Writing, Sharing, Doing: The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

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Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2004

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I. Introduction

I pray that what I give may be one small seed of hope among the many seeds we are sewing in this gathering.
Fr. Garth Michelson

Sbongile’s Story

Sbongile walked home Saturday afternoon after a regular church service. The Spirit moved her to worship in thanksgiving and hope. Sbongile did well through secondary school, but at twenty years old she is not in school and without a job. She would love to study marketing, but the nearest business school is fifty kilometers away, and she cannot afford the daily transportation. Meanwhile she appeases her passion by helping to advertise small scale businesses owned by her family and friends. Occasionally people pay her for her work. Her dream is to one day do marketing abroad, but that requires a degree and experience. So Sbongile saves money with hopes that she will move to Johannesburg to find a job or start her own business.

When she is not making fliers or designing signs, Sbongile is with her boyfriend. Her mom says that even if a woman has no job or education, if she has a man and eventually bears children she will be a respectable and useful member of the community. Sbongile questions that depending on a man will fulfill her potential as the person God has created her to be. Yet, she enjoys the company of her boyfriend, Mvu, short for Mvuselelo. He really is a good guy. He attends church fairly regularly with her and works as a Combi (taxi-van) boy collecting people’s pay and recruiting new riders. He plans on becoming a Combi driver and eventually owner. Mvu has no desire to move or settle beyond the Durban area.

The couple dated six months before they consummated their relationship. Sbongile felt that was a testament to her character, as few girls can restrict their boyfriends for even that long. They were both virgins, and at first they were quite conscientious about using condoms. A year into their relationship Mvu became paranoid that Sbongile insisted on using a condom because she wanted to be able to sleep around with other people. He also feared that condoms would shrink his genitalia. After being outraged with his accusations of cheating and laughing at his fear of condoms, Sbongile consented to Mvu’s desires because she feared losing the affirmation that their relationship gave her. She stays away from Mvu during those days when she has a high risk of infertilization.

Over the past ten months, Sbongile has found that Mvu respects the times she says “no” less and less. Sometimes she wonders why she is in the relationship at all. Yet, to respectfully break up with him Sbongile feels she would need to do something like move to Johannesburg which looks more appealing with the prospect of having to end her relationship with Mvu. All Sbongile can do now is to wait at home, thinking up pretend advertising slogans, for when her boyfriend will come over after dinner.

Sbongile does not realize the full tragedy of her situation. The past year Mvu has been sleeping with a girl from Durban whom he met at the taxi rank. Mvu contracted HIV from her two months after meeting her. Sbongile has been infected for the past eight. Within a year, Sbongile will contract AIDS. As she weakens and develops Tuberculosis, Sbongile will wonder if she has the HIV/AIDS virus, but her boyfriend will deny having slept with anyone else. Even though she suspects her own infection, she never gets tested because she fears ridicule and discrimination from her family and friends. However, recently Sbongile’s new pastor has encouraged church members to participate in HIV/AIDS counseling and training. Sbongile was never interested, skeptical of the whole issue herself. But now she decides to talk with a church member who has completed the program.

Sbongile lives in a South African township were her and her friends’ mothers played prominent roles in the resistance to apartheid. Yet she does not have freedom within her own relationship let alone the economic and political systems. If Sbongile confirms her AIDS status and lives for awhile after, maybe she could utilize her passion to promote HIV/AIDS education. Sbongile depends on her faith and her faith community for hope. Although sometimes she finds it curious that a line of men preach to a congregation of almost all women…
Sbongile’s story is the story of women across Africa. African women of faith respond to those stories. Women of faith in Africa represent and reflect the pain of any oppressed people whom are victims of hate, violence, or judgment: Iraqis, Afghanis, Zapatistas, Homosexuals, Tutsis, Jews, early Christians, African Americans, all the world’s women...Indeed, as African they are subject to the exploitation of the world’s reorganized colonial structures. As women they are the most vulnerable to poverty and illness and the least able to formally contribute to faith discussions because systems of patriarchy rob them of the power of choice and voice. The women of the Circle seek to have their voices heard and assert their discernment of God’s will.

Members of the Circle assess their experience of culture, religion, biblical interpretation and social responsibility from a faith perspective. They tell of their pain and their triumph. They speak of their frustration in encounters with Western misinterpretation, negligence, and ignorance of the African female experience. While I claim no advancement in this regard – I write this in the hope that by listening to these women the women speak for themselves.

Listening to the Circle is not a passive activity. They write in order to promote action and to participate in it. Theology for them is meaningless unless it is lived. Often times they directly challenge the West to reform, renew, or create behavior that promotes the holistic living of the world community.

Why do I, a result of white American middle class suburbia, pause to listen? I resonate with some of their pain over the lack of female leadership and images of God, the Divine Creator. I admire their insistence on speaking largely from and to their own experience as African women. My heart goes out to the struggles and suffering they live, and I desire to support them on their journey towards relief. I esteem their trust and confidence in their discernment and their embrace of freedom to speak with such authority!

