problem comes in.

The response depicts how the churches view Christian MLM as sinful and immoral by use of the Adam and Eve teaching. From this response, Blackson does not offer in-depth analysis of what the churches understand as morality, hence the vital question arises on what the churches hold as morality. Implications are that since Christian MLM are regarded as immoral by virtue of their sexual orientation, then what is moral is heterosexual orientation. According to Blackson, the Bible and Zambian constitution are used as sources of authority in condemning same-sex orientation and Christian MLM. Failure to contextualize scripture on issues same-sex orientation is cited as another source for condemnation of Christian MLM.

MeLove⁴² commented that:

Almost all preachers I have listened to call same-sex orientation as sin. If I stood up in my church and said I am homosexual, I am sure they would say I have gone nuts because for them, homosexuality is abnormal and satanic. Others say hate the sin but love the sinner. In this same idea of love the sinner, many pastors have prayed for men who love other men in order to remove the sin of homosexuality from their bodies. For me, this is not real love because they fail to accept what God has created in its original state but only want to be at peace with it only when it fits their human standards.

⁴¹ Moore in analysing the use of the Bible in discussing homosexuality asserts that “the social, political, cultural and religious contexts within which these texts were written are not ours, and often very foreign to us...it is then important to know also, as best as we can, why the text in question condemns that activity, what it is about the activity that makes it objectionable according to the text” (2003:59). Moore highlights the need to understand Biblical texts on homosexuality from the context in which they are written from.

⁴² Study participant's pseudonym.

As pointed out by MeLove, Christian MLM are considered by the churches as sinful, satanic and mentally disturbed on account of their sexual orientation, thus in need of prayer for them to be healed of their same-sex orientation. The idea of ‘love the sin’ and ‘hate the sinner’ as highlighted by MeLove raises questions as to what constitutes sin and how do the churches understand sin? This question is important because the notion of same-sex orientation being viewed as a sin brings to the fore distorted understandings of the concept of sin in the churches. Since the sin which Christian MLM are accused of committing is not clearly stipulated by the churches, the concept of sin in this case leaves room for speculation. Whether Christian MLM sin by conforming to being who they are as men who love other men, which is in line with who they are created to be by God, is not made clear by the churches. Same-sex orientation is also associated with being under satanic influence and Christian MLM are equated to Satanists. From my experience as a Zambian, persons believed to be Satanists are feared in society, thus, by being tagged as such, Christian MLM who are open about their sexuality are most likely feared in the churches and community.

That Christian MLM who are open about their sexual orientation are feared and neglected in the churches was highlighted by Tracy Kelly⁴³ who said:

I came out⁴⁴ about my being a man who loves other men to my church elder and news spread in church that I was gay. The next Sunday when I went to church, no one wanted to sit next to me. During service, the pastor preached about me from head to toe, that I was unfit to be part of the society; that I would burn in hell if I did not repent. Have you ever been preached about? Imagine how I felt, all alone in the pew and the sermon was about me. I was hurt and when we came out of church, people kept pointing fingers at me and whispering *mwaka ona ka homosexual ako* (have you seen that homosexual). After that, I was prayed for, to remove this homosexual-spirit because pastor said I was sick and demon possessed. I went to *kumaphili* (the mountains) for prayers, nothing changed.

⁴³ Study participant’s pseudonym.

⁴⁴ Peter Davies argues that “coming out is a long and winding road: a series of realignments in perception, evaluation, and commitment, driven by the affirmation ‘I am gay’” (1992:75). It takes a long time for Christian MLM to start freely speaking about their sexual orientation, but the process would be said to be bearable through acceptance of one’s sexual orientation.

From this response based on Tracy Kelly's experience, Christian MLM are viewed by the churches as deviant, sinful and in need of repentance and that they are physically and spiritually ill. The churches in turn take it upon themselves to heal them of their same-sex orientation using prayer. The notion that same-sex orientation can be healed through prayer is rife in the churches because it is regarded as a spiritual problem needing a spiritual solution. This usually results in Christian MLM being subjected to endless prayers and other rituals prevalent in the traditional Zambian setup.

Blackson⁴⁵ shared his own experience and had this to say:

My mother called her fellow charismatic prayer warriors from church to pray for me. For them, I was sick and needed to be prayed for in order for me to go back to being normal. They prayed until they got tired. When she noticed that there was no change, she carried me off to some traditional healers who made me drink concoctions and made five hundred and twelve lacerations all over my body. They left me half buried in the bush and only pulled me out the following day. When you are gay you are assumed to be abnormal, sick and in need of deliverance.

