

# **INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**(Re)constructing Gender: A Holistic Strategy to  
Controlling HIV/AIDS in Kenya**



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**(Re)constructing Gender: A Holistic Strategy to  
Controlling HIV/AIDS in Kenya**

**Eunice Karanja Kamaara**

**MOI UNIVERSITY**  
**≡ PRESS** 

## **Food for Thought**

*"Weka wega, niwe weika, weka uuru, niwe weika"*

(Anne Nduta Kamaara)

*"When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad. And that's my religion."*

(Abraham Lincoln, U.S. President (1809-1865))



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ISBN: 9966-854-84-3

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## Acknowledgment

*“Those who drink the water must remember those who dug the well”* (Chinese proverb)

I am not here by accident. If I were not standing before you at this very moment in this very space, and if any one of you were not present today, it would not be me. For before God formed me in my mother’s womb, God knew me and designed it that on this 29th day of March 2012 I would be standing here at Moi University giving my inaugural lecture before this distinguished audience. To God be all Glory and Honour.

The first half of life on which the foundation of my academic career is built, revolved around my family: my deepest gratitude goes to my heroine and my mentor in the school of life, Mrs. Anne Nduta Kamaara. Without her and my late father, Stephen Mwaura Kamaara, I would not be. She has been a pillar of strength and a source of faith in God. This faith was handed down from my late grandparents: Thera Wanjiru and Samuel Mbugua wa Regeru (Thaai, thathaiya Ngai, thaai). My siblings: Kamaara, Mbugua, Munene, Regeru, Nancy, Wanjiru, Thera, Uto, among many others in my extended family provide me with identity and immense social security that for me, J.S. Mbiti’s words “I am because we are and because we are I am” means just that. I thank them immensely.

Words are inadequate to express my indebtedness and love to my husband, Francis Karanja, and our children Kevin Kamiri and Edita Wairimu. These have taken the toll of my academic career development. Yet, they have stood by me; encouraged me; and inspired me through it all. I thank God for every one of them for they give me a purpose to live.

My life ‘with books’ began in Ngemwa Primary School where Teacher Waruiru taught me how to hold a pen and to sing the alphabet in lower classes while Teacher Rachel, King’oi and Muroki picked this up in upper classes. I remember Teacher Muroki fondly. His strokes of cane put many of us on the straight and narrow path. My teachers in Kiambu High School built on what I had learnt in primary school to prepare me for specialized academic life. My no-nonsense headmaster, Mr. Cyrus Wahome, provided great inspiration on many occasions. He once described me as a ‘cultural fighter’ and even though at the time I did not know what it meant, I knew it was a positive label. The bulk of time over the last two decades of my life has been spent at Moi University where I have had opportunity to learn and teach across various levels and disciplines. I remain forever indebted to Moi

University for this opportunity. Among what I have enjoyed most is working closely with young people in different capacities in both private and public arenas which have been mutually reinforcing. This has afforded me the opportunity to discuss the subject of gender and sex intensively with young people. This has been a great learning process and of so great joy to live that I have absolutely no regrets of the road that I took in my professional life. This lecture is a synthesis of data and experiences accrued over many years. I owe my career development to all my students for it is out of my interaction with them that I developed interest in the specific area of youth sexuality and a desire to work with youth beyond the four walls of the classroom. This has expanded my career beyond academic work. As I seek to translate knowledge that I generate in research into practical development for young people, I continue to learn and unlearn a lot on holistic health of young people. Moi University has nurtured me academically and the following organizations have funded my academic work: AACC, AAWORD, CWS, Ford Foundation, OSSREA, The World Bank, International Institute of Education, UNFPA, USAID, WCC, among others. My gratitude to them is inexpressible.

If I have made it in my career, it is because there were many academic giants by whose feet I sat and on whose shoulders I stepped to see far. In gratitude, I mention my teachers and mentors who have inspired me: the late Prof. Hannah Kinoti, Prof. JNK Mugambi, Prof. GEM Ogutu, Prof. Gregor Wolbring, Prof. EA.Obeng, Prof. EM. Kasiera, Prof. Fr. JK Njino, Prof. J. Akonga, Rev. Dr. CB Peter, Prof. M Nyangweso and Prof. M. Getui. There are many others who will remain unnamed but only for lack of space. To all my colleagues in The School (School of Arts and Social Sciences) and more specifically, in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, thank you for your support over many years. If this lecture is well prepared and is well presented, it is because some of my family members, colleagues and students contributed to the process. Worthy special mention is Joyce Majanja of the Moi University Press. Her professional expertise and sense of aesthetics account for the final look of this lecture. However, I take sole responsibility of all errors herein.

I would not forget to mention my circles of girlfriends who have provided me with space and occasion to unwind as we “T and laugh” together. Thank you, gals. You are the reason I remain sane in spite of the challenges of life.

THANK YOU ALL

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## **Abstract**

If power is as fundamental to our understanding of the human social world as energy is to our understanding of the physical world, gender is the gravitational theme around which human development revolves. From the moment of birth, individual human persons are socialized on power dynamics as they observe gender relations within the most basic social unit, the family. Thus, gender injustice, basically manifested in sexual encounters, is the archetypal distortion from which all other forms of oppressive social structures and systems proceed. Traditionally, socio-cultural definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity (gender) expect men to dominate and women to be subordinate in sexual encounters. Thus, men are expected to be sexually aggressive and active towards meeting their sexual needs by making decisions on when, where, how and with whom sex takes place while women are expected to be passive and respond to male needs without expressing their own. In spite of modernity and gender empowerment programs, at the dawn of the 21st century gender relations remain largely unaffected.

Findings from my research since the early 1990s, concur with others from various parts of the world that unequal gender relations are positively related to sexual activity and consequently to HIV and AIDS spread. From an African Christian ethical and theological perspective, I focus on unequal gender power in youth sexual activity and profess gender reconstruction for the control of HIV/AIDS in Kenya. Additionally, I profess gender reconstruction as a means to overcome endemic poverty and drive the attainment of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but more specifically for achievement of the goal on combating HIV/AIDS. At the national level, I operate within The Kenya Vision 2030, the national blueprint for development towards a better Kenya. Gender justice cuts across the three pillars of the vision: economic pillar, social pillar and political pillar, all of which are founded on individual and social morality, the central concern of this lecture.

Imperative to development is the academy. Moi University Strategic Plan: 2005-2015 focuses on the pillars of Vision 2030 to invest in the education of the people of Kenya. Among the prioritized strategic issues and objectives of the plan is achieving excellence in academic, research and extension programs. Within the University, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies focuses on enhancing understanding and promotion of the positive role of

religion, a pervasively influential phenomenon in contemporary multicultural world. The call for gender reconstruction derived from my study of religion from interdisciplinary perspectives contribute to our society's development agenda as envisioned in both Moi University Strategic Plan and Vision 2030.

This inaugural lecture is divided into four parts. In the introductory part, I locate my journey in search of knowledge in the Study of Religion from interdisciplinary (socio-anthropological, ethical, theological and gender) perspectives thereby illustrating human attempts, successes, and limitations to knowledge and knowledge creation for development. I begin the second part of the lecture with a presentation of the complex socio-cultural and religious contexts within which young people in Kenya live. Against this background, I then present the sexual behaviour of young people showing how gender is embedded in it thereby bringing out the positive relationship between gender relations and HIV/ AIDS spread. The third part provides a solution towards addressing the undesirable situation of gender relations and youth sexual activity by presenting what I profess: gender reconstruction. The practicality of gender reconstruction is demonstrated in the last part of the lecture which presents a local community based and community participatory initiative that has a holistic strategy towards transforming the situation of bad news of HIV/AIDS into good news.

## Citation

Four ululations marked the birth of Eunice Wanjiku alias Nyanginya on January 5, 1965 in Ngemwa Village, Ikinu location, Githunguri Division in Kiambu, Kenya into a big warm family of many grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and three sisters and four brothers. She is the last born child of two strict Presbyterian and disciplinarians: the late Stephen Mwaura Kamaara (*koma thayu mwendwo-ni iri - RIP*) and Anne Nduta Kamaara.

Wanjiku joined PCEA Ngemwa Primary School (Kwa Watatua) in 1971 and sat for the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) in 1978. She passed well and proceeded to Kiambu High School where she did her Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in 1982 and was awarded a Division II pass. She returned to Kiambu High for “A” levels and sat Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education (KACE) in 1984 which she passed with three principles and one subsidiary. Wanjiku joined the Kenya National pre-University Youth Service in Gilgil and Naivasha in 1986 and later joined the University of Nairobi where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Religion in 1989. It is in the same year that Wanjiku graduated also into full womanhood when she got married to Francis Karanja, into a Roman Catholic family upon which she ‘naturally’ became Roman Catholic. She taught briefly at the Mother of Apostles Seminary in 1990 before joining the then Department of Religion at Moi University for a Masters programme. She was awarded a Masters degree in 1992.

Wanjiku, now securely associated with two men, assumed the name, Eunice Karanja Kamaara. She joined the service of Moi University in the Department of Religious Studies at the level of Graduate Assistant (1992–1993) and has risen through the positions of Tutorial fellow (1993–1994), Lecturer (1994–1999), Senior Lecturer (1999–2007), Associate Professor (2007–2011) to Professor in September 2011. This long career at Moi University (recognized with a long service award) has involved teaching and training, research, extension, and administration. In 2006, Prof. Kamaara was appointed an International Affiliate of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) in North America.

Over the last two decades, Prof. Kamaara has taught both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in religion and other departments; trained, mentored, supervised and examined numerous Master and Doctoral research works and

chaired many Master and Doctoral oral examinations. She is a DAAD Trainer in Higher Education Management in the areas of Quality Management, Strategic Planning, Project Management, and Conflict Management.

In 2005, the former Department of Religion and Department of Philosophy were merged to create the current Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Prof. Kamaara was appointed Head of the Department, a position she held until September 2008 when she took sabbatical leave in Indiana University. She has served as Senate Representative of the School of Social Cultural and Development Studies (now School of Arts and Social Sciences), as member of numerous committees of the University Council, the University Senate, the School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS), as well as of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. She is associated with the development of many university policy documents. Prof. Kamaara has taken a leading role in the SASS curriculum review processes as Coordinator of the BA Cultural Studies programme and of the BA in Philosophy, Religion and Theology program. Currently, she is serving as External Examiner for the following universities: University of Nairobi, Maseno University, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Egerton University, Bondo University College, and the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

Prof. Kamaara has carried out many research projects and assessments at international, national, and local levels. These include, but are not limited to: research consultancies for The World Bank on youth sexual health programmes; for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on gender and sexuality; for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on youth at risk in Kenya and an assessment of Kenya Civil Society Strengthening Program; the Organization of Social Sciences Research (OSSREA) in East Africa on gender relations and youth sexuality; Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) on women and HIV/AIDS; and the Association of African Women in Research and Development on HIV/AIDS and the family in Kenya. She represents Africa in the Working Group on Biotechnology of the World Council of Churches (WCC), has served and consulted for the All Africa Conference of Churches, and the National Council of Churches of Kenya. She has been engaged in international collaborative research projects with Loyola University in Chicago, University of Missouri-Columbia, Strategies of Hope, based in Oxford, UK, and academically engaged with Bayreuth University in Germany, University of Birmingham in UK, Duke



University in North Carolina, Depauw University, Greencastle, US, Turku University in Finland, Research Centre of Chang Jung Christian University in Taiwan, Bossey Ecumenical Institute, in Geneva, Switzerland, Hivos, The Hague – The Netherlands, University of Kwazulu Natal in South Africa, the University of South Africa (UNISA), and Maryknoll Institute of African Studies. Currently, she is working on a project on youth empowerment for Church World Service.

Deriving from these research projects, Prof. Kamaara has made over 200 presentations in local and international conferences and published over 50 articles in referred journals, sixteen chapters in edited works, authored and co-authored six books, and contributed to the Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity (CDC) published in 2010.

Prof. Kamaara is grateful for various opportunities to serve society at both international and local levels. Some of the organizations and positions in which she has served and/or continues to serve include: Founder Member of Eldoret-based Gender and Development Network (ELDOGADNET), Founder Member and Coordinator of the African Christian Initiation Process (ACIP); Member of the National Gender Advisory Board for HIV Vaccine Research, Member of the World Council of Churches 'Living Letters', Member of the Board of Advisors of the National Youth Guidance and Counseling Centre for Information Dissemination on Education, Health & Career, Member of the WCC 2001- 2010 Decade to Overcome Peace, Member of the Advisory Board of Globethics.net, Member of the Advisory Committee of I Choose Life Program, International Relations Advisor of the League of Young Professionals, and, Member of the Editorial Committee of the AMECEA Gaba Publications of the Catholic University of East Africa. At the local community level, Prof. Kamaara is Member of the Board of Governors of Wareng High School, Patron of the Moi University Peace Unit, and Advisor of the Diocese of Eldoret Catholic Youth Association, among others.

Prof. Kamaara belongs to the following professional organizations: International Seminar on Religious Education and Values (ISREV), Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD), Organisation of Social Sciences Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Academy of Association of Third World Studies (ATWS), Association for the Study of African American History (ASAHL), Pan African Anthropological Association (PAAA), Social Science and Medicine Network (SOMA-NET),

Business Ethics Network of Africa (BEN-AFRICA), Circle of Concerned Women Theologians (CIRCLE), Programme for Ethics in East Africa (PEEA), Association for Sociology of Religion (ASR), American Academy of Religion (AAR), Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR), and, the Kenya Daad Scholars Association (DAAD -Kenya).

Prof. Kamaara is a 'professional student'. Indeed, the more one knows the more one knows the more that one does not know. Currently, she is enrolled for a Master of Science degree in International Health Research Ethics in the School of Medicine at Moi University and is working on a research project on challenges of obtaining informed consent in International HIV Research in Western Kenya. In the more recent past she has become a student of Disability and Theology.

  
PROF. RICHARD K. MIBEY, FWIF, EBS  
VICE CHANCELLOR  
MOI UNIVERSITY

March 29, 2012

## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AAWORD-K	Association of African Women in Research & Development -Kenya
ACIP	African Christian Initiation Program
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa
AMPATH	Academic Model of Providing Access to Healthcare
AMREF	African Medical Research Foundation
ATRs	African Traditional Religions
CBO	Community Based Organization
CHRJ	Commission for Human Rights and Justice
CIOMS	Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences
CRE	Christian Religious Education
CSA	Centre for Study of Adolescence
CWS	Church World Service
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
EDC	Education Development Centre, Inc.
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
FPPS	Family Planning Private Sector
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers
GAD	Gender and Development

GOK	Government of Kenya
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IC	Informed Consent
IRB	Institutional Research Board
IREC	Institutional Research and Ethics Committee
KDHS	Kenya Demographic Health Survey
KMOT	Kenya Modes of Transmission
KEMRI	Kenya Medical Research Institute
KIT	Royal Tropical Institute
KNASP	Kenya National AIDS Strategic Plan
LTLT	Ladies to Ladies Talks
MAP	Medical Assistance Programme (Kenya)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOYAS	Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports
MTRH	Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital
MU	Moi University
MUSOM	Moi University School of Medicine
MUSP	Moi University Strategic Plan
MYWO	Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization
NACC	National AIDS Control Council
NASCOP	National AIDS Control Programme
NCCK	National Council of Churches in Kenya
NCST	National Council for Science and technology

NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIH	National Institutes of Health
OVC	Orphaned and Vulnerable Children
PCEA	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PMCT	Prevention of Mother to Child infections (PMTCT)
PEP	Post Exposure Prophylaxis
PSI	Population Services International
SASS	School of Arts and Social Sciences
SSCDS	School of Social Cultural and Development Studies
SFH	Strategies for Hope
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDHR	United Nations Declaration for Human Rights
UNRISD	the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Aid for International Development
VCTCs	Voluntary Counseling and Testing Centres
VMMC	Voluntary Medically Assisted Adult Male Circumcision
WAD	Women and Development
WCC	World Council of Churches
WHO	World Health Organization
WID	Women in Development
WMA	World Medical Association (WMA)

## PART I

### Introduction

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom” (Psalms 111: 10)*

*“The supreme end of education is expert discernment in all things-- the power to tell the good from the bad, the genuine from the counterfeit, and to prefer the good and the genuine to the bad and the counterfeit.”*  
(Samuel Johnson, British author and lexicographer. 1709-1784)

*“Muugi ni mutaare”* (A Gikuyu Proverb)

### Background

In nearly all traditional human societies story-telling was a pedagogical enterprise. In spite of enormous scientific and technological advancements of the modern world, storytelling remains an effective educational method. So, I begin this lecture, an exposition on my perspective to knowledge, with a story to illustrate human attempts, successes, and limitations to accessing knowledge, the very process that I have gone through to get to this podium. The story am about to tell is probably one of the most widely told story; the story of the six blind men and the elephant. It is a folklore that has been used commonly in Hindu, Buddhist, Jainist and Islamic cultures in traditional India. Trust India, it is the land of diversities. Here I re-tell the story from an African perspective.

### The story of the six blind men and the elephant<sup>1</sup>

Once upon a time, six blind men coming from different villages from far and wide visited a small village in the plains around Mount Kirinyaga. During the night, they heard something walking around the hut where they slept. It sounded like a mighty giant and had such heavy steps on the ground that the hut in which they slept shook with its every step.

The six blind men were very afraid. They had not met anything that was so strong that when it moved it shook a hut. They decided to ask the hosts about it and the following conversation took place:

The blind men: "What is that?"

The hosts: "That is an elephant".

The blind men: "What is an elephant?"

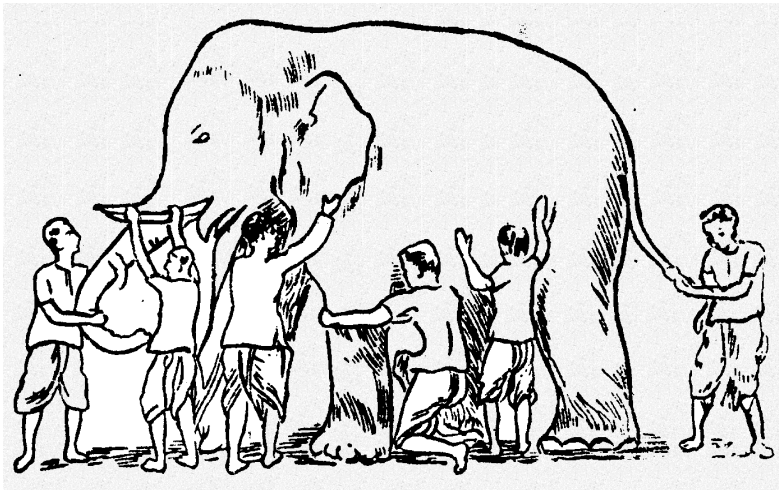
The hosts: "It is a big animal".

The blind men: "A big animal? How does it look like?"

The hosts: "We will show you in the morning".

The following morning, the hosts invited one of the villagers who had powers to tame elephants. He came with one of his tame elephants. He presented it to the blind men and asked them to touch it in order to feel and therefore know how an elephant looks like. All the six blind men touched the elephant, each one of them touching only a part of the elephant.

The first blind man, touching the leg of the elephant exclaimed: "Haiya,, the elephant is like a tree stem". But the second blind man, touching the tail of the elephant said: "No. The elephant is like a big flywhisk". His voice was drowned by that of the third man who, touching the stomach of the elephant said: "Eboni. The elephant is like the wall of a hut that a finely plastered with cow dung".



*The Elephant and Six Blind Men*

Then the fourth man who was touching the ears of the elephant said: “*Apenji*<sup>2</sup>, the elephant is like a winnowing basket” and he had barely finished saying this when the fifth man who was touching the tusk said: “*Kuwa mpole*, the elephant is like a big cow horn which...” who was cut short by the sixth man who was touching the trunk of the elephant saying: “*Hapana*, the elephant is like a thick branch of a mugumo dry tree”.

An argument ensued with each man claiming to have the truth on how an elephant looks like. Each of the blind men was so convinced that he knew best how an elephant looks like that were it not for the intervention of the host villagers, the argument would have turned into a physical fight. The hosts calmed the blind men down and explained: “None of you is right” but each of the blind men shouted back to the hosts: “No! I am right. I can feel the elephant!”

Then the owner of the elephant spoke saying: “I am the owner of the elephant. Please allow me to tell you how the elephant looks like”. So the blind men kept quiet and listened to the owner of the elephant. He spoke with wisdom and authority thus: “Every one of you is right because every one of you is feeling one real part of the elephant. But none of you is completely right because the elephant is made up of all the different features that you are describing. One has to feel all the different parts together to feel the big picture and therefore know how the elephant really looks like”.

### **The moral of the story in relation to knowledge**

Truth is multiple. For while all knowledge is one, there are different perspectives to knowledge. Due to the limitations and finiteness of humans in this life, no human being can completely access the whole picture that knowledge is. Knowledge is therefore like the elephant and all of us are like the six blind men. To see the elephant as it really is, we not only have to be sighted but we must stand at a distance in order to see the whole animal. Standing at a distance is what is referred to as objectivity in the search for knowledge. In the study of religions, we refer to this as the phenomenological approach to the study of reality. Like the six blind men, each of us observes reality from our different positions, our different perspectives; our different disciplines: physical sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities. While none of us is wrong because each of us is scratching on a real aspect of knowledge, none of us is entirely right. Often we see knowledge from our narrow (blind) disciplinary perspectives in which we are immersed



but we need various disciplinary perspectives to see the whole picture which is full reality. This therefore calls for humility to listen to one another and seek to understand one another so that together we can seek to know reality as it really is.

### **Philosophy, Religion and Theology**

In my blindness, I seek knowledge around the intersection between Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. Philosophers seek to understand and interpret reality on the basis of reason and as in Jainism they acknowledge that there are different viewpoints to reality, more so abstract knowledge. In the study of religions, religion, like culture is understood as largely given so that who we are is dependent on when and where we were born to whom. Theology, acknowledges that while God or the Ultimate reality is one, there are many ways of accessing this reality. This understanding is basic to academic growth and maturity and it allows not only for academic harmony but also for social harmony with all humanity. Jainism refers to this as *Syadvada*, *Anekantvad*, the theory of Manifold Predictions. None of us can have ultimate knowledge because we are all blind; that is, limited finite human beings. The ultimate reality whether we call this God, Allah, Bahauallah or Nyasaye, is Omnipotent (All Powerful), Omnipresent (all present) and therefore Omniscient (all knowing) and therefore the owner of the elephant. Theology, presupposes the existence of God. Thus, while it is possible to study Philosophy and Religions without believing in any supernatural reality one has to believe in God to do theology. However, my grounding is in the study of Religions, to which I now turn.

### **The subject matter of study of religions**

Basically, Study of Religions involves study of beliefs and practices related to a supernatural order or superhuman ideal from various perspectives: philosophical; sociological; anthropological; historical; natural; psychological; among others. In theistic religions, there is belief in supernatural being(s) referred to as God or gods. Among these religions we have monotheistic religions which acknowledge that this supernatural other is one Holy Being though the concepts describing this Being are many and varied such as African Traditional Religions and Christianity, and we have polytheistic religions such as Hinduism. Other religions that do not believe in being(s) or God/gods are called atheistic religions. For example, Humanism may be regarded as a religion. Other religions like Buddhism do not believe in God as a creator

of the universe but rather consider the search for practical moral living that could lead to enlightenment even though the religion does not preclude the existence of God or gods.

One common reality for all human is the yearning for the holy other, for the divine; for a transcendental reality who must also be immanent so that humans can encounter it. The greatest theologian of all times, the African, St. Augustine of Hippo captured this spiritual hunger thus: "Man's heart was made for God and will remain forever restless until it rests in him"<sup>3</sup>. The study of religions therefore involves the study of world religions – African Traditional Religions (ATRs), Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, etc. Any of these religions may be studied from different perspectives with focus on certain aspects e.g. Religion and Development, Religion and environment, Religion and morality (ethics), Religion and Economics. One may also study religions from its various dimensions. We will come back to this.

### **The function of religion in society: A double-edged sword**

There is no doubt about the role and importance of various human institutions: the family, appreciated in all human societies as a the most basic social institution ensures perpetuation of life through reproduction and socialization; economic institutions ensure production, maintenance and distribution of resources; and political institutions operate to control and distribute power. Compared to such human institutions, religion with its concern with an intangible beyond appears to be irrelevant to human life. This appears more so with increased technological and scientific advancements. But this is only an appearance. In reality, religion remains an indispensable institution. From the perspective of Augustine human souls are restless until they find rest in God while from an African perspective, to be born is to be religious.

Religion has been described as:

... Something unimportant and evanescent, something peripheral to the genuine business of human life. Yet the facts point to something else... Religion has been characterized as embodying the most sublime of human aspirations; as being a bulwark of morality, a source of public order and inner individual peace; as ennobling and civilizing in its effects upon (hu) mankind. It has also been accused of being a stubborn obstacle retarding progress, and of promoting fanaticism and intolerance, ignorance, superstition, and obscurantism. The record reveals religion to be among

the strongest buttresses of an established social order. It also, however, shows it is capable of exhibiting profound revolutionary tendencies, as in the peasant war in sixteenth century Germany.<sup>4</sup>

Such are the contradictions of religion. Religion is a double edged sword.

According to the functional theory, society is made up of complex institutions, which as a whole constitute the social system.<sup>5</sup> If an institution loses its functions, it ceases to exist. Religion remains unabated in spite of earlier predictions that it would die with modern scientific technological and sociological development. This implies that religion is still functional. Indeed, Religion an aspect of human behaviour has forces which keep it revolving and evolving to meet the dynamic needs of human life with survival and progress as its main dynamics as in all human endeavours.

### **Functions and dysfunctions of religion<sup>6</sup>**

Like science and technology, religion addresses physical, psychological, and social needs of humankind. Beyond this, religion serves to meet the spiritual needs of humans. Psychologically and spiritually, religion addresses the ultimate questions of human life: Where did I come from? (Ultimate origin), why am I here (ultimate purpose), and whither do I go (Ultimate destiny)? Other disciplines try to but not as adequately as or as convincingly as religion does. Specifically, religion has the following functions and on the flip side, dysfunctions:

1. Religion provides a transcendental relationship. Within relationship with higher being, humans find strong security amidst anxieties, uncertainties, and frustrations arising from human helplessness, contingencies and powerlessness in this world. Religion fulfils human quest for knowledge and helps to resolve the mystery of creation and purpose of human life. It steps in where knowledge is inadequate: where science and reason end, religion comes in to fill the gaps. Thus faced with limitations of knowledge, Christians sing: "Lord you know all, you know all about me..."; faced with limitations of time and space we sing: "God is only a prayer away..." faced with limitations of power, we sing: "There is Power, power, wonder working power in the blood of the lamb?" and faced with disappointing human relationships we sing: "What a friend we have in Jesus..." The traditional Agikuyu will say: "*Ngai ni Kihooti, Ngai Njugi*" (directly translated it means "God is omnipotent, God is omniscient").

Yet, unreasonable reliance on the transcendent could lead to unrealistic expectations that could make humans unable to work towards their own survival and progress while overreliance on transcendental relationship may lead to poor social relationships here and now due to the emphasis on the future.

2. Religion provides emotional support, consolation and reconciliation in the face of disappointments and uncertainties that characterize mortal beings. This explains why, faced with adversities many people tend to become highly religious. Religion provides emotional aid and inner support reducing anxiety especially in moments of disappointments with the self and with others. It provides release from bondage and it consoles in moments of depression and pain. With its healing and health function, religion helps to resolve internal conflict within the self. In Kenya today, Kamlesh Patni of Goldenberg scandal, Njenga Waruingi former leader of Mungiki, and Henry Onyancha, the serial killer seem to have found refuge in religion and so they got saved.

But overreliance on religious emotional support could 'numb human nerves' leading to extreme negative responses to the challenges of human life. In such situations, religion provides false security and could impede human development.

3. Religion serves to give individuals a near and strong sense of identity which goes beyond the limited human social, biological and cultural identity. It gives the ego of identity with a supernatural other. In theistic religions, a believer links with God in a direct way through prayer. Further, religious identity links the individual to a limitless past and a limitless future as most religions have a concept of life after death.

But this sense of identity can be dysfunctional in that obsessed with it some people neglect their worldly identities and relations thereby forgetting that they are on this world even if they are not of this world. This false security and identity in religion may lead one to focus too much on the future that is yet to be realized that she becomes impatient to live in it. The Kanungu saga in Uganda in which hundreds of people died in the name of Religion may be sighted as excessive negative effect of religion<sup>7</sup>.

4. Another major function of religion is provision of moral guidance towards public order in that it sacralizes the norms and values of specific societies. With its transcendent reference to the 'hereafter', religion provides one of the strongest motivations for moral living. As a social reality religion holds people together in the same way other experiences like history, culture and natural calamities do. Moreover, it enhances human activity which in turn leads to provision of human needs – be they physical (material) and immaterial (emotional/spiritual). Human activity in turn also leads to shared values and norms which facilitate social order and cohesion. It acts as a social glue as a basis of culture especially in tribal societies.

However, in sacralizing norms and values, religion often ends up giving eternal significance to socio-cultural norms and values thereby impeding functional adaptation of society to changing conditions and application of new knowledge. The condemnation and eventual anathematization of Galileo Galilei by the Catholic Church because of his position that the earth revolves around the Sun and not the other way round as previously held provides an illustration of a case where religion can impede development. Religious fanaticisms can also lead to religious conflict, intolerance and violence. We are all familiar with conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Ireland.

5. Religion has a prophetic function in the sense that it can be a source of social protest against undesirable social, political and economic systems. Indeed, religion facilitates change in politics, education, health, economic, and social living. In other situations, religion can serve to counter balance disruptive tendencies of political and economic life For example; Protestantism is associated with the development of the spirit of capitalism<sup>8</sup> while Christianity and more specifically black theology played a major role to the end of apartheid in South Africa. Closer home, Christian, Islamic and Hindu religions have played a major role in the democratization process in Independent Kenya.

Yet, religion could impede demand for necessary reforms in which case it becomes what Karl Marx referred to as the opium of the mind that keeps people content in their miserable states in this life. For example,

the success of British colonial invasion in Kenya was largely facilitated by Christianity as the Cross came before the Flag. At the same time, religion may be utopian making unrealistic demands that impede development.

6. Religion has a maturation function as it is closely related to human growth and development in that it provides one with a philosophy of life. It serves to support humans throughout the unstable processes of growth and development in its priestly functions. In many religions, various rites of passage which allow for order and stability are religious events: birth, naming, initiation from childhood to adulthood, marriage and death.

However, this function of religion could turn dysfunctional if humans over-rely on it. For example, the tension between religion and science sometimes arises from uncritical acceptance of religious beliefs and practices. In such situations, religion becomes an impediment to the search for knowledge.

But what exactly is religion? How can one identify religion and set it apart from other disciplines? For traditional religions not only in Africa but all over the world, religion is a way of life that is so completely intertwined with all aspects of life that it is impossible to isolate it. Indeed, as already been discussed, there is folly in compartmentalization of knowledge since knowledge is one. However, for purposes of simplicity and therefore clarity for finite human minds, it may be justified to attempt to set the study of religion apart from such closely intertwined disciplines as sociology and anthropology.

### **Dimensions of Religion**

Religion has various aspects which may be referred to as dimensions. They help us to judge what is and what is not religion. Whether we identify Marxism or *Mungiki* as religions depends on whether Marxism or Mungiki have specific dimensions which are considered crucial for our definition of religion. Ninian Smart on religious experiences of humankind identifies religion as having the following dimensions: social, mythical, experiential, ritual, doctrinal, and ethical dimensions.<sup>9</sup>

*The social institutional dimension:* Religion is a social phenomenon and a social enterprise that brings people together in fellowship. It has a social and communal significance in that it is socially functional. Usually religious ideals are adopted to the existing social conditions and attitudes. Moreover, every religion brings people together so that it is about fellowship. Religion is really not a matter solely between the individual and his/her object of worship. The social dimension of religion is manifested in institutions and teachings affecting the community in which it is found. While people often talk of religion as being a matter of "I and my God" and often profess Christ as a personal saviour thereby referring to God as "My father", without social interactions, religion will fade.

*The mythical dimension:* Myth in religion is not about something false or untrue. It is a report or explanation of a society's beliefs and history especially with regard to answering questions related to the unknown ultimate realities of origin, purpose, and destiny. In the absence of empirical or historical answers to these questions, every religion develops some myths of origin, purpose and destiny to satisfy human curiosity. In many societies, myths and legends about God and images and stories through which the invisible world is symbolized abound. These present the mythological dimension of religion. Some popular myths include stories of creation, like the story on the Creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Christianity) and the story of Gikuyu and Mumbi (Traditional Gikuyu religion), and stories of salvation such as the Judaist Passover in Judaism.

*The experiential dimension:* All the dimensions mentioned above would be incomplete without the experiential dimension. This dimension deals with experience of religion. Every religion must be experienced. Although people can conduct and participate in the invisible world through ritual, personal religion normally involves the hope or realization of the experience of that invisible world. Many religions have documentations of dramatic human experiences of God such as the call of Prophet Mohammed (Islam), story of Moses and the burning Bush on Mt. Sinai (Judaism), and the story of St. Paul on the way to Damascus (Christianity). Religion has to be experienced for it to live. Thus we hear people's testimonies of how they met the saviour on this date at this place and how they experience God every now and then in both ordinary and extraordinary experiences like dreams, stances and other spiritual encounters. One of the most popular songs in Kenya expresses this with emphasis on personal experience: "*Nimeuona mimi mkono wa Bwana Yesu*" (literally translated: I have myself seen the hand of God").

*The ritual dimension:* Religion is expressed through rituals like worship, prayers, offerings, sacrifices, libations, funeral, weddings, and baptism. In many religions, these are not only formal but elaborate like Holy Mass in the Roman Catholic Church in which a priest is mystified and transformed into Christ while ordinary bread and ordinary wine transforms to become body and blood of Christ. Even the simplest form of religious service involves ritual, for example, closing eyes to coordinate participation with the invisible. Ritual has to involve all the inner and the outer parts of a person. If the outer dominates the inner, then the religion is hollow, that is, religious hypocrisy. The inner part covers the intentions and the sentiments of the believer. There are also secular rituals like hoisting and saluting the flag, greeting someone, etc. For African societies there was no dichotomy between secular and sacred rituals. Ritual can be extended beyond prayer. In India for example, yoga is a common form of mental and physical self-training through which the adept withdraw their senses from their usual immersion in the flow of empirical experiences to attain higher status of consciousnesses.

*The doctrinal dimension:* Doctrines are statements of faith which attempt to give a system of clarity in terms of what a people believes. They give intelligent power to revelation which at that stage may still be covered in mythologies. For example, when a Christian theologian has to describe the meaning of incarnation, she must necessarily make use of Biblical language and history. Major world's religions have a total picture of reality through a given system of doctrines for example on creation, salvation, resurrection, love of neighbour, baptism, creeds and trinity. Every religion has a set of statements summarizing what the adherents believe in. The Apostles creed sums up the Christian doctrine wheel the five pillars of Islam sum up Islamic faith.

*The material dimension*<sup>10</sup>: Every religion has material symbols and tools used in religious activities. These are ordinary things but they get special meaning in religious rituals. For example, a Cross is merely two pieces of ordinary materials like wood or metal placed across each other at a certain angle. However, these ordinary things acquire deeper and sacred meaning in Christianity to symbolize and express the doctrine of salvation. Material objects of religion can tell a lot about a society and its social, political and economic and physical life as these are derived from the environment. For example it is not by chance that the traditional Agikuyu offered animal sacrifices to *Ngai* (God) under a Mugumo (fig) tree because animals were part of their economic livelihood and the Mugumo tree was found in their



ecological environment. Similarly, it was not by chance that Jesus used bread and wine in the Last Supper: this is what was available in the Jewish culture. It would be a worthy project to develop a museum of religions where religious artifacts are displayed.

*The ethical dimension:* Ethics is about human behaviour or conduct. All religions have a code of conduct with clear 'dos' and 'don'ts' for the adherents. To some extent the code of conduct is so dominant in religion that it controls whole nations. For example, the Code of Manu prevails in countries where Hinduism is dominant while some nations with high populations of Muslims have a code of ethics that is largely derived from Islam. Religion has been influential in shaping the ethical attitudes of society in which it is found. Every religion has an ethical dimension. I seek knowledge around the ethical dimensions of religion with focus on the ethical dimension of African traditional religions and Christianity with special focus on the youth sexual ethics.

For any institution to be appreciated as religion, it has to have all these dimensions. However, it is important to note that different religions stress certain dimensions more than they stress others. For example, Roman Catholicism like traditional African religions stresses the ritual dimension more than the experiential dimension while Pentecostal churches stress the experiential dimension more than the ritual dimension.

My search for knowledge has revolved mainly around the social and ethical dimensions of religion; the social moral function and dysfunction of religion in the context of gender relations and human sexual behaviour. In the specific context of Kenya, Christianity and African traditional religions in Kenya are used to 'sacralize' gender injustice thereby operating as opium of many people's minds thereby pacifying men and women for the oppression that results from gender injustice. Yet religion, in its prophetic function could facilitate what I profess: gender reconstruction for human development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. But what makes gender reconstruction of ethical concern? What makes it right or wrong? To understand my focus as an ethical concern in the study of religions, some background information on the general study of ethics is necessary.

### **What is Ethics?<sup>11</sup>**

Ethics is derived from a Greek word *Ethos* or from a Latin word *Mos* (*mores-plural*) meaning custom, conduct, character. *Ethos* is traced back to Greek thinkers of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC during the time of Socrates, Plato

and Aristotle. It is within this period that the first systematic discussions on morality took place in Athens in modern day Greece. Morality refers to goodness/rightness or badness/wrongness of human actions while ethics is a scientific study of human behaviour. Ethics may be studied from philosophical, religious or theological perspectives. So we have moral philosophy, ethics in various religions, and moral theology.

As a philosophical study, ethics is a science or intellectual habit which addresses human acts from the point of view of natural reason. The basic assumption in ethics is that the original stimulus for all human actions is the desire to be happy. The desire to be happy is natural attribute deep-rooted in the being of every human. It is universal; transcending time, space, culture, religion, race or any other factor. The universal desire for happiness is known under various names: the urge of self perfection, the drive of personal ambition, the desire for success in life, etc. The moral problem/challenge/struggle throughout life is to select and make the kind of actions that are conducive to happiness.

### **Subject matter of practical ethics**

The scope of ethics is limited to systematic study of human actions from the point of view of their wrongness or righteousness in the pursuit of happiness. So ethics is a science of morals; the department of study concerned with the study of human acts. Human acts includes all actions and omissions over which a human person has and exercises personal control because he/she understands and wills these actions and omissions in relation to some end he/she has in view. The properties of human act therefore include knowledge, freedom and voluntariness.