Studying African Women Theologians is comparative theology, which, according to some, is the only way to do theology in our interconnected world. This comparative theology
affirms the value for dark skinned Madonnas, or a God who identifies with His people. Understanding the experience of the Circle women and their theology grounds me in my own experience and theology. As some believe, “Sometimes we have to leave home in order to find home.” The work of the Circle encourages me to examine my own life more closely, affirming what I find as my own valid experience, in its similarities and differences to that of the Circle women. I believe it can also encourage all women, all Christians, all Americans, and all people to examine their unique experiences for the deeper meanings they evoke.

Stop and Listen. Stop and listen because the West has forced Africans to listen and obey the Western voice for so long. Stop and listen because the world is interdependent, and we cannot help but affect each other. Stop and listen not out of pity, but because they are your human family - and you care. Their voices have been silenced, but not destroyed. You will learn something about them, and perhaps yourself too.

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1 For an even stronger decree: “whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” Mark 8:35.
II. Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

A Circle expands forever
It covers all who wish to hold hands
And its size depends on each other
It is a vision of solidarity
It turns outwards to interact with the outside
And inward for self critique
A circle expands forever
It is a vision of accountability
It grows as the other is moved to grow
A circle must have a centre
But a single dot does not make a Circle
One tree does not make a forest
A circle, a vision of cooperation, mutuality and care

Women in Africa have always played significant roles in the progress and development of religion and society whether or not they have received recognition. For example, in the 1950s, African women were primary leaders in large scale democratic movements seeking the liberation of their people from colonial powers. But, it was not until the 1980s that the contributions of African women began to be acknowledged around the world in an unprecedented way. In Copenhagen, 1980, the United Nations sponsored a world conference announcing the Decade for Women. Four years later the leading resistance organization to apartheid in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), declared 1984 The Year of the Women, “in recognition of the importance of the role of women in the fight for freedom.” In 1985, ANC president Oliver Tambo concurred, proclaiming that the 1980s were the “Decade for Women” at a conference in Nairobi, Kenya. As governments, international organizations, and political groups acclaimed the meaningful contributions of African women, women of faith in Africa argued that it was time for the churches to acknowledge women’s role as well. Less than a year prior to the first convocation of the Circle of Concerned African women theologians in Legon, Accra, Ghana, the World Council of Churches (WCC) initiated a Decade in Solidarity

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Recognizing the work and achievements of African women makes it possible for them to do more, because as the women receive affirmation for their contributions they become more aware of and believe in their own potential. The gathering of these African women of faith, known as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, would show to the world that the 1980s would not bring attention to women’s value and significance to an end. Instead, the Circle would underscore and highlight women’s diverse contributions to the churches and to society long after a designated decade for women.

**African Theology**

African Theology developed in the 1960s and early 1970s focusing on the equality of races, but it did so blind to gender inequalities. During the colonial era, the Europeans presented Christianity to Africans as inseparable from Western European culture. Until the second half of the 20th Century, African Christian leadership remained relatively unchallenged in the hands of Europeans and their descendants. Under South Africa’s apartheid government, theological education was controlled by the state. No one from the majority black population of South Africa was allowed to teach. Similar to the arguments of Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, South African theologians began to re-articulate the faith that had been given to them by their European conquerors. Theologically trained men such as, Manas Buthelezi, Simon Maimela, Itumeleng Mosala, and Alan Boesak, members of oppressed groups in South Africa, called for authentic equality of all people. These men knew their voices were being heard when South African theologians from the “oppressor class,” such as John de Gruchy, G.C. Oosthuizen, and Archbishop Dennis Hurley, supported their oppressed brothers by bringing the message of liberation to white South Africans. With the opportunity to articulate distinctively African

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interpretations of Christian faith and Scripture, these theologians, black and white, challenged their society to recognize the truth of the need for liberation from racial oppression. Yet, as groundbreaking and liberating as this theology was, it too was “blind” to gender discrimination and oppression even though some men claimed that the liberation of women was implicit in the theology of liberation. African men could only consider how the oppression they faced contradicted Christian faith, but could not confront their own sexism. African gender oppression could not be adequately addressed by faith communities until its victims claimed the opportunity to voice their experience.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye was among the first to realize that in order for Africans to develop a truly liberative theology the oppression of women needed to be added to the theological agenda. Oduyoye sought to rectify the shortage of writings by African women during her participation in the study, “The Community of Men and Women in the Church,” which was conducted by the World Council of Churches from 1978 to 1982. Thus, the study enabled Oduyoye to further develop her own theology and make connections with other African women of diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. After almost three decades of male articulation of African theology, Oduyoye published Hearing and Knowing, thus paving the

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7 It was assumed that liberation applies to all people – the oppressed and the oppressors.
10 Published in 1986, Hearing and Knowing, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books) examines African church history and experience as the context from which present African theologies have arisen.” She describes “soul-snatching” and the method of Christianizing Africa by Westernizing it. Examining feminism and the trinity she expands the theology of community, P.A. Kalilonbe, International Bulletin of Missionary Research 11, no. 3 (July 1987).
way for “African Christian women to tell their faith stories as they have heard and known them and not to rely on others to write about them.”

By 1988, Oduyoye had gathered contact information for many African women, most of whom were connected with the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. Eight of these women gathered in Geneva that same year to form an International Planning Committee (IPC) to shape Oduyoye’s vision of gathering together African women theologians.