Following responses on what Christian MLM hold as the churches' views about them and their sexual orientation, it is understandable why many men who love other men opt to remain in the closet about their sexual orientation. When they try to openly live as Christian MLM, they are subjected to being stigmatized and in some cases have prayers forced on them in an attempt to cure them of their "wrong" sexual orientation. Allan Boesak agrees with these responses and states that the churches view "homosexuality is 'deviant', 'sinful', and a disease that should be cured" (2011:11). These three misconceptions about same-sex orientation and Christian MLM abound within some sections of the church which emphasize that the church should love the sinner (person of same-sex orientation) and not the sin of the practice of homosexuality. A vital question as I have argued above is: at what point is a person of same-sex orientation considered a sinner and why? If Christian MLM live according to their innate sexual orientation, then they are only fulfilling God's intentions for their lives. The imposed prayers to cure Christian MLM also bring into question how the churches understand prayer and its efficacy, love and sin. Love as

⁴⁵ Study participant's pseudonym.

rightly noted by one participant does not require a person to fit into a particular box for him or her to be considered worthy of acceptance. Greathead, Devenish and Funnell agree that the churches view Christian MLM as mentally ill and in need of healing and curing as they argue that persons of same-sex orientation continues to be “viewed as a mental illness or a perversion requiring psychiatric treatment” (2002:117). To emphasize that same-sex orientation is neither a disease nor mental instability, Isaacs and McKendrick contend that “confusion lies in the association of homosexual behavior with mental abnormality. While it is true that in isolated instances homosexual behavior can be exhibited by persons with personality disorders, the same is true of heterosexual behavior. The overwhelming majority of homosexuals are mentally healthy people” (1992:5). Christian MLM are neither mentally sick, sinful nor satanic thus, when they are referred to as such by the churches, chances are that a lot of damage is done to their spirituality, self-esteem, character and happiness.

5.4. Summary

This chapter has presented what Christian MLM hold as the churches’ views about them and their sexual orientation, based on the research findings during the second set of FGDs with Christian MLM in Zambia. I have established that the location in which a church is situated contributes to its reaction towards same-sex orientation and Christian MLM. I have argued that education and wealth levels are factors in how open churches are in discussing issues of sexual orientation in their sermons, as two participants noted the differences in sermons preached in affluent and outskirts churches in Lusaka. Although affluent churches are more open to discussing issues of same-sex orientation than outskirts churches, their openness mostly leads to predominantly negative messages on same-sex orientation. I have also established that churches on the outskirts of Lusaka uphold a traditional Zambian worldview which then makes them silent on issues of sexuality, thereby making same-sex orientation a non-issue. This chapter has also established that the churches view same-sex orientation as an affront to God’s creation plan for humanity; citing the Adam and Eve teachings based on creation accounts. The chapter has also established that Christian MLM are regarded by the churches as satanic, sinful and sick. In this chapter, I present strong argument concerning what constitutes sin when it comes to issues of same-sex orientation and hold that Christian MLM are only being who they are when they

choose to love other men. Having established in this chapter what Christian MLM hold as the churches' views of them and their sexual orientation, the next chapter will conclude the thesis with a review of the salient features of this study.

Chapter six

Conclusion

6.0. Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion of the work that this dissertation covered. The study generally has shown that Christian MLM consider themselves to be created in the image of God and that their sexual orientation is not a hindrance to them being part of the *imago Dei*. The study has also highlighted that Christian MLM hold that the churches view them as being an affront to the image of God and sinful. The study aimed to explore how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and the image of God amidst the general teachings of the three church mother bodies on the image of God and same-sex orientation. Employing postcolonial and queer theories and incipient theologies as frameworks in this study, the findings show that Christian MLM do not regard their sexual orientation as wrong, they in fact view themselves as loving other men, and thereby, exhibiting traits of the loving God in whose image they are created. This chapter provides a summary of the work covered in each chapter, evaluated on the research topic and objectives. The chapter will also show how this study contributes to the body of knowledge in the area of this study and points to new possible areas of future research, as well as raising recommendations for practical actions.

6.1. Summary of the chapters

A summary of chapters covered in this work will be evaluated based on the research topic and objectives thereof. This topic of this study is “A Gendered Perspective on the Intersectionality between Same-Sex Orientation and the *Imago Dei*: A Case Study of Men who Love other Men in Lusaka-Zambia”.

Chapter one aimed to give a general introduction to the study. The chapter presented the outline of the background to the topic, motivation, introduction to key terms and location of the study, introducing theory and methodology, research design and my positioning within this study.