While most disciplines in the humanities and social sciences are descriptive, ethics is normative. It is not just about describing phenomenon; it is also about identifying and prescribing the right behaviour. It involves a conscious attempt to positively influence human behaviour. Hence ethics is theoretical science (speculative – to know) as well as practical science (applied). Some moral philosophers argue that theoretical ethics is on its own valuable because knowledge is intrinsically good so that we could pursue knowledge for knowledge's sake. However, other ethicists argue that knowledge has to be applied to be valuable. It is to this latter group that I belong.

While economists consider happiness as resulting from production, maintenance, accumulation and distribution of material resources, sociologists focus on social relations and organizations, while political scientists focus on the processes of acquisition, organization and distribution of power. Information scientists consider happiness as derived from effective generation and management of information as power and wealth (intellectual property) while engineers seek happiness by making work easier for greatest production. While environmentalists pay attention to management of natural resources, biologists will associate happiness with reproduction while those in health sciences consider human health as the source of happiness. Religion is interdisciplinary in that it integrates all aspects of the human person and human activities: Theistic religions present God as the first electrical engineer who said "let there be light and there was light"; the Great Physician who heals cure while doctors treat; the great environmentalist who designs and maintains ecological balances; the Author of the first basic social unit; the great information technologists; the unmatched and unmatchable Creator of that which cannot be replicated: the human mind, the human hand and the human heart will always be indispensable.

### **Ethics as a science**

Ethics is not mathematical in the sense that it is not based on formulae. Successful human living cannot be predetermined of any individual by any kind of science or philosophy. Ethics cannot claim to establish a rigid or fixed pattern of individual action to achieve happiness. Each human being distinctly lives under particular circumstances peculiar to himself/herself. In ethics we have general universal moral rules derived from rational conclusions but even then moral actions are individual and concrete events.

Therefore, the ultimate concern of practical ethics is to guide humans in making judgments about specific actions in specific situations with regard to their rightness or wrongness, and consequently to make decisions and act on what is right towards human happiness of not only the human agent but of all humankind. Thus, the central question in ethics is: What makes an act right or wrong? This question has been discussed from various perspectives with different people taking different approaches. Basically however, there are two schools of thought within which there are many perspectives: i) those who consider the end of an act, and, ii) those who consider the means employed in an act.

Philosophers have classified all ethical theories into two namely:

- i) **Teleological Theories:** According to the teleological theory, the wrongness or rightness of an act is determined by the goal so that the end justifies the means. According to these theorists, the basic criterion of judging whether an act is right or wrong is the end results or the value of the act. An act is therefore good only if it produces, will probably produce or at least intends to produce value or comparative amount of value (greater balance of good over evil) than any available alternative action. But then the question comes: who's good? This secondary question is what provides for different categories of teleological theorists: Teleological theorists differ on the question of whose good it is that one ought to promote and may therefore be categorized as follows:
  - a) *Ethical egoists:* These theorists seek to promote that which is in the actor's own greatest good. An act is good if and only if it promotes, or intends to promote the greatest good for the moral agent more than any other act that can be conceived and done. This theory is held by philosophers like Thomas Hobbes (1558 -1679), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1990). For these the greatest good will result when individuals pursue their own good.
  - b) *Utilitarian theorists.* For utilitarian theorists, the sole ultimate standard of right or wrong is the "principle of utility" in view of all not just of the moral agent. They promote that which will produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people or the least pain for the least number of people. This theory is propounded by John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873) Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and G.E. Moore (1873 -1958), among others.

But even these are broad categories. Within each of these are different theorists differing on details.

- ii) **Deontological theories:** Deontologists hold that the end/consequence is not fundamental in determining the rightness or wrongness of an act. For them, moral absolutes that is, absolute obligations and absolute prohibitions, fundamentally determine what is right or wrong: so as long as one fulfils his/her duty in the particular situation, the result does not matter since it is the means that justify the end. Deontological theorists differ on the question of the source of obligation or demand for duty:

- a) *Act deontologists*: These emphasize the difference and uniqueness of individual human situations so that the demand for duty is determined by the specific situation of an act. Faced with a moral situation, the human agent should ask herself: which act in this specific situation meets my duty best? Among the major act deontologists is W.D. Ross (1877 – 1971).
  
- b) *Rule deontologists*: These recognize that there are general and universal rules by which all human persons are obliged to follow. In secular contexts, justice is the central moral principle, in Christianity, love is considered the greatest rule while in traditional African religions, maintaining healthy relationships is the universal obligation of all humans. Henry Sidgwick (1907) is well known for his postulation on the principle of justice: “It cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner which would be wrong for B to treat A merely on the ground that the two are different individuals, and without there being any difference between the natures and circumstances of the two which can be treated as reasonable ground for difference of treatment”<sup>12</sup> Among the major proponents of this the rule deontological theory is Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) who is well known for his categorical imperative – “Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will to be universal law”.

However, none of these theories adequately address the question of what makes an act right or wrong for it is not always possible to determine the end of an act as teleological theorists suggest nor are human beings capable of understanding fully the natural order and the universal obligation of all humans in all situations as the deontological theorists suggest. Further, certain moral situations may be too complex to be determined by mere consideration of ends and duty as these may conflict. For instance, a pregnant woman may only be saved from death if the life of her unborn child is terminated. The alternative act would be to do nothing (act of omission) and lose both lives. Hence to preserve life may require that a life is terminated which means that, in this specific situation, the universal duty to save life or not to kill conflicts with the universal value of saving life. Yet, many religions align themselves to either one of these theories thereby becoming dysfunctional. For example strict Roman Catholic deontologists condemn use of condoms even where they could save life for the sole reason that use of condoms is against the natural

order and of universal human duty to save life. Yet in certain situations, for example among discordant couples, use of condoms could save life. In the process of meeting the duty to save life, such rigid ethical prescriptions cease to promote life.

For theists and for Christians and traditional Africans in particular, there is only one supreme and highest norm of morality; to love God through love of neighbour. Other norms or authorities are secondary. But this moral absolute rarely describe the subject of an act. How to love one's neighbour depends on the needs of the neighbour in specific situations. Judgment of the moral value of an action is not possible without careful study of the nature of beings (deontological approach). Much less is it possible without proper regards to the demands of the ultimate end (teleological approach). This means that one has to borrow from both approaches and maintain a moderate situation since both approaches are not mutually exclusive but are complementary.

As a science, ethics has a formula for determining what is right and what is wrong – but this formula is not mathematical as it requires consideration of all the sources of morality, that is, factors which gives value to a human act. To this we now turn.

### **Determinants of Ethical Value of Moral Acts**

What makes an act bad or good? What gives value to an act? What does one consider in judging an act? Basically, there are three determinants of the ethical value of an act: object, circumstances, and end (intention and result of the act).

#### *Object*

The object of an act is that effect which an action primarily and directly causes. It is the always and necessary effect of an act independent of any circumstances or intention of the moral agent. Thus, for an act to be called what it is called, the object must be realized. The necessary effect of theft for example is the appropriation of another person's goods against his/her will whether this is by a rich man or by a poor man, whether the intention was personal enrichment or alleviation of extreme need. The object of abortion is to terminate pregnancy by forcibly removing a fetus from a womb before it is viable whether this is done for health reasons or just to eliminate public shame while the object of murder is killing of a person by another. The object of an act is the primary source for the judgment of the morality of an act.

Thus faced with an act that has happened (past) or is happening (present) or is about to happen (future), one primarily asks: What is the object of the act? If the object is evil, then the act is evil but if the object is good, then the act is good.

### *End*

Once the object of an act has been determined, one then considers the end in terms of what results from the action (end of the act) as well as to the intention of the moral agent (end of the actor). For example, the end of the moral agent who gives alms may be to seek penance while the end for the act may be to relieve distress. If the end of the act and the end of the actor are evil, then the act is judged most evil. If the end of the act is evil while the end of the actor is good or vice versa, the act is moderately evil. If the end of the act and the end of the actor is good then the act is less evil. Note that the end of an act does not alter a good act to become a wrong act or vice versa; the end merely determines the extent of the wrongness or rightness of the act.

### *Circumstances*

Not all circumstances exercise an influence on the morality of an act. In fact most of them are morally indifferent. For example whether alms are given on a Monday or on a Sunday does not increase or decrease the goodness of giving alms. In this context therefore circumstances refer to those particulars of the concrete human act which are necessarily connected with its object. Circumstances of ethics refer to properties which increase or decrease good or evil effects hence their morality. Seven circumstances of an act are considered:

- i) *Who?* This refers to the individual moral agent in terms of her sex, age, religion, profession, etc. A priest who defiles a child will be judged more evil than a *matatu* tout who does the same act even though the object is the same.
- ii) *Where?* The circumstance refers to the place where the act took place. A priest who defiles a child in Church is judged more harshly than a priest who defiles a child in a bar.
- iii) *Why?* This refers to the reason for acting. If a person was enticed by some external agency to do a certain act, he is judged more harshly than if he was not enticed.

- iv) When? Time affects the level of rightness or wrongness of an act. Thus a priest who defiles a child in a church at midday will be judged more harshly than a priest who defiles a child in a bar at midnight.
- v) What? This refers to the character and behaviour of the individual moral agent for example is she, kind, humble, religious, remorseful etc. A person who is generally of good character is judged more harshly than one who is known to be generally of bad character.
- vi) By what means? What was used in an act can influence the degree of value of the act. For example, a person who kills another by cutting him up with a machete is judged more harshly than a person who kills by shooting.
- vii) How? The way the action was done can increase or decrease its value. For examples, taking property from another person violently is judged more evil than taking property from another through trickery.

To determine the morality of an act all these three determinants must be taken into account. The object of an act determines whether the act is wrong or right and therefore deserving to be punished or rewarded respectively while the end and the circumstances determine the extent of the punishment or reward.

While ethics is standard in the sense that universal ethical principles guide all humans regardless of time and space, the interpretation and application of these principles differ from context to context. For example, while all human communities consider human life to be of paramount value and therefore worthy of respect, different communities have different understanding of who a human person is. In the context of this lecture, I consider indigenous African ethics as well as Christian ethics, the two ethical worldviews that govern people's thinking and acting in Kenya.

### **Indigenous<sup>13</sup> African ethics**

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel proclaimed:

In Negro life, the characteristic point is that consciousness has not yet attained the realisation of any substantial objective existence in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realises his own



being... so that knowledge of an other and a Higher than an individual self is entirely wanting. The Negro ... exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state and we must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality... there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. <sup>14</sup>

Nothing could be more erroneous. As Placide Tempels observes: "... to declare on a priori grounds that primitive people have no ideas on the nature of being, that they have no logic, is simply to turn ones' back on reality"<sup>15</sup> In the following paragraphs, we present an overview of indigenous African ethics. According to Bolaji Idowu, "... with the Yoruba, morality is certainly the fruit of religion. They do not make any attempt to separate the two; and it is impossible for them to do so without disastrous consequences."<sup>16</sup> This could be said of all indigenous African societies. Indeed, religion is at the centre of all principles governing all aspects of traditional African life. Thus, to understand African indigenous ethics, it is essential to understand their worldview

It is important to understand the traditional African worldview and to take it seriously because, in spite of modernity, this worldview significantly continues to guide African peoples' thinking and acting. Within indigenous African societies, this worldview is formulated, expressed, and transmitted from generation to generation not through the written word but through oral traditions and lived experiences. Precisely, the African worldview is guided by the ultimate questions of human existence: The questions of ultimate origin, ultimate purpose, and ultimate destiny. But Africa is not homogeneous. There are hundreds of autonomous communities each with a distinct cultural, religious socio-political governance, educational, health, ethical, and recreational structures. However, the principle underlying the different beliefs and practices is common. For example, while the different communities have different names of God, the reality that these names depict is the same. In this context, we focus on common foundations of morality among the different communities in Africa.

Indigenous societies in Africa are characterized by a theo-centric worldview founded on the acknowledgement of God as the ultimate designer, creator, sustainer, purpose and destiny of everything in the created order. Hence, there is no dichotomy between what is sacred and what is secular as every human activity is considered sacred. For traditional Africans, one cannot be

spiritual without being religious and one cannot be religious without being spiritual; in fact conversion is alien in traditional Africa since every person is born into a religion.

The worldview is also anthropocentric in that the human person is recognized as the centre of creation and God's steward under whom responsible management of the rest of the created elements directly lie. Besides the general principles or worldview, each of these structures has clear guiding principles and objectives with a lot of emphasis on human rights for every individual person but in the context of community. In every aspect of life, the '*Utu*' ethos which recognizes human life as the highest value and healthy relationships between humans and God, among humans and between humans and the rest of creation is considered the goal of life and adhered to. The earth is acknowledged and respected as host and mother to all creation. While there is no mention of theories and emphasis is laid on practical rather than speculative ethics, integrated deontological and teleological ethical thinking seems to prevail in indigenous African ethics.

### **Sources of African ethics**

Traditional Africans have a deep sense of right and wrong; good and evil inculcated in every aspect of life. To access knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, traditional Africans have a clear system of socialization curriculum with different levels of education marked by initiation religious rites, the most important of which is the rite of initiation from childhood to adulthood.<sup>17</sup> Later on in this lecture, I will be focusing more on this rite. Africans have customs and taboos, the oral tradition as well as observation of nature.

### ***Customs and Taboos***

The word morality is derived from the Latin word *Mos* (*Mores*) in plural which means custom. Every society in Africa has established customs; accepted ways of thinking and doing things. Going against these customs is considered immoral. While customs refer to what is acceptable behaviour, what is unacceptable is referred to as taboo. Thus, taboos are prohibitions and when one does he is subject to punishment befitting the crime. While we know that there is a difference between ethics on one hand and customs and taboos on the other since it is possible for a society to have unethical customs, there is no dispute that what is customary accepted provides humans with a source of morality.

### *African oral traditions and histories*

African Oral tradition refers to an established body of knowledge that is handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. This is not unique to illiterate societies since literate societies are known to have oral traditions as well. But in the absence of written documents, illiterate societies have a much more elaborate and reliable systems of documenting, transmitting, and preserving oral traditions and histories through songs, riddles, myths, proverbs, and stories recounting historical or fictitious events which always end with a moral lesson. In all these forms of oral traditions and histories what is ethical is taught, encouraged and praised while what is unethical is condemned and discouraged.

### *Observation of nature*

Like deontologists, traditional Africans believe in the existence of a natural order of things and that operating within this order is ethical while going against this order is unethical. While every human being is expected to have access to ethical knowledge through observation of nature by virtue of her being, some Africans are specially endowed with the gift of such observation and are relied on for direction and guidance. These include religious specialists like healers and seers.

### **Central values in African ethics**

One cannot understand the indigenous African ethics without understanding African epistemology and thereby the central values guiding the peoples understanding of what is right or wrong. This epistemology may be summed up in one word which sums up the African philosophy: *Utu*.<sup>18</sup> The *Utu* philosophy encompasses the central values of indigenous African ethics as follows:

#### *The Individual human person has the greatest value.*

As has already been discussed in the previous paragraphs, indigenous Africans have a theocentric and anthropocentric worldview within which humans are considered as the greatest of God's creation. Humans have a distinct nature for although they are creatures like everything else in creation they hold a special place in creation. For Africans what distinguishes humans from the rest of creation is humanness that is 'Utu. According to the *Utu* Philosophy to be human is to have *Utu* and therefore every human person is special and most valuable. Human life is therefore held with utmost respect.

Critics of the *Utu* philosophy argue that the philosophy lacks in recognition and appreciation of the dignity and value of individual persons. But such criticism is based on lack of adequate understanding of *Utu*. Indeed, indigenous Africans hold individual persons in high regard and focus on individual growth and development. In socialization, the focus is not on whole groups but on individual persons with due respect to their individualities in all aspects of their being. As argued by Gyekye, the African use of stories, proverbs, riddles, and myths as a pedagogical method facilitated independent critical thinking in accessing knowledge especially towards building of individual moral character.<sup>19</sup> To be wise is to be ethical. As individuals grow older therefore, given the sources of African ethics, it is understood that a person grows wiser and more ethical.

Individuality and *Utu* is so clear in indigenous African minds that it is possible to tell when an individual has lost *Utu*. For example, given the value that is given to individual human life, a person who commits the most serious violation (murder) is considered to have lost *Utu* thereby reducing himself or herself to the level of an animal or at worst a “thing”. Thus such a person is referred to as a beast (*nyamu*) or the prefix denoting a thing is added in reference to him or her (*kimundu*). Once a person has lost his *Utu*, she becomes unworthy of being considered or treated like a human being. In some communities, a person who murdered another would be killed as animal or thing that she has reduced herself to. In other communities however, a human person can never lose her *Utu* and therefore not even murder could be an excuse to kill another person. For such communities, such a person was literally excommunicated from the community and a goat killed on his behalf to atone the community. To be human is to be ethical. This indicates how deeply ethical traditional Africans are.

#### *A Person is only a person in community*

From observation of human nature, it is without any contradiction that indigenous Africans appreciate *Utu* as the essence of individual human persons but only in community. This idea is best expressed by John Mbiti thus:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his essence to other people, including those past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for

the individual depends on the corporate group...Only in terms of the other person does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges, and responsibilities towards himself and other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen his neighbors and his relatives whether living or dead. When he gets married, he is not alone; neither does the wife 'belong' to him alone. So also, the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's [or mothers] name. Whatever happens, to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. Therefore the individual can only say: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am".<sup>20</sup>

In the words of Desmond Tutu:

A person with *Ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, based from a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, in the African worldview human nature is the result of a balance between personal identity of unique individual persons and social identity of these persons as members of society at various levels: familial, clan, nation, and human community. This explains why individual sin was understood at one level as attracting individual punishment but on another level attracting punishment of whole community. This understanding of human persons as persons in community makes a lot of sense given that human beings are social by nature and that there would be no motivation for being moral if individuals could live solitary lives. But humans cannot survive as illustrated in *The Lord of Flies*<sup>22</sup> where to be without ethics is to be without community and in such an arrangement life is short and brutal.

### *Human relationships*

It follows that if human persons are persons only in community, then human relationships are central to African ethics. Hence, according to African spirituality the ultimate purpose of life is relationships; relationships between Creator and created, and among the created. As designer, author, purpose and destiny of the created, the Creator determines relationships between the Creator and created and among the created. Therefore for the created

to understand how to relate with the Creator and among themselves, the created need to know the will of God, more or less like we use manuals to effectively operate the products of human creativity such as radios, computers, and mobile phones. For the traditional Africans, the will of God is expressed in nature and is very easily understood to human persons who seek to understand it in humility and truth. Unhealthy relationships are easily identified in that they lead to anti life situations while healthy relationships are characterized by interdependence, justice, solidarity of humankind, respect, empathy and caring. From this perspective, then, ethics is not a matter of individual legislation by abstract, solitary thinkers; rather, it is grounded in practical life and human action”<sup>23</sup>.

The ultimate destiny of life is God who ensures perpetuation of life through healthy relationships from one generation to another through birth and rebirths. God maintains the cycle of life as human persons and all other creation transit from one stage in life to another; from pre-birth to birth to rebirth through death. All creation is designed to work together in unity and rhythm: when healthy relationships flourish among all creation, life is promoted for all creation and all creation rejoice together but when there are unhealthy relationships, life is threatened and all creation suffer together. Life was therefore understood as unitary whole where individual elements of creation were understood as part of the whole creation as they are all interdependent.

A systematic process of formulating and passing on this education existed basically in forms of rites of passage from pre birth to ancestor-hood. In recognition of the difficulties of youth as a stage of human development characterized by identity and sexual crises, the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood through initiation marked one of the major levels of education. This rite was an elaborate process of intensive education with special emphasis on:

- i) The importance of maintaining healthy relationships with Creator and among the created
- ii) The centrality of humans in God’s reign and of the earth as host and mother of all created elements
- iii) The concept and practice of rights and responsibilities with clear indication that all actions have consequences

- iv) The dignity of all human persons in the context of community and the need for self esteem and self worth

Each of these values would have been introduced in the previous rites of passage (before the rite of initiation to adulthood) and were buttressed in future rites of passage. The rite of initiation from childhood to adulthood was the specific moment when this central education for holistic life in community was intensively and very purposively instilled in individuals and every individual was thereafter held responsible for his thinking and acting. Thus if we were to sum up African ethics in one golden rule it would be: To be a person in community is to engage in healthy relationships.

### **Christian ethics**

Christian ethics begins from the presupposition that there is God who is in charge of all creation: the ultimate origin, purpose, and destiny of all creation. Christian ethics therefore revolves around God and his will for humanity and the rest of creation. With this premise, Christian ethics is therefore the same as moral theology. This understanding is central to all Christian approaches to morality. While the level to which different approaches to ethics differ, all Christians agree on the following as the sources of Christian ethics:

- 1) *The Bible*: Christian ethics basically derives its authority of morality in the Bible. This is because the Bible contains the Word of God, with its supernaturally revealed principles, which are accepted by faith. This means that the primary source of moral authority in Christian ethics is the Bible. While the approaches to sourcing the Bible for principles of ethics may differ from one tradition to the other, for example from the Roman Catholic to the Protestant, all agree that the major elements of the Bible are:
  - i) Authority - The "Authority of the Bible" means that all the words in the Bible are God's words. This does not mean that all the words in the Bible were audibly spoken by God Himself, since the Bible evidently contains the words of hundreds of people, but that even what was spoken by others are God's reports of what they said, and, rightly interpreted in their contexts, come to us with God's authority. This does not imply dictation but inspiration of the process of Bible authorship, and canonization. Authority goes with inerrancy. The inerrancy of the Bible means that the Bible does not affirm anything that is contrary to truth because it is the Word of God. This does not

necessarily mean a kind of absolute scientific precision because we have human limitations in speech and understanding of God. The Bible does not contradict itself. On the contrary, various parts of the Bible will always support each other.

- ii) Clarity: The clarity of the Bible means that all things necessary for ethical guidance to human salvation are clear enough for anybody seeking to read and understand it in God's light. All who read it seeking help towards salvation and willing to follow it can understand it. This is not to say that there are no sections of the Bible that do not make difficult reading. Some of Paul's epistles for example were difficult to understand as affirmed by Peter. (See: 2Peter 3: 15-16). The Bible has very encouraging practical implications for our day-to-day lives.
  - iii) Necessity: The necessity of the Bible means that the Bible is absolutely necessary for knowing God's will and for maintaining spiritual life. But it is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws.
  - iv) Sufficiency: The sufficiency of the Bible means that the Bible is exhaustive in providing us with all the resources that we need for salvation if only we can trust and obey God. Sufficiency emphasizes that it is in the Scripture that we find God's will and purpose for humanity (...3: 16).<sup>24</sup>
- 2) Oral tradition: For the Roman Catholic Church, the tradition of the Church founded on St. Peter the rock on which Christ promised to build the Church is a second source of morality.

### **The Central Principles of Christian ethics**

In a bid to summarize Christian ethics, Christian ethicists and theologians have identified two main principles; justice and love. While Christianity is not legalistic, these principles may be considered as moral convictions that cut across Christian moral life as great imperatives. They apply to all spheres of life and are adequate in providing moral guidance in any moral situation. However, it is important to note that these principles are not to be followed blindly and are not ends in themselves for humans are not justified by good works but rather by faith in and grace by the author of all good works.



*Justice:* Justice is a central principle in Christian ethics. It emerges in all ethical issues be they in medicine, business transactions, human relations such as gender and race issues, international relations such as trade, and environmental issues. Justice refers to fair play where everyone gets what he/she has a strict right to, what is due to each person. According to ancient philosophers and medieval theologians justice was considered one of the classical virtues (together with fortitude, wisdom and temperance). However, today justice is considered a principle that guides humans as individuals or as social groups in their relationship with their environment; other humans, animals, plants, and inanimate things.

There are disagreements on what constitutes justice as a principle that guides all human life and all sorts of actions may be defended as being just. For example, it may be argued that slaves have to be overworked because this is what is due to slaves. Another example may be given where a person justifies an act of stealing from the rich to give to the poor. Nevertheless in both religious and secular circles, all people agree that:

- Justice is probative: this means justice has to do with judgment to approve or disapprove an act.
- Justice is obligatory; it is not something one can choose to do or not to do. All people are obliged to be just.
- Justice is standard: this means that in similar situations, all persons ought to behave or be treated the same. Often law indicates what is just and what is not.

Included in justice are all acts of obligation and of responsibility as stipulated by all kinds of law. These include faithfulness, truthfulness, benevolence, honesty, respect for other people and their property, care and respect of all creation, etc. Consider the Hebrew (*mishpat*- justice, judgment) and Greek (*dikaiousune* - righteousness, judgment) and (*tsedaqah* - righteousness, justice) words for justice.

As a central Christian principle, all Christians are expected to be just. Throughout the Bible God is described as a just God and since Christians regard God as the foundation of Christian ethics, then they are called to be just (Ps. 103: 6, Is. 61:8, Rm.3:5, Deut. 16:20, Am.5:24, Mt. 5:6, Heb. 11:33). There are verses specific to the command for justice in the Bible. In some

situations, it is equated to worship of God. The Ten Commandments sum up what is due to God, to spouses, to parents, to slaves, and to neighbour. An analysis of the commandments indicates that justice is what should direct human relations to God, to one another and to the rest of creation (see: Deut: 5:6-21). In the New Testament, Jesus sums up the commandments into one: "Love the Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind;" and "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Lk. 10: 27).

*Love:* Love is the other central principle of Christian ethics. God is love. People talk of love and justice as if they are one and the same thing. But are they really the same? Theologians and ethicists have for a long time debated on the differences between love and justice and the relationship between them. Emile Brunner, a 20<sup>th</sup> century neo-orthodox theologian from Switzerland for example argues that the two are different. He observes that justice is about giving what is due, nothing more, nothing less, but love goes beyond this to give what is not deserved. True love is exemplary in Jesus Christ. But there is a close relationship between love and justice. Justice is the minimum requirement of love for love is much more than justice. While justice makes no free gift because it is what is due to a person, love is about giving what may not be due. One can be just without loving but one cannot love without being just. But remember:

Prior to works of charity are the demands of justice. With good reason, Vatican II insists that "the demands of justice should first be satisfied, lest the giving of what is due in justice be presented as the offering of a charitable gift (AA8)<sup>25</sup>.

There is a sense in which Brunner is accurate. However, carrying Brunner's argument too far may raise difficulties. For example, there are people who will argue that because governments are not obliged to love but to be just, they should not meet economic or social welfare needs. Such thinking completely misses the Biblical understanding of justice, which incorporates love: "What I require is justice... taking care of widows and orphans.

Another ethicist, Reinhold Niebuhr argues that love and justice are not only different but a tension exists between them so that one who loves is rarely just. For him love is an "impossible possibility" given the nature of humans. Niebuhr is right also to some extent but again he misses the true Biblical understanding of justice.

Separating justice and love as done by Brunner or presenting them as being in tension as by Niebuhr is appropriate in secular ethics for while justice is institutional and legal love is personal. However, in Christian ethics, largely based on the Bible, justice and love are so closely interrelated that one cannot think of one without the other. According to Dennis Hollinger,

Love needs justice, and justice needs love. While love tends to be personal and justice institutional, separating them into distinct spheres (Brunner) or setting them in tension (Niebuhr) is not only contrary to Biblical teachings but also fails to appreciate their mutual reinforcement in the midst of historic situations<sup>26</sup>.

Justice and love sums up the entire Christian moral theology. Because love incorporates justice then love is the greatest and actually sums up Biblical morality. The greatest of these is love. Refer to the golden rule (Deut.6: 5, Luke. 10: 27, I Cor. 13). Love incorporates works charity, compassion, sympathy, and pity.

### **African Christian Ethics**

My search for knowledge revolves around the interaction between indigenous African ethics and Christian ethics. In spite of attempts by European Christian missionaries to dismiss African indigenous religions as primitive and backward, African religions have persisted to date. Many Christians will go to Church during the day and see a witchdoctor at night - literally and figuratively. Reasons for this persistence are many but one of the major ones is that indigenous African religions, and in this context African ethics, remain valuable to Africans, Christian and non-Christians alike. There is no contradiction between African religions and Christianity. It is in recognition of this that African theologians developed the concept of inculturation to refer to the process through which Christian values are expressed and interpreted in the cultures of the people among whom it is lived. For as expressed by Pope John Paul II when he adopted the word into official Church documents: inculturation "expresses one of the elements of the great mystery of the

incarnation".<sup>27</sup> Thus when we refer to African Christian ethics, it is not merely about the insertion of Christian ethical values into African thought forms but about a deeper process in which Christian ethical values as introduced by European missionaries have changed expression of indigenous African ethical values and at the same time expression of Christian ethical values have been changed by indigenous African ethics. Generally, African Christian ethics expresses strongly and upholds the indigenous African value of relationships while embracing the Christian value of love whose minimum requirement is justice.

Contexts matter. I concur with Samuel Waje Kunhiyop in his observation that while it is possible to theoretically think of universal Christian ethics, in practice, there is nothing like universal Christian ethics.<sup>28</sup> Just like there are universal secular ethical principles, the understanding, expression and practice of these ethical principles differs from place to place and from time to time. Indeed:

Just as the Western understanding of ethics has affected the ethical thinking of Christians in the West, so the traditional African understanding of ethics affects the thinking of Christians in Africa. And just as Western Christians have brought some principles of Western ethics to Africa, so African ethical thinking can feed back into western thought, pointing out biblical principles that have been neglected in Western Christianity. One of the most important of these principles is community.<sup>29</sup>

There are a lot of similarities between African Ethics and Christian ethics. Both are theo-centric and anthropocentric. Both have similar principles even though they are expressed differently. The central Christian principle of love may be compared to the indigenous African principle of healthy relationships. Yet, both indigenous African and Christian ethics may not be regarded as legalistic. For both, ethics is a way of being for humans in relationship with God, their creator. Indeed, there is no contradiction between indigenous African ethics and Christian ethics, for to love as required by Christian ethics is to be in relationship as required by indigenous African ethics.

## Endnotes

- 1 Adopted from: <http://www.jainworld.com/literature/story25.htm>  
Accessed on 2nd January 2012. This is one of the most widely told story.
- 2 I thank Prof. CJ Odhiambo for support in Dholuo translations in this lecture
- 3 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Translated with an Introduction by R.S. Pine-Coffin, (London: Penguin Classics, 1961), 21.
- 4 Thomas F. O’dea and Janet Aviad O’dea, *The sociology of the Family*, (New Jersey: Prentice’Hall, 1993), 3.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 <http://www.preservearticles.com/201104296054/10-most-important-functions-of-religion.html> Accessed on January 2, 2011.
- 7 S. Kabazzi-Kisirinya, Deusdedit R.K. Nkurunziza and Gerard Banura, Eds. *The Kanugu Saga: Murder, Suicide or Salvation?* (Kampala: Department of Religious Studies, 2000).
- 8 *See: Max Weber, The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.* Translated by Talcott Parsons, with a foreword by R. H. Tawney. ( **New York: Scribner, 1930**) **and also:** “*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*” by Max Weber translated By Richard Swedberg (Norton Critical Editions, 2009).
- 9 Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969.
- 10 Ninian Smart added this seventh dimension in his later work: *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.
- 11 Much of what I have here is borrowed from my teacher and colleague Prof. Father Joseph Njino in his book: *A Guide to Ethics*, (Eldoret: Zapf Chancery, 2008)

- 12 Henry Sidgwick, *The Method of Ethics*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 380. See also: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/sidgmet4.pdf> Accessed on January 2, 2011
- 13 I use the term indigenous African interchangeably with traditional African to mean African Worldview in pre-colonial times. However, I refer to this in the present tense because some individual persons and communities continue to adhere to these.
- 14 George W. F. Hegel., *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Doer Publications inc. 1956), 93.
- 15 Placide Temples (1945) *La Philosophie Bantoue* ( Bantu Philosophy) (Paris: Presence Africaine), 45.
- 16 Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (new York: African Islamic Mission,, 1988), 145.
- 17 For more information on the importance of this rite, refer to “The Book of Initiation” in *Ka: The Holy Book of NETER*, (Nairobi: African Comb Books, 2005) pp 75 – 187. .
- 18 Due to the different languages used in African, some people will refer to this as essence of humans using different terms such as *Untu, Ubuntu, Umuntu, Umundu*, among others.
- 19 Kwame Gyekye *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, rev. ed (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 154-168.
- 20 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann, 1982), 108-109.
- 21 Desmond Tutu *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Image Books 1999).
- 22 William Golding, *The Lord of Flies*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1954).
- 23 Maulana, Karenga, *Maat, the moral ideal in ancient Egypt: a study in classical African ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 36.

- 24 For details on these characteristics of the Word of God, see: Gruden, Wayne, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994)
- 25 C. H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics II*, (Alcester: Goodliffe Neale, 1985), 198.
- 26 Dennis Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 223.
- 27 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, 53 AAS 71 (1979), 1319.
- 28 Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, (Nairobi: WordAlive, Bukuru: African Christian textbooks, and Michigan: Zondervan, 2008).
- 29 Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, pp. 65-66.

## PART II

### Gender, Youth Sexual Behaviour and HIV/AIDS in Kenya<sup>30</sup>

*“A bull dies with grass in its mouth.”* (Dholuo saying)

*“Whether women are better than men I cannot say - but I can say they are certainly no worse.”*

(Golda Meir)

*“Let no one despise your youth but be an example in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith and in purity”* (I Timothy 4: 12)

#### Introduction

In this second part of my lecture, I begin by presenting the socio-cultural and religious environment in Kenya with specific reference to gender relations and sex in Kenya: the traditional African attitude; the Christian attitude; and the contemporary attitude; and their expectations of gender relations, particularly as they relate to sexual behaviour. Against this background, I then present the sexual behaviour of young people showing how gender is embedded in it thereby bringing out the positive relationship between gender and HIV/AIDS spread. In this context, I see the struggle for gender justice as the desired process and at the same time the desired end in healthy sexual relations and the consequent reduction of HIV/AIDS in Kenya. Indeed, a firm moral foundation for youth in Kenya is indispensable if the future of HIV/AIDS in Kenya is going to be different. But first, suffice to locate myself and my subject of interest within global, national, and institutional development. For as the great Greek Mathematician, Archimedes of Syracuse, I say: “Give me a place to stand and I will move the world”.

#### Youth, Gender and HIV/AIDS in Global and Local Development

Information Technology has so effectively driven the process of globalization that the contemporary world has truly become a village: individual persons and nations can no longer operate in isolation from other persons and



nations. It is in the context of this interdependence and interconnectedness that the Millennium Declaration for Global Development was made and adopted by 189 nations with 147 heads of state and governments signing the document at the UN Millennium Assembly of the United Nations (Millennium Summit) held in New York, US., in September 2000. Out of the Millennium Declaration, Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were identified namely: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development. In recognition that gender is the gravitational theme around which development in all aspects of life revolves, my focus is on achievement of all the eight goals for as noted by the Gender and Development Group -World Bank:

Gender inequality, which remains pervasive worldwide, tends to lower the productivity of labour and the efficiency of labour allocation in households and the economy, intensifying the unequal distribution of resources. It also contributes to the non-monetary aspects of poverty – lack of security, opportunity and empowerment – that lower the quality of life for both men and women. While women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities, the costs cut broadly across society, ultimately hindering development and poverty reduction.<sup>31</sup>

Specifically, however, I focus towards achievement of the goal on combating HIV/AIDS.

While thinking global is imperative to development today, action is effected at the local level and therefore MDGs have to be implemented in view of the specific contexts of each nation. The Kenya Vision 2030, the national blueprint for development, motivated by a collective aspiration for a better Kenya, aims at transforming the country into a globally competitive and prosperous country with high quality of life by 2030. Andrew Taboso provides the following graphic presentation of Vision 2030:

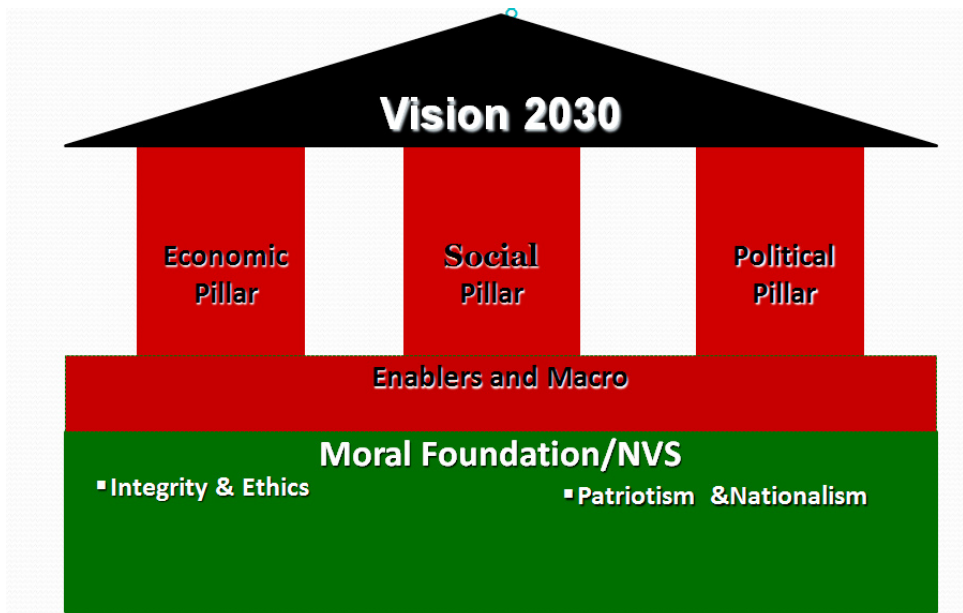


Figure 1: The New House of Kenya<sup>32</sup>

Kenya Vision 2030 has three pillars namely: economic pillar, social pillar and political pillar, all of which are founded on morality, the central concern of this lecture. More specifically, I profess gender reconstruction for gender justice and development.

All the pillars are relevant to what I profess. The economic pillar focuses on the strategic areas of tourism, agriculture, trade, manufacturing, business process, and financial services. Kenyan men and women are involved in these economic activities. For effective productivity, what is required is not gender competition which promotes discrimination or exploitation but gender justice: To move the economy up the value chain, we need both men and women to work closely together in just relations. In the current context of unequal gender relations these areas will not thrive hence my profession of gender reconstruction.

The political pillar is geared towards transformation of Kenya's political governance across the strategic areas of rule of law; electoral process; democracy and public service; transparency and accountability; and, security, peace-building and conflict resolution. This pillar cannot stand without

gender justice especially at the family level which is not only the most basic social institution but also the most basic political institution within which individuals are nurtured for broader public life. In the absence of gender justice, Kenya's political life will continue to be characterized by violence and exploitation, both of which are negatively related to development.