In preparing for a pan-African meeting in 1989, The IPC identified “religion and culture as the crucial foci for creating a liberative theology that would respond to the needs of women in Africa.” The Committee was concerned that issues pertaining to women in religion and culture were often misplaced or ignored because of the lack of literature by African women about themselves, and, particularly, by African women doing theology. These women then developed the idea of forming the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians for the main purpose of rectifying the dearth of theological literature by and about women of Africa. Men could no longer pretend to speak on behalf of all Africans. Now the women of Africa wanted to take responsibility to express their experiences of faith and culture which differed from those of men. The International Planning Committee agreed to a holistic approach to theology in which

12 Oduyoye remarks that it was difficult to keep track of some of the women she encountered through various institutions because “They had dropped the names they were born with, and assumed the names of the men they had married.” These women were “socially dead,” unknown unless you know the man they are attached to, Oduyoye, “The Story of A Circle,” 1. The “Ecumenical Association to Third World Theologians” (EATWOT) is an association founded in 1976 by theologians from the “Third World.” The founders defended the young currents of liberation theology in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the US. They defined their function in 1976: “The goal of the ecumenical union should be the continuous development of Christian theologies of the Third World that serve the commission of the church in the world and proclaim the new humanity in Christ in the struggle for a just society.” Christoph Dahling-Sander, “Liberation Theology. Liberated by Christ,” trans, Portland Independent Media Center, (June 2003), 1.
14 Ibid., 17.
women would “concentrate their efforts on producing literature from the base of religion and culture to enrich the critical study and empowering practice of religion in Africa.”

**Forming A Holistic Theology**

What does it mean that the Circle aims to do holistic theology? Nyambura J. Njoroge explains that the women do not address philosophical or abstract ideas, but rather, “are dealing with today’s life-threatening/destroying and life-giving/affirming issues. Doing theology means wrestling with God’s Word as we confront the powers and principalities of this world.” What makes the Circle’s doing of theology particularly holistic are its inclusive aspects.

For one, the Circle was designed as a voluntary organization without a membership fee, making writing the only requirement for membership. Initially, there seemed to be no need for a hierarchical structure with a president and vice president. It was envisaged that members would choose a task for themselves and follow it through to completion. The IPC believed this structure would open up Circle membership to the largest number of women possible.

Indeed, as Africans and as women, Circle members are “aware of the dangers and pain of exclusion,” thus the IPC was particularly attentive to designing an inclusive approach to doing theology, defining membership, and structure. The very image of a circle evokes an atmosphere in which all members sit face to face listening intently to one another, encouraging, and challenging what is heard. The value for inclusiveness in this circle counters the image of a clique, that an intentionally exclusive group. Women reflecting on faith, religion, and culture complement the broader circle of African Christian theology initiated by men. Mercy Oduyoye, speaks of correcting the imbalance of African theology by doing a “two-winged” theology.

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19 Ibid., 2.
20 Ibid., 1. Kanyoro notes that Oduyoye first used this image in her opening address at the Circle’s inaugural meeting in Ghana, 1989.
Employing the image of a flying bird, Oduyoye explains that theology without the faith reflections of women is like a bird with only one wing, disabled and unable to take to the air. Yet, this does not mean that the Circle merely wants to be the “other wing.” Rather, the women hope that the theology done by members of the Circle offers an example of African theology that can fly on its own, or in other words, “through which both women and men could communicate with God.”\(^\text{21}\)

A bird cannot fly very high if one wing is dominant over the other.

The Circle also evinces a holistic character and stands true to the reality of Africa, in that members take an interfaith approach to theology. Although initiated by Christian women and, still mainly Christian, the Circle has members who practice Islam as well as African traditional religions. The planning committee intentionally did not set adherence to a particular religion, as a requirement for membership. Njoroge says, “any theology that does not listen intently to women, men and children…lacks authenticity and relevance.”\(^\text{22}\) Christianity has not been the only religion to ignore the situation of some of its members. The experiences of women typically are as overlooked in African Islamic and Hindu communities as in Christian ones. Thus, as the Circle desires to make theology relevant for all Africans it chooses to espouse an interfaith approach to theology.

Incorporating women of all religions into the conversation has helped the Circle recognize some of the common struggles and issues that affect all women in Africa. With over 150 denominations of Christianity present in Africa, the diversity within Christianity itself is a serious issue posing its own set of challenges. As well, the Circle must take racial/ethnic and cultural diversities seriously as these are part of the reality of the continent of Africa and for Circle members individually and personally. Not only are there numerous cultures and ethnicities in Africa, but with colonialism and the mobility of globalized societies, Europeans and Asians claim a homeland in Africa as well. Of course, gathering with such a diverse

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
representation of people does present challenges. In order to address the ways in which these cultural, religious, and ethnic differences express how Africans relate to one another and experience God, the Circle recognizes the importance of incorporating women from these various groups. The Circle encourages a holistic representation of the concerns and reflections of all women on the African continent. However, the purposes and scope of this paper limit us to the theologies and various cultural and ethnic experiences of African Christian women.