Chapter two aimed to give an outline the general teachings on the *imago Dei* and same-sex orientation in particular of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia and Council of Churches in Zambia. The chapter established that the three church mother bodies do not generally approve of the practice of same-sex sex despite acknowledging that all persons are created in the image of God. Salient in this chapter were the sources of authority that the church uses in discourses on same-sex orientation, which are the Bible, church tradition, African culture and the national constitution. This chapter also established that the churches have not overtly linked the terms “same-sex orientation” and “*imago Dei*” in their general teachings.

Chapter three focused on creating an intersection between the terms “same-sex orientation” and “*imago Dei*”. In this chapter, I acknowledged that creating the intersection between these two terms is not generally explicit; hence, I explored this correlation in relation to Christian MLM. The chapter highlighted issues of Christian MLM’s much contested identity, and brought to fore factors that contribute to the identity formation of Christian MLM. The chapter also highlighted how general theological anthropological teachings based on sexual orientation tend to exclude Christian MLM from the bracket of the *imago Dei*, thus once more raising identity issues for Christian MLM. This chapter began by addressing issues of identity related to when Christian MLM are identified by whom they choose to love and have sexual relations with. The chapter then offered analysis of some factors that contribute to Christian MLM’s identity formation. Central to this chapter was where I created the intersection between same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* as these two terms are fundamental to the identity of Christian MLM. It was established that creating the intersection between these two terms is only possible once both human sexuality and God are queered, to allow for a non-heteronormative understanding of the aforementioned. In a bid to bring same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* closer to the Zambian context, the chapter provided an analysis of why the same-sex debate is taking place, arguing that same-sex orientation challenges patriarchy, heterosexuality and the traditional Zambia understanding of sexuality.

Chapter four explored how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God, based on research fieldwork findings conducted among fifteen Zambian Christian MLM. Based on the recurring and unanimously held

views by Christian MLM during the first set of paired focus group discussions, where the group was asked to discuss how they understand their sexual orientation and the image of God, a set of themes emerged. The understanding that their sexual orientation is genetic and that Christian MLM do not have any control over their sexual orientation was unanimous. This chapter also established the importance of a supportive family system in helping Christian MLM understand their same-sex orientation. This chapter has also established that Christian MLM understand that their same-sex orientation has no bearing on them being created in the *imago Dei*. In fact, they understand themselves as being reflections of what it means to be created in the image of God through loving other men.

Chapter five explored what Christian MLM hold as the churches views about them and their sexual orientation. The chapter established that the location in which a church is situated contributes to its reaction towards same-sex orientation and Christian MLM. I further argued that silence in outskirts churches on issues of same-sex orientation may be due to the traditional Zambian worldview which informs their approach to issues of sexuality. The chapter also established that affluent churches are open in discussing same-sex orientation but that their messages are mostly against the practice of same-sex orientation. This chapter has shown that the churches generally view same-sex orientation as an affront to God's creation plan for humanity; citing the Adam and Eve teachings based on creation accounts. The chapter further established that Christian MLM are regarded by the churches as satanic, sinful and sick.

6.2. Study's contribution to the body of knowledge

This study has contributed to the already existing body of knowledge in this area in the following three ways. First, the study has combined the use of three frameworks providing an interdisciplinary approach to this work which aimed to explore how Christian MLM in Lusaka-Zambia understand their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God amidst the general teachings of the three church mother bodies on the same-sex orientation and *imago Dei*. This study used elements of postcolonial theory, queer theory and incipient theology as lenses through which to capture how Christian MLM understand their sexual orientation and the *imago Dei*. The focus within postcolonial theory was on identity of Christian MLM in general which was complemented by queer theory whose focus was on sexual identity of Christian MLM.

Meanwhile incipient theologies as posited by Cochrane (1999) focussed on the marginal voices of Christian MLM as the starting point for this study. Through this study, understandings of Christian MLM based on their experiences of their sexual orientation and being created in the image of God were brought forth, hence highlighting their contested sexual identity based on their sexual orientation.

Second, this study brought together the terms “same-sex orientation” and “*imago Dei*” that have usually been used separately in the teachings of the churches in Zambia. This study established this link through the analysis of available literature (chapter three, 3.4) and also through the fieldwork research conducted among Christian MLM (chapter four) who helped merge these two terms, the intersection of which shapes their identity. The linking of these two terms in this study is important because it has demonstrated how Christian MLM view themselves as the image of God because they love other men.

Third, this study has established how men of same-sex orientation view the terms usually used in addressing them such as ‘gay’, ‘homosexuals’ and ‘MSM’. From the FGDs, a new term for addressing men of same sex orientation emerged; that is, “Men who Love other Men” (4.2). This is important because it contributes an emic conceptualization to academic terminologies on issues of same-sex orientation, shifting focus from what happens in same-sex relationships (MSM) to what necessitates same-sex relationships (MLM).

