

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND WAY FORWARD.

The memories of painful stories challenged my life as a single young women. Young people are also facing the issue of HIV/AIDS, pandemic that is sweeping couples and young adults. With this in mind, one cannot but think of the words of Setiloane when he says: "*I belong , therefore I am*" (Setiloane:1986:10)

I wonder if these words have the same meaning and impact to both men and women. I'm more concerned with the above quotation because after listening to the widows stories, I have learned that this quotation does not apply to women as being part of belonging. For women it means oppression and isolation. I started my research work being emotionally and spiritually hurt. Looking at the unfair treatment given to widow's. As I am comparing my feelings with the past period, I would simply say, I'm not yet healed, but I believe that I'm in the process of healing because therapeutically healing comes through dialogue and by confronting the issue at hand. Meeting the women in black brought hope to me inspite of their struggles.

I have learned that I have bottled anger for years, but thanks to God that I'm now able to produce a piece of writing on the very same topic: "African way of mourning, a challenge to pastoral care". This is a challenge to me and to many women who are struggling.

As I come into contact with different people from different cultures, I've started to realize that "*ga gona ntlo e e sa neleng*", literally meaning that there is no single human being who does not have problems. Every human beings has a story to share, and what is important is not how you tell it, but how you live it out with other people.

As Africans, I'm aware that we are caught up between two cultures, that of Christianity

and African customs. I will therefore define the two in order to discover an answer to the problems experienced by widows. I did not understand why women in black, are treated so badly, and inhuman. Yes some of us would blame culture for that, therefore if this is the case I have a problem with culture. The reader needs to explore with me the issue behind this kind of treatment. Those who hide around the issue of culture also needs to examine how they are cheating themselves.

My research has led me to share some insight about culture. Several of the women in black suffered because of culture. Then one can ask, what is culture.

THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE.

I'm aware that every living creature has culture. Therefore, with this concept in mind, I believe that no human being can claim to be without culture. Mugambi share an interesting point about culture when he says:

Culture means literally speaking, cultivation. It is the state of being cultivated. Culture is what we are, what we have, what we believe and what we long for. Culture is for the people what agriculture is for the land. Culture influences the way we choose to live. For an example, the food we eat, music we listen, the way we dress etc. Culture is what we consider to be our hope and despair, joy and suffering. Source of love and hatred, what gives us satisfaction or anxiety”(Mugambi:1997:14)

I agree with Mugambi wholeheartedly, because I know that different people have different cultures that suit their needs and context. Then if this is the case that means that culture is not static. Culture is good but not everything in culture is good, especially when we are within the same culture, a certain group of people turn to dominate, oppress dehumanize and marginalize others. A good example of about the stories of widows

shared in chapter four. I quote Regina's

After a year we returned to Gabriel's rural home, for a memorial service. At that ritual the diseased knobkerrie (traditional stick) and tools were laid down on the ground in other for the widow to step on them as to see if she hasn't sleep with any man.

Here a widow's sexual life is denounced in public, whereas a widower's sexual experience is honoured. We find that his process of mourning is shortened so that he may be able to marry so as to satisfy his sexual needs. This kind of culture humiliates women and uplifts men.

What kind of a ritual is this? Oooo..it's so disgusting and humiliating . it does not help or aim at uplifting on of the partners. I'm struggling with this question in mind, why oppressive rituals done to women only and not to men also. As women are mourning for the loss of their husbands, they also have to undergo a ritual that some of the dehumanizes and oppresses them women in black are having it tough, in the community, family and in the church. It's even worse that even when those bad rituals are performed on them they cannot even talk for themselves.

As women in chapter four were sharing their stories I was reminded of the story of the adulterous women. The woman who was pardoned by Jesus, after she was threatened (dear reader be reminded that the man who was caught up with her was excluded and be freed), she was threatened with stoning forced by man , she remained silenced through out the whole drama, while the man acted and spoke around her in John8:1-11. Voices of women were never heard and taken into consideration. Paul's text like 1Cor.14:34-35 is also used by many clergy to keep the women silence and condemn them. Due to that most women chose to keep quite, suffered in silence and fearing that if the talk, they will

loose respect, embarrass themselves and their families. As Nolan capture the whole thoughts by highlighting the issue of disobedience by saying:

it is the so called sin of not being submissive to every established authority and every level, no matter what it might demand of us. Once someone is in power, no matter how illegitimate that can be, once something is declared law, no matter how unjust and evil it may be, we are made to feel guilty about disobeying. Therefore we become conditioned to feel that we are holier, more spiritual and closer to God when we are submissive”(Nolan:1989:101)

I agree with Nolan because in many cases when a women speaks her mind, she is labeled as disrespectful and a rebellious person. This is a point of power struggle between men and women.