The social pillar of the Kenya Vision 2030 focuses on investing in the people of Kenya through the strategic transformation of key social sectors. Six key sectors are identified namely: education and training; health; water and sanitation; environment; housing and urbanization; and gender, youth and vulnerable groups. All these sectors are relevant to this lecture given the holistic nature of development but I focus more closely on education and training, health, and gender, youth and vulnerable groups. More specifically, I focus on gender, youth sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

Among the key stakeholders identified by Kenya Vision 2030 are religious leaders, civil societies and leaders in education sector with the Kenyan people as key to the achievement of the Vision. I come in as a Kenyan grounded in scholarship of religion and as a member of civil society within which I have a responsibility to not only support but also drive Kenya towards the achievement of Vision 2030. I stand before you as a Professor of Moi University, one of the leading educational institutions in this country. In line with the MDGs and with Kenya Vision 2030, the Moi University Strategic Plan: 2005-2015 focuses on the social strategy to invest in the education of the people of Kenya. Among the prioritized strategic issues and objectives of the MUSP is achieving excellence in academic, research and extension programmes. I am a cog working with many others to turn the Moi University wheel towards achievement of the MDGs at the international level and of Kenya Vision 2030 at the national level.

In view of prevailing misconceptions of the meaning of gender, I begin with a brief introduction of two key terms: sex and gender

### **Introduction of key terms**

#### **i) Sex**

Sex refers to the physiological characteristics that differentiate humans as male or female. According to Stoller (1968), a person's sex is determined by a "by an algebraic sum of all these qualities, and, as is obvious, most

people fall under one of the two separate bell curves, the one of which is called 'male', the other 'female'"<sup>33</sup>. Human beings are sexual beings by nature: while human sexuality is wide and refers to the whole being of persons, in the context of ethics, we limit sex to sexual intercourse. Scholars have sought to explain human sexuality from different perspectives coming up with the following theories of human sexual behaviour:

- a) The biological theory - This theory recognizes that human beings have physiological characteristics as well as bio-chemical sexual characteristics (sexual hormones) which are defined either as male or female human species.<sup>34</sup> These are evident and expressed from the moment of birth but may not be obvious until the adolescent period of physical and psycho-sexual development when human sexual development is at its prime. The hormones trigger sexual feelings and impulses basically characterized by sexual attraction to members of the opposite sex.
- b) The rational theory - This is based on the Kantian, Cartesian and Augustinian moral traditions whose central concern is with the mental sphere of the human person.<sup>35</sup> For these philosophers, sex is not just physiological and biological but more so a mental reality since it is the mind triggers that physiological and biochemical responses. Hence certain mental conditions are required for sexual health, sexual expression and sexual response.
- c) The psychoanalytical theory - This theory, based on the works of such psychoanalysts as Sigmund Freud recognizes that there are personality factors within individual persons which determine the person's response to the sexual biological forces and to rational thinking.<sup>36</sup> These personality factors are shaped by an individual's experiences in the formative period of psychosexual development especially in what Freud refers to as the 'oedipal' phase.
- d) The symbolic interaction theory - The symbolic interaction theory recognizes sexual determinants outside the human person to recognize socio-cultural impositions on biological forces within the individual being.<sup>37</sup> The theory compares with the general social theories of cognitive control of motivation and systematic

socialization both of which postulate that sexual behaviour is systematically manipulated within the socio-cultural environment.

- e) Sexuo-spiritualism – The human person is not just a biological, mental and social being. He/she is also a spiritual being. An individual's spirituality affects his/her response to sexual instincts and impulses, his/her personality, as well as his/her socio-cultural environment.<sup>38</sup> Due to spirituality which is closely related but not the same as rationality one may choose to suppress his/her sexual instincts and impulses, be able to overcome negative personality factors resulting from experience, and one may choose to be moral in an immoral society.

While acknowledging that all the theories of human sexual behaviour are necessary for a holistic perspective to human sexual behaviour, in the context of this lecture, attention is paid to the symbolic interaction theory and the sexuo-spiritual since these are the main theories that are relevant to the impact of gender relations on human sexual behaviour. But first, suffice to provide a definition of gender.

## ii) Gender

Gender may be defined as men's and women's roles, responsibilities and attributes as determined by society and acquired by individuals through the process of socialization. Often, gender roles, which are social roles, are defined as if they arise from sexual differences. Yet, gender and sex are two concepts with different though interrelated meanings. Robert Stoller advanced one of the best distinctions between sex and gender thus:

With a few exceptions, there are two sexes, male and female. To determine sex, one must assay the following conditions: Chromosomes, external genitalia, internal genitalia, gonads, hormonal states, and secondary sex characteristics. ...One's sex, then, is determined by an algebraic sum of all these qualities, and, as is obvious, most people fall under one of the two separate bell curves, the one of which is called 'male', the other 'female'.

Gender is a term that has psychological and cultural rather than biological connotations: if the proper terms of sex are 'male' and 'female', the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine', these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex. Gender is the amount

of masculinity and femininity found in a person and obviously, while there are mixtures of both in many humans, the normal male [historically and culturally] has a preponderance of masculinity and the normal female a preponderance of femininity.<sup>39</sup>

While gender has to do with how male and female individuals are perceived and expected by society to behave as men and women, sex has to do with biological characteristics. While gender changes from one society to another and from time to time, sex is universal: it never changes because it is natural and physiological. For example, giving birth is a female biological sex role found in all human societies. Among the traditional Kikuyu of Central Kenya, thatching of huts is a female gender role while, among the Luhya of Western Kenya, it is a male gender role. This illustrates change in gender role from society to society. In traditional Kenyan societies, fighting in war was strictly a male gender role. Yet with the crisis of the fight for independence, women took to fighting as in the Mau Mau rebellion, a role that has been made easier in modern warfare due to the weapons in use. This illustrates change in gender roles with time. This indicates that gender has to do with learned or socially acquired patterns of behaviour.

Gender issues arise when male or female needs are met at the expense of the needs of the other sex. Over the years, there has been recognition that in most cases all over the world, men's needs have been met at the expense of women's needs. This has led to a gender imbalance with regard to the distribution of labour, resources and opportunities. It has also been recognized that women's special needs such as maternal health have largely been ignored. All these have been attributed to patriarchy with one of its attendant consequences, gerontocracy (control or government by men). The appreciation of this historical development has meant that gender issues have often concentrated on women issues to the point that gender issues have been conceived to mean women issues. But gender issues refer to both men's and women's issues arising from social roles and attributes.

The subject of this lecture revolves around human sexual behaviour as a gender issue. Within the patriarchal African society, male youth needs appear to be met at the expense of female youth needs. It is argued that gender relations (the way male and female perceive and treat one another as they act and think within their society's expectations) is related to human sexual behaviour through various channels of learning such as learning by identification and experience gained from their behavioural environment.

## **The Context of Gender Relations in Kenya**

Africa as a whole in general is at crossroads. Traditional African cultures, modern cultures and modern religions combine in a complex way to define the way Africans think and behave in all spheres of life. For clarity and simplicity, I will discuss the context of youth in Kenya along the three worldviews as follows: i) gender and sex in traditional societies, ii) gender and sex in Christianity, and iii) changing gender relations in contemporary Kenya.

### *Gender and Sex in Traditional Kenyan Societies*

J.S. Mbiti notes that in African societies, religion is integrated into the people's whole way of life. In his own words:

Religion permeates into all departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the people themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life.<sup>40</sup>

With specific reference to Kenyan traditional societies, Mbiti is accurate. Thus, in this section, gender relations as expected by traditional Kenyan societies are presented without making a distinction between what is socio-cultural (secular) and what is sacred. These expectations are derived from the initiation process, which was until recently, common to all Kenyan societies as a socio-religious activity. The initiation process is given special attention because it is the process through which gender awareness is raised in the individual especially as gender relates to sexual life. Indeed, the fact that initiation typically occurs at the critical psychosexual stage of human development dramatizes and makes explicit the difference between male and female social and sex roles. Moreover, in most societies initiation involves modification of sexual organs, an act that clearly indicates the sexual significance of this process.

On the relevance of the initiation process among African societies, Mbiti observes that it is only after initiation that individuals are allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of their people; that individuals enter into a state of responsibility where they have rights and obligations. He emphasizes:

The initiation rites prepare young people in matters of sexual life, marriage, procreation and family responsibilities... Initiation rites have a great educational purpose. The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge, which is otherwise not accessible to those who have

not been initiated. It is a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man/woman relationships...<sup>41</sup>

Judith Bahemuka, a well-known authority on social anthropology concurs with Mbiti on this. She indicates that in most traditional African societies, it is not birth, but socialization and initiation that make a person a member of his or her community.<sup>42</sup>

Besides the social dimension, initiation in traditional African societies has a psychological dimension. Collective initiation and education through various activities relates to resolving unresolved, oedipal conflicts and to combat identity crisis. For example, as argued by C. M. Worthman and J. Whiting the period of seclusion in initiation serves to break the dependence of males on mothers and to enable them attain the status of adult masculinity.<sup>43</sup> Other activities in male and female initiation rites serve to internalize in the initiates their masculine and feminine roles respectively. In the process, a super male ego is created where masculinity is idolized through overt expression of envy of male social roles and formalized protesting rituals making contempt of female social roles.

Writing on the significance of initiation in Africa, Karen Erickson Paige and Jeffrey M. Paige note that the initiation rite provides the critical moment of becoming male or female; the moment when female power is diminished and male power is enhanced and validated.<sup>44</sup> Margrethe Silberschmidt clarifies this in her discussion of the making of males and females among the Kisii of Kenya. She observes that female initiation involves excising a girl's masculine element (clitoris) to remove female aggression and therefore make the woman more sexually controllable.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, male initiation involves removal of male fear to enable the man gain control over the female. There are a few exceptions in Kenya among them the Luo community whose initiation involves excision of teeth but the rite is still central to matters of sexual life. Thus initiation makes women completely feminine and men completely masculine.

Considering that it is medically true that clitoridectomy diminishes sexual excitability in females, the idea behind this practice, that is, to make women sexually controllable, is understood. This effect of clitoridectomy was known to the traditional societies, which practiced it, as is attested by various beliefs.



For instance among the Agikuyu of Central Kenya, uncircumcised women were believed to be sexually loose and insatiable. An understanding of male and female initiation rites is therefore an understanding of socialization on gender relations in traditional African societies.

Obviously, there are variations in the fine details of the initiation process from one ethnic group to another. There may be variations even among sub-ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the meaning and significance of various practices within the process in as far as instilling manhood and womanhood is concerned are similar. What happens over initiation revolves around training boys to be active and dominant in sexual relations while girls are trained to be passive and subordinate in their relations with those of the opposite sex. For purposes of illustrations and clarity, we will consider initiation in two specific Kenyan communities, the traditional Kikuyu male initiation process and the Nandi female initiation process. While the Agikuyu are adequately representative of the Bantu speaking Kenyan societies, the Nandi are representative of the Nilotic speaking Kenyan societies. This justifies their selection.

#### *The Traditional Gikuyu Male Initiation Process*

The traditional Gikuyu male initiation process may be understood as preparation for manhood and for future male roles as husbands and fathers: as heads of families on whom all other members depend for economic provision and social security.

If a man thinks that his son is due for initiation (usually around ages 11-13), he prepares a big feast. Special foods such as porridge, traditional brew; meat and black beans are made and served to the invited guests. This feast is referred to as *mwarano* meaning, age group formation because it is in the process of sharing in this feast that other men declare that they have boys of initiation age. All the identified boys form an age group that would be circumcised together making initiation a social activity. The person who prepares the feast has the privilege of having all the initiates reside in his homestead throughout the initiation process. Of course the fathers of all the other boys contribute a specified number of goats or cattle and other items to this man for their sons' subsistence during the period of seclusion following circumcision.

After this feast, initiates-to-be paint their bodies and are secluded for a while. Within this seclusion period, older men instill in them such masculine values as courage, willingness to take risks, and hard work. After this seclusion, the initiates-to-be spend the eve of the circumcision singing and dancing as

they move from house to house declaring their intentions to graduate from boyhood to manhood through circumcision (*mararanja*). Some of the songs sang overtly ridicule female social roles and clearly express admiration of male social roles. As they move from house to house the initiates-to-be receive gifts and advice on their expected behaviour as men.

Very early the next morning before daybreak, the initiates-to-be and their mentors (*atiiri*) converge at a place set aside for the ritual. Usually, this is a place near the river that had been cleansed and certain religious rites performed among them shaving off head and pubic hair (*menjwo*). More religious rites are performed on each of the initiates-to-be by a medicine man to appease God and the ancestors to help the boys go through circumcision without unpleasant or tragic events such as expression of fear or excessive bleeding. After these rites, the boys take a bath in the river. This has a two-fold purpose: to symbolize their transition from boyhood to manhood and to make their bodies numb to suppress pain. Straight from the river, the boys are circumcised one by one beginning with the son of the man in whose homestead the initiates would reside.

Circumcision marks the climax of the initiation process and the transition from childhood to adulthood. Following this ritual, the initiates are secluded in a hut specially made for this purpose. Here, as they heal, the initiates receive education on the secrets of the society and of family life especially, the masculine role. The basic sex education is on how to seduce girls and generally how to behave towards women. Such masculine attributes as dominance, courage, display of physical strength, authority and command, ability to take risks, and non-expression of emotions are instilled especially as they relate to man-woman relationships. It is clearly impressed on the initiates that men are the heads of families and therefore must be seen to make all decisions for the family with authority. It is made clear that it is essential for them not to falter or express indecision or ignorance if they are to maintain their positions of power and authority. They are also educated on how to keep their expressions away from the public in order to maintain respect especially from the womenfolk. For example, they are taught the secret to ensuring that impotent men are never exposed.

When all the initiates are healed, they are allowed out in a ceremony that symbolizes the final “passing out” parade from boyhood to manhood. According to Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the last rite of initiation before entry into the new world of adults is arranged sex: one cannot be a man before he has

lost his virginity.<sup>46</sup> The initiates are now referred to as “pass outs” (*ciumiri*). Special songs are sung for them expressing such beliefs, as men are strong, brave and wise. Such symbols as of lions, bulls and leopards are used in the songs. Other songs praise the initiates at the expense of femininity. For example, the initiates are praised for not being “emotional and fearful like women”.

From this moment onwards, the initiates are regarded as young men and never as boys. Reference to any of them as a boy is considered abusive to the entire age group. The young men are given authority to beat anybody who refers to any of them as boys. The young men are now allowed to mix with young women and to seduce them. They are now allowed to get into sexual plays with them as long as they do not have penetrative sex. Indeed, there are special dances for both young men and women that go on throughout the night. Within this dance, the young men and women sleep together and actually engage in specially designed non-penetrative sex - a ritual referred to as *ngwiko*. While Jomo Kenyatta claims that the “Kikuyu system of courtship is based on mutual love and the gratification of the sexual instinct between the two individuals”<sup>47</sup> the expectations point at something else. An important thing to note is that they are the young women who are held responsible for ensuring that penetrative sex does not occur. Thus, they are expected to tie their ‘loins garment’ tightly and to ensure that the young men do not untie them. Women who break their virginity before marriage are punished heavily while men are actually not expected to be virgins at marriage.

Throughout courtship, men are expected to court as many women as they can: the more girlfriends a man has, the more respected he is. Some young men come out as heroes to earn the special title of *kiumbani* (seducer), meaning the great seducer, because of the many young women that they seduce. In this courtship men play the dominant role as they have been taught over the initiation process and women are expected to be passively involved.

Silberschmidt observes the following about masculine behaviour among the Kisii:

Respect, discipline and self-restraint do not include male behaviour towards (marriageable) women: only small un-initiated boys are supposed to treat initiated girls with respect. Consequently, women from now on become ‘sexual objects’ that the initiated boys pursue. Linked

to this, male strength in sexual performance, male potency, virility and fertility are underlined in the ritual. Masculinity includes command over women in matters, and, in particular, sexual control.<sup>48</sup>

This is comparable to the expectations of masculinity in traditional Gikuyu society. Courtship, which follows soon after the initiation process, entails seducing as many girls as one can.

Within this process of courtship, a young man always gets to a point when he feels ready to marry. Such a man is required to inform his father about his intentions. The father, together with his friends, makes all the necessary arrangements such as payment of bride wealth. Having completed all the necessary arrangements for marriage, the young man, with the help of his age mates, lay in wait for the young woman he wants to marry and 'hijack' her to his house. The young woman is expected to resist passively but to express her emotions loudly by crying and screaming out aloud. Her friends follow her as she is 'hijacked' and help her cry. The young men take her to the young man's home forcefully. Suffice to note that much of this is role-playing because by the time of the 'hijacking', the girl would have known the arrangements and would have given her consent to marry the man. She is therefore not really being forced into marriage. This 'role-playing' we must mention, however, reinforce male dominance and female subordination as expected attributes of masculinity and femininity respectively.

Consummation of marriage is done when, on the first night, ceremonial sex is performed. In this ceremonial sex, the virginity of the girl has to be tested and broken virginity could be enough ground for the young man to refuse her. Yet, by this time, the young man is rarely a virgin since he is expected to have shared wives of his age mates who had married early. This is a way of training the man in sexual activity and to ensure that he is sexually experienced by the time he gets married. L.S.B. Leakey observes:

In the normal course of events, the bride was still physically a virgin at this time. Her husband on the other hand, had by now probably had full sexual intercourse once or twice with wives of men belonging to his age group and knew the correct procedure connected with full sexual intercourse, having been instructed by them in the art of love.<sup>49</sup>

After this consummation of marriage, a man becomes a full member of the Gikuyu society.

*The Traditional Nandi Female initiation process*<sup>50</sup>

The traditional Nandi female initiation process is best understood as preparation for womanhood: motherhood and housewifery. The process starts when the girls are about ten years old, when they have to sleep with boys in a special house called *sikiroino*. This is obligatory for all girls. If any girls refuse to adhere to this, the boys have authority to beat them into it. The experience is supposed to “teach the girls how to behave towards men and how to control their sexual desires”.<sup>51</sup> From the tender age of ten, it seems that girls are taught to be submissive to men and to obey them without question. On the other hand, boys are expected to play the dominant role of forcing girls into desired action.

When boys and girls sleep together in the *sikiroino*, they engage in all forms of sex play except sexual penetration. As has been implied, the experience is supposed to train the girls in sexual control. Later on, the girls are examined for virginity. Those found to have lost their virginity are ridiculed and punished by their brothers and their male relatives. Sometimes, they may even be speared to death. Those who are found to be virgins are praised and rewarded with cows and sheep. The fact that the boys are not examined for virginity means that the boys are not strictly expected to be virgins before marriage. One may want to argue that it is difficult to prove virginity in boys because of their physiology and that is why they are not examined for virginity. However, such an argument would be invalid because the traditional Nandi people have ways of proving cases that could not be physically verified. For example, swearing of oaths is administered as proofs. We have no indications that male virginity is considered either necessary or important. Indeed, sexual control seems not to be expected of the males as is expected of the females in the traditional Nandi society.

It is clear that virginity is not expected of young men in traditional Nandi society. On the contrary, it would seem that they are not only tolerated but also encouraged to seek sexual experience before marriage. Indeed, by the time of marriage, young Nandi men are expected to be sexually experienced. According to J.G. Peristiany:

The young Nandi at this period of his life did not seek in marriage an outlet for his sexual passion; since his initiation he had led in the *sikiroino* a life free from repression of that sort. The young man by now had full

sexual intercourse with the wives of men belonging to his own initiation age-group and knew the correct procedures connected with full sexual intercourse, having been instructed by them in the art of love making. What he wanted was to increase his material wealth through the joint effort of his household. He also wanted to have children and through them enhance his social prestige.<sup>52</sup>

After this event of continuous sleeping in the *sikiroino* by which time the girls are about fourteen years of age, they are prepared for clitoridectomy. This is the ceremony that marks the climax of the initiation process and is the exact transition point from girlhood to womanhood. Early in the morning of the eventful day, the initiates-to-be assemble at an appointed place where religious rites would have been performed and libations poured to appease God and the ancestors. The girls then bathe in a river (which would be near the place) one by one, after which the expert medicine-woman performs the operation. The operation involves cutting off of the clitoris, which symbolizes elimination of masculine elements that may be in a girl. Thus, it is only after initiation that a girl becomes sexually accessible to men, and controllable and therefore, marriageable. Through this painful process, the girls are expected to persevere and not show any signs of fear. Those girls who express fear are considered a shame not only to themselves but also to their parents and brothers. The brothers sometimes threaten to kill the girl or themselves out of this shame. This expectation for brothers endorses male dominance.

Immediately after clitoridectomy, the girls are taken to a secluded place for a period of between six months and three years. It is throughout this period that education on matters of sex, marriage and family life are instilled. These includes education on the expected women's subordination to their husbands, how to behave in sexual activity for maximum pleasure and satisfaction of their husbands, and when to abstain from sex as in observance of the *post-partum* sex taboo. As a pre-marriage event, initiation may be referred to as a solemn religious dramatization of man's victory over death and social disintegration. Thus, while in seclusion, marriage arrangements for the girls are made. Through marriage and the consequent procreation of children, life is perpetuated while through education and socialization over the initiation period, social order and harmony are ensured.

*Common features on initiation among Kenyan societies*

Among many traditional Kenyan societies, initiation, whose climax is mostly marked by circumcision and clitoridectomy of boys and girls respectively, is,

... the public confirmation of the rights of the individual to become an adult social person. Thus, initiation moves each gender into a new social world, and childhood comes to an end. ...serves to underpin not only the making of male and female identities - but in particular, the difference between these identities. Through the ritual the moral code for each gender is taught and new restraints are imposed upon the individual - to replace an immediate source of authority embodied in the parent with the simultaneously remote and internal one of social obligation.<sup>53</sup>

For all these societies, circumcision and clitoridectomy confer on members of society individually and collectively, masculinity and femininity, respectively before being permitted to engage in sexual relations, in the past considered the preserve of adults in whom responsibility had been inculcated.

As has already been noted, the fine details of initiation in traditional Kenyan societies differ from one ethnic group to another. However, the meaning and significance of the various activities are common to all societies especially with regard to gender relations and youth sexuality. Throughout the initiation process various activities are put in place for the purpose of instilling clear and specific cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity. Girls and boys are socialized on how to be feminine and masculine respectively. The expected behaviour is reinforced by praise and reward and undesired behaviour discouraged by ridicule and punishment.

The major cultural male gender attribute common to all traditional Kenyan societies is therefore, dominance, socially and psychologically. From a very tender age boys are made to feel that men are powerful and authoritative. Within the Nandi female initiation rite, it may be noted that boys are expected to ridicule and punish their sisters if they express fear of clitoridectomy or if they are found not to be virgins. Within the Kikuyu male initiation process, boys are expected to dominate and to force girls into desired action. This is best demonstrated in the act of 'hijacking' girls for marriage.

On the other hand, girls are socialized on how to be submissive especially to men: they are expected to follow orders from males without question. Girls

or women who demonstrate deviance or who question male authority are ridiculed and punished while those who are unquestioningly obedient are praised and rewarded. Among the Somali of the North Eastern Province, as among other ethnic groups in Kenya, the greatest virtue of a girl is reticence.<sup>54</sup>

With regard to sexual life, men are expected to be active, sexually experienced and to exhibit uncontrolled sexual desires. For many African societies, men are encouraged to have many girlfriends and eventually many wives. Among the Kikuyu for example, a young man who has many girlfriends is regarded as a hero and is praised across ridges. Provisions are made for young unmarried men to get sexual experience from wives of their age mates. Among the Maasai of the Rift Valley Province, men are given prepubescent girls to sleep with in order to become sexually experienced before marriage.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, women are expected to be passive, to control their sexual desires, and to be virgins until marriage. Over the initiation process, girls are taught how to perform in the sexual act for maximum satisfaction of their husbands without expressing their own satisfaction. Indeed one of the major reasons for clitoridectomy, which was common in nearly many African societies, was diminution of female sexuality:

The practical significance of female circumcision (sic) was primarily that of withdrawing the convalescent girl for some time from the obtrusiveness of the youth. But the real reason above all was that of removing the erogenous zone from the front into the vagina by the extraction of the organ's most sensitive parts for the strong sexual urge and bridling lasciviousness in order to force upon her in this matter monogamy proper to Nandi traditional male sexual control over the female.<sup>56</sup>

This may be said of all traditional Kenyan societies that practice clitoridectomy. Clitoridectomy is considered essential to control women's sexual desires while at the same time it is believed to enhance men's enjoyment of sex. It would appear that women exist as sexual beings not for their own sake but for the sake of men; women seem to be regarded as sex tools for men's pleasure and service. With this background one may understand the moral evil in clitoridectomy; a tool of oppression. Alongside clitorisectomy, premarital sex for women is condemned and heavily punished.



Besides dominance, sexual experience and sexual prowess, men are expected to be strong, brave, unemotional, authoritative, and to show readiness to take risks. The male initiation process is designed to promote these values. On the other hand, women are expected to be weak, cowardly, emotional and submissive in all facets including in sexual activity.

In general, it may be said that the social world in traditional Kenyan societies is gendered. There are clear socio-cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity, which appear to be opposed to each other. While circumcision validates men's power and gives them sexual rights, clitorisdectomy diminishes female power and sexual activities. While sex is naturally recognized at birth, initiation is what confers gender on individuals.

J.A. Sanford observes:

Traditionally, male circumcision signified a transition rite from adolescence to adulthood. It was held that both sexes co-existed in an individual at birth. Only the public rituals could remove the appropriate sexual elements and confirm the proper ones... affirmed that a boy was a female (feminine) by his foreskin and a girl was masculine by clitoris. The excision of these "organs of the opposite sex" ensured the boy or girl would mature in a mature manner.<sup>57</sup>

In terms of social value system, what is expected of males is opposed to what is expected of females; after initiation, boys enjoy an unrestricted sexual life while girls are secluded until marriage. As Silberschmidt argues:

What is appropriate behaviour and gives social value to a man is certainly not appropriate for a woman and vice-versa. It is morality in which - when speaking in sexual terms - virtue is at stake. Not men's virtue but that of young girls and in particular a wife's virtue.<sup>58</sup>

The rites performed over initiation tell us clearly enough that the process serves as a conditioner of male and female behaviour and their attitudes to one another throughout their whole lives. The process seems much more critical for females than for males. Within the double moral standards, male needs are met at the expense of female needs. While female sexual needs are diluted through clitorisdectomy and moral demands, girls are trained on how to meet male sexual needs. The instructions that the girls receive over initiation on marital relations "included how to sleep with their husbands... how to be attractive and how to bring up children."<sup>59</sup>

It is inappropriate, from a gender perspective, not to mention that initiation is not only imposed on male and female children by adults. It is also supported by the children themselves who are often not only willing but also eager to undergo the process. As argued by Bruno Bettelheim, in the book by Bryk cited above, due to deep psychic motivations, the children themselves make efforts “to resolve the conflict between child and adult, between male and female, and between polymorphous-perverse and genital tendencies”<sup>60</sup>

The children do not merely submit to custom or authority of elders. They are often eager to find instinctual satisfaction and to enter adulthood thereby acquiring adult rights particularly sexual freedom for males. These are obvious effects of systematic socialization.

### *Gender relations and sex in Christianity*

Numerically, Christianity is the major religion in Kenya with over 70 percent of the population claiming to be Christian. This section seeks to present the religious environment within which Kenyan youth live with specific reference to gender relations, sex and Christianity. The section is divided into two in line with the two sources of Roman Catholic Church authority, that is, Oral Tradition and Scripture. Under Tradition, the historical development on the theological understanding of gender relations and sexuality is presented after which the Word of God (the Bible) is analyzed to discern God’s design and will for gender relations. Thereafter, the contemporary Christian understanding of gender relations and sex is presented.

Christian tradition has had a great impact on Christians of our contemporary times whether they are conscious or unconscious of it. Indeed, much of modern biblical interpretation, particularly with regard to sexual ethics issues, is derived from the Church tradition that has been handed over from one generation to another since the Church was founded. It is therefore neither appropriate nor accurate for anyone to write on gender relations and sex in Christianity without reference to this tradition.

The first three centuries of Christianity was dominated by a negative view of sex: not only sexual love but also procreation itself was under attack. The value of sexual love and the dignity of procreation were denied by some heretical groups. The Marcionists, for example, held the view that procreation is evil because it supports the sadistic work of the evil god of Old Testament. The Marcionists viewed the Old Testament god as an evil and inferior creator who

took delight in making people suffer. The discomforts of pregnancy and the pains of childbearing were seen as evidences of his sadistic tendencies.<sup>61</sup>

It is against this background that Early Church theologians, most of whom were professors in the first school of Christian theology, the Catechetical School of Alexandria, got involved in the sexual ethics debate. The Church, in complete opposition to the heresies, taught that procreation is not only good but also holy. However, the theologians upheld the negative view of non-procreative sex and continued to regard women as dangerous beings to sexual morality as they were seen to tempt men from the moral path. The dominant opinion of the Early Church theologians was that women were inferior to men and therefore should suffer subjugation. But the debate on gender and sex did not gain prominence until the medieval Church.

#### *Historical Development of Gender Relations in Christianity*

The most renowned theologian in the area of gender and sex is St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430). He is referred to as the

Master of medieval thought for through him, the middle ages were furnished with a framework of ethical reference in the area of sexuality and conjugality. Right up to the twelfth century, theologians, jurists and moralists systematically referred to him when discussing these ethical issues.<sup>62</sup>

According to Joseph Kambo, Augustine is “renowned of all times because of his clear and well synthesized theology which was the foundation of Christian doctrine”.<sup>63</sup>

Augustine held a negative view of non-procreative sex. To him, sexual intercourse even with one’s legitimate wife is evil if conception is prevented. That Augustine was a Manichean for more than ten years of his prime youth is of great significance to the history of the Christian view of gender and sexuality. This is so because when Augustine was converted to Christianity, he brought with him a strong reaction against Manichaeism. The result is that Christian morality seems totally opposed to Manichaen morality. While Manichaeism taught that humans should have sex for pleasure and not for procreation, Christianity taught that the sole lawful purpose of sex is procreation. In his attempt to fight Manichaeism, it seems that Augustine went into the extreme opposite thinking. Kambo observes:

For Augustine, any sexual desire, sexual relationship and sexual pleasure was lust and therefore sinful. Though he recommended procreative sexuality, Augustine loathed anything to do with sex. This made sexuality to be ceaselessly held with lots of negativism during his time and these (sic) after.<sup>64</sup>

Alongside this sexual negativism, Augustine believed that women are inferior to men by nature because they are not made in the image of God. He pronounced:

The woman, together with her husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance may be one image; but when she is referred separately to in her quality of help-meet, which regards the woman herself alone, she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.<sup>65</sup>

Within this Augustinian thinking, gender is translated into a sexual issue in that a woman needs a man in his capacity as a sexual partner (husband) if she is to ever bear the image of God. Yet, man on his own bears the image of God. This definitely endorses the concepts of male superiority and female inferiority.

To understand the thinking of Early Church theologians and of Augustine, it is essential to understand the philosophical context and background within which they lived. At the time of the Early Church, Greek Stoicism, Gnosticism and Manichaeism, characterized mainly by a dualistic world-view, prevailed. All creation was divided into matter and spirit, that is, body and soul. Matter was regarded as evil while spirit was regarded as good. Hence, matter was to be suppressed while spirit was to be promoted. Within this dualism, female was equated to matter and male was equated to spirit. Bodily instincts and desires were associated with women and both had to be suppressed while philosophical knowledge was associated with men and had to be pursued. It is with this thinking that sexuality came to be negatively viewed. Lawrence Osborne traces the roots of negative attitude to sex in Christianity to what he calls the pessimistic cosmology of Gnosticism, which equated sexual love to death.<sup>66</sup>

Some other Early Church theologians believed that woman is inferior to man because she initiated the original sin and that her suffering in subjugation is

punishment for her sins. In view of Greek dualism and other philosophies, which held sexuality in extreme degradation, this belief may be understood. It is this extreme degradation of sexual love (as a strong bodily desire), which molded the traditional Christian sexual ethics, which was narrowly centered on the procreative function of the sexual act. Indeed, the Early Church taught that the sole lawful purpose of marital sex is procreation and therefore "intercourse even with one's legitimate wife is unlawful and wicked where conception of the offspring is prevented".<sup>67</sup> Against this sexual negativism, the moral frailty of the female sex was assumed convincing the theologians all the more that female is evil and must be suppressed if man was not to be tempted by it away from the moral path. Thus male domination had to be exercised and female subordination ensured.

The thinking that women are evil, inferior to men, not made in the image of God and therefore must suffer subjugation persisted throughout the Middle Ages of Christianity and inevitably influenced later theologians. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, when the main works of Aristotle were translated into Latin, the idea that women are inferior was reinforced. Aristotle had come up with his anatomical theory that the male contributed the form of a child in procreation and that the female is only an incubator. Peschke reports: "The man is the active life - and form - giving principle in procreation. The woman is merely passive and only offers the matter".<sup>68</sup> According to this Aristotelian biology, the female is a 'misgotten male', or a 'maimed male' which is by nature inferior in capacity for thought, will, and physical activity. Brown reports:

...a woman is produced by defective seed, which is lacking in heat, strength or quantity. Women were failed males. The precious vital heat had not come to them in sufficient quantities in the womb. Their lack of heat made them more soft (sic), more liquid, clammy-cold, altogether more formless than man.<sup>69</sup>

This view found its way into the writings of such great theologians as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas who claimed it as their own. Aquinas for example, is cited thus:

The particular nature of the active male seed intends to produce a perfect likeness of itself, and when females are conceived this is due to weak seed, or unsuitable material, or external influences like the dampness of the south wind.<sup>70</sup>

Anybody who is familiar with modern biology would find Aristotelian biology comical and anyone founding his arguments on it absurd!

Suffice to note that in spite of all these philosophies, theologies, and scholasticism, some Christian theologians believed in the equal dignity of man and woman. Examples of such theologians include St. Ambrose, St. Basil, and St. Francis of Sales. Ambrose wrote: "Everybody, man as woman, must know that he bears God's image and likeness" while Francis wrote: "The Woman is equal to the man especially in the claim to grace and glory", and Basil declared: "The woman, no less than the man possesses the privilege of being created after God's image. Both sexes have the same dignity, both the same virtues".<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, throughout the Middle Ages the negative attitude to women and to sexuality carried the day.

The Great Reformation of the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century gave way to a new consciousness which marks significant change from the dominant Christian ideology on sex and gender of the medieval period. Essentially, the Reformation was a conflict over authority not only in the realm of theology but also in that of morality: the challenge to Church authority was accompanied by a critique of its moral teachings. In the area of sexual and conjugal morality, the Reformation led to three major changes as observed by Erich Fuchs thus:

First of all, there was a break with ancient Christian tradition, which exalted celibacy as the royal road to salvation. Reformation strongly asserted a primacy of marriage and thereby gave sexuality a new positive status (even if its boundaries were carefully drawn). Sexuality was recognized as the locus of the fundamental human experience of conjugality. Man does not exist independent of woman but is a partner in humanity in a bond that is emotional and social...(secondly and consequently), a stand on women quite different from that middle ages women although rigidly subordinated to the husband was seen neither as a demonic creature created to test the chastity of true believers... she has a co-responsibility with her husband for conjugal and family life... Finally, restored to the created order marriage became a matter of moral and social responsibility... Through marriage, which was no longer deemed a remedy to concupiscence but recognized as an aid to human weakness, man (and woman) can build mankind (humankind). It was important, then, that marriage and the family be protected by law.<sup>72</sup>

The changes on sexual and conjugal morality by the Reformation notwithstanding, there remained in people's consciousness the attitude that women are inferior to men. For example, Martin Luther who actually spearheaded the Reformation is said to have subscribed to the thinking that women suffer subjugation as a punishment for the original sin. It would seem that while the belief that women are inferior by nature had been shaken, the attitude that women are inferior remained. This 'hangover' from the Medieval Church may be understood from a socio-anthropological perspective: attitudes take a long time to die.

Theological thinking with regard to sex and gender in modern times indicates some development from the thinking of the medieval period. Within contemporary Christianity, a strong counter-reaction especially from feminist theologians has arisen. This advocates for a positive attitude to women and to sexuality. Some contemporary theologians demand that women be recognized as beings made in the image of God and that "sexual love is discovered and exalted as human value, willed by the Creator, and therefore wholly good".<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the dominant thinking of the Early Church and the Christian Middle Ages continue to hang over as manifested by the continuing debate on the status of women *vis-à-vis* that of men. Sexual negativism also abound as sexual love remains a taboo subject in the whole Church especially in Kenya where many Christians, unaware of the changing attitude to sexuality, continue to regard the sexual act, even within marriage, shameful, and at worst, evil.

The issue of gender relations and sexuality implicitly remains negative. Patriarchal attitudes continue to govern Christian sexual ethics. As noted by Elaine Graham:

While Thomism notions of the essential inferiority of women are no longer explicitly entertained, no alternative theological anthropology is advanced, either to endorse modern thinking on the equality of sexes, or to identify alternative Christian understandings of human nature. It still wants to draw its anthropology from Natural Law without realising that historically this rested in faulty biology, or that contemporary scholarship on human gender eschews simplistic connections between reproductive differences and social roles.<sup>74</sup>

From the face value, it would appear that the contemporary Christian Church really believes in the sanctity of sexual love and the equality of men and women. But this seems to be only at the theoretical level. In terms of practice, men continue to control and dominate women as they retain their superior positions. Thus, Paul Avis observes that Churches remain “... the willing tool of patriarchy, the instrument of oppression and the sustainer of exploitation on a vast scale”.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the Augustinian thinking that only man is in the image of God finds expression in the argument of G. Leonard and others thus:

To speculate as to whether the Word could have become female human being is therefore not appropriate. And further, the fact that the Word became human as male is for us an essential aspect of the incarnation; to say otherwise is to negate God’s revelation of himself. In the wisdom of God it was deemed fitting and right that the son become male human being not female.... However, we may add that it does seem to be, from the human angle, more appropriate and fitting that the Second Person of the Trinity should be revealed in male rather than female form.<sup>76</sup>

What Leonard and others seem to ignore is the inadequacy of human language in describing God and also the limited and temporal tones of human experience. In arguing that the imagery of fatherhood for the first person of the Trinity and ‘son’ for the second person of the Trinity is not accidental but expresses the real and unchanging nature of God, Leonard and others insist that God is male. This implies that women are not made in God’s image and therefore men are superior to women. Leonard and others seem to limit Christ Incarnate to his human nature, ignoring the more basic divine nature. Christ’s divinity is unfathomable and indescribable in human terms and experience.

Not unlike in the Early Church or in the Christian Middle Ages, although in less explicit ways, patriarchal attitudes characterized by male dominance and female subordination continue to govern Christian gender relations especially in the realm of sexuality.