Fourth, my study has also brought to fore the difference between heteronormative and Christian MLM’s understanding of the *imago Dei*. Having shown that Christian MLM do not understand the image of God in terms of male-female sexual complementarity but instead highlight love and justice as essential elements of the *imago Dei*, Christian MLM have through this study questioned the heteronormative conceptualization of *imago Dei* and challenged this by claiming the *imago Dei* for themselves. This is vital because not only do they challenge the *imago Dei* as understood by heterosexual men and women who make up the churches in Zambia, but they also challenge the worldwide church’s doctrinal teachings on the *imago Dei*, thereby, offering their own interpretation of the image of God which has nothing to do with sexual orientation or procreation.

Lastly, in this study the starting point were the voices and experiences of Christian MLM, providing an emic approach to the study (chapters four and five), unlike the etic approach that has been predominant in approaching issues of same-sex orientation. This study has contributed to the body of already established knowledge on issues of same-sex orientation because it captures the views of Christian MLM on how they understand and experience their sexual orientation and the image of God. By capturing views of Christian MLM, this study not only puts faces to persons of same-sex orientation but also refutes assertions that bodies do not speak; embodied theologies have been highlighted through this study.

6.3. Possible areas of future research

As this study is neither final nor exhaustive, suggestions and questions for possible areas of future research arise.

First, it would be informative to conduct an empirical research on how women who love other women understand their sexual orientation, especially because the Zambian constitution, society and churches do not explicitly mention their sexual orientation as wrong.

Second, empirical research on how Christian MLM construct their masculinities within the Zambian context is worth exploring. This study has focussed on what Christian MLM hold as the church's view about them and their sexual orientation but has not dealt with masculinities among Christian MLM. An exploration into how Christian MLM construct their masculinities within the Zambian religio-cultural context would be informative.

Third, having discussed the general teachings of the three church mother bodies on same-sex orientation and the *imago Dei* (chapter two), it would be imperative to explore how church theology has evolved in the twenty first century to accommodate LGBTIQA communities. This study could be conducted from a context like South Africa which may be more embracing of persons of same-sex orientation.

Lastly, studies into the process of acclimatization to one's sexual orientation, especially for persons of same-sex orientation, are another area worth investigating. This was highlighted

during this study but was not fully explored. It would be enlightening to know the role the family plays in this process of acclimatization to one's sexual orientation, especially in the Zambian context where same-sex orientation remains illegal. Dennis-Joachim Dlamini (2005) in his Doctoral thesis "Contextual and Theological Factors Influencing the Practice of Pastoral Counselling with Families of Gays with Special Reference to South Africa" argues that gayness is part of the core of African culture and experience. He stresses that dialogue is the basis of all relevant pastoral practice, and that a pastorally appropriate response to the families of black gays will involve a dialogue between gays, their families, the church, the Bible and society. Despite this already existing work which is from a South African context that is generally more embracing of same-sex orientation, I still argue that there is need to explore this from a Zambian context.

6.4. Recommendations

Following this study, I propose the following two recommendations. First, that we revisit understandings of human sexuality and suggest a hermeneutic of love. By human sexuality being viewed only in light of heterosexual reproductive ability, other essential elements that go with sexual relations such as love, care and companionship are overshadowed, and yet they are present in life-affirming relations that Christian MLM engage in. I agree with Hammer (2004:455-456) who succinctly asserts that a hermeneutic of love opens same-sex unions and marriages where procreation is absent to possible avenues of love, care for life, and community living as the main foci. The church in general and Zambia in particular needs to undergo a paradigm shift to embrace other sexualities and not only heterosexism.

I also propose a re-look at the *imago Dei* teachings which emphasize a "theology of complementarity" (Russell 2012:22) at the expense of persons of same-sex orientation. The theology of complementarity needs to be problematized by both the churches and persons of same-sex orientation as it has been the major argument used by churches to counter same-sex unions. Whilst appreciating the role this theology has played in enhancing human population, it need not be absolutized as the only correct way of being created in the image of God.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the work covered in this study, categorized according to each chapter and evaluated based on the research topic and objectives to show that the aim of this study has been attained. This chapter showed how this study has contributed to the body of knowledge in the area of this study and pointed to new possible areas of future research. In this chapter, I recommend a revisit to the understanding of human sexuality and propose a hermeneutic of love. I also recommend a critique of the theology of complementarity in understanding the image of God which needs to be undertaken by both the church in Zambia and also Zambian Christian MLM.