In most cases you find that if a women talks, they are perceived by men as disturbing the balance of power within the relationship of marriage, hence there are so many case of violence in marriage. The previous past law was also treating women as infants. Whenever a women want to buy furnisher, a signature of her husband was needed. If she does not have a husband, her brother's signature would also be preferred or else she would not buy nor rent anything in her name.

This kind of culture indeed contradicts the issue of *Imago Dei* (the image of God), that has been given to both men and women, especially to the partners in the ruling, and living equally and in harmony and sharing responsibilities. If culture oppresses and dehumanizes the image of either men or women, then I'm having problems with that particular culture and it must be changed. The process of change can be done through education, support groups for widows and challenge the church to come out with a

therapeutic model.

Let us now analyze the second issue raised by my co-researchers. The issue of Christianity was also raised and its oppressive elements.

THE CONCEPT OF OPPRESSION WITHIN CHRISTIANITY.

The Bible is thought by many an anti-feminist document. On the same note the Bible has been used as a resource for arguing against a woman's desire to be anything but a dutiful housewife and a mother. This is many people's peak of the obvious prejudice which the Bible has against women. With the above comment in mind, one can understand why women are treated as inferior by men. For example Eve's creation from the rib of Adam provides the biblical stigma of fundamental inferiority and secondary status. The Bible itself is full of stories of oppressed and abused women. Since then, there has been resistance to change by most men and some women. Missionaries came into Africa using the Bible as their manuscript, they managed to destroy certain cultural practices that were helpful to Africans. As Mugambi once said: *"Africans were therefore expected to abandon their culture and religious heritage, adopt norms of others in order to be accepted as Christians"* (Mugambi:1997:54)

I agree with Mugambi because this is evident that even the theology that is taught in our schools, seminaries, and churches is Western. As an African I know and understand that Christianity is hard to digest in the African context. What has been happening is that African Christians have been living on two levels i.e.

1. the traditional African level
2. and the Western cultural level, hence we are talking about African Renaissance.

Any tradition or cultural practices that denies both man's and women's full life, as intended by Christ should be rejected. A cultural practice that promotes and protects both the humanity of man and women must be embraced. Therefore this require a revisit of our doctrine from a human gender perspective. Paul also reminds us that "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ*"(Gal.3:28).

As God's people we need to be liberated from all cultural and religious structures that marginalizes, oppresses and isolates the abused and the vulnerable. I believe that it is our responsibility as both Christians and Africans to take the challenge of proclaiming the gospel of liberation to the captives. Especially to the women and children. Liberation theology must be introduced. Then,

WHAT IS LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

Liberation Theology, simply means a theology that liberates people. All we need in therapy is the theology that will free and liberate us.

Guitierrez is also helpful in correcting the situation we find ourselves in. He say's that *liberation is an embracing process that leaves no human life untouched, because when all is said and done, it expresses the saving action of God's history*(Guitereiz:1984:2)

I Agree with Guitierrez because liberation theology leaves no stories untold, and no stones unturned. Therefore there won't be any women who won't be able to keep quite because of cultural hindrances. Ruether, a feminist theologian states two problems that we needs to be liberated from

1. Androcentricity- the male orientation of life
2. Misogyny- literally meaning being nasty to women. (TEE College

Notes:Course:342:1992:109)

I also felt challenged when reading from the word of God, fro the story of Exodus that There would have been so salvation from slavery for the Hebrews if they had not stood up and marched across the sea ofthe Reeds at low tide. This is precisely what the women in black are trying to do. I therefore challenge all African churches to stand up and proclaim the gospel of liberation to the broken-hearted. Clinebel also has this to say: *Ministers are the only professional persons with training in counseling who have automatic entrée to the world of the most sorrowing people. It gives an unparallel opportunity and responsibility to be effective guides and companions of the beareved as they walk through the valley of death”*