### *Biblical Views of Gender Relations and Sex*

Having presented the historical development in gender relations in the Christian tradition, it is imperative to present an analysis of the biblical views on gender relations and sexuality. It is important to discern God’s design



for gender relations and sexuality as presented in the Bible rather than as interpreted by Christian theologians over time and space. This is essential because while theologians may err in their interpretation of God's design, the Word is without error. Through an analysis of selected biblical texts, two questions which are considered basic to understanding gender relations and sexuality in Christianity are addressed, namely:

- i) Is male superior to female human being?
- ii) What is the purpose of sex?

Genesis 1 presents the first creation story in which how God created everything in existence is chronologically recounted. Verses 26-28 report:

Then God said, "And now, we will make human beings; they will be like us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all the animals, domestic and wild, large and small". So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them and said "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control."<sup>77</sup>

A literal analysis of this text indicates that both male and female were created by God in God's image because in God's own words, there is no mention of male or female. God only talked about human beings who would be made in God's image. It is the narrator who introduces the concepts of male and female. In verse 27, the narrator presents God as a male gender who created male and female "to be like himself". In God's words, human beings would have power over other creatures. There is no indication at all that either of the sexes would have more power over the other.

It would seem that the patriarchal cultural background of the narrator or of Bible translators influenced them to think of God as a male. Arguing on patriarchy as the root cause of female subordination, Daphne Hampson emphasizes:

The fact that God has in the West been conceived as a male and the world of the Bible has been considered to be normative for human relations has served to legitimize the place which women have occupied in Western culture and to thwart their striving for equality.<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, the fact that the Bible has been written by men from patriarchal cultures, which had always conceived God as a male entity, may account for the Biblical presentation of God as male.

According to the cited Scripture on the first account of creation, sexual differentiation is God's design so that through heterosexual acts human beings may get children. Sex is God's creation and therefore God's good gift to human beings. The second creation account offers another purpose of sex. After God had created Adam, the narrator indicates:

Then the Lord God said: "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him" ... So the man named all the birds and all the animals; but no one of them was suitable companion to help him (Gen. 2: 18-20).

The suitable companion was found in the female form which Adam attests to be equal to him in his words: "At last, here is one of my own kind - bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). According to Peschke:

Therefore man and woman go together and complete each other. This completion is not only biological but also a spiritual one. Sexuality reaches deep into the human soul. The total man, not only his body is sexually man or woman.<sup>79</sup>

Within this understanding the Old Testament advocates sex only between a married man and his wife. Premarital sex, which is usually against the principle of procreation and has no design for permanent companionship, is condemned as evil.

The New Testament presents two views of womanhood; the subordinationist and the equalitarian. From Pauline letters we can remotely trace the subordinationist view while the equalitarian view is found in Jesus' teachings as recorded in the gospels. One of the most explicit of Paul's teachings on man-woman relationship reads:

Submit yourself to one another because of your reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the Church; and Christ is himself the savior of the Church, his body. And so wives must submit completely to their husbands just as the Church submits itself to Christ. Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and

gave his life for it. ...But it also applies to you: every husband must love his wife as himself, and every wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 6:21-33).

Some theologians have interpreted this scripture as indicating the subordinations view since wives are commanded to submit completely to their husbands as though to the Lord. But then immediately after this command to women, Paul commands men to love their wives "as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for it." Reading the two commands by Paul on man-woman relationships, there seems to be an opinion that women are subordinate to their husbands. Further critical analyses, however, indicate otherwise. Considering that love is the greatest virtue within which all other virtues fit, it would appear like Paul found men to be called to greater responsibility for their wives. Men are called to give up their lives if it is so demanded for the sake of their wives.

A controversial statement is found in 1Timothy 2:12-15 where Paul writes that women should not teach or have authority over men because Adam was created first and because woman is the guilty one of the original sin. Paul then adds that the role of women is to bear children through which task women will be saved. What needs to be understood is that Paul wrote the various epistles as a response to specific situations. Moreover, he was bound to think within his socio-cultural background. In the specific letter where he notes that women will be saved by childbearing, Paul was reacting to a definite abuse of authority by a woman claiming to be a prophetess. He was also reacting to an unhealthy pursuit of spiritual and extraordinary gifts that was diverting women from familial duties.

It would not be accurate, therefore, to say that Paul had a subordinations view of womanhood. Indeed, at other instances, Paul overtly expresses the view that men and women are equal. For example he wrote: "So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Moreover in all his letters Paul sent greetings to and messages on Christian women, mentioned by name, in an honourable way. For example, in his personal greetings to the Romans, Paul recommends Phoebe to the Roman Christians as a diligent servant of the Church at Cenchreae. He also sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquilla among others who he refers to as fellow workers (Romans 16).

Jesus Christ on whom Christianity is founded and who is the role model for all Christians treated women with equal regard as men. In his ministry, Jesus did not discriminate between men and women; but accorded them equal dignity (See for example, Luke. 8: 2f, Luke. 10: 38-42, and Mark. 5: 5-25). He taught both men and women; he healed both men and women; he accepted support from both men and women; he ministered to male and female alike.

It has been argued that Jesus discriminated against women because he did not have any female disciple and he did not have women featuring in such great events as The Last Supper and the Transfiguration. But such an argument may not be justified. Considering the rough terrain within which the disciples had to work, it would not have been reasonable to have women in the group of disciples. Moreover, Jesus had to consider the culture of the people to whom he was ministering otherwise his message would not have been acceptable. It must be noted, however, that where Jesus did not foresee much cultural shock, he transgressed the limits set by the Jewish culture in favor of women. For example, he spoke to and requested for drinking water from the Samaritan woman, he allowed himself to be touched by an “unclean” woman, and he also saved an adulterous woman from death by stoning (See John. 4, Mark. 5 25f, and John. 8 respectively).

Indeed, read within the patriarchal cultural contexts and in view of the specific situations of the writers, the Bible has an equalitarian stand on man-woman relationships because both male and female are created in the image of God. The seemingly male dominance and female subordination may be understood in view of the specific socio-cultural situations and in view of the fact that the Bible has been written, canonized, interpreted and translated by men from patriarchal cultures.

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament recognizes sex as a good gift created by God for the purposes of procreation and mutual companionship. The New Testament therefore echoes the Old Testament’s advocating of sex only within marriage. However the New Testament differs from the Old Testament in that it does not approve of polygamy despite the fact that God spoke to and blessed polygamists like Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon as he did for monogamists on condition that they feared God and acted on his commands. The New Testament advocates monogamous union, emphasizing that in marriage, the male and female become one.

Premarital sex and other forms of sexual behaviour such as adultery are condemned as evil throughout the New Testament because they do not serve the purpose of procreation and permanent mutual companionship. Except for marital sex, all other forms of sexual behaviour are classified together with idolatry and murder as mortal sins.

There is what has been referred to as a peculiar trait of New Testament sexual ethics, which recommends virginity and celibacy.<sup>80</sup> Paul seems to advise the Christians in Corinth that virginity and celibacy are higher values than monogamy (I Corinthians. 7: 6-9). A critical analysis of Paul's advice reveals that Paul was only giving his opinion in view of the expected *parousia* (second coming). Moreover, Paul does not actually compare virginity and celibacy to monogamy; he recognizes the former as a special gift from God which is given to a few individuals to enable them serve God unreservedly, a virtue that Catholic Priesthood and the Religious are enjoined to observe.

From these brief analyses of some selected biblical texts, it is clear that male dominance and female subordination are not God's design. God created both sexes to be equal complementarities that form a total whole. At the same time, it is clear that sexual love is good because sex is God's creation, God's gift. The Bible indicates that, sex like all gifts, may be abused in the form of premarital sex, adultery and polygamous unions, among others. When it is so abused, the Bible condemns sex as a shameful and mortal sin.

### *Changing gender relations in contemporary Kenya*

It is difficult to write on gender relations in contemporary Kenya because the current situation lacks in any agreed or general value system. Some people still uphold the traditional cultural value systems. Others have wholly adopted Christian values. The great majority, however are at cultural crossroads: they hold a value system that has a mixture of indigenous culture, Christianity and other values. Modernization and the consequent process of secularization worsen an already complex value system with new values from Western and Eastern cultures. Suffice to note that this complex value system does not always have consistent values even within one individual. Depending on the specific situation every individual chooses what value system to adhere to. Most young people in Kenya, whether in the urban or in the rural areas, seem to adhere to this complex system. This value system is rather confusing because of the inconsistencies therein. Current research findings, particularly on gender relations and sexuality among the youth, indicate this complexity.

A Study by R.L. Munroe and R.H. Munroe on the Maragoli of Western Kenya on cultural reproduction of differentiation of sex made one major conclusion: social change has had little impact on cultural reproduction of gender differentiation.<sup>81</sup> According to Munroe and Munroe, there has been modest change in specific areas such as in the sexual division of labor but this has not affected the overall inculcation of strong gender typing. Culture - specific gender distinctions in everyday activities and social groupings and in role and task preferences remain stable and robust with little from outside socio-cultural influences. This implies that male dominance and female subordination prevail among the Maragoli. V.M. Lema, writing on the entire Kenyan situation concurs with Munroe and Munroe when he reports that one of the major determinants of sexual activity among schoolgirls in Kenya is coercion from men/boys.<sup>82</sup> Another study carried out among the same people (Maragoli) indicates otherwise.<sup>83</sup> Bradley records significant impact of social change on gender relations especially with regard to declining son preference, erosion in the authority of husbands and male elders, and to lessening inequalities between husband and wife. One wonders how and why social change is affecting certain aspects of gender relations without affecting gender differentiation.

As if in response to this paradox, M. Silberschmidt did a major study in Kisii District of Kenya on gender antagonism and socio-economic change<sup>84</sup>. Silberschmidt found that gender relations in Kenya are changing due to changing gender roles. The change in gender role, according to Silberschmidt, is however one-sided in that women, in addition to all their traditional gender roles, have taken up such roles as bread-winning which were traditional male gender roles. But men have not taken up any new roles. He observes that the resultant effect is that the position of Kenyan men at the family level has weakened affecting their self-respect and identity. He adds that men are increasingly using their earnings to attend to their personal needs rather than family needs.

Silberschmidt further notes that there has been change in gender relations and gender role negotiation with regard to sexuality, gender identity and social value. He gives the example of a situation where women adopt family planning without telling their husbands let alone asking them. E.L. Gwako confirms this in a study on Conjugal Power in Kenyan Families.<sup>85</sup> Yet, women continue to refer to their husbands as the heads of their families or as their 'owners' in spite of the increasing irrelevance of men. In view of these issues,

Silberschmidt indicates a need to reconsider conventional and stereotypical assumptions about gender relations in regions that are experiencing social cultural change.

C.M. Worthman and J.W. Whiting concur with Silberschmidt on the complexity of gender relations in Kenya.<sup>86</sup> Writing on social change in adolescent sexuality among the Kikuyu, Worthman and Whiting observe that abandonment of traditional initiation rites and attenuation of the age-set system have most markedly altered the socialization process.<sup>87</sup> In the absence of information on sexual values, adolescents are left almost without value with serious negative effects particularly on their sexuality.

Another scholar, H.A. Kelly, indicates that social change has led to “continual negotiation” between men and women with reference to roles and power.<sup>88</sup> Among the Orma, a pastoral community from Eastern Kenya whom Kelly studied, women are acquiring more power due to social change. From women’s meetings (*Gaa eyba*) women are eliciting collective power with which they are attacking offending males and which they are stemming desired subordination from men. A critical appraisal of these and other researches on gender relations especially as this relates to sexuality indicates the complexity of the Kenyan situation. There seems not to be any agreed practice. Gender roles and relations have high flexibility, are continually changing and are constantly being reinterpreted in an adaptive process.

True, gender relations in Kenya today are changing. Women are increasingly becoming free from political and economic domination as gender empowerment programs employ affirmative action to afford women access to education, employment, and public decision-making positions. I will come back to this point later. For now, let us focus on answering the question: Are gender relations in sexual behaviour changing? Not significantly: gender relations in sexual behaviour seem to by and large, remain constant. A certain model of gender relations and human sexuality prevails in Kenya. This model has been referred to as ‘fertility-oriented model’.<sup>89</sup> The model is derived from traditional culture, Christianity, and modernity altogether combined and recognizes fertility as the single major determining factor in man-woman relationships. Within this model, a woman does not exist as a sexual being with her own right or for her own sake. According to Kisembo and others, “she exists first as mother of her husband’s children. Apart from this necessary requirement, she is of little importance”.<sup>90</sup> The main characteristic of this model is male dominance especially in sexual encounters.

According to a British psychologist, David Lewis of the University of Sussex, who has been studying macho men, male chauvinism exists in every man in the world but the level to which each displays it differ.<sup>91</sup> In psychoanalysis, male dominance is explained from the view that men are naturally fearful and insecure and are prone to failure unless they feel they are dominating.

Nelson's argument seems to be in line with the biological and the psychoanalytical theories of human sexual behaviour. As has already been noted, this work recognizes these theories but relies more on the symbolic interaction theory, which stipulates that sexual behaviour is a product of social and cultural impositions on biological forces within the individual person. In this context therefore, male dominance in sexual encounters, is significantly a product of our contemporary socio-cultural and religious environment.

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the fertility-oriented model of human sexuality is found among all societies in Kenya though its manifestation differs from one group to another and from one region to another in terms of intensity. The model exerts pressure and expectations affecting male and female sexual attitudes and practices. This is particularly because men are socialized to equate their maleness and manhood to their ability to perform sexually while women are socialized to equate femaleness and womanhood to their ability to meet male sexual needs and societal reproduction needs. In Kenya, male dominance and contempt of femininity is overtly expressed. For example, *matatu* (public transport mini-buses) touts harass female passengers, physically and verbally and rarely is any objection raised.<sup>92</sup> They also display stickers in the *matatu* which are not only degrading to women but have negative connotations of female sexuality. Such stickers include:

- A woman is a maize cob for every man with teeth to eat.
- Women are like *matatu*, if you miss one you will catch the next.
- I love 3W; Wealth, Women and Wine.

The worst gossip about a man in Kenya is where he is said to be dominated by the wife (*amekaliwa* - a Kiswahili word literally translated means, "he is sat on") and men will go into great heights to avoid such labels. In line with expectations, few men will admit to any insinuations that he may be dominated by the wife and so domestic violence against men is rarely reported. Over the last few months, however, news of men who have been battered by their husbands especially from Nyeri County has suddenly become headlines in the local media. Men and women alike seem to receive



the news with a lot of giggles. Yet, this is not a laughing matter as it reflects unhealthy development in gender relations that calls for urgent rethinking and social engineering. I will come back to this later. For now, we observe that expectations of male dominance and contempt of femininity is learnt right from the oedipal phase of psycho-sexual development where boys who display feminine character like expressing emotions are reprimanded to stop being "as stupid as a woman". As children grow up, they are socialized to accept male dominance and female submissiveness; to show reverence to masculinity and contempt to femininity. In most societies such gender relations are learnt most in adolescence and youth.

In their attempts to dominate, as is expected of them, some men in Kenya engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour such as premarital sex. For example, young men may coerce their girlfriends into sexual activity if only to display their manhood and dominance. Others express their contempt of femininity by having sex with as many girls as is possible without any expression of affection, care or respect due to the attitude that women are objects that men use to meet male sexual needs. On the other hand, due to the contempt of femininity, women lack in control over their sexual behaviour. For example, many young women are driven into irresponsible sex because they do not have the assertiveness to say no to sex; they have been socialized to be passive especially in sexual encounters.

Within the contemporary Kenyan context, society generally expects men to display uncontrolled sexual desires and sexual prowess in a way that a man who is faithful to his wife is referred to as a dominated male. Machomen are expected to be polygamous or unfaithful in monogamous unions. At the same time, men are expected to always take the initiative in sexual encounters and to be sexually experienced. These expectations drive young men into sexual activity and sexual mobility. In other instances, young men are sometimes caught up in a situation where they cannot say no to a woman's sexual advances even though they do not want to engage in sexual activity. Due to socio-cultural expectations that men initiate sex, there are instances where men are sexually harassed and they give in to the harassment without opposition. For example, a man can easily be tricked into a secluded place by a woman and end up in unwanted sexual activity.

Within the fertility-oriented model, men are expected to be strong and to display readiness to take risks; men are not expected to display their emotions

be they of fear, love, or insecurity. In their attempts to fit into these definitions young men may engage in premarital sex without showing any care, love or concern for their sexual partners. Should the partner get pregnant, for example, or sexually sick, they discard them to pursue others. For these men, risks should be taken as they come. Thus, the risk of getting a girl pregnant or of contracting a sexually transmitted disease including HIV/AIDS is worth taking if only to exhibit their masculinity. Some men will never say no to sex even when they know they are taking risks. Indeed, "unsafe sex is seen as an assertion of manhood".<sup>93</sup>

In general, the fertility oriented sexual model may be referred to as the dominant male sexual model. Kisembo and others provide us with a comprehensive summary of this thus:

Whereas the woman is weak and inferior, the man is strong by common presumption and dominant. He is the bearer of the seed of life, the destiny and the activator of human life. The initiative in any undertaking, including sexual relationships in [and outside] marriage is his. The woman is as it were a passive receptacle. It is up to the man to choose his wife never the other way round.<sup>94</sup>

In the absence of a solid socialization process that was found in traditional societies, young men and women pick examples from older men and women. To a great extent, youth behaviour, therefore, may be considered as a reflection of the adult world. This is especially the case in issues to do with sexuality, which young people rarely ever get from their parents, teachers or other reliable sources. Some scholars have tried to explain why male dominance that characterizes traditional societies prevails in spite of modernity. Joseph H. Pleck observes:

The simplest explanation is that men hold these attitudes because to do so is in their self-interest; such attitudes justify men's relative privilege. Another explanation is that men (and women) hold these attitudes simply because they are widespread in the culture.<sup>95</sup>

The former explanation seems more convincing. Since the *status quo* is seen to be favourable for men, and since men are holding the reins of power, they would prefer that the *status quo* remain. Unless men are willing to let go of some of their unmerited privileges, male dominance and female subordination is bound to persist with the excuse that this is the Kenyan

traditional culture. Yet, other aspects of traditional cultures in Kenya have completely disappeared. For example, traditional modes of dressing among the Kikuyu have disappeared.

With this analysis of the context within which young people in Kenya live, we may now turn to the thrust of the argument presented in this chapter: Gender relations are positively related to sexual activity among young people in Kenya and subsequently, to HIV/AIDS spread.

### **The challenge of HIV/AIDS in Kenya**

In spite of investment of hundreds of billions of dollars by myriad governmental and nongovernmental development agencies (including PEPFAR's over 61b by the year 2013), HIV/AIDS remains one of the major health challenges globally but more so for Sub-Saharan countries, Kenya included. According to UNAIDS, about 34 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2010 and although annual new HIV infections fell to 21 per cent between 1997 and 2010, the number of new infections is still high at 2.7 million.<sup>96</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa continues to suffer the brunt of the scourge with 68 per cent of all infected persons coming from the region even though the region is home to only 12 per cent of the total world population. Globally, there are almost equal numbers of men and women living with HIV but in Sub-Saharan Africa 59 per cent of all people living with the virus are women.

While available literature suggests that the positive relationship between unequal gender relations and sexual behaviour in the context of HIV/AIDS was established more than a decade ago, and in spite of many decades of behaviour change interventions, little change has taken place: a positive relationship continue to exist between gender relations sexual activity and therefore a positive relationship between gender relations and HIV spread in Kenya. Deriving from a concern over the sexual health of young people growing up in Kenya I persist in discussing the subject. Among the wisdom of the traditional Gikuyu society, *utamerithitie ndatigaga kuhaanda* (she whose seeds have not sprouted does not stop planting).

Statistics on the HIV/AIDS situation in Kenya are grim. They suggest that about 1.2 million people are living with HIV and even though prevalence rates have been falling (from over 14 per cent in 1999 to about 7.4 in 2007)<sup>97</sup> prevalence remains high especially for women which stands at 8.7 per cent compared to that of men at 5.5 per cent.<sup>98</sup> Unsafe heterosexual sex remains

the major cause of HIV infection in Kenya accounting for 64.1 per cent of all infections with 70 per cent of these cases being from heterosexual encounters within union/regular partnerships.<sup>99</sup> The difference in HIV prevalence by gender is associated not only with biological differences between male and female but also with socio-cultural factors which promote gender sexual violence. A study carried out at the USAID-AMPATH, (in cooperation with the Ministry of Medical Services and the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, this partnership delivers HIV care and treatment services to more than 75,000 HIV-infected persons through 65 Ministry of Health facilities in western Kenya), suggests that gender violence significantly contributes to HIV infection especially for women in long term relationships.<sup>100</sup> According to the study findings:

Fifty three per cent of all women interviewed reported having ever been sexually abused. Sexual violence included demand for sex using coercion or the performance of certain sexual acts, forcing the participant to have sex with other people, treating her in a sexually derogatory manner or insisting on unsafe sex. Intimate partner was reported highest (56 per cent) perpetrators of sexual violence...<sup>101</sup>

The above statistics are grim for Kenya where the spread of the virus is threateningly high. While the spatial spread of HIV differs from one region to another, the socio-demographic map of HIV and AIDS in Kenya indicates that certain categories of people are more vulnerable to infection than others. Among the most vulnerable groups in Kenya are youths (15-35 years age group). Over 60 per cent of new infections are among these.<sup>102</sup>

While ignorance by youth on the implications of their sexual behaviour was initially identified as the major factor leading to youth unsafe sexual activity, indiscriminate provision of sex education does not seem to have had significant positive change. This indicates the need to program sex education to be holistic so as to recognize not only the environmental, social, cultural and biological factors determining sexual behaviour but also to integrate in this education a moral component.

### **Knowledge and attitude on sex among the youth in Kenya**

Before analysis of gender relations, sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS among the youth, suffice to give some brief information on knowledge on and attitudes to sex and HIV/AIDS among the youth in Kenya. Many research projects have been carried out with the aim of establishing the knowledge

levels of young people on sexual matters and HIV/AIDS, attitudes to sex and HIV/AIDS, and actual sexual behaviour in relation to HIV/AIDS. Some of these are cross sectional cutting across different social strata, ages, educational status, sex, among other variables while others are longitudinal. Among the researches, some are ethnographic in nature while others are epidemiological, theological, and sociological. While some of the studies have been entirely on young people, others have been comparative between youths and adults.

In most research projects on knowledge of sex and HIV/AIDS youth respondents are requested to respond to a number of questions related to facts on sex, conception, pregnancy, modes of HIV infection, risk factors on HIV infection, and symptoms of HIV infection. Findings of all past research projects concur that youth across Kenya have high levels of knowledge on sex, conception, and pregnancy.<sup>103</sup> They also concur that majority of youths indicate that although sexual activity by young people before marriage is not accepted nor approved by society, it is a norm.<sup>104</sup> Not surprisingly, the same attitudes prevail among adults so that youth sexual behaviour may be interpreted as a reflection of adult sexual behaviour.

A study carried out by Karungaru Kiragu in Kenya clearly indicates this.<sup>105</sup> Kiragu carried out a national survey involving 1,476 respondents comprising of youths (15-19 years old) and adults (20-54 years old) to find out whether or not adults and youths have differing attitudes to premarital sex. Answers to the direct question on whether or not premarital sex is morally wrong indicated that generally both adults and youths consider premarital sex morally wrong though more adults than youths do so. Nevertheless, countercheck questions on the same issue provided a different opinion. First, Kiragu asked both adults and youth to state the best age at which boys and girls should start having sex. The adults gave a mean age of 18.2 for boys and 20.4 for girls. The youths gave a mean age of 17.6 for boys and 19.6 for girls. Then Kiragu asked both strata of respondents to state the best age for boys and girls to get married. The adults gave mean ages of 25.4 for boys and 20.8 for girls while the youths gave mean of ages of 25.5 for boys and 21.4 for girls.

Findings from Kiragu's study indicate that adults as well as youths expect boys and girls to have sex, at least two years for girls and about seven years for boys, before marriage. Both adults and youth expect boys to start having sex earlier than girls and to have it for longer periods than girls before they get married. This is consistent with the cultural expectation in Africa that

boys should be sexually experienced before marriage. This is also consistent with the finding that boys are initiated into sex earlier than girls though the ages of actual initiation are much lower than those expected.

Majority of young people know that sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and the consequent demand for abortions, and stress are consequences of their sexual activity and mobility. However, in spite of high levels of knowledge that use of condoms in sexual encounters significantly reduces these consequences, youths hardly use them. Certain conceptions and misconceptions on condom use abound among youths in Kenya. First and foremost, youths in Africa consider condoms as acceptable only for use by prostitutes, drug addicts, public transport touts, and such groups of people, who are socially regarded as sexually promiscuous. Condom is associated with shame and therefore not for use by self-respecting youth, especially girls. Secondly, a significant number of young people in Africa believe that use of condoms is morally evil and therefore against God's will. The Roman Catholic stance is that use of condoms is evil because it is against the natural order of things. Some young people, both Roman Catholics and non-Roman Catholics follow this stance. Others argue that use of condoms encourages sexual promiscuity, which is against God's laws. Consistent with this thinking is the belief that condom use psychologically affects sexual enjoyment. Youths also believe that condom use reduce sexual pleasure because direct contact is hindered thus the saying that one does not eat a sweet with the wrapper on.

Most young people think they know how to use condoms. Asked to illustrate or explain how it is done, a majority of them, especially girls are shy. A few boys do explain how to use condoms but their explanation indicates inadequate knowledge on this. In particular most of those who were willing to explain how condoms are used do not know the appropriate time to wear it. A strange misconception found among some youth in Kenya is that wearing two or more condoms increases their effectiveness. Other strange misconceptions are that condoms should be lubricated with oil before use and that a condom can be reused with or without washing. The latter misconception is found among youth from poor urban backgrounds like youths living in slums. It is important to note that information on proper use of condoms is not easily available because it is neither provided in the packaging nor in advertisements. This could be due to the gender role stereotyping that men are knowledgeable in sexual matters.

Other misconceptions abound on sexuality though to lesser magnitudes. One of this is that a girl cannot become pregnant on her first engagement in sexual intercourse. Another misconception is that urination immediately after intercourse ensures that conception does not take place while yet another one is that the sexual act does not lead to pregnancy if it is done with the woman on top. An important thing to note is that this information sometimes is not misconceptions but is used by men to convince women to engage in sexual intercourse.

By and large, young people display knowledge on and positive attitudes to sex but youth sexual behaviour is not commensurate with this knowledge.

### **Knowledge and attitude to HIV/AIDS among youth in Kenya**

Unlike in the early eighties and early nineties when HIV/AIDS was not common, there is a high level knowledge of HIV/AIDS nearly all youth directly know a relative who has died of AIDS. Most of them recognize it as a sexually transmitted infection and are knowledgeable on how HIV is or is not transmitted. A study carried out by Ruth Nduati and Wambui Kiai indicates a high level of understanding of how to prevent HIV infection.<sup>106</sup> Faithfulness in marriage and abstinence before marriage were emphasized as important in this. Several demographic studies across the continent also indicate the importance of limiting one's sexual partners for reduction of risk to HIV infection. Condom use is also identified as an effective method of controlling HIV infection. But this often refers to the male condom. Most of the youths have never seen a female condom. Often, therefore, when young people are talking about condoms, they are almost always referring to the male condom.

The biological model of HIV is clear to majority of the youth in Africa as they can explain that it is a viral infection. Together with this though, they seem to believe that socio-cultural factors such as sexual promiscuity, including prostitution, adultery, and multiple sex, are positively related to HIV infection. However, they do not seem to believe in sexual abstinence outside marriage. Majority of youths engaging in sex think that their sexual partners are faithful and therefore they do not think they are personally at risk of HIV infection. Incidentally, like adults in Africa young people believe that together with the biomedical model of HIV is the traditional model, which explains HIV as a "curse". Some of the names used among some African communities

suggest supernatural causes of HIV infection. For example among the Luo of Kenya, HIV/ AIDS is attributed to *chira*, a condition associated with failure to observe traditional cultural norms such as refusal of a woman to be inherited upon the death of her husband.<sup>107</sup> Unfortunately, this misconception gains popularity because of the reality and nature of HIV/ AIDS, for example, when a woman whose husband has died of AIDS refuses to be inherited only to die because she also had AIDS, people may erroneously conclude that she has died because she refused to be inherited. The fact that people in many parts of Kenya are still secretive about the cause of deaths in case of AIDS combined with traditional beliefs on causes of deaths such as curses, this misconception continue unabated.

As with adults in Africa, youths believe that although AIDS has no cure in modern medicine, traditional medicine and miraculous healing works. This indicates a sharp dichotomy between modern and traditional understanding of causes and solutions to medical conditions. This explains the popularity of Loliondo, Tanzania in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a medical health destination for many Kenyans for a 'wonder drug'.<sup>108</sup> A study carried out by this writer among others suggest that there is concurrent or/and intermitted use of traditional healing practices alongside modern medicine in the management of AIDS.<sup>109</sup> The dichotomy is further seen in the strategies that young people adopt to avoid HIV infection, strategies which combine both traditional and modern approaches. For example, young people indicate the need for faithfulness between sexual partners but at the same time will seek and observe traditional cultural norms as ways of avoiding HIV infection.

### **Sources of Information on Sexuality and HIV/AIDS for Young People in Kenya**

One would be interested in knowing where the youths get their information on sex and HIV/ AIDS. Research projects from across the continent indicate that majority of young people identify their parents as the most trusted source of information on sex while their friends, especially male friends for girls, are the least trusted. Consistently, they would prefer to get information from their parents, religious leaders, teachers, the mass media, and their friends in that order. Unfortunately, the mass media is their major actual source of information, followed by friends. Paradoxically, these are the least trusted sources. Below is figure showing preferred versus actual sources of information on sex for youth according to a study carried out in Ken



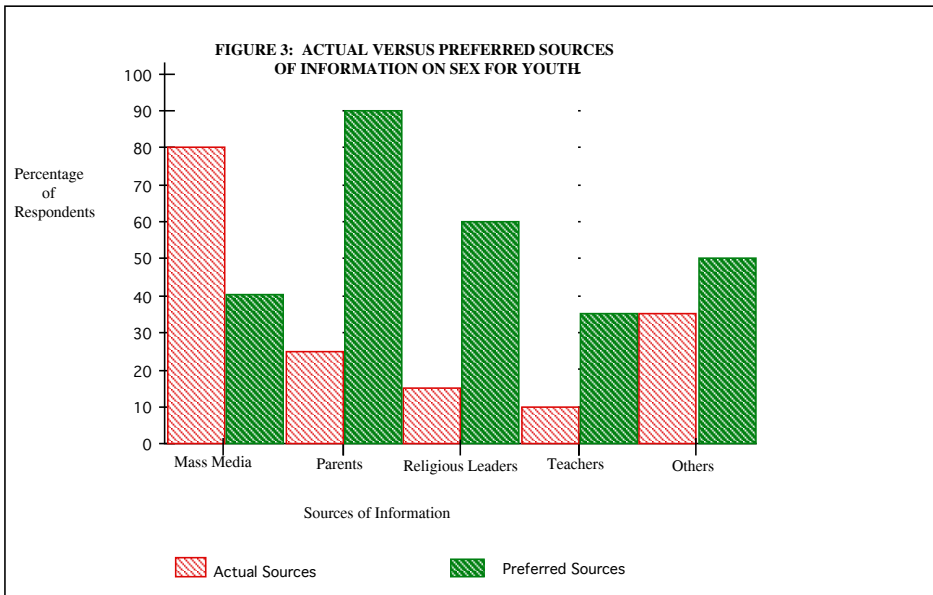


Figure 1: Preferred Vs Actual Sources of Sex Information for Young People<sup>110</sup>

The data presented in figure 1 indicate the need for parents to provide information about sex to their children. The huge gap between the preferred and the actual source of information may be accounting for the wrong attitudes and misconceptions about sex among the youth.

The second most preferred source of information is religious leaders. In the context of this lecture, this is significant information because it indicates the central role that the Church has to play in helping young people cope with their sexuality in the context of gender and HIV/ AIDS. Unlike in some developing countries where religion has little impact on people’s day to day lives due to secularization, in Kenya, religion, especially traditional religions and Christianity remain significantly influential.

Religious values are important in shaping sexual behaviour among the youth in Kenya. It has been established that religion serves to control premarital and multiple sex as a strong negative relationship exists between religious commitment and these behaviours; youths with strong religious commitment are less likely to engage in premarital sex, or if they do they are less likely

to have many sexual partners. A research by MAP International-Africa, a continental Christian research and education institution, suggests that less than fifty percent of all “churched youth” in Kenya engage in premarital sex while about eighty percent of all youth engage in it.<sup>111</sup> This indicates a significant difference between the behaviour of “churched youth” and of all youth in terms of prevalence of sexual activity before marriage. It is in view of such data that the Church is considered a significant factor in addressing the challenges of youth sexuality in Kenya where Christianity is numerically dominant. A more recent study suggests that some youths in secondary schools in Kenya have a positive attitude to aspects of sex education provided in Christian Religious Education<sup>112</sup>. According to the youth themselves, religion is an effective way of ensuring appropriate behaviour. Youths who are already in some religious programs recommend that other youths be encouraged to participate in youth programs that are run by religious organizations.

### **Gender, youth sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS**

There is no controversy any more: unequal gender relations promote unsafe sexual practices all over the world but especially in less developed countries. Reading about the situation in Latin America, one would think that E. Marianismo Stevens, is writing about Africa when he observes that the ideal woman is presented as being weak, chaste, submissive to and dependent on male authority, self-sacrificing, long suffering, ignorant and vulnerable while ideal men are the exact opposite: strong, experienced, knowledgeable, dominant, independent, and willing to take risks.<sup>113</sup> As indicated earlier in this lecture, femininity and masculinity is best expressed in sexual encounters.

Speaking on the impact of gender on sexual behaviour at a plenary session of the XIII international AIDS conference, Geeta Rao Gupta observes:

Gender relations are an essential component of the socio-cultural fabric of a society. From the earliest age boys and girls are socialized to adopt specific ideals of femininity and masculinity. These *socio cultural norms* have a significant impact on women and men’s sexual behaviour, on their respective sexual responsibilities, on their sexual education and on their ability to access information about sex and resources, including sexual health care.<sup>114</sup>

Further, Gupta observes that sexuality comprises the following Ps: practices, partners, pleasure/pressure/pain and procreation, and, last but not least, power and that sexual relations are characterized by unequal power determines what, when and how the other Ps of sexuality are expressed and experienced.<sup>115</sup> He notes:

Power is fundamental to both sexuality and gender. The unequal power balance in gender relations that favours men, translates into an unequal power balance in heterosexual interactions, in which male pleasure supersedes female pleasure and men have greater control than women over when, where, and how sex takes place. An understanding of individual sexual behaviour, male or female, thus, necessitates an understanding of gender and sexuality as constructed by a complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic forces that determine the distribution of power.<sup>116</sup>

Unequal gender relations characterized by female subordination and male dominance promote unsafe sexual practices significantly contributing to HIV infection all over the world.<sup>117</sup> While I agree with Gupta that gender relations are characterized by unequal relations I do not agree that the relation favour men. In my opinion, they appear to favour men but actually, men too suffer from unequal gender relations I will discuss in the next section.

Among the major challenges presented in the pattern of HIV/AIDS in Kenya is the gender dimension of the epidemic. According to the Kenya National AIDS Strategic Plan 2009/10 - 2012/13:

The feminization of the epidemic is apparent with prevalence among women (8.8 among the 15-49 years age group and 8.4 per cent among the 15-64 years age group) significantly higher than among men (5.5 per cent among the 15-49 years age group and 5.4 per cent among the 15-64 years age group). While prevention programmes among young people have contributed to delaying sexual debut and increasing risk perception, for young women who are already sexually active, prevention programmes have generally failed to make a major difference.<sup>118</sup>

Gender disparities are even higher among adolescent girls.

Prevalence among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years is six times that of men in the same age group (3 per cent of all young women in that age group compared to less than 0.5 per cent of young men). Among

young women aged 20 to 24 years, the prevalence rate is 9 per cent as compared to 2 per cent in young men. Kenyan girls' and women's vulnerability to HIV infection can be gauged by such statistics as 28 per cent of men aged 15-49 years believe that a woman has no right to request a man to use a condom. Only 24 per cent of women aged 15 – 29 years who reported having sex with a man other than a spouse or regular/cohabiting partner within the past 12 months had been able to request condom use (KDHS, 2003). Women's vulnerability is therefore compounded by a male dominated society whose sexual beliefs are not always scientifically correct. A particular concern is for young married women, who may have even less opportunity to negotiate safe sex than young unmarried women because many are deemed to have minimal maneuver room to discuss their husbands' infidelity. Indeed, infection rates are higher among young married women than among unmarried women of the same age.<sup>119</sup>

Yet, in spite of National AIDS Control Council (NACC) recognition that women are most vulnerable due to unequal gender relations, there is little activity geared towards addressing this and none of the NACC's high level outputs are directly addressed to gender relations. It would seem that impact activities and outcome targets are unable to deal with the issue of gender inequality in sexual relations.

Sexual activity often takes place among youths especially for boys, but also between youths and adults especially for girls. A direct question on who normally encourages the other into sex indicates some contradiction. While girls claim that men and boys encourage them into sexual activity, boys insist that females encourage them into sexual activity. Probed to explain, males indicate that girls use suggestive language to invite males into sexual activity. Visiting males in their private rooms, and wearing of short and tight dresses were cited as the common aspects through which females encourage males into sexual activity. The fact that girls rarely say "no" to male sexual advances is also cited as suggestive language encouraging sexual activity.

Socio-cultural expectations of male dominance and female subordination especially in sexual encounters may account for this seemingly contradiction. The female is socially trained to behave in a submissive way and to give in to male demands. Thus girls are disempowered to assertively say "no". Moreover, the cultural expectation that girls are to be charming makes

them behave in a certain way in order to appear attractive. Most of the girls wear short and tight clothes to appear attractive to company of men but not necessarily for sex.

On the other hand, the socio-cultural definitions and expectations of masculinity “push” boys into making sexual advances and demands without expecting the girls to say “no” in “serious manner”. One key informant involved in a study carried out in Kenya on gender and youth sexuality observes:

For boys who are under peer pressure to prove their manhood through sexual activity, a negative response from the girlfriend cannot be taken. The boy must ensure that he succeeds in winning the girl into sex otherwise what will he tell his friends? That he could not convince the girl? That would be tantamount to denying his manhood. So such a boy pursues the girl until she gives in. Unfortunately, the girl is not assertive in her response most of the time because she wants to behave like a polite girl, a girl who is not too argumentative. Otherwise, she thinks the boy may not want her for a wife if she is too assertive.<sup>120</sup>

Persons introducing sex to young girls and engaging in sexual relations with them are often males in authority by age and social status. These include teachers, private tutors, priests, choirmasters, youth leaders, and schoolmates in senior classes. *Camposanity*<sup>121</sup> features on how continuing male university students complete for sexual encounters with first year female students and the references that they use reveal a lot about gender relations on campus: “*Bamba Fresha*”, “*Sambaza Fresha*” “*Gold rush*” “*Fresha Pap*”, “*IPO* (Initial Public Offer) for *Fresha*” and currently ongoing “*Ponyoka na Fresha*” Some of the reasons given by both boys and girls for engaging in sexual activity buttress the gender dimension of youth sexual activity. The reasons given by boys include: “response to peer pressure, to prove my manhood, and to enjoy myself”, among others.<sup>122</sup> The major reasons provided by the girls are: to please partner, to avoid losing partner, and to avoid mistreatment by partner’. The reasons given are consistent that while boys engage in sex to meet their needs while girls respond not to their needs but to those of their male partners. This indicates a strong relationship between gender and sexual activity among young people.