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Appendix one: Pseudonyms of study participants

1. Angelic
2. Blackson
3. Bob Spinks
4. Cheecky Babz
5. Chizo
6. Chola
7. Duke
8. Kapande
9. Ken
10. Lolo
11. MeLove
12. Springer
13. Pretty
14. Tracy Kelly
15. Vin

Appendix two: Consent Letter

CONSENT LETTER FOR RESEARCH TO CONDUCTED BY LILLY PHIRI (211513491)

Title of Project: “Who is Doing Who?” A Gendered Perspective on the Intersectionality between Same-Sex Orientation and the *Imago Dei*: A Case Study of Men who have Sex with other Men in Lusaka-Zambia.

Academic Supervisor: Professor Gerald West **Email:** west@ukzn.ac.za

Researcher’s Name: Lilly Phiri **Email:** phiri.lilly@yahoo.com **Cell:** +260976639668 or +27712122925

Study Overview: I am a Master’s student in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) and conducting a research under the supervision of Prof. Gerald West.

You are invited to participate in a study exploring how you understand your sexual orientation and the image of God. Past research has demonstrated dominant theologies’ understanding of same-sex orientation. This study will extend previous research by exploring your voices on same-sex orientation and the image of God.

What You Will Be Asked to Do: As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in four focus group discussions (which will be paired in sets) within your already existing structures. The two main questions that you be asked to discuss in these focus group discussions are;

1. How do you understand your sexual orientation and the image of God?
2. How do you experience your sexual orientation and how does the church view you in light of your sexual orientation?

Participation and Remuneration: Participation in this study is voluntary, and will take approximately 60 minutes of your time per focus group discussion. You will be served with light snacks during this study.

You may decline to answer any questions presented during the study if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time by advising the researcher, and may do so without any penalty.

Personal Benefits of the Study: The benefits of participation in this study include you being able to speak about your lived experiences and also coming up with theologies arising from your own experiences. You will receive additional background information about the study. There are no other personal benefits for participation.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Be assured that this study will be held in confidentiality and all discussions will only be used for purposes of this study and any publications that may result from this study. Your name will not be used during and after the study, thus, you shall be allowed to choose a code or a pseudonym so that you remain anonymous.

Risks to Participation in the Study: Risks that may arise from this study are minimal. You shall be accorded all the respect and to ensure that no harm comes your way, all focus group discussions will be held in the venue where you always meet for your usual group meetings.

Questions and Research Ethics Clearance: If after receiving this letter, you have any questions about this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel

free to ask the me or my academic supervisor listed at the top of this letter.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Thank you for your interest in our research and for your assistance with this project.

Consent of Participant

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by *(names of researcher)* under the supervision of Prof. *(names of academic supervisor)* of the School of Religion, Philosophy and classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I may withdraw from the study without any penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Study participant’s code or pseudonym:.....

Signature of participant:.....

Date:.....

Signature of Group Leader/Witness:.....

THANK YOU.

Appendix three: Research instrument

Focus group questions

FDG1 main question: How do you understand your sexual orientation and the image of God?

Potential sub-questions:

- How do you as an individual understand your sexual orientation?
- What are some of the factors that have contributed to your understanding of your sexual orientation?
- As Christians (human beings), we understand ourselves to be created in the image of God, what does it generally mean for humans to be created in the image of God?
- What does being created in the image of God mean for you as a person of same-sex orientation?
- In your own understanding, is there any relationship between the way you understand your sexual orientation and your understanding of the image of God? If (yes or no), explain more.
- Does the way you understand your sexual orientation influence how you understanding the being created in the image of God?
- Does the way you understand the image of God influence how you understand your sexual orientation?
 - Is there anything more you would like to add to what we have just discussed?

FDG2 main question: How do you experience your sexual orientation and how do the churches view you in light of your sexual orientation?

Potential sub-questions:

- Living in the Zambian context where your sexual orientation is constantly questioned and condemned, how do you experience your sexual orientation both in the churches and community?
- In light of your sexual orientation, would you care to briefly share some of your lived experiences?

- The church teaches that “all humans are created in the image of God”, do you experience this in your own life in the church as a person of same-sex orientation?
- How do the churches view your sexual orientation?
- What are some of the general teachings the church uses as its basis for its views on your sexual orientation?
- Given your sexual orientation, how does the church view you as a person?
- What are some of the general teachings the churches use as their basis for their views on you as a person of same-sex orientation?
- Is there are difference between what the churches teach on human beings being created in the image of God and how they view you as a person of same-sex orientation?
 - Is there anything more you would like to add to what we have already discussed?