The Circle of African Women Theologians are concerned about the ways culture and religion degrade the dignities of individuals and inhibit all areas of African life. This concern extends especially to the experience of sexism. All women can relate to sexual discrimination. How one responds to sexism is determined by other factors such as ethnicity, social location, educational status, and economic position. Thus, the Circle seeks to include and honor the diversity of opinions and methods of addressing particular issues. The IPC was aggrieved that women were silent for too long, enduring much suffering, and little, if anything, was done to correct threats against African dignity and life. In joining the struggle for justice, peace, and reconciliation in the African continent, the IPC agreed that as concerned women, “We will have to seek new ways to discover how we may respond theologically to the most urgent needs of our continent”.

**Implementing the Vision**

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians thus seeks to articulate the voices, cries, songs, and prayers “in the womb of the community of faith,” where theology is created. The meeting of seventy women in Accra, Ghana, 1989, inaugurated the vision of Oduyoye and the seven other women on the initial Planning Committee. The women presented papers, were introduced to the vision of the Circle, and agreed to participate in a Biennial Institute of African

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24 Ibid., 3.
Women in Religion and Culture. This meant that the women would meet every two years in sub-regional gatherings presenting papers that would be critiqued and edited for publication, mentoring each other, and formulating and experimenting “with various methods to enable others to hear African women speak for themselves.” In the seventh year, 1996, one-hundred and forty women met together in Kenya. With the membership doubled and several articles and newsletters published, it seemed as though the Circle was off to a good start. At the same time, the increase in membership and experience of the previous six years caused Circle members to adjust their structure.

The women elected an International Coordinating Team with zonal leaders from southern, eastern, western, francophone, and lusophone (Portuguese speaking) Africa. The International Coordinating Team would have to address the issue of financial support for the Circle, since Oduyoye’s retirement from the World Council of Churches ended a significant means of support. The major change the Team made was to the establishment of Study Commissions on four priorities identified at the 1996 meeting in Nairobi. These Commissions are currently:

1. Women in Culture and Religion
2. Cultural and Biblical Hermeneutics
3. History of Women
4. Ministries and Theological Education and Formation

The women also pinpointed HIV/AIDS as the most urgent concern for the Circle to address.

Looking toward the future of the Circle after the 1996 conference, the newly elected Head Coordinator, Musimbi Kanyoro remarked,

With our growing influence comes increased responsibility...The Circle women are being challenged not only to respond to the dearth of theological literature from African women but also to play a significant role in helping to create and sustain viable communities of women and men in the church and in society in Africa. Can we shift so soon in our short history?

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30 Ibid., 33.
Evaluating the Work of the Circle

Seven years after the pivotal first meeting, a critical review of the work of the Circle is not out of place. First, I will attend to their method of theological reflection as outlined in the four study commissions. Despite the difficulty of funding their research and projects, a core group of fifty women within the Circle have made research and writing contributions. I will present the work of one contributor from each area of the Study Commission area. The work of Mercy Amba Oduyoye will illustrate research conducted in the area of Women and Culture, and the work of Musa W. Dube will illustrate work in the area of Cultural and Biblical Hermeneutics. In order to examine a contribution to the area of Ministries and Theological Education and Formation I review a non-profit organization founded by a Circle member in South Africa. Rather than presenting a separate section on the Circle’s attention to the History of Women, the biographies of women involved in the various study areas sufficiently conveys the issues at stake. Brief background sketches of each of the contributors will elicit a thicker description of the social and cultural experience of women in Africa. Even though these three educated women do not represent the typical African women, they speak drawing conclusions from their own experience allowing space for their African sisters to make their own assessments. By the end of the study I hope to have developed an understanding and appreciation for the faith, values and commitment, and theological work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in their effort to realize the liberation of African women. Thus, this paper serves as a tribute to the contribution of these women to theology and to religious action for social and ecclesial change. All they ask is to “Take time to read what we have to say.”

Ibid., 30.
III. Women in Culture and Religion

I maintain that the identity and autonomy of women fare not much better today under the matrilineal systems of the Akan group than under the overt patriarchies of southern Nigeria… I also maintain that colonial rule reinforced these patriarchal systems and compounded the woes of African women by augmenting their ordinary burdens with those of their Western sisters.  

In the past theologians have rarely addressed the experience of African women, hiding her accomplishments and her pain. Circle members desire to fill the gaps in theological writing about African women. By telling what actually does occur among women in African cultural and religious contexts, the Circle theologians build a foundation from which to articulate “what ideally should happen.” Thus, the Circle’s second study commission, Women in Religion and Culture, shares past and present depictions and realities of women in Africa to reveal the life-giving aspects of cultural and religious traditions as well as to uncover those aspects that are life-depleting and oppressive.