One of the factors contributing to sexual activity among young people is circumcision. For most traditional African societies, this marks the climax

of the initiation process from childhood to adulthood. The initiation process arouses male youths to gender consciousness and consequently, to sexual activity. Some societies in Kenya have changed the process of initiation so that modern methods of initiation have been adopted. However, perceptions that circumcision is license to engage in sex abound. Among the major obstacles to reduction of HIV spread through Voluntary Male Circumcision (VMC) are cultural misconceptions that circumcision marks readiness for sex and is a vaccine against HIV infection. According to a global campaign against HIV, the major concerns of VMC are: If messages are not communicated clearly, some men may think they are no longer at risk of HIV and may consequently increase their number of sexual partners and, thus, raise their risk of HIV; If a man thinks he is protected from HIV, his female partner may have less ability to negotiate condom use or to refuse to have sex with him; a woman's risk of violence, stigma, and abandonment may be higher if she gets HIV when her partner thinks he is "immune" to HIV; and, if circumcision is seen as "proof" of being HIV negative, men living with HIV, or who do not know their HIV status, may get circumcised and then refuse to use condoms"<sup>123</sup>. In view of this, it is critical that circumcision be provided as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention package, not a stand-alone service for men and that community input be solicited on how the religious and cultural meanings of circumcision can incorporate the provision of medical male circumcision so that the procedure is culturally acceptable are recommended"<sup>124</sup>.

In spite of major changes in the initiation process in many Kenyan societies the close relationship between initiation to adulthood, gender relations, and onset of sexual activity remains. Circumcision remains the point at which a boy is transformed into a man and sexual activity is qualified as one of the major expressions of manhood. A man who is confronted with such a misfortune usually spends most of his property trying to cure himself"<sup>125</sup> Gregory Wafula confirms this:

I was scared about circumcision because I knew after circumcision I would be required to sleep with a girl. I was worried that I would not perform well. However, when the time came and we started circumcision dances round the village, I got mixed feelings. At times I would be afraid while at other times I would be eager. It was over the initiation procedure that my uncle planned for me to sleep with another girl....Among our people, it is only after circumcision that a boy is allowed to sleep with girls and later get married.<sup>126</sup>

However, initiation from childhood to adulthood is not, for girls, so major an indicator of womanhood. In line with the fertility oriented model referred to in the previous chapter, childbirth is the indicator of womanhood.

Asked whether they hope to marry their current sexual partners, most boys usually respond in the negative while girls respond in the affirmative. The boys cite age and economic instability as the reasons why they do not hope to marry their current sexual partners. On the other hand, girls say they hope to marry their current sexual partners because they love them. These responses indicate lack of commitment among boys to their sexual partners while girls demonstrate commitment. The responses reinforce the notion that boys sexually use girls to their own end. This notion is confirmed by the fact that many boys in Africa refuse to marry girls even after they have made them pregnant while rarely do girls refuse to marry boys who make them pregnant.

Presented with the direct question on whether boys sexually exploit girls, the boys abruptly respond by negating. However, repeated informal probing especially in focused group discussions indicate that boys are aware of this exploitation but they do not take the blame. They claim, as earlier discussed, that girls encourage them into sexual activity. On their part, girls argue that boys often trick them or use threats to force them into sexual activity. The threat that the boys would leave the girlfriends if they do not consent to their sexual advances is commonly cited.

For youth as for the general Kenyan society it would seem that men are expected to have many sexual partners but not girls. Siberschmidt observes:

The belief is that a man needs a lot of sex and a variety of sexual partners. Faithfulness is not an issue for men as it is for women. There is a sense, conveyed more by men than by women, that regular sex with a variety of partners is a man's right – a logical extension of the commonly held view that men are naturally polygamous while women should be monogamous by nature.<sup>127</sup>

Despite immense social change, it is clear that, like traditional societies, modern Kenyan societies expect men to control female sexuality since female sexuality is still regarded as constituting male existential identity. The ability to control female sexuality is still socially instilled well before marriage. On the other hand, women are still socialized to submit to male sexual control. Among the adults as well as among young people, it is accurate to note:

A woman's respectability is first of all linked to her sexual behaviour. A woman's sexual behaviour determines to a large extent her social value. It is decisive for her attraction in the marriage market and determines her possibilities of becoming a respectable wife and mother.<sup>128</sup>

It is accurate to observe that within Kenya, there is a gendered social value, which is in preparation of marriage within which gender ideology is produced and reproduced. This value is maintained through socio-cultural definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity to which both boys and girls conform. This explains the positive relationship between the prevalence and nature of sexual activity by young people and gender relations.

As already discussed in a previous section of this part of the lecture, youth in Kenya are knowledgeable about the importance of condom use as a method of preventing HIV infection. However, this practice is not popular. Various reasons are given by the youth for their unwillingness to use condoms. These include: poor knowledge on how condoms are used and desire to take risks, among others. From a gender perspective, it may be observed that males are expected to be naturally knowledgeable on sexual matters and will therefore not seek information on such issues as condom use. Further, socio-cultural definitions of masculinity expect males to take risks even when their own lives are at stake. This explains a common Luo saying in reference to risk of HIV infection: *Ruath tho gi lum idhoge* (a bull dies with grass in its mouth). On the other hand, definitions of femininity expect girls to be passive and will therefore rarely request their sexual partners to use condoms. For young people, as for the adult population, generally, a self-respecting woman would not think of using a condom or of asking a male partner to do so. The general perception is that it is a promiscuous woman who talks about condoms, let alone use them. This is in line with the socio-cultural expectations that women are ignorant and do not take initiative in sexual matters. A girl who displays knowledge of sexual matters is branded "loose" and not worthy of a husband. To avoid this tag, girls remain ignorant or fake ignorance of sexual matters including use of condoms.

Closely related to HIV infection is gender sexual violence. Gender sexual violence is not only common among the adult population in Kenya but also among young people especially date rapes. Often, this is meted against girls by boys. An assessment of youth at risk carried out by EDC for USAID throughout Kenya indicates:



There is a high level of sexual abuse of girls and young women, with more than 20 percent becoming mothers before the age of 16 years, and a much higher percentage who suffer through abortions.<sup>129</sup>

However, deeper analysis suggests that there are incidences of violence against boys though not as covertly as it happens with girls: often, boys are unable to resist sexual advances by girls merely because it is not masculine to do so. Incidences of sexual violence against males are rarely reported because a man who confesses sexually harassment by a woman is jeered as 'not man enough'.

Within a socio-cultural-setting where sexual activity is actually expected though not overtly, and where male dominance and female subordination in sexual encounters is the norm, HIV prevalence among young people is not surprising. From the foregoing, it seems evident that a relationship continues to exist between gender relations and sexual activity among the youth in Kenya

### **Beyond numbers: Decoding gender relations, youth sexuality and HIV AIDS using a legend<sup>130</sup>**

While statistics provide a quantitatively measurable, easy, and important way of presenting situations, they are not accurate presentations of human situations especially with regard to human attitudes and behaviour. Hence having set out the above statistical data, it is necessary to analyse qualitative data to propound and advance the argument that controlling HIV and AIDS among the youth in Kenya will remain a great challenge if we continue to focus only on statistics rather than interpreting these statistics alongside socio-cultural systems and structures especially those defining expectations of femininity and masculinity in contemporary Kenya. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it would seem that society is naturally adjusting to the demand for change in gender relations in political and economic spheres but not so in sexual encounters in spite of the challenge of HIV/ AIDS. The bottom line is that whole societies suffer the consequences of unchanging gender relations in sexual behaviour. But young people, both boys and girls suffer the brunt of this. The advent of HIV and AIDS has served to worsen the implications of neglecting youth sexual and gender education. Attempts by individual young men and women not just to cope but also to survive in this situation have unfolded various tragedies, many of them translating into hopelessness. The following is an analysis of one such tragedy to decode youth sexuality and gender relations among the youth in Kenya today in the context of HIV and AIDS.

## The narrative

*'Ruined lives'*

*When I joined Moi University in September 2001, I promised myself 'that it's in Moi University I got it and it's here I will leave'. I have indeed lived to keep my promise.*

*I was in Form Three when a student on his attachment in our school proposed for a relationship. He had all the qualities a woman would want in a man so I gave in. He told me all a form three girl would want to hear. In my innocence and naivety, I succumbed to his pressure to have sex with him, consequently, I lost my virginity to him.*

*After his placement, he reported to college for his final year and we still had contacts. I visited him on a number of occasions, (I've even lost count the number of times I visited him). He was my first and only love and therefore hanged on every word he told me.*

*My boy friend later graduated and we lost contact until last month (March) when his sister told me about his whereabouts (details of this later). Before registration in the Faculty of Law, in PSSP, I went for medical tests as is the requirement. I then opted for an HIV test, which unfortunately turned out to be +ve. It then dawned on me that I had treaded the rest of my life for a university student who had deliberately and intentionally preyed on my innocence.*

*My first impulse was to take away my life, counselling sessions did not mean much to me and I quickly walked out of the session. I however did not confide my status to anyone until today.*

*The following day I went to a different Health facility and the results were still +ve. Therefore there was no doubt that I had been infected by this teacher-student. Since as the sister said, he had passed away after 6 months of being bed-ridden, besides, I had never had any other sexual relationship with anybody, no blood transfusion and the last time I used a syringe was in 1989.*

*Now, since whoever infected me did not mind about my life, I will also infect as many as possible as long as they are university guys oblivious of my status. So guys, anyone of you out there who may have crossed my 'path' should count himself unlucky and should quickly place an order for ARTs supply before it's too late!*

*I decided to spread the virus indiscriminately in the Campus, (and have no apologies), because its here I got and I intend to leave it here.*

*I've a well-documented report of all those guys who 'crossed my path' since I joined this college. I will be posting their full names and registration numbers on the Students' Notice Board after the end of Sem. II Exams (August).*

*So far, I've had 124 students, yes one hundred and twenty four. Out of these, only 6, yes six used a condom. I still reiterate the fact that I owe nobody an apology and am still on a spreading spree till August.*

*Otherwise, I wish you success in your end of First Semester exams as you wait for your slow and sure DEATH.*

*N.P.*

In April 2005 a person identifying 'herself' only as 'N.P.' and claiming to be a student of Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya, posted this confessional letter on a notice board at the Eldoret West Campus. Its revelations of a deliberate campaign to infect as many Moi University males as possible with HIV sent ripples of shock far and wide particularly once the local press and modern information technology widely circulated the legend. The anxiety was further heightened by the anonymity of the author and calls for investigations into the real identity of the author were heard everywhere.

Long after official attention to 'Ruined Lives' had faded reactions to its fear-inducing message of alarm continued to circulate in those realms that often fall below the radar of institutionalized officialdom. The fora for these public debates ranged from court corridors ('N.P.' had stated she was a Law student on the Privately Sponsored Student Programme) to banking halls, pubs and ultimately crossed national boundaries through email, blogs and chat rooms on the Internet. Indeed, it is on the Internet that the moral and health implications of 'Ruined Lives' was interrogated. In 2006 the confessional letter surfaced on the website [www.kimanzichana.jubiiblog.co.uk](http://www.kimanzichana.jubiiblog.co.uk) under the title *Mkenya Aliyewa Watu* (the Kenyan who killed people). The narrative was preceded by a photograph of a female emaciated corpse. The photograph – whatever its source may have been – not only spread the impression that 'N.P.' had finally succumbed to the virus, it also lent visual amplification to the images of corrupted bodies that the resigned title of her confession suggests. The shock tactics employed by the hosts of this website are reminiscent of the methods of preaching the HIV and AIDS message that NGOs and Church initiatives originally adopted. In her study of sexuality in Nairobi Spronk recalls an early 1990s Red Cross and Ministry of Health poster:

[It] depicts a man following a shapely figure clad in a red mini dress and high heels. Against a backdrop of a city at night, we can see the frontal view of the skeletal figure, which is a mask of death. The caption reads: 'WHAT YOU CAN SEE IS NOT WHAT YOU GET – AIDS KILLS'.<sup>131</sup>

One can see the extent to which 'N.P.'s' story amplifies this position. Inasmuch as she makes mention of her victims needing to 'quickly place an order for ART supply before it's too late!' her title, tone and parting shot indicate that for her HIV/AIDS is a death sentence and the question of 'people LIVING with HIV and with AIDS' is a mission impossible. Again, 'N.P.' is clearly

embittered by the fact that she could not detect the presence of HIV in the man she says infected her. Ironically, she exploits the fact of the concealed presence of the virus which allows her to maliciously spread it to any 'university guys oblivious of [her] status'. But let's focus on gender issues for now.

HIV stigma is gendered: it affects women more than men. While the mentioned photograph above guarantees the fate of the infected persons, the heading *Mkenya Aliyewwa Watu* which flags the photograph not only signals the malice aforethought that guided the spread campaign by 'N.P.' it also reverberates with the drama of affected numbers heightening the condemnation of 'NP'. If this letter is based on facts, it would seem like 'N.P.' was out to punish as many men as she could, having identified them *en masse* as her enemies. The sinister announcement of the sheer number of men she succeeded in enticing to have sexual relations with her invites a gendered analysis of sexual relations in Kenya. The focus on numbers in a sense stems from and also reinforces the current campaign strategies of governmental and non-governmental bodies working in the area of HIV and AIDS prevention and interventions. It is thought that the endless repetition of these alarming numbers will serve to prevent people from engaging in 'risk behaviour', that is, illicit sex, or sex outside the socially approved institution of marriage. The numbers themselves have come to live a life of their own, in their sweeping and frightening statements of death. The repeated recitals that indicate thousands and even millions of 'HIV cases' or 'death cases', or, in the common phrase in town, 'Every one out of seven Kenyans has it', create an uncanny atmosphere marked by implicit or sometimes explicit accusations.<sup>132</sup>

'N.P.' had had sex with 124 males from the Moi University community of whom only 6 wore condoms (of course. men are expected to take risks!). 118 was therefore the number that 'N.P.' presumably succeeded in infecting with HIV (Isn't female sexuality evil and dangerous for men!). Like the posters of decayed bodies and worm-infected fruit that were earlier used by campaigners for behavioural change, the strategy of reverberating statistics is a fear-inducing one. It therefore runs the risk of either being dismissed as alarming exaggerations or, conversely, as painting a picture of a world so grim and doomed that people simply abandon all hope and plunge headlong into so-called 'risk behaviour'. In all probability reactions oscillating between these two positions were behind the '118' label that was variously applied to the 'Ruined Lives' episode. *Matatu* touts gleefully called out 'stage 118'

to passengers wishing to disembark at the Eldoret West Campus where the confessional letter was posted. In other instances the whole legend of the mysterious author, her letter and arrests by the police was referred to as the '118' scandal. The coining, varied application and mobility of this label '118' is clear evidence of the appropriation, circulation and editing of popular culture texts in (to) new contexts.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, here we have the unlikely shift of emotional contexts from moments of deep fear and anxiety to ones of flippant jocularly and gallows humour. In this bleak humour we find new evidence about what HIV and AIDS have meant to Kenyan populations and the various ways in which they live with the pandemic. The coining of new idioms such as '118' in this instance, or 'slim' and 'slow puncture' in earlier moments speak not only to the dominant mental images of the disease but also to the terms within which people grapple for hope and squeeze life, humour, relief, however fleetingly, out of seemingly interminably bleak moments. While these 'light hearted' idioms demonstrate that the impulse to cope with life's challenges is intrinsic to humanity, they could prevent people from taking issues as seriously as they deserve to be. I will come back to this later in the next part of this lecture.

By promising to provide a list of the many men she deliberately tried to infect with the HIV, 'N.P.' projects her ingrained belief that AIDS as a disease is a punishment for immorality – hers and that of the men who cross her path. This moralistic reading of the disease does not deal with either the socio-cultural functions of sex amongst the youth or the biological impulses triggering it. It adopts as a priori the Christian view of sex as the just province of monogamous marriage, the negative view of sex, and worst of all the negative view of women as evil. Thus 'N.P.' implicitly regrets giving in to the pressure to have pre-marital sex and once she receives the news of her HIV positive status she no longer sees a purpose or value for her own life. The sense of chaos that echoes in her mind is played out in her deliberate smear campaign. The certainty with which she sees death – which is to her the climax of individual destruction – is imposed on the world around her in ways that suggest an apocalyptic vision. This gloomy projection subverts every aspect of the 'ABC' (Abstain, Be faithful, Condom use) campaign.<sup>134</sup> The fact that only 4.8 percent of her target group paid heed to the idea of condom use as part of the practice of safer sex – which includes preventing the spread of the HIV and AIDS – demonstrates the very marginal success of that particular strategy of HIV and AIDS education amongst the youth.

So far I have argued as if the narrative contained in 'Ruined Lives' is the factual account of one young woman's life. What if 'Ruined Lives' was no more than the product of a fertile imagination? Would that make its story any less indicative of the socio-cultural basis and impact of HIV and AIDS in Kenya? The idea that 'Ruined Lives' may have been the product of a person's (whether male or female) imagination rather than a factual account leads us to consider the importance of literary fiction as illustration as well as product and definition of individual and societal identity. In this particular instance, literary discourse would help to outline perceptions and reactions to the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Kenya. We will not belabour the point that literary fiction mirrors, indeed, is inspired by and in turn echoes social reality.<sup>135</sup> Equally worthy of note is the fact that specific genres of fiction are framed to serve and communicate particular ideals about the world we live in. Like parables, legends are essentially cautionary tales whose chief characteristic is the mapping of extreme circumstances of destruction and suffering which are alleviated or overcome by the timely and moral actions of a selfless hero. In postcolonial Africa, urban narratives often take on these qualities of the legend. They are infused with depictions of the urban space as a morally corrupting and ethically vile environment in which ethnic mores compete hopelessly against an alienating and dehumanizing global culture of capitalism which has in particular long claimed the women who cavort recklessly with modernity and its things of glamour.<sup>136</sup> Urban legends then – written and unwritten – emerge as those condensed moral tales of the city as the place where African social and cultural values have been corrupted and where people search in confusion for moral anchors that will stem their glide into debased modernity.

As presented earlier in this part of this lecture, postcolonial Kenya is precisely defined by its lack of an agreed or coherent value system on sexuality. While some people, especially in rural Kenya, still uphold traditional ethnic cultural value systems, others uphold Christian values systems and yet others espouse a 'modern' value system largely borrowed from the West.<sup>137</sup> The majority, however, are cultural mulattoes who hold a *bricolage* value system that bears a mixture of traditional ethnic culture, Christian culture and a host of other value systems resulting from modernization and secularization. Suffice to emphasize that this complex value system does not always have consistent or readily recognizable values even within one individual. Depending on the specific situation, every individual chooses what values to adhere to. In the

absence of systematic sex education, most young people in Kenya are left to seek answers to questions of their sexuality from their peers and the media. In so doing, most of them end up adhering to inconsistent and complex value systems.

Nevertheless, while there have been a lot of changes with regard to sexual values and the consequent behaviour due to modernization and the attendant cultural globalization, gender relations with specific reference to sexuality have not changed much. Writing on the construction of gender, specifically of womanhood in colonial Kenya (within the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), Tabitha Kanogo presents a situation that could be compared to that of Kenya today where women are subordinate to male authority embodied in their fathers, elders and missionaries.<sup>138</sup> A recently concluded study suggests that there is a significant relationship between unequal gender power and risky sexual behaviours leading to risk of HIV infection among the youth in Moi university community.<sup>139</sup> Basically, gender relations continue to be characterized by male dominance and female subordination. Theoretically, but not practically as we will discuss later, this implies that men make decisions on when, where, with whom, and how sex takes place. This model of sexual relations is based on a negative view of female sexuality which presents women as sexually evil and therefore their sexuality has to be controlled by men if humanity is to escape doom. Consequently, male sexual morality is rarely under scrutiny. It is female sexual morality that has to be monitored and controlled by the 'moral' sector of humanity - men. This view has been inherited from both traditional African and Christian cultures and is perpetuated in modern cultural settings. It is a model of gender relations that unconsciously encourages and pressures young people into premarital sex even in this era of the caution demanded by HIV and AIDS.

The representations of HIV and AIDS that we read have in 'Ruined Lives' find another point of convergence in their (sub)conscious projection of gendered youth sexuality in Kenya. In the narrative women emerge as 'AIDS-givers' and men as passive victims'.<sup>140</sup> The first few paragraphs of 'Ruined Lives' appear to indicate that the man who infected 'N.P.' is the guilty person in the story but this impression fades as one reads on. As the narrative unfolds the man's guilt 'melts' away and his behaviour becomes inconsequential as 'N.P.' fits into the stereotypical sexually uncontrolled and evil woman who tempts men into sexual disaster thereby putting a whole community at threat. And whether 'Ruined Lives' is fact or fiction, its interpretation does not change

much in so far as gender relations and sexuality are concerned. Critical reading of the text, 'Ruined Lives' reveals no knowledge of how the man got infected with HIV and whether he was aware of it when he infected 'N.P.', if indeed he is the one who infected her. It appears the man's behaviour is of no consequence and is therefore not under scrutiny, indeed, it is not really the focus of the confessional. Indeed, women become sexual aggressors every time sexual activity has an unwanted outcome.

The thrust of my argument remains: socio-cultural definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity which dictate gender relations primarily characterized by male dominance and female subordination prevail in Kenya in spite of changes in gender relations in political and economic spheres. As young people conform to these definitions and expectations, they resort to sexual relations and many are infected with HIV in the process. Nothing illustrates this argument better than 'Ruined Lives'. The narrator in the story describes 'herself' as a powerless and naïve victim of a beast that 'deliberately and intentionally preyed on my innocence'. The student-teacher took advantage of her inferior position as a form three secondary school student as against his position as an older, more mature, and more educated student at a public university. The female "succumbed" to the sexual advances of the male not because she wanted sex but because he put "pressure" on her to meet his needs. Notice that the male initiated the female into sexual experience.

This experience is typical of theoretical explanations and popular understandings of male-female relations in sexual encounters. Beatrice Paola (2005) in an article 'Turning down Sex'<sup>141</sup> accurately observes: 'most women are brought up with the mentality that their job is to make men happy. They attach this belief to their roles as wives, girlfriends and even to shallow friendship like flings'. Yet, the practical situation (implicit) is that 'N.P.' is no less responsible for what befell her than the man. There is no indication that the man coerced 'N.P.' to have sex and therefore 'N.P.' should take responsibility for her choices and actions. Moreover, according to the text, 'N.P.' visited the man in his university hostels on so many occasions that in her own words: 'I've even lost count the number of times I visited him'. 'N.P.' readily fits into the stereotypical representation of women as objects that exist for the pleasure of men, a role they play until tragic results occur.



James N. Henslin, a Professor of human sexuality argues: '[w]omen often try to be unselfish, giving and accommodating men's desires and needs, so that when men express a desire to have sex, it is difficult for some women to reject it thinking that they may lose the relationship if they do' <sup>142</sup>. On the other hand, David Lewis, a British psychologist has studied macho men and argues that, male chauvinism (characterized by dominance especially in sexual encounters) exists in every man in the world but the level to which each displays it differs due to socio-cultural factors.<sup>143</sup> Both Henslin and Lewis capture the Kenyan context accurately. Male dominance and female subordination characterize sexual encounters: men largely determine when, how, where, and with whom sex takes place while women are passive participants. The reversal of this scenario is fodder of tragic urban legends in which men become helpless victims of the treachery of heartless modern women.

As has already been mentioned in this lecture, the only viable reason that accounts for continued unequal gender relations is the fact that men who continue to hold the reins of power think that maintaining the current model of gender relations is in their interest. That is, men think that they gain from their positions of dominance and are therefore hesitant to let go of their privileged positions. A reversed reading of ruined lives; however, suggest that in unequal gender relations in sexual encounters, both men and women end up in irrational behaviour which leaves both sexes counting their losses.

The circumstances of the spread campaign that is 'Ruined Lives' leave one curious about the pattern of men's sexual relations. 'N.P.' must have noticeably changed partners often. Why did men continually give in to her advances? Were these men completely unaware of her mobility or did the bug of male dominance extend to a rivalry that saw every man struggle to equal the sexual exploits of his peers? It seems that an uncanny capacity for emulating the behaviour of other men and a general tendency to want what every other man has is part of the psyche and performance of male dominance. In other words, once there was a 'popular' girl on campus, every man wanted to be seen with her. The social definitions of manhood, indeed the performance of masculinity in our society, seem precisely hinged on dominating and being noticed.

But is it practically the case that men always determine when, where, how and with whom sex takes place? Did 'N.P.' not determine whether sex took place between her and her teacher? Did she not, out of her own volition, visit the student - teacher on campus?

Dominant cultural practices shape her perception of herself as a victim even when she has wilfully reversed the norm and become, however maliciously, sexually pro-active. Inverted gender roles are seen to result in aborted futures thereby further complicating the antinomies and contradictions that attend to postcolonial youth sexuality and gender.

Clearly, contemporary value systems in Kenya especially with regard to gender and youth sexuality are contradictory, or as earlier expressed, complex and inconsistent. Against such a cultural background, it would seem not just irrational but impractical to expect the youth to behave in a responsible way just because we provide information on how HIV is transmitted and how many people are dying every day. Statistics would make little sense and therefore do not influence behaviour especially when they perennially depict a 'hopeless' situation. Statistics on human behaviour must be presented alongside shrewd interrogation of social and cultural value systems and structures with emphasis on justice and life rather than on injustice and death if any positive change is to be realised.

The predicament of 'N.P.' is indicative of the fact that there has been little if any behaviour changes amongst the youth, not even in a university going population that represents our most educated youth, and for whose consumption 75 per cent of HIV and AIDS messages are now tailored. How is it that only 4.8 percent of 'N.P.'s' target group bothered with condom use? Isn't it true that men, in line with socio-cultural expectations of male sexual behaviour like to take risks? Would we be right to say that the ABC campaign has largely failed? True, we have no way of knowing how many men 'N.P.' propositioned in total, and what percentage of these the 124 'victims' represent. But seemingly, it is a dismal number if we consider that she managed her 124 in under 4 years! That gives us a rate of 2.5 men per month, and if we consider that she was not on campus 365 days a year, the figure may be that much more alarming, say 10 sexual encounters per month!

So far, it is clear that continued assumption that knowledge on HIV and AIDS alone will translate to positive behaviour change needs to be challenged because socio-cultural systems and structures play a major role in determining human behaviour. In the context of this lecture empowering men and women to critique and transgress the limits set by the socio-cultural definitions and expectations of femininity and masculinity is considered central to winning the fight against HIV and AIDS. While religion has had a major role to play in 'sacralising' unequal gender relations in sexual activity, it has been identified

by youths as second only to parents as a preferred source of sex information and guidance. This suggests that religion has great potential to positively influence the youth towards gender justice, responsible sexual behaviour, and consequently, significantly reduced HIV/ AIDS prevalence. The Christian Church is the single major religion in Kenya claiming about 70 percent of the total population of the country. In the following section, I discuss the need for gender reconstruction in addressing gender relations and sexual activity of young people and the role of the Church in contemporary Kenya

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- 117 See for example A. E., Pettifor, Measham, D. M., Rees, H. V., and Padiant, N. S. Sexual power and HIV risk, South Africa. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 10(11) 2004; Anke, van der Kwaak, 'Female circumcision and gender alliance: a questionable Alliance' *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 35, no. 6 (1992), p. 777-787 Nancy Krieger, 'Gender, sexes, and health: what are the connections: and why does it matter?' *International Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 32, (2003), p. 652-657; Lesley Doyal., 'Sex, gender and health: the need for a new approach' *British Medical Journal*, vol. 323 (2001), p. 1061-1063; WHO, 'Gender dimensions of HIV status disclosure to sexual partners: rates, barriers and outcomes'. Geneva, World Health Organization (WHO), 2004; and, WHO/KIT, 'Integrating sexual health interventions into reproductive health services: programme experience from developing countries'. Geneva and Amsterdam, World Health Organization (WHO) and Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), 2006.
- 118 National AIDS Control Council (NACC), Kenya National AIDS Strategic Plan 2009/10 - 2012/13, pp. 5-6.
- 119 National AIDS Control Council (NACC), Kenya National AIDS Strategic Plan 2009/10 - 2012/13, p. 9.
- 120 Cited in Eunice Karanja Kamaara, "Gender Relations and Sexual Activity Among the Youth and the Role of the Church" Doctoral thesis, Department of Religion, Moi University, 2003, 106-107.
- 121 *Camposanity* is a regular column in Lifestyle magazine of the Sunday Nation newspapers that features stories from all universities in Kenya. *Fresha* refers to female first year students who continuing students rush to win into sexual encounters while they are still ignorant of campus life. *Fresha* implies that the first year female students are fresh (sexually unexposed). That *Fresha* never refers to male students tells a lot about gender relations.
- 122 Compare with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Dreams in a Time of War*, p. 126.
- 123 [http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/FS-MaleCircumcision\[E\].pdf](http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/FS-MaleCircumcision[E].pdf) Accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

- 124 Ibid
- 125 Margrathe Silberschmidt, *Women Forget that Men are Masters: Gender Antagonism and Socio-economic Change in Kisii District, Kenya* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1993), 157.
- 126 Kamaara, *Gender Relations and Sexual Activity of the Youth and the Role of the Church in Kenya*, 111.
- 127 Margrathe Silberschmidt, *Women Forget that Men are Masters: Gender Antagonism and Socio-economic Change in Kisii District, Kenya* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1993), 157.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 EDC “Cross Sectoral Assessment of At-Risk Youth in Kenya” Revised report for USAID – Kenya, November 2009, p.4. See: [http://kenya.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/Cross-sectoral per cent20Assessment per cent20of per cent20At-Risk per cent20Youth per cent20in per cent20Kenya.pdf](http://kenya.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/Cross-sectoral%20Assessment%20of%20At-Risk%20Youth%20in%20Kenya.pdf) Accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2012.
- 130 This section on ruined lives is extracted from Joyce Nyairo and Eunice Kamaara, “Ruined Lives: An Analysis of Gender Relations, Youth Sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Kenya” Chapter eleven, in Burton, Andrew and Hélène Charton-Bigot (Eds), *Generations Past: Youth in Eastern Africa*, Athens: Ohio University Press, pp. 262 – 278. I acknowledge support received from Joyce Nyairo.
- 131 R. Spronk, ‘Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and New Self-Definitions in Nairobi’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, (2006), p101.
- 132 *Ibid.* p.90.
- 133 K. Barber and C. Waterman, ‘Traversing the Global and the Local: Fuji Music and Praise Poetry in the Production of Contemporary Yoruba Popular Culture’, in D. Miller (ed.) *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, (London, 1995); I. Hofmeyr, J. Nyairo and J. Ogude ‘Who Can Bwogo Me? Popular Culture in Kenya’. *Social Identities* 9:3 (2003), pp.373-382.

- 134 The ABC campaign has been propagated as a strategy to control the spread of HIV and AIDS in spite of its limitations and clear indications that it does not work even among young people: All researches on youth sexual behaviour concur that majority of young people are sexually active most of them with many sexual partners and yet they rarely use condoms. Lately, the strategy has been queried as ineffective even among married people. See for example, Gideon Byamugisha, *What Can I do?* (St. Albans Herts: TALC, 2004).
- 135 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming*, (London, Heinemann, 1972); David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, (London, Penguin 1992), Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1961).
- 136 See particularly Mwangi Ruheni *What a Life* (1972) Meja Mwangi *Kill me Quick* (1973), *Going Down River Road* (1976) and *The Cockroach Dance* (1979). In Ngugi wa Thion'go's *Petals of Blood* (1977) Nairobi is a treacherous den of immorality and in Manichean terms what was once the idyllic rural Illmorog is seen to be hopelessly corrupted once the Trans-national Highway connects it to other urban centres and rapidly urbanizes thus leading to its eventual detriment. Without exception, these writers depict unmarried women in the city as an amoral lot whose greed for material well-being turns them into ruthless prostitutes.
- 137 See for example: V. Lema, 1990; M. Silberschmidt, 1999; R. Spronk, 2006; T. Weisner, 1997).
- 138 Tabitha Kanogo, *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya 1900-1950*, (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 2005).
- 139 Geoffrey Kirui, "Sexual behaviours, gender power and norms and HIV/AIDS among Moi University students" a Master of Philosophy thesis in the Department of Sociology, Moi University. 2010.
- 140 C. Nzioka, 1994. 'AIDS Policies in Kenya: A Critical Perspective on Prevention' In P. Aggleton, P. Davies & G. Hart (eds.) *AIDS: Foundations for the Future*. (London: Taylor and Francis), pp.1994:169.
- 141 Beatrice Paola, 'Turning down sex' in *The East African Standard*, Saturday, April 23, 2005, p. 15

- 142 Cited by Beatrice Paola, 'Turning down sex' in *The East African Standard*, Saturday, April 23, 2005, 15.
- 143 Cited by Florence Machio, in "Male Chauvinism" in *The East African Standard*, Wednesday, June 18, 1997.

## PART III

### Gender Reconstruction: from Competition to Partnership and Justice

*An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind* (Mahatma Gandhi)

*“Anyone who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment. Social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex (the ugly ones included).”* (Karl Marx)

*“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved”* (Psalms 80: 3)

#### Introduction

The focus of this inaugural lecture is gender relations and youth sexual behaviour with specific reference to HIV/AIDS in Kenya. So far, I have indicated: i) gender is the gravitational theme around which development revolves, ii) gender relations are positively related to youth sexual activity and mobility in Kenya and therefore consequently positively related to HIV/AIDS spread, and iii) the Church has a major role to play in controlling HIV spread among the youth by redesigning its youth ministry to address unequal gender relations. In this part, I present what I profess: gender reconstruction as a theological and ethical paradigm for gender justice in sexual encounters. After explaining what gender reconstruction is, I analyze the historical emergence and development of what are referred to as gender programs in Kenya to provide a rationale for gender reconstruction. As this analysis will show, women’s programs have dominated the struggle for gender justice in Kenya since a group of women transgressed the socio-cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity to initiate what is largely known as the Mau Mau movement in the early 1950s. Soon after, the women’s program was hijacked to become a Western-controlled and Western-driven initiative that, in line with Western capitalistic and individualistic models of development, promotes competition between men and women. For lack of local control and

self definition, gender programs in Kenya have had counter-productive results leading to largely dysfunctional relations between men and women. In this situation, as illustrated by the previous part on gender relations and youth sexual behaviour, both male and female suffer from HIV/ AIDS. The current situation therefore calls for systematic and holistic gender reconstruction controlled and driven by grassroots communities. Thus gender reconstruction is professed as an effective way to gender justice.

Thus, as a preamble to my profession of gender reconstruction, I present the role of the Church in Kenya in the context of gender relations and youth sexuality and thereafter challenge the Church to take seriously its mission of Good News to young people by developing a theological anthropology of sexuality and gender justice.

### **Gender Relations and Youth Sexuality: The Role of the Church in Kenya**

Less than 20 years ago, Uganda, Kenyan's neighbor to the west, registered one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world. Barely ten years later, the country experienced a sharp decline in HIV prevalence rate, thanks to a national grassroots HIV preventive campaign, dubbed "zero grazing", supported by the Museveni government. Some scientists claimed that this decline had to do with high death rate of persons infected with HIV but twenty years later, declining HIV prevalence in Uganda has remained stable pointing at the success of this community based behavioural strategy. The implication of the Uganda experience is that long term community owned behavioural strategies are effective approaches to HIV/ AIDS control and management. Moreover, unlike many donor-dependent biomedical interventions which operate in a 'hit and run' way, strategies that involve changing social norms in sexual attitudes and practices are sustainable.

One of the major agents of development in Kenya is the Church. The Church, defined as community of believers whose role model is Jesus Christ, is numerically the largest single group of people in Kenya. According to D. Barrett, the major religions in Kenya are Christianity, African Traditional Religions, and Islam with estimated populations of 11,452,200, 2,972,150 and 941,300, respectively.<sup>144</sup> Statistical projections by David Barrett suggest that after the year 2000, Africa is the most Christian continent with a population of four hundred million Christians; the predominantly Christian countries being Uganda - 84 per cent, Zambia - 83 per cent and Kenya - 82 per cent of the total national populations.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the Church in Kenya is next to

no other institution in terms of proximity to the people. It is the largest civil society institution with a regular (at least weekly) huge audience. The Church reaches down to the grassroots of all communities in Kenya be they rich or poor, rural or urban. Fortunately, the Church is still significantly credible and many Kenyans not only identify themselves with the Church but also look up to it for guidance. This guidance is not only on spiritual matters but also on matters of physical development. With such a large following and position of authority and influence, the Church in Kenya is not just the major religion but remains the single major institution with the potential of changing the future of a country laden with suffering from HIV/AIDS.

It is against this understanding that the role of the Church, in addressing gender relations and youth sexual activity in Kenya is presented. The role of the Church, derived from some contemporary theological reflections on missiology and pastoral care, is presented first in terms of what the Church has done and thereafter in terms of what more the Church can do. The central role of the Church in championing the planning and implementation of a new community based on a progressive and preventive approach to HIV/AIDS is highlighted. The Church is challenged to repent of her sin of conformity and thereafter lead the way to a more peaceful and just society in which both men and women are treated as equal human beings made in the image of God. The chapter begins with a brief discussion on the influence of religion in general on youth sexual behaviour.