I agree with Clinebel because the word of God also challenges us to take care of the widows. It is therefore our responsibility as Christians and Africans to see to the following:

1. A CHURCH BECOMES A HEALING AGENT.

Our churches needs to be transformed and become healing agents in order to restore human dignity to a state of wholeness. A good hospital is there to treat the sick, in the same way the church must extend it's arm of care, acceptance, and love to all that needs to be emotionally , spiritually and physically healed. We need to become a church that comes out of our isolated suspicious corners, and boldly say in the name of Jesus, let's talk, let us find each other. Let us build a bridge here, heal a wound there, repair a damage over here, find a way forward there instead of sitting around and do nothing When the church responds to the widows, caring for them and learning from their pain, a

model of therapy can evolve, whereby widows as well as widowers will be both treated as fully human.

The church can only be a healing agent if it is a sanctuary, a place where people feel safe. People need a place where they can come and share their pain, knowing that they will not be judged, but rather received and loved.

2. HUMAN DIGNITY MUST BE RESTORED

Anything that undermines and oppresses human dignity must be abolished. Human dignity must be affirmed to both males and females. It is so interesting to note that in Africa, when we greet each other we say; *siyakubona mfowethu* (I see you my dear brother/sister) then the other person will respond by saying; *ngiyakubona mfowethu* (I see myself in you sister/brother) (Masango: unpublished class notes)

This above affirms human being in the most beautiful way. This concept of greeting affirms humanity and further introduces another concept of living *ubuntu*,

Mbiti is helpful because he leads us deeper into respecting human dignity that God has Given as a gift to humanity. He says; *I am because you are*(Mbiti:1986:61)

The above concept lives and flow in our daily lives, therefore when taken seriously, it can assist us in correcting the evils of oppression, rejection and isolation. Finally, the research needed to analyze the image of God in human beings.

2. WE ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD.

The bible teaches us that “*God created human beings in God’s image, in the image of God both males and females we created*” (Gen1:27)

In each one of us, there is the image of God (*Imago Dei*) This passage offers a new look

at gender issues and stereotypes. Then the vital question for me here is that, what do we really mean when we talk about the image of God? The image of God simply means we do not speak about the physical and emotional appearances, but we speak about the spiritual being which is what is important to God than our own thinking and attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Acknowledging the fact that both males and females are created in the image of God, there should be no subjection of dominion of men in both cultural and Christian practices. The church as the body of believers, representing God on earth, has a big task to incorporate most of the practices so that those rituals that are bad and humiliating (especially to the women in black) must be avoided and all that are good must be maintained.

Hancock and Mains have these remarks;

It is ironic that the church, which should be represent compassion, and the power of Jesus Christ in the lives of the wounded, broken hearted people, had sadly failed to listen and respond. There is a little doubt in my mind that the long time male dominance of the church has left it crippled in ministering to women who had been hurt by men. But we are beginning to listen, and beginning to hear. The voices are coming through. And by encouraging, comforting, and journeying with the abused, the isolated and the marginalized as friends, we can help to press on"(Hancock & Mains:1987:50)

As a matter of facts, African people have come a long way with the issue of oppression and discrimination. This is the time to look back as Africans and ask ourselves the question: how can we learn from our past? So that we don't recreate the mistakes we did in the past.

Before God we need to confess that we have done wrong, and that by believing I the myths that the women in black are full of curse and bad luck, we therefore ask forgiveness.

It is therefore the responsibility of the church to see to it that Both African culture and Christianity work hand in hand with the existing structures that seeks to unify the two divided groups with the purpose of producing one culture as Mugambi says that:

“Culture is not static, it can be changed” (Mugambi:1997:14) I agree with Mugambi because we need to change all the structures of culture that oppresses and isolates and that are harmful to our neighbors and to ourselves. By so doing Africa will be blessed!!!

SUMMARY

The reader now realizes that the women in black must also be treated with love and care. They are fellow human beings who are loved by God. Our churches should represent compassion and the power of Jesus Christ in the lives of the wounded, broken hearted people. As Christians it is our responsibility to love and care for the marginalized and the abuse.

In this way we will be able to heal men who abuse women and also learn to include women in black. The main focus is on inclusion of women, a challenge given to us by God through scripture that says that *“There is no Greek, nor Jew” before the eyes of God we are all equal.*