Through The Founder

Even though a Circle study commission on Women in Religion and Culture was not officially inaugurated until 1996, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the Circle’s founder, has made telling the stories of women in religion and culture a high priority throughout her professional theological career. Oduyoye founded the Circle for Concerned African Women because of her primary interest to “set the story straight” about African women in religion and culture. The first meeting of the Circle in 1989 was entitled the “Biennial Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture.” Oduyoye, the visionary of the Circle, has provided the passion for honestly sharing the experience of women in culture and religion for many years. Her work

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35 Phiri, Her-Stories, 17.
offers a good example through which to consider the first pillar of the Circle for Concerned African Women.\textsuperscript{36}

Since her involvement with the World Council of Churches in 1976, Mercy A. Oduyoye incredibly disclose the condition of the African woman. Already an exception in the male dominated world of Theology, she was the lone woman of African culture among her colleagues in the World Council of Churches. With the publication of *Hearing and Knowing* in 1986, “Oduyoye paved the way for African Christian women to tell their faith stories as they have heard and known them and not to rely on others to write about them.”\textsuperscript{37} This section focuses on her most recent works that address the condition of African women in religion and culture.\textsuperscript{38} I will draw on Oduyoye’s other published and unpublished works as reference and background for the themes presented in these two latest works.

Oduyoye believes that “personal experiences are a valid source for understanding gender issues in the organization of human society.”\textsuperscript{39} To present the situation of African women she describes her own personal experience as an African woman in religion in culture. Therefore, her story as an Asante in Ghana and living among the Yoruba of Nigeria will better inform an understanding of her work and its correspondence to the third goal of the Circle.\textsuperscript{40}

*Education and Formative Years Among the Asante of Ghana*

Mercy Amba Yamoah was born as a member of the Akan people in southern-central Ghana in 1934.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, Oduyoye witnessed the dramatic development of Ghanaian national identity from the legacy of traditional culture and kingdoms and western colonial exploitation.

\textsuperscript{36} Several other women in the Circle have written about African women in culture and religion since 1996 including: Elizabeth Amoah, Ebenye Mbondo, Musimbi Kanyoro, and Nyambura Njorore. Oduyoye’s work, though mostly written before 1996, provides the largest contribution of material.

\textsuperscript{37} Njoroge, “The Missing Voice,” 1.

\textsuperscript{38} Chiefly *Daughters of Anowa* (1995), and *The Will to Arise* (2001).

\textsuperscript{39} Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 6.

\textsuperscript{40} The third objective of the Circle is to write about the history of women.

and rule. The self-assertion of educated Ghanaians resulted in the first successful attempt by a sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from European colonization. When Amba Yamoah was fourteen, a group of soldiers and WWII veterans held a protest in Accra, that developed into an outbreak of riots reflecting the widespread dissatisfaction with colonial rule. During the next ten years, the first Ghanaian political parties formed. Just as she was about to begin her studies at the University of Ghana in 1957, Ghana became an independent republic.42

Amba Yamoah credits her Akan family for significantly shaping her development. Her father, the Reverend Charles Kwaw Yamoah, was President of the Wesley Methodist Church of Ghana. Amba Yamoah “well fulfilled the promise of the eldest daughter of the Akan household into which she was born in 1934.”43 As customary for daughters of an African manse (minister), she attended a Methodist boarding school, Mmofraturu, in Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti nation.44 There, every morning she and the other girls would recite passages from the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Sermon on the Mount during the morning ritual assembly. Following Mmofraturu, Amba Yamoah went to the government school, Achimota. At this school, Amba Yamoah was exposed to an emergent Ghanaian national pride, an English curriculum, and the notion of Christ’s compassion for those who suffer. These values and mediums would all inform her later work.

Through the oral traditions and practical life of her mother, grandmother, and other women of the Christian community Amba Yamoah developed “compassion for and by women in Christian scripture and personal history.”45 She states that she owes her life’s inspiration and guidance to her matrilocal upbringing, “the unbroken thread which pervades her work.” Her grandmother and mother taught her the value of life-centeredness in the community and “that a person owes her community nothing less than her best, but she cannot give of her best if she is

44 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 174.
not empowered to do so.” She was fortunate that her father valued the empowerment of his daughter.

Her formation as a powerful leader for social justice continued at the university level. At Legon University her professors promoted ideas of inculturation and skenosis of Christian theology. One of her professors, Dr. John S. Pobee, would later raise funds and provide administrative assistance for the Circle’s first convention in 1989. From Legon, Yamoah went to Osei-Tutu Teacher Training College at Akropong. She emerged from there to read theology from 1963 to 1965 at Newnham College, Cambridge.

Her time in England prepared her to work with her Western counterparts in the WCC. The Youth Department of the World Council of Churches recruited Amba Yamoah to be their Education Secretary in 1967, after she had been teaching in Ghana for two years. Yamoah found herself in the epicenter of change among the mission churches of Africa in dialogue about acculturation, Christian-Islamic dialogue, ecumenical co-operation and the recognition of the historically shunned African Initiated Churches (AICs). She married Nigerian theologian, Modupe Oduyoye, in 1968 and moved to Ibadan, Nigeria to teach at Ibadan universities until 1986. The first woman lecturer in the Religious Studies department at Ibadan University, Oduyoye expanded her students’ grammar of theology. She dared her students to think of theology as inter-disciplinary and as a living tradition continually challenging culture and ritual.