### **Christianity and youth sexual behaviour in Kenya**

On sexuality, it may be observed that nearly all world religions condemn premarital sex as evil. This inhibits young unmarried people from engaging in sexual activity though the level of success in inhibition differs from place to place and from time to time due to other contributory factors. Various researchers the world over concur that religion, in this case Christianity, has a major role to play in determining the prevalence of sexual activity by young people. Karungaru Kiragu, who has done major studies in adolescent sexual behaviour, emphasizes that all youth sexual health programs must recognize the influence of religion and incorporate it in their strategies for increased effectiveness<sup>146</sup> while MAP International suggests that there is significant difference between knowledge, attitudes, and practices of church youth and of all youth.<sup>147</sup> The African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) reports that religion significantly reduces rates of pregnancies among secondary school girls<sup>148</sup> while M. Amuyunzu, in proposing solutions to adolescent sexual and



reproductive health, underlines the major role that religion plays.<sup>149</sup>

Christianity is categorical that premarital sex is sinful. Within some Christian denominations, illicit sex, which includes premarital sex, is not only a mortal sin but also the worst of all sins. According to St. Paul, sexual sins are the worst sins because unlike all other sins, these are committed within one's body; against one's own body (I Corinthian. 6:18). Moreover for Christians, the human body is regarded as the temple of the Lord. This means that defiling one's body is tantamount to defiling God's temple. This idea supports the sexuo-spiritualist theory on human sexual behaviour presented earlier in this lecture. African Traditional Religions differs in practice from society to society, but for majority of Kenyan societies, premarital sex, especially for girls, is abhorred. Virginity at marriage is encouraged with praise and other rewards while loss of it is castigated, sometimes with death sentence. But sexual fidelity is not a requirement for young unmarried men.

According to data presented in the previous part of this lecture, gender relations in Kenya contribute significantly to youth sexual activity and Christianity may be 'sacralizing' or, at least, maintaining the social values, which promote unequal gender relations. If this is the case, then Christianity may be impeding change in gender relations, a change that is definitely desired. In this context therefore, it would seem that Christianity influences young people in Kenya against engaging in premarital sex. At the same time, in supporting contemporary gender relations characterized by female subordination and male dominance, the Church encourages young people into sex. Such are the contradictions of religion.

Before any discussion on the role of the Church, it suffices to present the mission of the Church. This is necessary to ensure that discussion on the Church's role is done within the Church's mission. Indeed, it would be not only irrelevant but also unfair to criticize the Church's performance outside its mandate.

### **The Mission of the Church**

Jesus Christ, the role model of Christians, has a specified mission which remains the unchanging mission of the Church in whatever time or place. The approach to this mission may change due to the demands of the different contexts but the mission remains the same. Just before he began his public ministry, Jesus proclaimed his mission, in what has come to be known as the Nazarene Manifesto, thus:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people (Luke 4: 18-19).

The mission of Christ may be summed up as a mission of delivering people from all situations of suffering.

According to J.N.K. Mugambi, the mission of Christ, which is the mission of the Church, is twofold: to liberate humankind on the socio-political and economic plane and to lead people to salvation on the eschatological plane.<sup>150</sup> This is accurate since Christ was concerned with both the physical and the spiritual needs of the people among whom he lived. On many occasions, however, some people have argued that the Church is instituted for the sole purpose of promoting the spiritual welfare of humankind. Thus they have ignored the developmental role of the Church. Yet, the two roles are so completely intertwined that it is impossible to separate one from the other especially because it is not possible to separate body and soul in humankind, at least not in the present world. As noted by the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1985:

The salvific mission of the Church in relation to the world must be understood as an integral whole. Though it is spiritual, the mission of the Church involves human promotion even in its temporal aspects. For this reason, the mission of the Church cannot be reduced to a monism, no matter how the latter is understood. In this mission there is certainly a clear distinction - but not a separation - between the natural and the supernatural aspects. This quality is not a dualism. It is thus necessary to put aside false and useless oppositions, between for example, the Church's spiritual mission and *diaconia* for the world.<sup>151</sup>

The twofold mission of Christ is evident in the works of the historical Jesus whose mission involved attending to people's needs in totality. Jesus did not only prepare his followers for eschatology, he also fed them with food when they were hungry, healed them of their physical ailments, and spoke against the socio-political and economic injustices of his time. (For examples of each see Luke.9:10-17, Luke.14:1-6, and Luke 11:37-54, respectively). That the mission of the Church is both physical and spiritual should be indisputable.

Following in Christ's mission, the Church, in recognition of the humanity of all persons, has a duty to all people among whom it works regardless of their religious background. In line with this thinking on the unlimited mission of the Church, Agatha Radoli argues:

Like Christ who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt.20:28) the Church has to render service to everyone whether they are believers or not. Eastern Africa consists of a suffering people. There is widespread injustice in the region. The people of this region desperately need a ministry of healing that will take into account all the elements and aspects needed to make them whole and sound.<sup>152</sup>

This concurs with a note made by Bishop Adedokun of Nigeria during the African Synod on the Church that Christ the liberator not only came to save humankind from sin but also from all consequences of sin such as social injustice.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, there are profound links between evangelization and human socio-economic and political development.

### **The Role of the Church in the Context of Youth and HIV/AIDS Sexual Health in Kenya**

If this be the mission of the Church, then the Church has a major role to play in meeting young people's needs in all spheres of life here and now. "The Church in Kenya, as in any other part of the world, is entrusted with the role of *"sacramentum unitatis*, the sacrament of love, justice and real humanity lived by Christ and based on him".<sup>154</sup> While the mission of the Church is unchanging, the approach to mission is determined by the context within which the Church is operating. This means that the role of the Church is always deduced from the socio-historical situation of the people being evangelized since the context determines the interpretation of the Gospel. Mejia Rodrigo S.J. buttresses this point thus:

Pastoral priorities are never deduced from theological principles but they are commanded by the real needs of the people of God. The priority responds not to the theological importance of the issue but to its urgency and relevance for the historical moment in which the local Church finds itself.<sup>155</sup>

Therefore, to understand the role of the Church, it is necessary to understand the situation of the specific people to which the Church is evangelizing. What then is the situation of young people in Kenya today?

The Church in Kenya is operating against a dramatic backcloth characterized by immense suffering. Poverty, resulting from unequal distribution of resources, poor development planning and management, poor leadership, corruption, and general mismanagement of resources, among others, afflicts the great majority of Kenyans. Moreover, abuse of human rights, crime and violence, disease and ignorance, among many other evils, worsen the lot of many Kenyans. Generally, Kenyans are a suffering lot. These challenges affect various categories of Kenyans in different ways to different extents. For young people in Kenya today, one of the major threats to their lives is HIV infection and the consequent AIDS. Less than twenty years ago, unwanted pregnancy was perhaps the most dreaded consequence of premarital sex. Today the incurable HIV infection is. The previous part of this lecture presents the fine details of the situation of young people in Kenya with special reference to gender relations and youth sexual activity: gender relations characterized by male dominance and female subordination significantly contributes to sexual activity among young people.

### **What the Church Has Done**

The word church has many meanings depending on context. It could refer to a building or space set aside for Christian worship. It refers also to any Christian denomination as well as to a congregation of Christians. Further, church could refer to Christian hierarchy or leadership as an institution. Used with a capital letter, the word could refer to the religion founded by Jesus Christ about 2000 years ago, or, as in this context, to the community of Christian believers with their leadership. The question of what the Church has done with regard to gender relations and youth sexual health entails a critical evaluation of the teaching and work of the Church (both leadership and lay Christians) in this area. As a scholar of religion, I engage in this evaluation guided by academic objectivism, but, without contradiction, in faithful obedience to my Christian calling. Such monitoring and evaluation is necessary for the Church, as for all human institutions, if the Church is not to lose its mission and vision in dynamic contexts and in the midst of modern challenges. As observed by Laurenti Magesa, such evaluation:

... should avail the Church an opportunity to scrutinize itself in the light of its own faith. Perhaps more importantly, it should aid the Church in the effort of charting out for itself a path of life, a way of being and acting which is more faithful to its calling as a sacrament of Christ's witness

in the world. This is possible only if it makes an effort to stay in step with changing times. The effort to continually renew itself is indeed not new in the Church. It is an ongoing activity, which is often carried on silently. However, the movement towards renewal sometimes needs a more open degree of consciousness; a more articulated and clear sense of direction.<sup>156</sup>

In discussing the role of the Church in terms of what the Church has done for young people in Kenya, I am interested in any plans of action and to analyze practical achievements made by the Church. This is done in the understanding that effective evangelization is not achieved through impressive theoretical blue prints but through meticulous implementation of the blueprints. On their own, plans of action are useless to development and so am not only interested in the Church's theoretical aspirations but also in *praxis*. Theological *praxis* goes beyond beliefs, practices and action to recognize the specificity of the contexts within which God relates to humans and humans relate to God. It is not theologically satisfying to discuss what the Church has done without presenting ideas on what more the Church should do. It is necessary to point out what more should be done especially if the purpose of evaluation is to enable the one being evaluated to perform better. Thus, the second part of this section involves providing suggestions and challenges, which the Church may use to plan and thereafter implement plans for increased realization of evangelization.

Any discussion on the role of the Church in Kenya necessarily begins by appreciating the major role played by the Church in development in general. It may be noted that the Church has contributed a lot in all spheres. For example in: i) Education -most of the best public schools in Kenya are Christian based, for example Alliance High School, founded by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), Precious Blood Riruta - founded by the Roman Catholic Church, and Maseno School founded by the Anglican Church. Besides, many universities in Kenya today are Christian based among them the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, The Presbyterian University of East Africa, and the Kenya Methodist University. ii) Health - Such hospitals as Mater Misericordiae, PCEA Kikuyu, and Mukumu are church based. Besides, the Church in Kenya has been involved in community development activities (such as promotion of agriculture, *jua kali* (informal) industries and initiation of income-generating activities) and in provision of public facilities and services like water and electricity. Moreover, the Church has contributed immensely

to the democratization process in post colonial Kenya<sup>157</sup>. Indisputably, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) most of which are church based have been instrumental in the development of this country. In this regard, one can say that Christian and Christian-based organizations have done and facilitated a lot of development for young people in contemporary Kenya. Moreover, there are many Christian theological statements and writings on young people with regard to their social, political and economic situation. For example a lot is available on the economic situation of young people characterized by poverty, lack of enthusiasm and hopelessness.

Narrowing down to the specific area of gender relations and youth sexual activity, the following questions arise: What has the Church done to control youth sexual activity? Is the Church conscious of prevailing gender relations? Has the Church criticized these relations? What image of Christ has the Church presented to young people threatened with sexual health challenges? Has Christ been presented as truly Lord and Savior? What has the Church done to liberate the youth from their situation of suffering?

In answering these questions, I wish to draw illustrations from the Roman Catholic Church, which is among the most active group of Christians in terms of liberating people from suffering. Indeed, every diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Kenya has a department of gender and a department of youth headed by departmental coordinators. Moreover, the Catholic Church is one of the most systematic groups of Christians with clear-cut Church authority in a way that one cannot confuse individual Christian opinion with the authentic Church teaching. Occasionally the Church releases to the public its official teaching on socio-political and economic issues so that there is little room for individual Church leaders to present their own understanding and interpretation.

In the general area of youth sexuality, it is essential to first and foremost, indicate that the entire Christian Church has consistently taught against premarital sex. For the Church, abstinence from premarital sex is the only effective strategy that can significantly control threats of pregnancies, stress and STDs including HIV/AIDS from young people's lives. While all sexual reproductive health programs do not support the singling out of abstinence as the only effective strategy for improved sexual/reproductive health, all recognize and acknowledge this as the only method with a hundred percent success rate. Moreover, sexual abstinence has no side effects.

From the face value, one would think that the Church has not achieved much success in this area since many young people in Kenya are sexually active. As has been observed already, statistics from research projects from different institutions concur that over 80 percent of young people in Kenya are sexually active by the age of 24, majority of them with multiple sexual partners.<sup>158</sup> There is a dearth of literature on the role of the Church in influencing youth sexual behaviour. However, research carried out by MAP-International, which has already been referred to, indicates that there is a significant difference in terms of prevalence of sexual activity when one compares 'churched youth' with all youth: the study indicates that only 49 percent of churched youth are sexually active.<sup>159</sup> This indicates a difference of about 31 percent between the prevalence of sexual activity among 'churched youth' and all youth. This is a significant percentage and implies significant success by the Church in controlling youth sexual activity. The Church should be commended for this.

More importantly, this data points to the fact that the Church is capable of achieving a lot for the youth in terms of helping them abstain from premarital sex. Considering that only 50 percent of the Churches studied discuss sexual matters with their youth, it would seem that the Church has unexploited potential in calling young people to sexual abstinence. In view of the effectiveness of participatory methods in development approaches, one would want to know whether young people think that the Church has a role to play in educating them on sexuality. A group of youths from Uasin Gishu district of Kenya, for example, were first presented with a question on their sources of information on sex. Then they were presented with another question on their preferred sources of information. Their responses, presented in figure 1 in the previous chapter, suggest that youths consider the Church as one of the major institution with the role of providing youth with information on their sexuality: the Church is second only to parents as the most preferred source of information on sex. It would seem that a lot of young people have a lot of regard for religious leaders, among them pastors, priests, catechists, lay leaders, preachers and the Religious, as sources of information on sex. This opinion was reinforced by responses to a direct question on the role of the Church in controlling youth sexual activity. In response to this open-ended question nearly all youth respondents proposed that the Church should design and implement youth sex education programs. Most conspicuous is the low rating of religious leaders as actual sources of information on sex for young people. This suggests that the Church does not adequately play this role. Therefore, one would want to know what the Church has done beyond the age-old teaching against premarital sex.

Nevertheless, on the area of youth sexuality, particularly as it relates to gender relations, nothing seems to have been done. Yet gender relations with regard to youth sexual activity is at the center of the Gospel message, which presents Christ as a savior and liberator who does not show any partiality. Sadly, the subject is conspicuously rare in Church blueprints. Worse still, little, if anything, is known and said about the positive relationship between youth sexual activity and gender relations. In terms of practical action therefore, one may confidently say that nothing has been done in terms of understanding let alone addressing the specific situation of young people in terms of the factors leading to their sexual activity, the major challenge and threat to their lives today.

On gender relations in general, the Church appears not conscious of the implications of these on sexual behaviour of young people. However, with the vigorous global gender campaigns it seems to be dawning on the Church that gender is an important aspect in development, hence the establishment of gender programs in many Churches. But generally the Church appears to be, to some significant extent, unconscious of gender. This unconscious situation is worrisome because as argued by Laurenti Magesa on the role of the Church in general, the situation: "...establishes another more dangerous and un-Christian one, the climate of insensitivity, of behaving as if the problem does not exist. For in such a climate the sense of remorse or repentance dies; wrong comes to be seen as right".<sup>160</sup> Some religious leaders actually display the 'climate' described by Magesa. Consider the following response from a Catholic priest in response to a question on whether there is need to change the socio-cultural definitions of masculinity:

No, I really do not think we need to change anything. God, in his wisdom created male and female as different creatures with different abilities. To maintain order, God made man the head of the family giving authority over all others. Women have to respect men if men are to keep the family under control. New ideas are making women rebellious to men leading to family violence, which is now more (sic) common in the country.<sup>161</sup>

It is evident from this response that some Church leaders confuse gender with sex. The response by the Catholic priest, for instance, implies that male and masculinity or female and femininity are one and the same thing. Moreover, his reference to them as God's creation implies that masculinity and femininity are not only natural attributes but sanctioned by God to control women for



social order. This seems to me like a hangover of the dualistic belief of the Early Church that female is evil and must always be subjugated, if it is not to tempt male from the moral path. It is a pity that the Bible is used to endorse such out-dated beliefs.

Perhaps one would argue that these are individual opinions, which do not necessarily present the opinion of the Church. But the 'climate of insensitivity' is also to be found in official Church documents. The use of non-inclusive language in some documents implies insensitivity. The use of such terms as 'man', 'sons of God', 'mankind' and 'his' in the generic sense to refer to both men and women without any clarification is found in many Church documents. One of the examples that may be given of this non-inclusive language is, unfortunately found in none other than a document of the African Synod. Indicating some of the areas, which deserve attention for the whole Church, the Synod observed: "Within the Church, rights must be preserved. No one should be deprived of his ordinary rights because he is associated with the Church in one way or the other".<sup>162</sup>

While the authors of various Church documents may not have intended to exclude women in their use of language, the use of "his" rather than 'his/her' may, especially in patriarchal contexts, be taken to imply that only men have rights and only men should not have their rights deprived of them. I call this unfortunate coming from all African Bishops of the Catholic Church in the mid 1990s. Perhaps the fact that the Synod was entirely made up of men explains this insensitivity to the implication of use of exclusive language. Another example may be given where Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Sum* declares: "...before speaking, it is necessary to listen, not only to a *man's* voice, but to *his* heart. A *man* must first be understood; and where *he* merits it, agreed with... {the use of italics is by this author for emphasis}".<sup>163</sup> In a situation where only men are expected to speak and make all major decisions, such non-inclusive language may serve to reinforce people's beliefs and attitudes. The Pope's choice of language seems, albeit unconsciously, insensitive considering that he was writing to all Christians on the very subject of justice. In a traditionally patriarchal Church, his message may literally be taken to mean that women are not counted among Christians or if they are, they are not relevant to the subject of justice.

Anne Nasimiyu Wasike gives another example where she cites Pope John Paul II who, in emphasizing the ban of women's ordination, called all the American Bishops to support the dignity of women and "every legitimate

freedom that is consonant with *their* human nature.”<sup>164</sup> Nasimiyu-Wasike rightly argues that the fact that the Pope placed ‘their’ before human nature suggests that women’s human nature is somehow different from men’s.<sup>165</sup> Considering the ban that the Pope was emphasizing, the underlying message is that women are naturally not suited for priesthood. Yet, priesthood is a gender role (learnt) rather than a sex role (biological). Equating gender with sex is the general misconception underlying sex discrimination and anybody who is conscious of gender must never be seen or even mistaken to buttress this misconception.

One may think that issues to do with the use of ‘he’ and ‘she’ in an exclusive manner are petty. But we need to be aware of the fact that it is through language that humans express their intentions, expectations and apprehensions. We must never lose sight of the inherent dynamics of language and the fact that language is used to persuade, to evoke or to provoke, especially in social structures. In a psycho-socio-linguistic analysis of messages in popular media, Davies M. Mukuria presents the role that language plays in the perpetuation of gender inequality.<sup>166</sup>

From the foregoing, it would seem that the Church has been instrumental in the reinforcement of some of the attitudes behind gender discrimination. Indeed, in its insensitivity, the Church has in a way approved the prevalent gender relations characterized by male dominance and female subordination. This means that the Church may be unconsciously inspiring the youth to conform to the socio-cultural expectations and definitions of masculinity and femininity.

The question remains, has the Church challenged these gender relations in any way? Does it teach/preach against such gender relations? Who is Jesus to women who are daily suffering discrimination on the basis of their sex? It is accurate to observe that Jesus has been presented to women as a comforter who helps them cope with their daily hardships, who shares their sorrows, and who helps them to be tolerant and unquestioning or is Jesus presented as a liberator? . Rarely does the Church present Christ as the feminist who challenges women to fight evil. One respondent explained how happy she is since she got saved because in her own words:

... am now able to persevere my husband’s shortcomings and to forgive him. Previously, I used to question his infidelity but these would only earn me a beating. These days I only pray for God to change him back to the husband that I knew.<sup>167</sup>

While I do not underestimate the power of prayer, I do not recognize Christ the liberator in this aspect of this woman's life. While there is some positive change in her life in that she is no longer beaten because she no longer questions the man, I doubt if she will still feel liberated if she finds herself infected with HIV. Unfortunately, this kind of self-sacrificing servant-hood is sometimes prescribed to women by the Church as the only strategy, in the name of maintaining peace and social unity. But while self-sacrifice is a virtue in certain situations, in others it is not. Furthermore, self-sacrifice is not a prerogative of women. It should be reciprocal.

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, a psycho-biologist, appropriately argues:

If women insist on peace at any price - if they settle for abnormal quietism as a way of avoiding the risk and potential isolation that may result from opposing evil - they are not exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. They are sinning just as surely as the man who rides roughshod over relationships in order to assert his individual freedom. For 'peace' in the biblical sense does not consist of "peace at any price". It is rather the *shalom* in which all things are in their rightful, creation ordained place. And in the light of the Fall, the distortion of *shalom* - including that between men and women - calls for a prophetic refusal to say "peace, peace when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14) and willingness to make changes needed to restore true *shalom*.<sup>168</sup>

Occasionally Church leaders (both clergy and lay people) and Christians teach against gender violence which is only one aspect of gender discrimination. However, no Church teaches against other aspects of gender discrimination. In spite of the Biblical principle that male and female are equal as both are made in the image of God, the Church conforms to the socio-cultural practice of ignoring the plight of women.

As in attitude, the Church seems guilty of the sin of conformity to the world. Nasimiyu-Wasike traces the origin of this specific sin to the missionary Church. She observes:

The African Church has inherited the misinterpretations of woman and her relation to God and Jesus from the European Church. Therefore the African woman in addition to being under her cultural bondage and oppression, also experiences the socio-economic oppression of neo-colonialists in the Church. According to missionaries African women were not to be trusted.<sup>169</sup>

Whatever the origin of the Church's attitude to women, it is clear that the Church has presented to women a Christ who is a conformist. Rarely does the Church present to young women Christ as a liberator; one who challenges them to transform rather than tolerate their situations of suffering. Yet good news is not about being tolerant to suffering, it is about changing situations of suffering into situations of justice and love. Christ's suffering to the point of death on the cross and his triumphant resurrection was that humanity, women included, would have life and have it in abundance. This is the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fortunately, Christian theologians are constantly calling the attention of the Church not only to their gender unconsciousness but also to their sin of conformity. In its meeting held in New Delhi in 1981, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) noted:

Women everywhere and at all levels suffer immensely from male dominated patterns of culture and social organization. Although women have contributed to the development of Third World Countries, they have been accorded minority or inferior status. Women's oppression has been made more evident by their general absence in decision-making positions even on issues that radically affect them. This is true not only in society at large but in the Churches as well. All religions without exceptions are guilty of discriminating against women.<sup>170</sup>

EATWOT may be accurate as far as gender insensitivity and lack of appropriate teachings on gender relations are concerned. However, I would add, that the Church is guilty of discriminating against men in conforming to the thinking that men are privileged in situations of unequal gender relations. Most Church leaders may not be conscious of this essentially because Church leaders are often men from patriarchal traditions.

It is essential to note that there are many religious leaders throughout the Church who are not only gender conscious but are also actively involved in the struggle to bring about gender equity. A pastor with the PCEA told this writer that he constantly challenges men in his congregation to consider women as equal partners "so that the kingdom of God may be realized on earth". A Roman Catholic priest indicated that he tries to involve nuns as much as possible in the celebration of mass in his parish (for example in scriptural readings including the Gospel Reading, in homily, and in serving the Eucharist) if only to make people understand that women have a place in the leadership of the Church.

However the majority of the Church leaders are either ignorant of gender concerns or they unconsciously conform to socio-cultural definitions which draw lines of superiority and inferiority between males and females. In general, contemporary Christian notions and practices indicate that the Church is still trapped in the ancient era where gender is reduced to sex so that definitions of masculinity and femininity are presented as “divinely-instituted orders of creation”. Ontological arguments in support of unequal gender relations abound in the Church. As observed by Elaine Graham, “while traditional notions of inferiority of women and superiority of men are no longer explicitly entertained, the Church has not evolved an alternative theological anthropology”.<sup>171</sup>

It is without contradiction to report that the above notwithstanding, the Church may be said to have some official Church blueprints, which address the issue of gender relations. Let me draw illustration from what I consider to be the single classical document of the Roman Catholic Church on the position, the Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women<sup>172</sup>. At no other time are women and their concerns so directly addressed. This on its own affirms the dignity of women. Pope John Paul II deserves a standing ovation for this great evangelism!

Addressed to every woman in the world on the eve of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995, the letter begins with repeated appreciation of women “for all that they represent in the life of humanity” in their various roles as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, workers, consecrated women, among others. The section on words of thanks is clearly emotionally written convincing one of the Pope’s sincerity and genuine gratitude to women. More importantly, the Pope thanks “*every woman* for the simple fact of *being woman*.” The importance of this statement is in that women are not just recognized for their roles in society but for the simple fact of *being*. The Pope recognizes in writing that saying thank you is not enough. So he goes on to address the historical conditioning of society that has been an “obstacle to the progress of women.”

The Pope admirably begins by recognizing appropriately:

Women’s dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.<sup>173</sup>

This recognition is important as it forms the basis for the struggle to re-establish the place of women in society. While we concur with the Pope that this relegation of women to margins of society has led to spiritual impoverishment, we add that it has also led to physical impoverishment. In the special area of youth sexuality for example, as has already been discussed, unequal gender relations have led to premarital sex with all the physical consequences of this, including HIV/AIDS.

Arguing from a philosophical and theological perspective, the Pope transgresses the bounds set by the Church's tradition to apologize on behalf of the entire Church for gender injustice and calls the Church to "a renewed commitment to fidelity to the Gospel of vision." In this he invites the Church to "examine the past with courage" in order to restore the dignity of women in faithfulness to the calling of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>174</sup>

Coherently and systematically, Pope John Paul II narrows down to the issue of gender relations and sexuality. He observes:

Yet how many women have been and continue to be valued more for their physical appearance than for their skill, their professionalism, their intellectual abilities, their deep sensitivity, in a word, the very dignity of their being...

Then too, when we look at one of the most sensitive aspects of the situation of women in the world, how can we not mention the long and degrading history, albeit often an 'underground' history of violence against women in the area of sexuality?

Here we are thinking of atrocities perpetrated not only in situations of war, still so common in the world, but also in societies which are blessed by prosperity and peace and yet often corrupted by a culture of hedonistic permissiveness which aggravates tendencies to aggressive male behaviour.<sup>175</sup>

The Pope clearly condemns unequal gender relations embedded in our society. In line with the argument propounded in this lecture, the Pope recommends social reconstruction as the way to restoring the dignity of women. One is irresistibly impressed by the Pope's exertion of his concern for women but as the Pope thereafter points out:

The journey (for women's liberation) must go on! But I am convinced that the secret of making speedy progress in achieving full respect for women and their identity involves more than simply the condemnation of discrimination and injustices necessary though this may be. Such respect must first and foremost be won through an effective and intelligent campaign for the promotions of women, concentrating in all areas of women's life and beginning with a universal recognition of the dignity of women.<sup>176</sup>

The Pope could never be more accurate. There is need to condemn the discrimination of women prevalent in our world today but, this on its own will not bear much fruit. Action should follow.

While this official statement is clear on what should be done, it is a pity that the Pope's Letter to Women is a document that many priests do not seem to know that it exists. I have asked many priests if they know about the letter and few respond in the affirmative. The few who know about it rarely refer to it in their ministry. One is left wondering what the Church has done to translate these theological articulations into action. In Kenya there are efforts by the Roman Catholic Church to address women issues. As has already been noted, many dioceses of the Church in Kenya have offices for gender and development. However, the activities of this office, as presented by some of the officers-in-charge are basically geared towards economic empowerment of women like many secular gender development projects. Focus on social development and specifically on gender relations as the basis of all forms of gender discrimination is rarely addressed.

While economic empowerment of women is critical to their liberation, approaches to this need to be strategic. Certain empowerment approaches work against their very objectives. For instance, initiating income-generating activities for women within the current gender relations may serve to provide their husbands with extra income as they still make decisions, directly or indirectly, on how the money from the project is spent. In other instances, men may feel inferior if their wives are economically independent and resort to loss of self value, self neglect and/or gender violence. A feature article in a local Kenyan newspaper by Charles Onyango-Obbo decries the negative effective of economic empowerment of women on men in Kenya with a rather sarcastic note:

I am not sure that having African men wasting away in the villages and being made impotent by lethal illicit brew is necessarily a bad thing. One result of “male wastage” has been that something politics and law have failed to do for decades has happened – power is slowly being shifted to the hands of women in the countryside. ...<sup>177</sup>

Definitely, what Onyango-Obbo calls ‘male-wastage’, can under no circumstances be considered a good thing, not even by women. I will come back to this point later. For now we observe that such impacts of gender empowerment indicates the need for gender approaches that seek to transform social structures and to empower both men and women by addressing gender relations.

One of the major structures in the Roman Catholic Church which has been identified as patriarchal and discriminatory to women is refusal to ordain women. Indicating that he is not blind to this, Pope John Paul II addresses it in his letter to women thus:

Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are complementary. Womanhood expresses the “human” as much as manhood does but in a different and complementary way... Womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view but also from the ontological. It is only through the duality of the “masculine” and the “feminine” that the “human” finds realization.<sup>178</sup>

In moving from “womanhood and “manhood” to “feminine” and “masculine”, respectively, the Pope falls into the common pitfall of confusing gender with sex. Indeed he goes on to use an ontological argument to show why women should not be ordained. He introduces the idea of ‘sacramental economy’ within which men are seen as being ontologically suited for priesthood while women are not. The Pope insists that these “role distinctions should not be viewed in accordance with the criteria of functionality typical in human societies”<sup>179</sup>. One needs to understand the ecclesial model and structure of the Roman Catholic Church to appreciate their understanding of priesthood. Unfortunately, time and space do not allow for an exposition of this.

However, it is essential to understand that the history of the Roman Catholic Tradition limits the bounds beyond which no Pope may dare transgress without adverse effects on the unity of the Church, at least within our



contemporary age. The possibility of ordination of women is one of the issues that cannot be changed overnight even by a papal decree. The issue therefore requires careful treading on. Moreover the Church insists that it is not out of inferiority but rather out of a system of division of labor inherited from the early Church. The subject of ordination of women is so major a controversy that it cannot be exhaustively discussed under another subject. However, suffice to remind the reader of the dualistic thinking on the nature of man and nature of woman which prevailed in the Medieval Church. The Church in our contemporary times seems to continue to hang over this thinking.

Generally the main regular contact between the Church and young people is in Church Catechism. An evaluation of the curricula that is used in pre-baptism, pre-confirmation, and pre-marriage classes in any church in Kenya indicates a major gap on the part of the Church in carrying out its mission of evangelization: the curricula is adequate in addressing the salvific mission of the Church but it is completely lacking in terms of addressing youth needs here and now. As long as body and soul cannot be separated, spiritual needs must be addressed alongside physical and mental needs of human persons.

### **What the Church should do**

It has already been mentioned that if the Church is to be relevant to the needs of young people, it must begin by understanding their situation, their valid frustrations, fears, dreams, and hope. Only with an accurate interpretation of the situation of young people in present day Kenya can the Church present a relevant and credible Jesus who has appropriate impact on youth's concrete lives, in this context, sexual lives. In the specific area of gender and sexual behaviour, young people are in a social quagmire. To appreciate the situation of young people, the Church necessarily needs to be clear about the sexual nature of young people in view of their specific stage in human development and to relate this to their socio-cultural contexts with regard to God's design and will for humanity: the Church has to develop a theological anthropology of gender and sexuality.

First and foremost, it should be appreciated that biologically, young people are in a difficult and tumultuous stage of psychosexual development. This stage in human growth is characterized by sexual and identity crises. Biologically sex hormones are developing triggering in the youth dangerous sexual instincts and impulses which translate into sexual desire. Yet, their

mental development is not commensurate with their physical development. This implies that they may not be well equipped on their own to rationalize on the need to control their sexual desires.

A theological examination of the social situation within which the youth are growing up indicates that they lack role models. Adult sexual behaviour in Kenya today generally raises serious ethical questions; sexual unfaithfulness, sexual mobility and sexual violence are common among adults. In line with symbolic interaction theory, young people are inclined to copy adult behaviour. Worse still young people seem to lack reliable information on sex. Data presented in the previous parts of this lecture indicate that young people do not have access to adequate and preferred sources of sex information. Their major actual sources of information are the mass media and friends, the two sources which may not be considered reliable: while the mass media has contradicting information coming mainly in form of uncontrolled advertisements and films with conflicting values, friends of youths who are their peers are often driven by ignorance and/or the sexual crises associated with their being. For example, while some mass media programs encourage condom use, others discourage them and while some peers will be ignorant of sex, others will be seeking to conform to social expectations. These leave the youth confused, and unsure of what values to adopt.

Young people are faced with a scenario where they have sexual instincts and impulses which they do not know how to control; where they are casually told not to engage in sexual activity but they are expected to conform to socio-cultural definitions and expectations which encourage sexual activity; where they are told not to engage sex without moral support yet they are socially surrounded by adult sexual moral decay. In this scenario, where young people feel neglected, ignorant, confused, and generally in a crisis, it should not be surprising that the youth actively engage in sex. This situation of young people is worsened by the consequences of their sexual behaviour. Sexual activity among young people leads to unwanted pregnancies, abortions, stress and sexually transmitted diseases including the incurable HIV/AIDS. The most pathetic scenario is that once this suffering befalls the youth, they are condemned and experience even more neglect. With what can one compare this situation of young people in Kenya?

For lack of a better analogy, I borrow the story of the Good Samaritan from the Bible:

There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by, on the other side (Luke. 10: 30-32).

I compare young people in Kenya to this man who fell among robbers: Youth are laying, as it were, by the roadside attacked, stripped, beaten half-dead. What makes the situation worse is that the half dead youth are neglected: People passing by the road cross over to the other side and walk away. This is, to me, the best picture of young people in Kenya today. The society has not only 'created' all the social evils that have attacked, stripped and beaten the youth but the same society has abandoned them, having labeled them "an impossible generation." In the specific area of sexual activity and gender relations, suffice to emphasize that young people in Kenya are expected to behave in a specific way as male or female as they relate to one another: males are expected to dominate and women are expected to be subordinate in sexual encounters. This model of gender relations encourages young people into sexual activity with all the consequent suffering of unwanted pregnancies, stress and STIs including HIV as already highlighted. Once this suffering befalls young people different members of their society neglect them in their half dead state.

The Church has to play the role of the Good Samaritan and come to their aid. This role involves first and foremost establishing the root cause of their sexual behaviour in order to avoid injuring them further in the process of giving help. Prevailing gender relations is not only one of the major causes of sexual activity but is indeed the foundation on which all other forms of oppressive structures are based. This view is shared by Richard Foran who sees the struggle for the full emancipation of women as the gravitational central theme of theology and the hallmark of authentic Christian spirit as all other oppressive structures, systems and relationships proceed from this archetypal distortion.<sup>180</sup> Thus, gender equality is a prerequisite to any sustainable human development. This calls the Church to do address gender relations in general and in this case, in youth sexual behaviour.

The Church has to rid itself of gender insensitivity to recognize that there is indeed a problem related to gender. With such recognition the Church

would be in a position to educate not just Christians but all Kenyans on the impact of gender discrimination on human development. It is only with such awareness that the Church can move beyond conformity and instead lead the way to just gender relations. The Church has to set the pace if the right and just path is to be followed. Once conscious of gender and its implications on human development, in this specific case on youth sexual activity, the Church should spearhead education not only for youth but also for all people.

Within the Church the battle of gender begins with a challenge of patriarchal theology, which erroneously assumes that God ordains male dominance and power. This assumption is derived from the fact that God has throughout the ages been presented as a male. Yet, God is neither male nor female. The impression that God is male is a product of the fact that the Bible has been written, canonized, interpreted and translated by men from patriarchal cultures. Authentically, as noted by Anglicans at the 1978 Lambeth Conference:

God is not masculine. Neither is God feminine. God is the source of masculinity and femininity, and of all those human characteristics, which are variously called masculine and feminine in different cultures. God's nature is reflected in the balance and interaction between them.<sup>181</sup>

In this liberating educative role the Church has to begin by designing a theology that is positive to sexuality. As long as sexuality is considered evil with the consequent need to control female sexuality, which has traditionally been regarded as evil, gender relations will remain oppressive not only to women but also to the entire humanity. If the Church is truly founded on Christ then as A.M. Okorie argues:

The Church needs to reclaim a positive theology of sexuality, which emphasizes the personhood of woman. Such a theology encourages humanity to celebrate the female as a person who reflects the God in whose image we are created. The Church has become sleepy, and is slowly being awakened. There is even hope that the truth will triumph and that distortion in any form will be seen as repulsive to our God who refuses to remain imprisoned in traditions no matter how sacred.<sup>182</sup>

The designing of a theology that is positive to sexuality begins by a critical analysis of the mission of Christ in as far as gender relations are concerned. Only then can the Church present to the youth the liberator that Christ is.

Having challenged it to be progressive, proactive and practical in its role, it is critical that we suggest the way forward. Towards this end, the following section provides the Church with an alternative general theological anthropology, which, in line with modern thinking, is different from the traditional thinking inherited from Early Church theologians. While theologians such as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas made important contributions to Christian theology, it is essential to understand that they were also contextual. Since human societies are dynamic universality and contextuality in theology should be understood as two sides of the same coin. Thus, given the contextual nature of theology, it is critical that Christians continually review their theology to suit changing times. In a more specific way, this section proposes redesigning of Christian youth ministry for effective evangelization in a continent laden with unjust gender relations and HIV/AIDS.

### **Towards a theological anthropology of gender justice**

In the Jewish society to which the historical Jesus belonged:

Discrimination against females was inherent in the religious and socio-political organization of Israel from the country's earliest written records. Institutionalized polygamy, slavery, and concubinage created a double standard in society. Barrenness provided a legitimate reason for divorce. This was an exclusive male prerogative. Widows had no economic or legal security. The function of women was to bear and raise children under the tutelage of a man.

This negative view of women is reflected in what was the Jewish man's daily prayer. In it he praised God for not having been created a gentile, a slave, or a woman. Women were confined to the home except for trips to the synagogue. Here they were not counted as part of the quorum nor allowed to participate in the readings. The Jewish law instructed that the words of the Torah would rather be burned than entrusted to a woman.<sup>183</sup>

Indeed in the Jewish society women held inferior social status. Moreover they were regarded as men's property and related to men only in terms of sexuality. Ironically, women were valued only in terms of sexuality and yet their very sexuality was considered the most dangerous thing in life. Basically, women were kept out of public to keep them from tempting men away from the moral path into sexual lust.<sup>184</sup>

While Jesus was a Jew in every respect, Jesus challenged the socio-cultural structures of his time to give equal regard to both men and women. Jesus' approach to women was revolutionary. This is clearly evident from the Gospel records of Jesus' life and teachings. He treated women with respect and dignity as full human beings made in the image of God. Leonard Swidler describes Jesus as a feminist, a person who promoted the equality of men and women.<sup>185</sup> In both word and deed, Jesus transgressed the limits set by the Jewish culture to erase all marks of superiority and inferiority between men and women. He placed them at the same level. He allowed women to serve him in his public ministry (Luke 8:2-3) contrary to Jewish traditions which kept women out of the public sphere, used female characters in his parables contrary to rabbinic expectations (Mathew13: 33), used female imageries to illustrate God's nature (Luke15:8), condemned sin by women though with great compassion for the sinner, and challenged women to live up to human dignity (John 4:16).

At the same time, Jesus portrayed the equality in the spiritual potential of men and women indicating that both are called to serve Christ. On many occasions Jesus interchangeably used men and women in his illustrations citing their various daily activities. For example, in Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed which was sown by a man and grew forth to become a source of security and comfort to many living things. Immediately after Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to yeast which a woman put in some dough making it rise fourfold (Mathew13: 33-34). Another example may be found in Luke 15 where Jesus compared God to a shepherd who, when he had lost one of his hundred sheep, left the ninety nine safe sheep and looked for the lost one until he found it. Soon after Jesus compared God to a woman who, when she lost one of her ten silver coins, swept her whole house until she found the lost coin.