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47 The inculturation developed by Prof. Kwesi Dickson involved a “rehabilitation of African Ancestors by Christian theology, proposing African histories and genealogies as an alternative Old Testament for the reception of Christ in Africa.” Skenosis works with the idea of releasing the person and message of Jesus Christ afresh into a culture, and allowing an engagement to take place relatively unencumbered by the trappings of history...one of fathering in the plurality of religious aspirations on the continent rather than generating further subdivisions,” Pemberton, “Harmony in Africa,” 93.
Indeed, she must have been breaking new ground within the patriarchal Yoruba culture of Nigeria to which she describes her adjustment as a “traumatic experience.” Yet she emphasizes not what she brought to the Yoruba, but what they taught her. Away from her matrilineal Asante, she developed an extended “grammar of difference in the gendered distribution of political, ecclesial, educational and domestic power in ‘other’ African polities.”

I have already discussed how her charisma and dedication to women’s rights as citizens and as respected religious authorities led to the foundation of the Circle. Over her career Oduyoye has given countless lectures, written and edited several books, published her work in numerous journals, and composed many poems. Given her matrilineal Ghanaian upbringing amidst rising Ghanaian nationalism, world theological encounters and exposure to the African patriarchal culture of the Nigerian Yoruba, how does Mercy Oduyoye approach the subject of Women in religion in culture?

Content of Her Theology

In examining women in religion and culture, Oduyoye asks “What makes a woman?” Her contemporary, Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister of Ghana, similarly tried to answer the same question. For years, Ghanaians were forced into cultural assimilation by Western colonial powers. After independence in 1957, Nkrumah wanted to help Ghanaians utilize their new freedom to choose their own identity. Ghanaians like Nkrumah and Oduyoye must weigh influences from traditional, colonial or Western, and post-colonial cultures and religions. Nkrumah felt that traditional culture harmoniously united Ghanaians. He called the nation “Ancient Ghana” and promoted African nationalism and Pan-Africanism through the

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50 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 6.
52 The poem at the beginning of this section and at the end of the paper are by Oduyoye.
53 Oduyoye Daughters of Anowa, 21.
Organization of African Unity. Oduyoye shares Nkrumah’s recognition of the significance of the past, writing extensively about how ancient myths, folklore, and religion shape society’s expectations of women and men. She also shares his call for a united Africa, evident through her formation of the Circle.

However, Oduyoye does not solely rely on ancient tradition for a holistic understanding of African women in religion and culture. She cannot ignore how Western patriarchal religion and culture have impacted the expectations around the role of African women. Indeed, one purpose of her theology is to challenge accepted norms of behavior, rather than blindly follow traditions of the past as Nkrumah suggests in his terminology of “Ancient Ghana.” Oduyoye accepts and rejects aspects of religion and culture based on a higher definition of what promotes life. She argues that past and present cultural and religious norms for the roles of women have been defined by men for the advantage of men. She challenges the African woman to use God’s definition of what makes a woman to reject oppressive aspects of her experience, and to create new dreams, hopes, and models of women that are wholly life-giving. Oduyoye conducts this argument of assessing the image of women through three cycles: oral history, contemporary religion and culture, and the visions of how women wish to live in the future.

Oduyoye’s theology is process oriented. She wants her readers to understand how the current situation of African women developed. She highlights traditional and western practices that have shaped expectations about the participation of women today. Oduyoye believes that, due to the inseparable association of western patriarchy with Christianity, in Africa today, “Christianity reinforces the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission and leads to the depersonalization of women.” Thus, Oduyoye writes not only to awaken Africans to critical religious and cultural introspection, but to awaken Western Christian churches in Africa and

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54 Salm, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 24-25.
around the world to bear witness to the African experience which they have suppressed for so long.

Language in Myth, Folktales, and Proverbs

We cannot overestimate the power of folktales as vehicles for the transmission of norms... the norms of relationships in this form of received teaching are invariably gender-based.56

Oduyoye’s first cycle of analysis examines the imagery and language for women in myths, folktales and proverbs from the Akan and other West African peoples. Sharing pieces of African oral wisdom she points to how these embody the roots of many contemporary African assertions about women. She discusses sources of “cultural norms – seemingly inscribed in stone–that shape ‘acceptable’ social roles and practices.”57 By uncovering the underlying persuasions of folktales, Oduyoye provides a framework for women and men to assess how they are viewed in society, and then challenges them to recreate parts of their image that are not life-giving.

More Than Stories, Importance of Myth and Folktales

If I reflect on myths and folktales that have shaped my imagination about women in society, I think of stories like Cinderella, Snow White, and the Little Mermaid. Westerners turn to these stories for enjoyment, yet how often do we discuss the moral messages hidden in the plot and the typical gender roles prescribed to the characters? The African folktales and myths, that Oduyoye outlines, appear to have had lasting significance for African life. Oduyoye explains that “folktalk” functions for Africa as a history of thought, a philosophy of life.”59 These myths and tales are not romantic comedies conveying an unrealistic picture of life, but rather they seek

56 Ibid., 37.
57 Ibid., 14.
58 Oduyoye categorizes myths, folktales, and proverbs all under the name, “folktalk.” I, however, will use “folktales” to refer to all of those together and to folktales as distinguished from myth or proverb.
59 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 21.
to answer questions such as “why so” and “how come?” Oduyoye affirms how generations of people have turned to these stories in their search for meaningful community. She says that “the verbal images created for us, often as children, acquire the status of holy writ.” Yet, Oduyoye challenges her African community to recognize that these myths are not unalterable prescriptions from the Voice of God. These stories represent valuable insights into the paradoxes of life gained from society, as distinguished from voices of authority prescribing behavioral expectations. Oduyoye concerns herself with what this vast source of religio-cultural corpus says about women in culture. The folktales she presents convey distinct gender roles and expectations concerning such aspects of life as the use of power, production of children, and even personality traits. Oduyoye’s analysis of these tales questions how one should derive authority in prescribing what out to be.

African folktales affirm the dignity and value for both sexes, and criticize unacceptable behaviors. Yet often, Oduyoye explains, only within prescribed gender roles. Origin myths of the Yoruba of southern Nigeria reference the Supreme God in female imagery either alone as one God or in partnership with a male Divinity. Olodumare, the Supreme God, uses a male Divinity, Obatala, as his Divine agent on earth. Obatala molds the male and female human forms while Olodumare breathes life into them. Olodumare then sends sixteen male divinities and one female divinity to supervise the human community.

The sixteen male presidents of the community went about their political tasks, totally oblivious of the presence of the female divinity Osun. Things kept going wrong until, exasperated, they finally consulted Olodumare, who told them of the missing factor—the female Osun. They could no longer ignore her. When the sixteen male divinities tried to involve her, however, she sent her son as an extension of herself and did not attend in person.

While this myth acknowledges the necessity for the female role in life, the world is still dominated by males, and her position, in which she is not thoroughly interested, is severely limited. For those feminists from a Judeo-Christian religious background, explicit female

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60 Ibid., 37.
61 Ibid.
imagery of the Divine carries the hope of influencing a truly egalitarian society. In the above myth, although, it is apparent how female Divine imagery can still advocate patriarchal practices. There is, however, a variant of the myth in which Oduduwa, goddess and wife of Obatala who is often depicted as a hen, is a co-creator with Obatala. This latter example of divine partnership could provide the justification for the equal contribution of both sexes in life for which feminists search.

Oduyoye does affirm that the lives of these goddesses do encourage women to speak for themselves and assume leadership roles in political and social spheres. Yet, she explains that the woman is revered in myths for the specific cultural roles that she plays, not for the result of her free ability to individually discern the divine will for her life. What interests Oduyoye about this creation story is that, like that in Genesis, it affirms the equal starting point for humans, as all “live because the breath of God has been breathed into them.”

*Female Power*

Oduyoye does not shy away from patently assessing myths and cultural issues personally significant to her. Being childless herself, Oduyoye has individual interest in challenging assertions that a woman must bear children in order to be respected in society. In a myth taken from the Ezon people of southern Nigeria we find that,

Ogboinba, the strong-hearted, has chosen not to be a mother, but to have mystic powers instead. At the time of her creation there was another who had chosen to be a woman and to be the mother of rich and famous children.

These two women become friends, and Ogboinba uses her powers to help raise her friend’s children. But, Ogboinba grows jealous of her friend. She undertakes a perilous journey to find Woyengi or Tamarau, the Supreme God and Great Mother, to request to be made into a mother and a woman with mystic powers. In her quest, Ogboinba battles many mystic beings which

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62 Ibid., 22.
63 Ibid., 21-23.
64 Ibid., 35.
want to prevent her from changing her destiny, but eventually she reaches Woyengi. Instead of humbly presenting herself to the Goddess, Ogboinba inexplicably challenges her to a trial of strength. Angered by this provocation, Woyengi strips Ogboinba of all her mystic powers. Still, Ogboinba manages to save herself by hiding in the eyes of a pregnant woman, “for Woyengi had herself decreed that a pregnant woman should never be killed.”

The story reflects messages of both social acceptability and power. On the one hand, Western feminists may point out how the story negates the ability of women to be both mothers and centers of power and authority. On the other hand, Oduyoye explains the significance of the story for women in a culture that openly embrace goddesses and female rulers. Ogboinba’s barrenness was accepted in society because she identified with her friend, and acted as a second mother to her friend’s children. Oduyoye emphasizes how Ogboinba is condemned when she decides to use her power for selfish purposes. Oduyoye suggests that while a woman’s ability to wield power must be unrestrained, how and why she uses that power is. The story offers an implicit but controlling message. After all, what woman after reading this story, “would dare challenge her destiny?” When compared to myths about male power and social acceptability, stories like these vividly unmask the restrictiveness of gender roles.

Oduyoye draws on another Ezon myth which recounts the tale of Ozidi, a man who sought to avenge his father’s murder at the hands of his companions. Ozidi’s grandmother is a formidable character in this saga. She is a witch who acts as Ozidi’s protector, providing him with tricks and strategies in his search for vengeance. Tamarau, the Great Mother Woyengi, attempts to punish Ozidi for killing too many people in his pursuit of retribution. But, In the end, Ozidi is strong and enjoys the admiration of all, after having killed men, children, and women, including Oreame, his grandmother. (The latter he killed by accident.) Ozidi is left victorious, is given a bride, and then is closeted in a shrine.