With regard to sexuality, Jesus demonstrated his strong belief that both male and female are equal; he refused to conform to the Jewish regard of women as sexual objects whose value is always linked to their sexuality. The Jewish law on adultery, more or less like the Kenyan contemporary situation, expected men to be adulterous and yet adultery was one of the most serious crimes that a woman could commit not only against her husband but also against the entire society. When some people brought to Jesus a woman who was caught committing adultery, he transgressed the Law of Moses, which commanded that such people be stoned to death (John 8:1-11). Moreover, he went beyond

that to challenge the hypocrisy of the men who had brought her to him. These men were hypocritical on two accounts: Firstly, they had not brought the man who had been caught with the woman even though adultery is clearly a two people's affair, and secondly, they had the audacity to cite the Law of Moses, which explicitly condemns adultery for both men and women, a crime for which both men and women are to be punished equally; stoning to death. These men were seeking to make the Bible, in this case the Law of Moses, conform to the Jewish culture within which adultery was not exactly sinful for men. He set the woman free charging her not to sin again but to take responsibility of her life.

Teaching directly on adultery and divorce Jesus declared men and women equal partners in marriage, each of whom is charged with the responsibility of faithfulness. He indicated that adultery is no more a woman's sin than it is a man's. Contrary to the Jewish law on adultery, Jesus taught that a man commits adultery against his wife in the same way a woman commits adultery against her husband (Mathew 5:27-32). In his own words: "A man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his wife. In the same way, a woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery" Mark 10:11-12. Many more examples may be given all of which indicate Jesus' revolutionary approach to women: he believed, taught, and acted in a way that left it clear that men and women are equal and both should be treated with dignity and respect.

It is clear that the Church in Kenya today is not revolutionary but conformist in as far as gender relations is concerned. Like in the times of the historical Jesus, Christians in our contemporary Kenyan situation seek to make the Bible conform to double standards especially in the area of sexuality. As presented in the earlier part of this lecture, this treatment contributes significantly to youth sexual activity and the resultant suffering including HIV infection. The Church is challenged to present to Africa Christ as he really is, a source of good news and practices against human suffering. In this context, the Church is challenged to present to young people Christ as a revolutionist who respects both male and female youth for who they are and encourages them to transgress the limits set by their cultures.

The traditional theological thinking interprets biblical messages without any consideration of socio-cultural contexts within which the messages were written. What must always be remembered is that writers who were not only

male but also were from patriarchal societies wrote the Bible. These two facts must definitely have influenced their thinking in terms of their choice of what to write and how to interpret various historical and spiritual realities. For, although the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is therefore without error, the Word was not dictated neither is the Word in God's language.

Modern thinking recognizes men and women as equal human beings, both of whom are made in the image of God. It recognizes that gender, unlike sex, is socially conditioned and has little to do with physiological differences. Iona Mayer argues:

True, biological 'nature' does ordain distinctively different roles for each sex in procreation and suckling. Beyond this, however, sex role differences are a social nature and are socially constructed by ceremonial idiom - such as the ceremonial rule whereby male infants can never outgrow their nourishment from feminine hands. These characteristic patriarchal arrangements will seem natural and inevitable as long as ... no information strikes home from a different social reality, such as a world where men actually get their food and yet the heavens don't fall.<sup>186</sup>

Moreover, modern thought, derived from scholarly research and from real life experiences in an advanced scientific and technological age, recognizes that physiological differences are limited only to the reproductive human system. These differences are purely for complementary purposes and do not denote inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes. This thinking can no longer accept Biblical sexual theology. It calls for reinterpretation of biblical messages in view of the socio-cultural contexts of the writers, the time within which they were written and the purposes for which they were written. Such reinterpretation will provide alternative theology on which new gender relations, based on Christian sexual theology rather than biblical sexual theology, may be constructed.<sup>187</sup> Unlike biblical sexual theology, Christian sexual theology presupposes that Christ transcends socio-cultural thinking. Thus biblical messages should be made relevant for different people at different times and places by interpreting them outside their contexts in the light of Christ. The central question in Christian gender relations is: what model of gender relations would Christ recommend for the world today?

The Bible presents to us two views of womanhood, the subordinationist and the equalitarian. Most biblical writers belong to the subordinationist view basically because they were men and they belonged to socio-cultural traditions



which considered women inferior. All Old Testament writers, for example, influenced by the Jewish tradition subscribe to this view. This is evident in their records of history. Women's experiences are rarely recorded: women are rarely mentioned and when they are, their names are often not given regardless of their social status even when they play a central role.

Throughout much of the Old Testament, women are presented as subjects to men who work towards the making of heroes without themselves becoming heroines. For instance, wives of great figures such as Abraham, David, Moses and Solomon are mentioned in passing. Yet women were complementary to men in the making of history. For example, if Abraham is the father of all nations and therefore the father of all Christians by faith, then, Sarah is the mother of all Christians by faith. Yet, such reference is not made to Sarah.

In other instances, prominent female characters in the Bible are not mentioned by name. Such unnamed persons include, for example, the girl that directed Naaman the great King to consult Elisha the Prophet for cure of his leprosy (2Kings 5), the Hebrew women who defied Pharaoh's order to kill all Egyptian male children (Exodus 1:15-22) and the disobedient daughter of Pharaoh who rescued (Moses Ex. 2). Supposing the daughter of Pharaoh did not ensure Moses' survival, how would God's salvation plan have been executed? Who would have led Israel out of bondage? These questions underscore the role played by Pharaoh's daughter not to mention the cases of other unnamed female characters. While the Biblical authors may not have consciously harbored gender inequality attitudes, Bible readers and interpreters may deduce their disregard for women from the narratives.

In the New Testament patriarchal assumptions abound and female subordination is explicit except in Jesus' words and actions. For example, Paul orders that women be silent in Church and that women always cover their heads in public places in honor of their husbands (1 Corinthians 11). He also calls wives to "submit to their husbands as though to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). Other passages imply belief in the evil nature of women thereby justifying their subordination. For example, 1 Timothy 2 implies that women are naturally evil for which they have to pay through the pains of child bearing. Although apostles such as Paul, faced with certain circumstances, depart from their traditional subordinationist view to adopt the equalitarian view of women, Jesus presents the best example of this view. Jesus treated women with high regard as has been discussed already.

The challenge for the Church is to move from biblical gender relations to Christian gender relations as Jesus recommended by word and deed. The Church should seek to liberate women from their subordinate position and men from their dominant position. Both men and women need liberation and empowerment to seize their human and Christian rights to transgress the bounds set by their socio-cultural environments. This is no mean task because as observed by Florence Butegwa:

It is often difficult (for both men and women) to internalise and operationalise such concepts as equality and emancipation without feeling that you are in some way giving up part of who you are, because our culture and society is part of us. It is equally difficult for others to look at you without seeing something alien in you.<sup>188</sup>

Butegwa's observation is accurate. Having been socialized in societies where male dominance and female subservience are the norms, and therefore knowing no other ways of males relating to females, it is quite difficult to liberate men and women from the traditional thinking completely internalized in them. Nevertheless, this remains the only way out. It is important that the Church recognizes gender inequality as a structural sin, something objectified to become inbuilt in social and political structures, rather than a personal sin. This means that gender inequality is a socio-cultural condition in which individuals get caught up. As long as this condition prevails, the individual may be unable to think and act contrary to expectations.

What must be emphasized is the need to educate men and women on the negative impacts of contemporary gender relations on both sexes and on the benefits of gender justice for both sexes. The struggle for gender justice, which presupposes gender equality, must recognize the need for men and women to work together against any oppressive structures for human good.

While Christ is the best role model for young people, it is essential that we honestly admit that Christ is abstract; he is unseen; a silent observer who has no impact on people's lives unless he is incarnate, that is, living in the Church. And Christ will not be living in the Church unless we can address the real life situations of the faithful in a practical way. The youth need to see Christ living actively in the Church for him to intervene in their real felt needs. This calls for a redesigning of Christian youth ministry in Kenya to adopt strategies that target the youth in a direct manner.

## **The Need to Redesign Christian Youth Ministry**

In view of the special situation of young people in Africa a theological anthropology of sexuality and gender justice calls for a review of the current Christian youth ministry in order to make it relevant to young people's real and felt needs. In redesigning this, the following ideas may be useful.

First and foremost, the Church has to discern the real needs of young people. This involves listening to them articulate their situation. Certain questions must be presented to the youth and the youth's responses taken seriously. This way the Church will not be answering unasked questions and in the process providing irrelevant answers. Questions that could be posed to the youth include but are not limited to:

- What problems do you encounter in trying to practice sexual abstinence?
- What do you think is the best source of sex education?
- What do you think should be addressed in sex education?
- How do boys and girls relate in sexual encounters?

Youth responses to such questions will enable the Church to understand the real situation of young people. This forms a basis to understanding their real needs.

In view of the real needs of the youth, the Church should expand its baptism and confirmation catechism to include social life skills. For example, specific teachings affirming the equality of male and female, how positive gender relations contribute to development, the sacredness of sex and how to abstain from sex before marriage by upholding gender relations that recognize the equality rather than the inequality of sexes may be provided. This is the way to transform sinful social structures and construct a just and humane society; to transform the youth's situation of suffering into good news. Such teachings should be integrated into Church programs like baptism and confirmation as pre-marriage catechism if they are to receive the attention they deserve.

The Church should not neglect those youths who claim to be Christians but are not practicing or even those who are not Christians at all. Thus it should, within its ministry, provide forums in which all youth can be educated on responsible living in the context of contemporary times. Seminars and workshops that reach out to all youth should be held often and regularly. The

content of the seminars and workshops should be determined by the category of youth in terms of age and religious formation. Of greater importance, attention should be given to what has generally been erroneously referred to as 'problematic youth'. These are the youths who have already suffered the consequences of sexual activity such as pregnancies, abortions, stress, STDs and HIV / AIDS. We call this of greater importance because Jesus Christ came for the sake of the fallen. This is clearly seen in that Christ always identified with sinners. In fact he said it himself: "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10, Mathew 18:11). For these youth, the Church has a duty to transform their despair to hope.

An important point to note is that Christian youth should be encouraged to recognize that they too are part of the Church. They, therefore, have a role to play in sharing in the Church's mission. On the specific area of youth sexual activity and gender relations, young Christians should be peer liberators. This involves peer educating, peer counseling, and becoming role models. For Christian youth, the challenge is for them to preach to others, to be Christ to others, showing their peers the way, the truth and the life. The following message by Pope John Paul II to young people should be repeated often and the youth encouraged living it:

Have you already discovered Christ who is the way? Whoever wants to reach salvation must set along this way. You young people very often find yourselves at crossroads, not knowing which path to choose, which way to go. There are so many wrong paths, so many facile proposals, and so many ambiguities. In moments like those, do not forget that Christ, with his Gospel, his example, his commandments, is always the safest way, the way, which leads to full and lasting happiness.

Have you already discovered Christ who is the truth? Truth is the deepest need in the human spirit. Young people especially are hungry for the truth about God and man, about life and the world.

Have you already discovered Christ who is the life? Each one of us is so anxious to live life in its fullness. You live with great hopes, with so many fine plans for the future. But, do not forget that the true fullness of life is to be found only in Christ, who died and rose again for us. Christ alone is able to fill in depth the space of the human heart. He alone gives the strength and the joy of living in spite of any limit or external impediment.<sup>189</sup>

For young people in Kenya living in the midst of various evils, Christ must be preached to them; the Christ who calls them to follow Him in word and deed, first and foremost for liberation here and now. The Church must facilitate the youth's response by designing strategies that involve youth in a direct way. For example, some of the resource persons in educative seminars and workshops could be young people. This may encourage young people to take charge of their situations. Christ came that people may have life and have it in abundance (John 10:10). The Church as the representative of Christ on earth has to present itself not as a mere spectator or an occasional commentator. The Church has to be an active participant if Christ is to have an impact in people's concrete lives.

At another level, however, the Church should not forget that it has a role to lead young people to salvation. True and total liberation is only an eschatological hope. Therefore, as it liberates bodies and minds, the Church should address the spiritual needs of young people. The link between sexuality and spirituality should be emphasized. One may think that this recommendation is not academically objective since the reality of life after death cannot be empirically proved. But death is a reality; a reality that many young people have already experienced and others are sooner or later going to experience. A just and rightful sexual living here on earth is appealing since even if there is no life after death, nothing will have been lost - only heaven will already have been realized here on earth as peace and justice reigns.

For the Church in Kenya and in Africa in general to remain valid for young people in this age, it has to address their real felt needs. Young people desperately look up to the Church for liberation from unjust gender relations, sexual irresponsibility and the consequent HIV/ AIDS. From the analysis of the role of the Church presented in the preceding paragraphs, we observe that the Church has had liberating ideas and messages for women. For example, as early as 1979, the Lambeth conference expressed the need for a theology that liberates women. One wonders why but these messages have not translated into desired change in gender relations. Suffice to note that the Church does not operate in isolation but in the context of the society within which it operates. The following section presents a brief history of the struggle for gender justice through gender empowerment programs in Kenya, the history within which the Church has operated.

### **A brief historical analysis of the impact of gender empowerment in Kenya**

A presentation of the need for gender reconstruction in Kenya necessarily begins with a historical analysis of the Kenyan social context with regard to gender relations since pre-colonial times. This not only indicates where we are and where we have come from but also helps us to appreciate the context within which Kenyans live. Suffice to note that Kenya is not a homogeneous group; there are forty two ethnic communities, each with a distinct language and culture, not to mention the many sub-ethnic groups within the wider communities. Each pre-colonial Kenyan society lived in a close-knit community with little or no interaction with other communities. Each had its distinct way of life, with distinct educational philosophies and practices. However, in this context, we appreciate the common features governing gender relations to discuss, where possible, the Kenyan society as one. Where it is not possible, a case of the Agikuyu is used.

For many post-colonial theorists, colonialism has had so adverse and long-lasting an impact on the African continent that the contemporary situation cannot be understood without reference to the process. For example, according to Crawford Young "Overall colonial legacy cast its shadow over the emergent African state system to a degree unique among the major world regions".<sup>190</sup> A history of the struggle for gender justice in Kenya, through gender empowerment as we know it today, has never been an indigenous initiative; it is a later development whose genesis may be traced to the colonial period while its manifestations as a formal movement may be traced to the early 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the concept of gender injustice and the phenomenon that it represents was unknown in traditional African societies. Whether there was gender injustice or not is controversial. However, suffice to observe that the situation served the societies well and there were checks and balances to control behaviour between men and women. It would seem that both men and women were content with the situation and the extreme abuses of human rights that we see today as manifestations of gender injustice were almost no-existent. For want of space and time, I restrain from the controversy and allow the reader to make their own conclusions.

### *Gender Relations in Pre-colonial Kenya*

For many millennia the many communities in Kenya, as any human society is wont to do, adjusted themselves to their ecological niches with some, such as the Agikuyu and the Miji Kenda, developing agricultural economies while

others, like the Maasai and the Samburu developing pastoralist forms of production and the Ogiek thrived on hunting and gathering. The majority such as the Luhya and the Abagusii adapted themselves to a mixture of crop cultivation and livestock keeping. Production was primarily for collective subsistence rather than individual accumulation and management of the basis of production, which included land, livestock and labor, was largely communal. For example, in the traditional Agikuyu set-up where land was the basic resource and source of livelihood, individual ownership of land was unknown. It was communally owned with clear female usufructuary rights to grow certain crops and keep certain animals. Women and men had full control of specific resources in as far as reproduction, production and distribution was concerned. Surplus production was exchanged through minimal barter trade both locally (within communities) and across neighboring communities. For example, the Agikuyu would exchange food crops with beads from the Maasai. The rewards of labor were mostly redistributed in kind and according to need.

Within their specific ecologies, both men and women were equipped to manage their environment for societal welfare through specified tasks. Various checks and balances were in place to protect them against abuses through a clear system of division of labor. Division of labor was based on age and gender and socialization was by apprenticeship. Boys worked alongside adult men while girls worked alongside women to learn within their different spaces. There were distinct dressing codes for each group and clearly specified references for and relationships between different groups. Among the Maasai for example, children would not shake hands with adults but would present their bowed heads for a pat of blessing from the adult. For social order and harmony, movement from one stage to another was marked by elaborate rituals so that there would be no confusion on what group one belongs to and consequently what behaviour was expected. Women would have tasks that revolved around the house while men went out to into the dangerous wild to maximize on their major role in production. This system ensured that women were not exposed to unnecessary dangers but were protected in view of their major role of reproduction. Indigenous Kenyans were clear that they could risk their men and still perpetuate their communities but not so with women.

With autonomous social systems that provided for all their needs, pre-colonial societies in Kenya had little impetus for large-scale state formation even within individual societies. The society was organized into small political units made up of a few families related by blood (clan) except for those communities with centralized kingdoms. Boundaries between communities and between ethnic groups were fluid and interactions in form of intermarriages, barter trade, and intermittent raids and warfare minimal.

Critical analysis of how power structures operated within the family and the wider pre-colonial societies in Kenya reveal that politically, women like men, would join decision-making positions in society as they grew older and socially, women held high status alongside men especially as social arbitrators and religious leaders.<sup>191</sup> However some political roles were distinctly reserved for men but not without rationale. For example, going to war was strictly a male gender role for the same reason mentioned above: society could not risk losing ability to perpetuate itself by exposing its women to such dangerous enterprises.

With regard to gender and sexuality, various ethnographic studies by non African scholars have tended to (mis) represent African social systems by interpreting them outside their historical and cultural contexts. For example, some anthropologists have cited bride-wealth, common among all Kenyans societies, as a price that men use to buy their wives. Paul Spenser interpreted marriage among the Maasai of East Africa as 'transfer of a woman as a possession from her father who reared her to her husband who rules her'<sup>192</sup>. But scholars who have sought to make deeper analysis of the practice of bride-wealth have understood it as some form of social security designed to cement relationships between the families which become related by consanguinity. Indeed, bride-wealth is not a onetime payment but is given throughout the life of the families. Another widely misinterpreted practice is that of wife guardianship which was common among nearly all Kenyan communities but is now found among the Luo. The practice is erroneously referred to as wife inheritance. The Luo are clear that widows are not property to be inherited but human beings in need of support, love and care from men. With modern capitalistic systems of ownership, the practice of wife guardianship has been abused and this is what calls for reconstruction of such systems.



*Changing Gender relations in Kenya from the Colonial period to the present: the case of the Agikuyu*

It is not possible to discuss details of changing gender relations across societies in Kenya in general because as has already been mentioned in the previous section, there were different autonomous communities and given the pattern and interests of colonial invasion, different communities were affected in different ways. I pick on the case of the Agikuyu because this is the group that suffered the brunt of colonialism and consequently the group whose social organization especially with respect to gender relations was severely disrupted. Moreover, the involvement of the Agikuyu women in the Mau Mau struggle marks the most drastic change in gender relations in Kenya and, fifty years after independence, indisputably continue to inspire women in the struggle for gender justice. Indeed, the involvement of Kenyan women in Mau Mau is indispensable as it is the heritage on which women's movement in Kenya is founded. The contemporary story of Wambui Waiyaki Otieno<sup>193</sup> and specifically the famous Kenya burial saga between her and the Umira Kager Clan, and later her marriage to Mbugua, a man young enough to be her grandson, is probably the most well known public case of a contemporary woman's struggle against gender injustice in Kenya.

Prior to colonialism, as with all other Kenyan communities, division of labor among the Agikuyu was by age and gender. Within this setup, Agikuyu, women were primarily entrusted with specific reproduction and production roles within the domestic sphere of the community. But reproduction was considered the supreme role of women so that production roles were limited to light duties in relatively safe zones (around the house) while men did the more difficult tasks like digging virgin earth and venturing into the wild. As observed by Kenyatta, women were in charge of the farm products in terms of managing family consumption needs and disposing what was surplus through barter trade.<sup>194</sup> Indeed, women wielded a lot of power as they controlled all farm products, products that are essential for men. Note that then there was no dichotomy of educated/urban versus ordinary/rural women as we have it in contemporary Kenya. In this context, it would seem that it was necessary to control women's power in reproduction through unequal sex relations just like it was necessary to control men's power in production by having women control all farm products.

During the colonial period, this traditional social system based on communality and reciprocity disintegrated. Changes in the forces of production transformed many aspects of life. With re-defined modes of access to resources, antagonism between men and women was created. Alienation of land, for example, made it necessary for men to seek employment and so did the imposition of taxes which generated a need for money. With the migration of men to urban areas in search of labor, women were left as the functional heads of families. They had to take up what were previously men's roles and responsibilities in addition to their traditional female roles. For example, they had to manage familial farms whose use was changing due to the demand for money. While majority of histories of the Mau Mau struggle present it as a male national movement with little mention of the role that women played, records indicate that the Mau Mau<sup>195</sup> movement did not begin as a male political movement but was initiated by some women in 1948 at the Olenguruone agricultural settlement scheme as industrial action to protest forced communal work of terracing. Women's traditional role of ensuring food for their family was now threatened by this system of forced labor which ensured that women worked in the scheme at the expense of family food security. Thus, women refused to do terracing while their children had no food to eat. On the political front, a new system was emerging throughout the colonial period as societies adjusted to the colonial system. True to all human societies, in moments of crises, gender roles are constructed and reconstructed as occasions demand and this occasion rendered traditional systems of divisions of labor irrelevant. With the successful Olenguruone women's strike, political leadership ceased to be a preserve of men and so we find women involved in political leadership in terms of making decisions.

The most overt challenge of men's political leadership and the most political gender dynamism was witnessed when a group of Agikuyu women engaged in the famous 1952 riots demanding for release of Harry Thuku. It is alleged that, incensed by lack of political action by men in the face of Thuku's arrest, women publicly questioned male authority in political leadership indicating that they would no longer operate within the socio-cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity. To drive the point home, one Mary Nyanjiru employed a traditional Gikuyu curse of exposing her nakedness (*guturama*) to men as she dared them to take her dress and give her their trousers so that she could go in and demand the release of Thuku.<sup>196</sup> Throughout the Mau Mau revolt, women were active participants not just as civilian supporters

of the Mau Mau but also in active war, a role that was traditionally reserved for men. They not only acted as spies and suppliers of ammunition to the Mau Mau fighters but also as combatants in battle fronts with some of them leading whole regiments as war generals.<sup>197</sup> For their direct role in political activism, many women, among them Filed Marshal Muthoni, ended up in detention throughout the Emergency period (1952-1959). By the end of the Emergency, it is estimated that 27,841 Agikuyu were in detention, 3,103 of them women.<sup>198</sup>

Later on, after land consolidation and the consequent land demarcation and registration, the concept of individual ownership of land, the main resource for traditional societies, was introduced. Men, under whose names pieces of land were registered, received title deeds as proof of ownership thereby acquiring exclusive ownership and control of not just the land, but of the tools of production and the products of land. Over time, traditional crops were replaced with cash crops and men directly received cash for the produce. Thus women ended up as laborers with no access or control of land and its products even after their effective contribution throughout the Mau Mau revolt.<sup>199</sup>

However, the colonial period had transformed Kenyan women from actors in the domestic field to actors in the national political sphere. The story of the evolution of Kenyan women presents a case where women transcended their socio-cultural definitions of femininity to take up men's role. Sadly, this story is rarely told as the genesis of women's movement in Kenya. Thus, the women's movement in Kenya (which is almost synonymous with gender empowerment) is traced to the development of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (Development of Women), with aspiration for gender justice by Kenyan women becoming largely driven by gender empowerment programs from Europe and America. I note that gender (re)constructions over the colonial period was not by design but was a product of crisis: it was incidental as men and women naturally struggled against colonial oppression. Further, I note that while the activities of the Mau Mau were grassroots, the modern struggle for gender justice is heralded by educated women who model themselves on the achievements of Western women. The fact that *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organization (MYWO) was founded by white settler women at the height of the struggle for Kenya's independence in 1952 says a lot about its authenticity as a development agenda for Kenyan women. In actual fact, the organization was designed to ally women with the development against the Mau Mau by

providing women with incentives such as food and education; education to impress women on the benefits of colonialism and the evils of Mau Mau.<sup>200</sup> Muthoni Likimani observes:

The *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* organization started in the early 1950s under what was known as the Community Development and Rehabilitation Department. When it was started, it was meant for the uplifting of women's lives. They were teaching women subjects such as hygiene, literacy, sewing and proper feeding of their families. At the same time it was under the ministry of Community Development *and Rehabilitation*. The question is, rehabilitating who? It was aimed at rehabilitating those with Mau Mau mentality, and especially the women, not to be bitter, but to follow the rule of the law, and to appreciate the services offered by the colonialists. Women who were not involved in *Maendeleo* would be suspected by the government of not being Loyalist, of being Mau Mau. That was how *Maendeleo* started.<sup>201</sup>

Thus, from the moment of its inception and its founding mission, the women's movement in Kenya was not a Kenyan initiative nor was it geared towards addressing the real aspirations of the women for whom it supposedly targeted. Truth be told, the movement capitalized on women's need to advance foreign interests.

### *Gender relations in post colonial period*

An analysis of gender empowerment in post colonial Kenya is an analysis of the global gender empowerment movement since nearly all gender empowerment programs in the country are associated with international development. With every shift in conceptual development models in the developed world, international development agents in Kenya shift focus and terminologies accordingly. Sooner than later, both Governmental and Non Governmental Organizations and community based development agencies, quickly change tune and align themselves to the language of the international development agencies.

Suffice to emphasize that as a formal movement, gender empowerment in post colonial Kenya has developed along the global gender movement whose focus has largely been on economic empowerment of women. Indeed, global attention to the status of women emerged towards the end of the 1950s. Prior to this, the traditional development model assumed that economic growth would 'trickle down' to women and children through the man as breadwinner.

Women, like children, were therefore not considered key in mainline economic production and the only development agenda in which they featured was maternal and child health. When the model was questioned, attention began to be paid to women and women's movements began in various parts of the world. An organized women's movement in Kenya may be traced back to the early 1960s when *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* broke away from the government to become a national organization. Women would organize themselves into groups and receive training in such skills as knitting, cookery, and sewing. They would collect and save money generated through these trades. The conservative model of feminism prevailed as focus in capacity building remained on traditional female gender roles. In the early 1970s, the Women in Development (WID) approach to gender empowerment was adopted in America. This approach focused on development and sought to empower women in all spheres of life: education, politics, and economics and to include them especially in economic development. The WID theoretical model coined by a network of female development professionals based in Washington, US, "sought to make women's issues relevant to development by showing the positive synergies between investing in women and reaping benefits in terms of economic growth".<sup>202</sup> The WID model was impressive to many development agencies and a lot of attention and resources were set aside for women-only projects geared towards educating, training and facilitating women for production as a way of enhancing development in general. This approach was later criticized as one that was interested in economic development rather than in enhancing the status of women. Thus WID was accused of treating women as appendages to men in development so that their participation in development was merely an 'add on' to economic production at the expense of women. Thus, WID was seen as being counterproductive in the sense that it was increasing the oppression of women by integrating them in development processes without any structures to support them in access to resources and decision-making.

In an attempt to deal with the shortcomings of WID and to truly make women integral participants in development, the women's movement came up with the Women and Development (WAD) approach. This approach sought to integrate women in the entire process of development rather than adding them on for mere economic participation and more importantly, to address gender inequalities in all spheres of life. For a while, the WAD approach picked as it was seen to be driven by interest in women's emancipation than on economic

development per se. A lot of development agencies in Kenya throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s facilitated women-only projects under the WAD approach and many women organizations were formed all over the country. The 1979- 1989 women's decade was part of the WAD approach. But, the idea that women could be developed in isolation in a society of men and women was beginning to leak and the WAD approach was heavily criticized as guilty of the very challenge that it was seeking to address – gender discrimination, that is, discrimination of one sex by another on the basis of social constructs. This criticism saw the conceptual model of development shift from WAD approach to Gender and Development (GAD) approach. While the WAD approach focused on women, the GAD recognized that society made up of both men and women, constructed and perpetuated gender relations but while men generally accrue more benefits from this social system, women suffered most. Thus, it was necessary to address both men and women towards equal gender relations and consequently, towards development. To give credit where it is due, the GAD conceptual model of development is worthy commendation for introduction of gender disaggregated data analysis which provides for objective gender analysis of situations. Such gender analyses have played an important role in bringing out the connections between gender relations and development especially in sexual and reproductive health. For example, gender analysis was instrumental in propelling reproductive health to global attention at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 2000. However, the shift from women to gender was only in theory: In practice, GAD explicitly proposed that even though men may be targeted for development, greater attention should be paid to women who have traditionally been marginalized. The concept of affirmative action gained currency with the GAD model as more and more attention was paid to women to 'compensate' them for past injustices and present imbalances in access to power and resources. Consequently, gender empowerment remains almost synonymous with women's empowerment. To date, many development agents, and worse human development trainers, see no difference between women studies and gender studies. In reality there was barely any shift from the WAD theoretical approach and WAD remains disguised as the GAD approach.

Over fifty years since gender inequality was identified by international development agencies as a development problem in Kenya, gender justice has remained an illusion; women in the country continue to be relegated

to secondary positions in both public and private spheres while men are experiencing new forms of gender oppression. Assessors of the situation may come up with opposing views. Some may argue that in spite of continued subjugation of women, significant progress towards women empowerment has been made. Others may argue that discrimination against women has actually worsened. Yet others will argue that discrimination against women has been replaced with discrimination against men so that gender discrimination has only changed its face from being male to being female. The contemporary African situation experiences a high rate of growth and development of gender programs in all sectors of life; education, health, industry/trade, entrepreneurship, environment, shelter, and social welfare, etc. In Kenya, for example, there are over five hundred gender and gender-related organizations geared towards empowerment of women. Most of these programs are directly geared towards gender empowerment through enhanced qualitative political, economic, social, and religious participation of women in public life. It would be expected that with so much activity on gender empowerment, gender violence would be reduced. Paradoxically, gender violence has been on the increase. This section seeks to explain this paradox and to propose a redefinition of power for effective gender reconstruction in Africa.

S.A. Khasiani, for example argues that the women's movement in Kenya has had a positive impact although to a limited extent because the movement operates "within the culturally accepted parameters by confining its demands to what is 'safe to demand'"<sup>203</sup>. On the other hand, Maria Nzomo argues that women's movement in Kenya has had little impact especially in the political context because they operate under state control in a way that the state determines their structure and expansion.<sup>204</sup> According to Nzomo, what has been achieved so far "... is merely voicing and highlighting women's issues" but the huge and challenging agenda of improving the status of women is far from being achieved.<sup>205</sup> From a different perspective Maj Britt Theorin argues that while the 'men as the enemy' approaches to gender equality has been effective in bringing women together it has served to alienate men because it does not make it clear how men have to gain from gender equality.<sup>206</sup>

While what Khasiani and Nzomo observe is accurate, it is essential not to underestimate the importance of gender awareness even in the absence of concrete action. Voicing and highlighting women's issues is not minor since awareness is what prepares the ground on which the seeds of gender

action are planted when 'weather conditions' improves. I opine that gender empowerment programs have registered some positive impact in Kenya. In spite of its shortcomings, *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* may be cited as one organization that has membership right from the grassroots level to the national level. Its structure has potential to effect required gender reconstruction. It has, among others, done a lot to empower women economically and socially by building the esteem of women and exposing them to public life. But this organization is perhaps the best example of what Khasiani refers to as organizations "operating within the culturally (*and politically*) accepted parameters". A historical analysis of the foundation and development of the movement indicate that it has served the interests of male political elite by pacifying women to remain context with their traditional gender roles. For example, while the MYWO was most active during the *Nyayo* era (When Moi was President), women were least involved in political decision-making- The Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) in Kenya is another organization that has made great strides. But this has been limited to gender awareness campaigns and addressing of limited individual cases of discrimination against women. Another example is of the Gender Centre. The Centre is renowned for its efforts to influence policy towards gender equity and may be credited with implementation of national gender policies in various ministries in Kenya including the development of the Ministry for Gender, Children and Social development. Many more examples may be given but all point at the fact that gender empowerment in Kenya is still synonymous with women empowerment and wanting. A major challenge of gender approaches in Kenya as in various parts of the continent is that the programs operate either at the extreme radical end or at the other extreme, on the conservative. For example, while *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* Organization is rather conservative, FIDA-Kenya is rather radical. While radical approaches are too proactive to facilitate reconstruction, conservative approaches hinder progress.

Drawing from my research and extension experiences over the last twenty years, I am of the opinion that in spite of myriad activities on gender mainstreaming by many gender organizations in Kenya gender justice is far from being achieved because in many situations, gender programs have been counterproductive because they are based on the western ideology of competition coupled with individualism and materialism as opposed to the African values of communality and reciprocity. Operating entirely



as women's movements, gender approaches have tended to focus on the economic empowerment of women often at the expense of other aspects of empowerment and consequently, at the expense of men with disastrous emerging trends.

### *Emerging Trends in Gender Relations in Kenya*

The indisputable gain of existing gender empowerment programs in Kenya is economic empowerment of women. More and more women have been supported by the programs through education and training leading to their employment in high level jobs while others have been enabled to establish income generating projects through micro-financing programs and women 'merry-go-round' saving and investment systems. Consequently, family bread-earning is increasingly becoming a female gender role. In the absence of social systems to support men to take up traditional female gender roles, and to support men to cope with changing situations, some men are increasingly losing their positions in the family sphere and consequently feeling socially insecure as they face the threat of becoming irrelevant. Basically, two scenarios result after women become bread earners. In the first scenario, for fear of male aggression, much of the income generated by women ends up in the control of men so that women are reduced further to economic producers while men make decisions on how this money is spent. The result is that women are adversely exploited as men assume aggression to remain in charge. The second scenario is where women assume control of the products of their labor and consequently of their families. The result is that men resort to alcoholism and/or violence to cope with the situation. Writing on sexuality and Christian theology, James B. Nelson notes that men translate their fear and insecurity into aggression because once a man is sexually aggressive "he can perform, he can dominate, he can penetrate".<sup>207</sup> In return to male aggression, women are becoming even more aggressive as they seek to resist increased oppression so that gender relations in Kenya today are increasingly being defined by gender antagonism and competition and consequently, with more and more gender violence.

Various studies concur with my observations I have already referred to a major study by Margrathe Silberschmidt on gender antagonism and socio-economic change among the Kisii in Kenya.<sup>208</sup> According to this study, gender roles in Kenya are changing but only on one end; while women have taken up what were traditionally men's roles; men have not taken up any of the traditional female roles. The result is that women are over-burdened while

men have less and less to contribute at the family level. As they lose value at the family level, they begin to feel irrelevant as they increasingly lose self-respect and identity. To compensate for this, many men resort to alcoholism and drug abuse coupled with domestic violence as they struggle to wrestle power and social status from women back to themselves. In some situations, women find it prudent to finance their husbands' drinking in order to keep them away from interfering with the family economic activities.<sup>209</sup> Thus, men sink deeper and deeper into self pity and lack of self esteem as women become more and more economically empowered. This implies that as the programs make gains, they make loses as well. This indicates the need to reconsider conventional and stereo-typical assumptions about gender relations in areas that are experiencing socio-cultural change.

A relatively new phenomenon in post-colonial Africa is women in wage employment. Could this be signifying economic independence of women and changed gender relations? As if in response to this question, S.B. Stitcher carried out a study in Nairobi, Kenya in 1988 among 317 families.<sup>210</sup> In her analysis of the data Stitcher observes that wage employment of middle income women does not necessarily translate into economic independence or autonomy: Although there is substantial income pooling, there is a great deal of husband dominance in financial decision-making.<sup>211</sup> Over twenty years later the scenario seems to be the same. Grace Wamue Ngare and Nancy Waithera Njoroge carried out a small scale study on changing gender relations within the family in Kiambu and their findings suggest that it is the failure of men to adapt to the new economic dynamics is primarily the cause of tensions rocking the family unit.<sup>212</sup> They noted-

Observably, the family in Kenya has been evolving and is thus affected by various issues. The position of this paper is that, there has been a paradigm shift in gender power relations in the family in Kenya, a case of Kiambu. This is based on a gender role reversal. This has altered gender power relations within the family. By so doing, new gender identities have been created. The consequence is a compromised position of men which renders them helpless and hopeless. The situation has compromised traditional gender perceptions which previously culminated in a distinctly male identity and self respect. Unable to live up to the unwritten cultural norms and values of behaviour, most men in Kiambu have succumbed to feelings of Inferiority, uncertainty and frustrations, all with dire consequences on the family.<sup>213</sup>

Observation of contemporary situations in Kenya suggests that certain aspects of gender programs are functional but others are dysfunctional. Critical analysis of how power structures operate within the family reveal that women indeed have some power and covertly contribute to the decision making processes. Over time, women have learnt to negotiate for and exercise power within the family without seeming to be in charge. In reproduction for example, women are increasingly taking charge of major decisions on how many and when children will be born. On the other hand men are becoming marginalized, more so when it comes to socialization of their children. Mj Britt Theorin observes:

Men pay a high price for our rigid sex (sic)<sup>214</sup> roles – which prevent men from showing emotions, spending time with their children and living longer. Many men not only want to father children, but also want to be daddies – It is not too complicated to become a father, but becoming a dad requires time and commitment.<sup>215</sup>

What is functional is that women are becoming empowered economically and what is dysfunctional is that men are losing social value and increasingly feeling neglected and irrelevant. The result has been a loser-loser situation manifested in the increased incidences of domestic violence in spite of legislation and policies against it. This experience supports the need to integrate men in gender programs towards reconstruction of gender relations. As observed by Maj Britt Theorin:

... discussions of equality can no longer solely concern the conditions under which women live. Attention must be focused on the male role. The time is ripe for women feminists to integrate men into the struggle against sexism.<sup>216</sup>

A few decades ago, males enjoyed undisputed privileges as boy children, husbands, and fathers in terms of access to resources and opportunities and consequently in terms of power in decision-making. Not so any more. A new situation is emerging where this scenario is changing. For example, reports from the Ministry of Education suggest that while enrollment for primary school has always favored boys against girls, by 1998, at least three provinces Central, Eastern and Western Province had seen the enrolment of girls outstrip that of boys.<sup>217</sup> This is credited to the creation of the Gender Unit in the Ministry of Education in 1995. While such gains in gender parity

are commendable, it is critical that gender balance is not tilted against males. In an ongoing study by Church World Service on youth empowerment in Uasin Gishu and Cherangany Counties some youths observed that the boy child is under threat due to neglect. One youth from Yamumbi in Uasin Gishu county said: “Please write and report this in capital letters: THE BOY CHILD IN KENYA IS NEGLECTED COMPLETELY”.<sup>218</sup> Whether the perceptions of these youth are right or not, it is definitely an unhealthy manifestation of social development for if discrimination against women is evil, discrimination against men is evil as well.

A trend that has been emerging over the last few decades but has only come into public limelight in the last few months in Kenya is gender violence reversal. This is the situation where aggression against women is replaced with aggression against men. Reports from *Maendeleo ya Wanaume* Organization (which seems to be a reactionary response to occasional reports on oppression of men by women), 460,000 men are physically abused by their wives every year.<sup>219</sup> Over the last one month, the local dailies in Kenya have reports and features on battering of husbands by their wives, some in the headlines.<sup>220</sup> As to ‘NP’ in the *Ruined Lives* legend analyzed earlier in this lecture, responses to the reports are largely light-hearted and comical in a way that lacks any serious thought of the issue. Sample these responses circulating by Small Messaging Services (sms) in response to the story of a man from Nyeri who was cut severally with a machete by his wife:

Response 1

Notice! Notice! *Kukaliwa* Institute, Nyeri. We are offering the following courses to men: i) manhood and Courage, ii) Fisting while asleep, iii) Sleeping with a knife when drunk, iv) taekwodo, v) karate, and vi) how not to tell the media that you were beaten by your wife.

Response 2

Somewhere in Nyeri on the eve of St. Valentine day, wife to husband: “Wait-haka, today you need to bring me chocolate, a red dress, a red handbag and a pair of red shoes. if you find these too expensive, you may buy a machete. It is only 150 Kenya shillings.”

Even more comical responses are to be found in facebook and twitter.

Agreed, humor, is good medicine and can numb human pain. But pain is not necessarily undesirable for as medical doctors and philosophers know, pain

enables us to respond to unhealthy situations before those situations become lethal. If as a society we do not seriously respond to this unhealthy situation of unequal gender relations, we are well on the road to self destruction. The question we should be asking is: Why would one person (not a woman) be so aggressive on another human person? What can we learn from this situation?

Mukhisa Kituyi commenting on this situation observed:

Listening to talk shows and scanning the print and the social media, one can discern a drift towards hilarious bemusement at either the gender role reversal, the non-men of Nyeri or the unique mannerisms of Nyeri women. few are the cases of serious attempts to help us come to terms with what pressures are boiling over these unusual happenings. ...

First the level of attention given to these cases is overwhelming. not because Kenyans are peace loving people averse to brutalization at home. Cases of wife battering are too many and too widespread in Kenya to draw our attention. We have tended to treat male to female violence at home as some culturally justified form of maintaining social order. It is when the assumed mute object of discipline steps out of the prescribed role and shows emotion in the same way that the usual aggressor does, that it becomes news. Nyeri has gripped the nation because it is a case of the shoe being in the worn foot. ...

We will see more evidence of how alcohol is turning men into vegetables that cannot even raise an arm to fend off some of the blows aimed at the face. We will reflect on how, as women dominate domestic economic production in rural Kenya, they increasingly cannot continue to meekly surrender the fruits of their labour to men who spend their days whining away in the local market place waiting to collect the bonus payment on the milk cash and waste it on Yokozuna or Kumikumi<sup>221</sup>... These developments could not have come at a more unfortunate time. For the substantial promise of gender fairness in the Kenya Constitution to take root, there need for more bold partnership between men and women than we have been used to.<sup>222</sup>

It is towards “more bold partnerships between men and women’ that I propose gender reconstruction and for me, unlike to Kituyi, these developments could

not have come at a more opportune time than now when we are implementing a new constitution with great promise for gender justice as this adds to our lessons.

### **Lessons Learnt**

From the foregoing analysis of historical development of gender programs the following lessons may be learnt:

- 1) In spite of over 50 years of gender programmes in Kenya, male dominance and female subordination continue to characterize gender relations especially in sexual encounters.
- 2) Gender programmes in Kenya and more specifically the women's movement has not been a local imitative. There is need for self definition of development and self driven need through local initiative. Donor funded gender initiatives are neither viable nor sustainable.
- 3) Gender programmes in Kenya have largely been women's programs. The struggle for gender justice is not a women's issue but a societal issue. It is not merely in the interest of women that gender relations be equal; it is in the interest of men as well. Therefore, the struggle for gender justice should integrate both men and women.
- 4) Gender programmes have been piecemeal and sectoral focusing on economic and political empowerment but not on social relations, much less on sexual relations. Gain in one sphere has resulted into gain in another sphere making the programs counterproductive.
- 5) Gender programs in Kenya have been competitive targeting to make women winners at the expense of men. Naturally, men who hold the gender power respond with rage, hostility, and aggression to oppress women more and in return, women respond with more aggression. The end result is a cycle of violence. This needs to be broken.
- 6) Gender relations in Kenya today are dysfunctional

In essence, gender programs in Kenya have culminated in a loser-loser scenario: both men and women lose. Against this background, the need to review current gender approaches to make them human friendly by integrating both men and women as mutual partners in development cannot

be overemphasized. In view of the central role that the Church has to play in bringing about gender reconstruction, the following section focuses on shift from gender competition to gender reconstruction as a moral theological paradigm.

### **From gender competition to gender reconstruction: A moral theological paradigm**

The term 'reconstruction' is borrowed from the discipline of engineering. It refers to the process of breaking down an end product in order to rebuild it to produce an improved product. Usually, a product is reconstructed if it has become dysfunctional or less suitable for a specific situation.

J.N.K. Mugambi observes:

An engineer constructs a complex according to the specifications in the available designs. In order to ensure that the complex will perform the function for which it is intended. Reconstruction is done when an existing complex becomes dysfunctional for whatever reasons and the user still requires using it. New specifications may be made in the new designs; while some aspects of the old complex are retained in the new... Social reconstruction belongs to the Social Sciences, and involves re-organization of some aspects of society in order to make it more responsive to changed circumstances.<sup>223</sup>

Society is a dynamic entity. This means that specific aspects of it constantly become dysfunctional over time. Such aspects need to be reconstructed in order to make them responsive to changing circumstances. Often, society engages in social reconstruction unconsciously as it adjusts to changing times. Thus, reconstruction may be understood as a constant phenomenon that not even society can resist. In this context however, reconstruction is limited to systematic design and implementation of a specific strategy towards a clearly defined end so that gender reconstruction is limited to such action with regard to relations between men and women in society. Suffice to emphasize that even though reconstruction pre-supposes that the social system is no longer functional, it presupposes also that the system is not entirely defective; only certain aspects of it need to be changed.

Unlike sex, the reality of gender is not dependent on some intrinsic value but on a host of variables in social living; while sex is factual, gender is about perceptions. In social construction, perceptions are accepted as reality even

though facts may point at something else. In the context of this lecture, gender is understood as a social construct, that is, a host of social perceptions that lead to different attitudes, beliefs and interpretations of the natural fact of male and of female. Acceptance of these differences translate to different social expectations of male and female that binds individual males and females within the social group to act in line with the social expectations of their group.. Even though facts indicate that sex roles are complementary and therefore of incomparable value, gender as a social construct suggests that males are superior to female and therefore that males should dominate in their interactions while females should be subordinate. Since sex is the natural reality from which perceptions on gender are built, gender is often presented as if it is derived from sex. In fact, the word gender is often used interchangeably with sex as if they are one and the same thing as has been pointed out already. This explains why male dominance and female dominance finds great expression in sexual encounters.

Since gender is a social construct, it can be reconstructed as situations demand. Along this thinking, Nawal El Saadawi, writing on gender relations in the Arab World, observes:

The tendency towards passivity in women, and the tendency to aggression in men, is therefore not an intrinsic part of their nature, but are time bound phenomena related to history and civilization, where environmental and socialization processes play a major role.<sup>224</sup>

This is accurate in all contexts. Social constructs unlike natural constructs are dynamic and therefore subject to reinterpretation as social contexts change and as new information emerge. This implies that gender can be reconstructed. Indeed, it can be. Gender reconstruction presupposes that social perceptions and interpretations of males and females and consequently relations between men and women are not constant. In essence therefore, mine is not to fault contemporary gender relations but to critique their appropriateness in Kenya today and propose a more functional approach in the context of the contemporary challenge of HIV. In the context of youth sexuality and HIV and AIDS in Kenya unequal gender relations are dysfunctional and can no longer be tolerated. In professing gender reconstruction, I acknowledge that there had been a lot of processes that could be classified under gender reconstruction but these have been dysfunctional because they have addressed some aspects of gender justice at the expense of others. Thus I propose a



systematic design and implementation of a strategy to change the social perceptions of males and females towards just gender relations among young people as a holistic way of addressing HIV/ AIDS.

As is true of all social constructs, it is not possible or even desirable to try and break down the entire gender construct at once as this could have serious ramifications. Besides, certain aspects of the social system are functional and should be retained. In the following section I show that contrary to wisdom accumulated over many centuries on human nature and social change, contemporary gender empowerment programs in Kenya have attempted to break down contemporary gender construct with counter-productive results as has been discussed in the previous section on gender empowerment in Kenya. The upshot of this approach is there for all to see.

Social reconstruction is common throughout the Bible. In Genesis 3 God reconstructs relations between God and humans, between humans and humans, and between humans and the rest of creation. This reconstruction is necessitated by the disobedience of man. In Genesis 7, a rather cruel but effective way of reconstructing society is presented. According to this scripture, God “destroyed all living beings on the earth - human beings, animals and birds; only Noah and those that were with him in the boat survived”<sup>225</sup> (v.23). Another example of divine reconstruction is found in Genesis 11 where God mixed up the languages of the people of the whole world and later scattered them over all the earth. The idea was to disable them from common negative action such as the building of the Tower of Babel.

Other examples of reconstruction in the Bible are initiated by human persons. The entire book of Deuteronomy, for example, records various addresses by Moses to the people of Israel regarding their expected lifestyle in the Promised Land. Among the major events recorded is the review of the Ten Commandments as well as of the laws that were to govern the Israelites in the Promised Land. Other examples considered classic of the reconstruction theme are found in 2 Kings 22-23 (Josiah’s Reforms) as well as in the book of Nehemiah.

The scriptures cited above as examples of reconstruction, both divinely and humanly instituted, indicate that reconstruction is possible, necessary, biblical and worthy of pursuit. This endorses the pursuit for gender reconstruction that this writer professes. Gender reconstruction calls for breaking down of unequal relations between men and women, initially characterized by

male dominance and female subordination but currently characterized by antagonism and competition, to rebuild relations characterized by partnership for mutual benefit.

### *Basic Tenets of Gender Reconstruction in the Context of Gender Relations in Kenya*

According to many traditional Kenyan societies, the number three is symbolic of stability and wisdom: symbolic of life. As ordained by Creator (known by different names across different societies), human life is cyclical through three phases: the distant past, the present and the distant present. The distant present joins with the distant past so that too much into the future time is past time in the same way that too much east is west. This philosophy is embodied in the three cooking stones that mark the one family hearth around which indigenous Kenyan peoples cemented relationships and shared wisdom for life. According to the traditional Agikuyu, it is also embodied in *jungwa* (traditional tool) whose three stands make the seat of stability and wisdom. As discussed in the introductory section of this lecture, traditional African ethics are summed up in terms of healthy relationships. In Christianity, the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom and of life. Central to Christianity is the doctrine of Trinity, that is, one God in three persons. It is through service to our neighbor that Christians serve God thus Christian ethics may be summed up as love for neighbor. Since to love one's neighbor is manifested in healthy relationships, in practice, there is no dichotomy between African ethics and Christian ethics hence the possibility of the use of the term African Christian Ethics.

From the perspective of African Christian Ethics, the following three basic tenets define gender reconstruction in Kenya:

#### *i) Equality of sexes*

Gender reconstruction presupposes that male and female are equal but different sexually for purposes of complementarity in reproduction. Thus, sexually, man is incomplete on his own and so is woman. But reproduction is not complete without production. Production calls for partnership between men and women in the same way that reproduction calls for complementarity of the sexes.

That men and women are created equal is clear in African worldview for God created both male and female. Among the traditional Agikuyu people, *Ngai* (God) created Gikuyu and Mumbi and gave them dominion over all creation together with the children that *Ngai* gave the couple. The sexes are understood as natural and unchangeable while definitions of masculinity and femininity among the Agikuyu are understood as socially constructed.

Similarly, the Christian worldview observes

Then God said, "And now we will make human beings. They will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small". So God created human beings, making them to be like Himself. He created them, male and female, blessed them and said, "Have many children....". Genesis 1:26f

A critical analysis of this text indicates that both male and female were created by God in God's image. It is important to note that in God's words, there is no mention of male and female. It is the narrator, who introduces the concepts of male and female. If male and female which are natural constructs indicate equality, how much more should gender which is culturally constructed?

ii) *There are no competitive efforts in the struggle for justice*

Nobody gets his or her rights by trampling on the rights of another person. Gender approaches that focus on women alone create a dichotomy to assume that men are oppressors in their domination and women are the oppressed in their subordination. Hence they argue for liberation of women from men. Such a dichotomy leads to a loser-loser situation. As presented in the previous part of this lecture, unequal gender relations lead to irresponsible sex with the consequence of HIV infection for both young men and women. The gender reconstruction model departs from this dichotomy to recognize that both men and women are oppressors and oppressed at the same time. The model recognizes that society not only constructs masculinity and femininity but also puts pressure on men and women to behave accordingly. As has been demonstrated in the previous sections, gender antagonism and competition characterizes gender relations with us-them dichotomy. On reconstruction theology in general, J.N.K. Mugambi observes:

The us-them syndrome is self destructive because there is only one side for all of us to join-either mutual reconstruction or mutual destruction. The winner-loser dichotomy is unrealistic and inappropriate in the African situation. Africa needs winner-winner configurations in which all contestants participate for future reconstruction having learnt from the errors of their past involvement.<sup>226</sup>

While Mugambi was writing with reference to African Christian theology in general, his note is relevant to gender reconstruction especially in relation to youth sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS in contemporary Africa. Deeper analysis of gender relations in Kenya suggests that both young women and young men need support to transgress socio-cultural definitions of masculinity. Indeed, gender reconstruction is a societal need rather than a women's only need and the benefits of gender justice are for all. Gender reconstruction is not confrontational but reconciliatory; it seeks to focus on society as a single unit of men and women who need each other to prosper. This calls for a review of the "girl-child" gender campaign and advocacy to promote a gender inclusive strategy (with a slogan like "with both wings we fly") that is geared towards partnership rather than competition and antagonism.

*iii) Healthy relationships as expression of gender justice*

Gender justice like any form of justice is universally expressed in healthy relationships. While healthy relationships are characterized by love and care, how love and care is expressed differs from one context to another. As discussed in the introductory section of this lecture, in traditional African societies, division of labor on the basis of age and sex served societies well in their contexts and male dominance and female subordination in sexual encounters seem to have been tolerated if not accepted and desired by all. With changing contexts, gender relations have increasingly become unacceptable and undesirable as traditional gender roles change. Initially, the focus on gender relations debates has been that men oppress women. Lately, focus is shifting to suggest that women are oppressing men. Either of this approach is wrong as such responses on how to deal with the situation can only lead to antagonism. The current uproar in Kenya is not that the rights of a human person have been violated but that a man has been battered by a woman! The response by women is that many men deserve to be beaten because many more women are beaten and nobody raised a finger. This has created the recipe for societal self destruction - the 'us-them' dichotomy. This situation needs to be averted NOW. .

## Nehemiah 1 & 2: A Biblical Lesson on Gender Reconstruction for Kenya<sup>227</sup>

Mugambi is one of the major proponents of a paradigm shift from liberation theology to reconstruction theology in relation to the socio-political and economic situation in contemporary Africa. To him, within the New World Order, liberation with its dichotomy of oppressed/oppressor, us/them, and dominant/subordinate is undesirable. Africans need winner/winner concepts to address both internal and external challenges of development.

Arguing for a paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction Mugambi observes:

The themes of *reconstruction* and *restoration* are also powerful and relevant as concepts for motivating the Hebrews to transform their own society and culture at different times in their history. There are also the themes of *renewal* and *survival*.<sup>228</sup>

Some African Christian theologians have responded to Mugambi's profession of reconstruction theology with criticisms from various fronts. Among the criticisms that is of interest to this lecture is one by Musa Dube who has argued generally that Mugambi is insensitive to the feminist movement in Africa because, in spite of his prolific writing, he has not addressed himself to women issues. True. Mugambi has not directly addressed issues of women in his works and looking through his writing like Dube did, one will not find any quotation from African feminist scholars in religion and theology. In Dube's own words:

"So how could I possibly explain or understand this silence about women's rights and feminists voices in Mugambi's major work – a work that is intended to move us all from liberation to reconstruction?"

More specifically, Dube criticizes Mugambi's use of Nehemiah noting that the story is not only colonizing but also "anti women". Deeper analysis of the story in the context of Old Testament cultures, which were largely patriarchal, and in the broader context within which the story is written, renders this criticism untenable. Dube argues that "the leader of the community in the reconstruction is male and he calls for what I can call some form of 'ethnic cleansing'<sup>229</sup> and Nehemiah urges all Israelite men who had married foreign women to divorce them, and they do" In so doing, Dube implies that the fact that the leader of the reconstruction story of Nehemiah is male is on its own

problematic and presents gender oppression. This attitude is an indicator of dichotomous characteristic of liberation which is precisely what calls for a shift to reconstruction. Seeing that there are no OT leaders who could be regarded as ‘pro-women’ in our contemporary context, it would seem that going by such a criticism would suggest that we throw away the entire Old Testament with its subordinationist view of women to embrace only those scriptures that have a liberationist view. As indicated earlier, the basic assumptions of reconstruction theology is that not every aspect of society is dysfunctional and that read in the context within which they were written, Biblical texts have valuable lessons in spite of changing contexts. Earlier on in this lecture, I observe that all Old Testament writers were influenced by the Jewish tradition and have indicated the difference between Biblical ethics and Christian ethics noting that the latter transcends socio-cultural bounds to interpret scripture with due regard to the contexts within which they were written.

I wish to acknowledge Mugambi’s contribution on the reconstruction paradigm to my profession of gender reconstruction. Having learnt religion, philosophy and theology at his feet, and having read his works, I find his stand for justice and equity overtly clear and consistent. From where I stand, I appreciate that one person can only do so much and if a scholar has chosen not to focus on a certain aspect of Christian theology, it is often because knowledge is so great a phenomenon that ‘blind’ persons can only feel only one part of this reality (Refer to the story of the Six blind men and an elephant at the beginning of this lecture).

For purposes of accentuating that gender reconstruction is built on reconstruction theology, I affirm Nehemiah 1 & 2 as basis for gender reconstruction. A brief exposition on the reflection and action of biblical Nehemiah indicates that the call to reconstruct gender is a loaded process. Faced with a troubled nation, a troubled Jerusalem, Nehemiah not only identified the problem but also identified himself with the problem (1:2-4). He took responsibility for the problem and was therefore able to engage himself effectively in seeking a solution to it. For days, he mourned and fasted before God seeking forgiveness for himself, his family, and the entire nation as he beseeched God for a solution (1:5-11). Then, Nehemiah approached key stakeholders within Jerusalem to help clarify the problem and seek the way forward. Together with these, Nehemiah assessed the situation (2:11ff) after which he called the people to discuss the problem and how to resolve it (2:16-17). With reference to their past successes, Nehemiah encouraged

the people and gave them hope (2:18). Emphasising the centrality of God in all the challenges that the people had been able to face and overcome, he organised them and got them working. The walls of Jerusalem that had for many years been rubble were rebuilt in a record 52 days.

A lot of parallelism may be derived from the story of Nehemiah. Like Jerusalem, Kenya is in rubble as far as gender relations, youth sexual behaviour and HIV are concerned. Nehemiah as one of the people of Jerusalem took responsibility for the situation of bad news in Jerusalem at the time. He began by assessing the situation. Similarly, we need some self assessment and self definition with regard to our situation of gender relations. Borrowed definitions of development and donor driven initiatives have not done much in Kenya in terms of gender justice, and they will not do. Nehemiah calls upon Kenyans to take responsibility for their own development. The way I profess it, gender reconstruction calls us to establish local initiatives and be self driven for effective and reliable development.

One of the major lessons learnt from the preceding session on the history of gender programs in Kenya is that little progress has been achieved in terms of gender justice especially in sexual relations, the most basic of human relations. I argue that this is significantly because the struggle for gender justice has been reduced to a women's affair. As an approach to gender justice, gender reconstruction presupposes that successful completion of human endeavors call for men and women to work together as equal partners. This means that men and women must work together if they are to lead human lives. The second creation story recorded in Genesis 2 clearly indicates the complementarity of male and female. After every phase of creation, God was pleased with what he saw. However, after creating man, God was not pleased but was rather dissatisfied, so he commented: "It is not good for man to live alone" (v.18). It is only after God created Eve that God's creative activity is completed to perfection. Adam's exclamation, "At last, here is one of my own kind - Bone taken from my bone and flesh from flesh..." (v.29) indicates his completeness with the creation of Eve. The fact that sex roles, which are natural, are complementary indicates the incompleteness of either sex in reproduction roles. Similarly, the human role of production complements the role of reproduction. Any gender approach that antagonizes the sexes misses this basic fact.

Having identified himself with the situation, Nehemiah identified the key stakeholders in Jerusalem to assess, clarify and design strategies of addressing the situation. Nehemiah did not identify the stakeholder in terms of men and women but in terms of their abilities in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem. There is need to identify all stakeholders within our ‘troubled Jerusalem’, not in terms of sex which is a natural construct, but in terms of individual abilities and expertise to assess, clarify, design and implement strategies of addressing the situation of gender relations in Kenya. Nehemiah did not only identify one category of people for the rebuilding of the temple. He identified all stakeholders and involved them all. In the context of this lecture, I focus on the Church as one of the key stakeholders but the task of gender reconstruction lies not only within but also without the Church; not only with professionals but also with the laity; not only with urban but also with rural communities; not only with women but also with men; not only with the university, but also with local communities.

After careful discussion and assessment of the situation between the various stakeholders, the people of Jerusalem designed and immediately implemented an efficient and effective strategy towards rebuilding Jerusalem. Similarly, after assessment of the situation of gender relations especially with regard to youth sexual behaviour, the gender blame game should end and work of gender reconstruction should begin immediately towards mutual empowerment. The certainty of the presence of God which is core in traditional African and Christian thought forms gives strength to Kenyan men and women to reorganise themselves for the work of reconstructing gender relations, in this case, to control HIV and AIDS spread among the youth. Just like the wall of Jerusalem was effectively rebuilt, a new holistic approach that focuses on harnessing local community resources and bringing both men and women into a concerted effort towards gender justice in Kenya could be successful. So: “Come, let us rebuild”.



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## PART IV

### Professing Through Action Research: The African Christian Initiation Programme”

*“Wathi wathira witagia ungi”* (Gikuyu proverb)

*“Birmingham is in the same location that it’s been for over one hundred years. They haven’t moved Birmingham, but the way to get to Birmingham has changed. The road leading to Birmingham has changed, so [our] methods must change.”*  
(An African American pastor in Alabama)<sup>230</sup>

*“Come let us rebuild”*

(Nehemiah 2: 17-18).

#### Introduction

The response to control HIV and AIDS in Kenya has unfolded many useful strategies, lost opportunities, and definitely some mistakes. Some of the useful strategies that may confidently be cited are: setting up of Voluntary Counseling and Testing Centers (VCTCs), Voluntary Medically Assisted Adult Male Circumcision (VMMC), Prevention of Mother To Child infections (PMTCT) pharmaceutical development of antiretroviral drugs, herbal therapies against opportunistic diseases, prevention of transmission in health settings by blood screening, improved care and nutrition services; HIV Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) services and use of disposable syringes; promotion of safer sex strategies through positive behaviour change, development of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) policy and services and development of HIV/AIDS education and training materials.<sup>231</sup> Lost opportunities are best described by the long period of denial of the reality of HIV/AIDS while mistakes encountered include the continued attitude of self-righteousness especially among Christians and the attendant indifference to, blame and stigmatization of those known to be infected with HIV, and continued over-reliance on donor-driven initiatives. Other major mistakes include continued piece-meal and results-based rather than holistic approach to HIV prevention,



“association of HIV/ AIDS with medical departments than all departments, too much association of prevention of HIV/ AIDS with knowledge and individual choices than with social relations and structures that shape the decisions, and the long reluctance of western pharmaceutical companies to make drugs affordable and accessible”<sup>232</sup>

With the useful strategies, considerable progress has been made in the fight against HIV and AIDS. This is reflected in significant decline in HIV prevalence. Nevertheless, with high sexual activity, HIV prevalence especially among the youth remains high. There is no dispute whatsoever: Unequal gender relations in contemporary Kenya have a major role to play in promoting youth sexual activity and consequently in the spread of HIV and AIDS. Current youth programs geared towards sexual responsibility have barely addressed the issue of gender relations as it relates to youth sexual activity and gender empowerment programs have been piecemeal and competitive leading to even greater unhealthy relations. I profess a new and progressive approach that is proactive rather than reactive; holistic and long term rather than piece meal and short term; largely preventive rather than merely interventionist; an approach that associate sexual behaviour and HIV infection not merely with knowledge and individual choices but also social relations and structures; an approach that considers the way men and women relate to one another as the foundation on which human sexual behaviour is significantly built.

A national assessment of youth-at-risk in Kenya carried out by the Education Development Centre Inc. (EDC) for USAID-Kenya in 2009 throughout Kenya indicates:

Youth consider that their health problems have been too narrowly defined as sexually transmitted disease and HIV/ AIDS. They view health from a broad perspective, which includes personal health; community and environmental conditions; and psychosocial wellbeing, including values of integrity, caring, unity in diversity, spiritual purpose and lives of service, as well as recreation and sports. Youth activities and organizations, they feel, should engage in activities that promote these values.<sup>233</sup>

Religion is the custodian of moral values. As discussed in the second part of this lecture, in traditional Kenyan societies, religion was integrated into the rest of social formation and identity. In contemporary post colonial contexts

characterized by 'brokenness' religion has become compartmentalized and individualized to the extent that belonging to a religion, denomination or sect is no longer a matter of necessity but rather a matter of taste and choice. Thus, deprived of religious foundation, moral nurture has become nobody's and everybody's business leaving young boys and girls not only neglected. Against this background, neoliberal capitalism characterized by global competitive markets finds the youth an easy target as consumers of goods and services for profit. In this scenario, many boys and girls grow up to biological maturity without adequate preparation for complementary social roles. The result is a dysfunctional society, in this context, in terms of gender relations in sexual encounters. The situation is increasingly worsening as new generations are being born and nurtured by parents who did not undergo structured initiation into adulthood. I profess gender reconstruction as a necessity.

But effective profession is not merely by word but also by deed. Indeed, a lot of great ideas have been professed with regard to gender relations and sexual behaviour in the context of HIV/AIDS but commensurate action is lacking. Gupta observes:

... the progress in the public health discourse on gender and sexuality is not matched by progress in action. There is a substantial gap between the talk and the walk. This is partly because it is easier now to explain the why and what with regard to gender, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS, but there is less known about the how – how to address these issues in a way that has an impact on the epidemic.<sup>234</sup>

In the previous part of this lecture, I challenge the Church to be proactive and take action to change the situation of bad news for young people into Good News by redesigning its ministry to the youth to incorporate teachings on issues of gender and youth sexuality. As Gupta strongly observes:

... customs and practices that seek to subordinate women and trap men in damaging patterns of sexual behaviour are based on a biased interpretation of culture that serves narrow interests. We know that the customs and practices associated with male and female roles and sexuality in many societies today are compromising the rights and freedoms of individuals and promoting a cycle of illness and death. This must stop. There can be no more powerful reason for change; gender roles that disempower women and give men a false sense of power are killing our young and our women and men in their It must be said, however,

that this relatively little information on the how is not due to a lack of innovation and trying. Although there are still no clear-cut answers and there is very little data to establish the impact of the efforts that have been tried, it is possible to look back and identify clear-cut categories of approaches--approaches that fall at different points on a continuum from damaging to empowering.<sup>235</sup>

True, changing social norms is difficult and outcomes are long term and it may seem that I present to the Church insurmountable challenge. But it can be done. I devote this last part of my lecture to demonstrating this with an illustration of an on-going holistic community participatory initiative. This initiative seeks to reconstruct gender relations in sexual encounters towards gender justice by providing early adolescents with knowledge and skills to enable them transit from childhood to responsible adulthood. I first made the recommendations to the Church to addresses the challenge of gender relations and youth sexual behaviour in Kenya in the report of my doctoral study completed in 2003. Then, it was clear to me as it is now that I am part of the Church and so the challenge was directed to me as to others. Two years later, we founded the African Christian Initiation Program (ACIP) as a response to the challenge of youth sexuality. I salute Mary Wahome, Pamela Abuya, Joyce Nyairo, Emily Choge, Naomi L. Shitemi with whom I have journeyed in ACIP.

### **The African Christian Initiation Programme<sup>236</sup>**

The African Christian Initiation Program (ACIP) is a local community-based participatory initiative of the Eldoret-based Gender and Development Network (ELDGADNET). ELDOGADNET is an inter-denominational, inter-disciplinary and inter-ethnic initiative. It serves, among other objectives, to meet the mandate of Moi University to translate knowledge generated in the University into practical development for communities at local, national, continental and global levels.

#### *Historical Background*

Sometimes in the mid-1990s a group of female lecturers/researchers from the then School of Social Cultural and Development Studies (now the School of Arts and Social Sciences) at Moi University felt concerned that many female students joining the university would get pregnant in the course of their first year, thanks to the 'fresher rush' phenomenon which I mentioned earlier in

this lecture. To us, the unwanted pregnancies manifested challenges of sexual responsibility in a university environment. We decided to create forums for female university students to meet with female lecturers to discuss some of their challenges and to provide mentorship on how to deal with them. Thus, we initiated what we called 'Ladies to Ladies talk' (LTLT). It would seem that we were then operating on the traditional gender empowerment paradigm to focus on female university students only. Initially, our discussion revolved around social, economic and academic challenges but over time, topics of discussion narrowed down to the issue of sexuality as it relates to social-economic and academic challenges. It would appear that the single major challenge to the students was how to control their sexual behaviour in relation to socio-cultural definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity. At the time as now, HIV and AIDS seemed to be the major threat to young people. Our experiences from this forums indicated that many first-year students of public universities had neither the experience of nor any preparation for the demands of social life in a university setting without the supervision of teachers and away from the watchful eyes of parents and guardians. The series of LTLT sessions embarked on informal interaction and dialogue with female students on different levels beginning with a special program for 'freshers' during orientation week. Surprisingly, some male students one day stormed into our ladies to ladies talk and demanded that they too be given attention. We had little choice but to integrate male students into our talks. Without design, our women's program intervention was transformed into a gender program.

Meanwhile some small scale research projects on sexuality within the university student community were ongoing. For example, Eda Mutua and Mary Nyangweso investigated sexual behaviour among Moi University students while Pamela Abuya and Joyce Nyairo investigated the Institution of *Mikayi* in Moi University.<sup>237</sup> The findings concurred that most of the students had inadequate knowledge on sexuality and were ill equipped for university life characterized by freedom and individual responsibility. It therefore seemed necessary to deal with the issue at an earlier stage before the students get to the university. The LTLT established School Visitation Programs in which the lecturers visited schools to give talks on adolescent sexuality. Consequently, the initiative spread to secondary schools and later to primary schools. Initially, this was supported by a Visitation Program under the Association of African Women in Research and Development funded by Ford Foundation.

To our surprise, we found that secondary school girls and boys were more ignorant about their sexuality than the lecturers thought. For example, it was stunning to hear one female student ask: “Is it true that a girl can attract boys sexually if she wears a red pant?”<sup>238</sup> In spite of the ignorance, a significant number of the students reported that they were sexually active. As we held discussions in schools mainly on ‘boy-girl’ relationships we established that boys and girls growing up in contemporary Kenya were a neglected lot. Unlike in traditional Kenyan societies where children would receive holistic education on growing up through youth to adulthood, there are no structures for provided similar information and skills to children in contemporary society. Among the major practices that were condemned by Christianity is the traditional process of initiation from childhood into adulthood within which children would be initiated into responsible adulthood. Christianity did not offer anything to maintain valuable aspects of the process. Consequently, many adolescents today rely on uncoordinated information on sex and other aspects of their lives from their peers, parents, the mass media, churches and other sources. Yet, adolescence is the critical point in human physical and psycho-sexual development, at which socialization for responsible adulthood is best offered in a systematic way.

Overwhelmed by the situation, we realized that we had to focus our attention on a specific aspect of youth sexuality. Given our capacity, we felt inclined to seek to prevent adolescent sex rather than to intervene. Therefore, we decided that it was necessary to target early adolescent girls and boys before they join high school to prevent unwanted initiation into sexual activity. We discussed the strategy of doing this in our LTLT talks but at some point we felt overwhelmed by the challenge. At that point, I was registering for my doctoral studies and I chose to do research on gender, youth sexuality and HIV/AIDS and the role of the Church in Kenya. The findings indicated that gender relations are positively related to youth sexual activity and consequently to HIV transmission. The absence of a systematic and holistic process of initiating young boys and girls into responsible adulthood was identified as the major gap in controlling youth sexual activity.

In 2004, a year after my doctoral work, together with the colleagues with whom we were engaged LTLT we designed the African Christian Initiation Program. The program works to systematically integrate African and Christian values and to provide a process of initiation (and transition) from childhood to adulthood for boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 16.

Deriving from a concern of youth neglect and yet the confusing contemporary situation within which they grow. ACIP is guided by the understanding that the youth are not a lost generation but rather the hope for Africa's future: Lack of attention to this youth amounts to our self-destruction as a society. In recognition that initiation from childhood to adulthood is the specific moment within which men and women are made out of boys and girls, and that intervention at this point therefore largely determines whether the girls and boys will be made into responsible women and men, ACIP was founded as a community based development project.

### *What is ACIP?*

The African Christian Initiation Program (ACIP) is a community participatory program of the Eldoret- based Gender and Development Network (ELDOGADNET). ELDOGADNET is an inter-denominational, inter-disciplinary and inter-ethnic initiative that serves to:

- meet the mandate of Moi University to translate knowledge generated in the university into practical development for communities at the local, national, continental and global levels, and,
- to support the local and national community to empower young people to transit from childhood to responsible adulthood.

### *The Mission of ACIP:*

To support young people through a transition process from childhood to adulthood in order to empower them physically, mentally, and spiritually to successfully become responsible adults.

### *Specific Objectives*

The specific activities of ACIP are:

- i) To provide a strategic forum to mark initiation from childhood to responsible adulthood.
- ii) to provide voluntary circumcision of boys
- iii) to provide an initiation rite for girls
- iv) to instil confidence and self esteem to boys and girls

- v) to provide information and education for life
- vi) to train participants on life skills
- vii) to provide spiritual empowerment to boys and girls

***The Vision of ACIP:***

ACIP envisions a national holistic program that supports all young people to transit from childhood to responsible adults characterized by – sexual responsibility, peaceful, coexistence among communities morality in family and workplace by the year 2030.

***The Core Values of ACIP***

ACIP is founded on African Christian values of community, healthy relationships, service, love, respect, integrity, and hope.

***ACIP's Integrative Strategy***

Towards this, ACIP adopts an integrative strategy:

- i) It has a multi ethnic and multi-religious dimension – ACIP is an inter-ethnic and inter-religious program that encourages all communities to participate.
- ii) It is multi-disciplinary – Information, education and training are done from a multi-sectoral approach. ACIP has 13 modules covering areas of on responsible time management, relationships, secrets to success, gender issues, and on responsible sexual behaviour in order to avoid unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and sex-related stress, conflict management and peace building, how to avoid drug abuse, and how to avoid negative peer pressure. Professionals from all disciplines – medicine, psychology, sociology, religion, philosophy, public health, the Arts, etc. teach and train.
- iii) It is multi-sectoral – In recognition of the many stakeholders involved in youth formation, ACIP networks with various sectors of society: parents (parents' workshops), teachers, religious leaders, youth, and professionals among others. Some of the organisations that ACIP partners with are: Moi University, I choose Life, All churches around Eldoret, Partners in Prevention, the UG women's Forum, Testimony Homes, Family Impact, Strategies for Hope-London, Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYAS) and AMPATH. It continues to seek for more partners.

- iv) It is gender Integrative: In recognition that society is necessarily made up both men and women and that the various genders complement one another, ACIP Integrates boys and girls to learn together in mutual trust and mutual respect for mutual benefit.
- v) It is a three-tier education and skills building program that (negotiation, conflict management, self esteem and confidence building skills) supports physical, mental and spiritual development of early adolescents.
- vi) It has practical modelling - ACIP brings in real professionals, community members and fellow youth (like university students) who are identified as good role models as well as persons rehabilitating from drugs
- vii) Adopts a fun filled approach to learning – visits/ excursions to various places and insists on using relaxed learning methodologies and environments
- viii) ACIP has structures for learning across generations (the strength of traditional African socialization), peer learning, and practical modelling.

### *Activities of ACIP*

Every year, ACIP brings together scores of early adolescent boys and girls together for a two weeks' African Christian Initiation process workshop. The workshop facilitates their holistic empowerment and transition from childhood to responsible adulthood. ACIP is holistic in that it addresses physical, mental and spiritual needs of the adolescents. The specific activities of ACIP include:

- i) Voluntary circumcision of boys
- ii) Alternative female initiation rites
- iii) Education for life on: Health and Hygiene; Confidence and Self esteem; Sexuality; STIs including HIV/AIDS; Drug Use and Abuse; Peer Pressure; Peace Building and Conflict Management; Time and Leisure management; Education; Secrets to Success; and Work Ethics.
- v) Training on life skills: Negotiation skills; Conflict management; Study Skills; Expression of Confidence & Self esteem, among others.



- vi) Spiritual Empowerment: All sessions are punctuated with acknowledgement of God as the Author, Purpose and Destiny of all creation...

*Way Forward for ACIP*

- 1) ACIP is working towards up-scaling of program to national level through Trainer of Trainers workshops. In partnership with Strategies for Hope (SFH), in Oxford, UK, ACIP published a trainers' manual at the end of 2010.
- 2) The need and demand for the program is high because of evidence based research that circumcision is positively related to HIV control. Misconceptions coming with this finding suggest that some young people may be treating circumcision like vaccination against HIV infection. This makes circumcision counter-productive and the need for integrative approaches like ACIP can never be overestimated.

*ACIP acknowledge and thank our partners among them Moi University, Strategies for Hope -Oxford and Church World Service and invite anybody who shares our vision of social reconstruction to join us in serving humanity. We in ACIP believe in the African proverb: "If you want to walk fast, walk alone, if you want to walk far, walk with others". **COME let us rebuild!***

## Notes

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