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65 Ibid., 23.
66 Ibid., 23.
67 Ibid., 24.
68 Ibid., 26.
Oduyoye suggests that if we set these stories side-by-side, they convey “a clear contrast between Ogboinba, a woman of power and courage, and Ozidi, a man of power and courage.” The two myths provide an “image of woman as the community sees it.”\(^69\) Female power cannot be used for egotistic purposes or to deny life. Ozidi’s grandmother “rightly” uses her power to support him. Similarly, Ogboinba “rightly” uses her power for the good of the community by helping to raise her “pro-creating sister’s” children.\(^70\) Yet, Ozidi is praised for his personal triumph of avenging his father’s death, while Ogboinba is severely chastised for merely threatening to use violence. Ozidi is awarded visibility for his ventures, while the female protagonists ‘disappear.’ Ozidi’s grandmother dies, and Ogboinba hides within the eyes of a pregnant woman making “pregnancy the only state that protect(s) a woman from execution.”\(^71\) Acknowledging the influence of the transmission of these stories, Oduyoye says, “To this day, no African, man or woman, wants to be called abonini, a childless one.”\(^72\)

In comparison to biblical stories where early Western feminists found satisfaction in the presence of female characters, these Nigerian myths appear to be revolutionary.\(^73\) However, Oduyoye explains that the way these stories assign acceptable uses of power and ways of living according to gender is undeniably harmful. The myths affirm the role of women as biological creators of life and affirm the right of man to pursue his own personal goals and express self-assertion. Yet, can women and men live outside these roles? Oduyoye desires African women and men to feel free to move beyond gender appropriations, and instead to look for the human traits that are desirable for building up and maintaining personal (not just male or female) skills.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 26-27.
\(^{70}\) Tamarau can only compromise Ozidi’s life because he threatens the life of the community as a whole.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 28-29.
\(^{72}\) Ibid., 29.
\(^{73}\) Western feminists such as Elizabeth A. Johnson are now more concerned with how these female characters and images in the bible can promote the flourishing of women. This may include creating more inclusive language and imagery about God. See her, *She Who Is*, (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992).
in this communal task." People would then be free to live as they feel moved by the Spirit of God.

Androcentric Folktales

Akan folktales are another form of African teaching that contribute to rationalizing strict adherence to “gender and age-defined roles” in many African societies. Oduyoye shares the story of the origin of Akan folktales to explain why these tales should not be revered as ‘holy writ.’ Ananse, a spider, hopes to convince Onyankopon (God) to sell him his folktales, or Nyankosem (God’s stories). After Ananse accomplishes some acts of heroism, Onyankopon hands “the Nyankosem to Ananse and they become Anansesem, (Ananse stories).” Since God hands over the stories, they no longer center on God’s word, but rather become centered on the purpose and life of man. The stories are no longer “theocentric,” but rather “Ananse-centric” (androcentric).

Oduyoye uses the Akan folktales to further access prescriptions on the image and role of women. She demonstrates that threads of patriarchy have thrived even in a matrilineal culture. Among the Akan, the mother is the most cherished person in a man’s life. However, the folktales communicate the paradox that cherishing one’s mother may not lead to or ensure that women are afforded the same respect and dignity as men. Moreover, the folktales frequently depict old women as demons and witches. The witches most often malevolently assert themselves only to be outsmarted by a “little man” projecting the superiority of male intelligence over that of the female’s. In the Nigerian myths, women are censored for being strong minded. Likewise, Akan folktales discourage young men and women from choosing their own marriage partners. Oduyoye only found one example of a girl who chose her own

74 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 34.
75 Ibid., 37.
76 Ibid., 39.
77 Ibid., 40.
78 Salm, Culture and Customs of Ghana, 125-145.
79 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 41-42.
spouse with good results. Indeed, if women demonstrate a strong will or make demands about their choice of husband, it is warned that “they will bring home a man-eating pumpkin!” Parents, particularly fathers, are the only ones who can responsibly make such a decision.

Another folktale implies that women’s choices cannot be trusted because they are too preoccupied with material wealth. Male folktale characters often use heroism and protector relationships to prove their self worth. A man is expected to provide the material needs of his wife; if he does not, she can justifiably seek a divorce. The story of Boniaye-Kae-Dabi tells how she and her child leave her husband, Gyekye, when there is not enough food to eat. She only returns after Mother Eagle grants Gyekye prosperity. Does this story imply that women are only materially driven? Oduyoye hopes women will read these stories to understand how they are viewed by society, or rather how they are viewed by the men who tell the stories in the community. She hopes that women will compare themselves to the image of women prescribed in these stories, and ask themselves, “Am I really most concerned with material gain?” or “How much am I willing to sacrifice to bear children?” She hopes that women will not be afraid to uncover potentially skewed perspectives inherent in these folktales.

Another Akan tale establishes the necessity of complying with taboos in order to support the lives of children. Aso is married, but impotent. God (Nyankopon) is not happy that Aso will not allow other men to impregnate his wife. So, Nyankopon decrees that any man who can impregnate Aso can have her for his own wife. Surely the male’s attitude of “owning” women emerges here, damaging the female psyche. Oduyoye objects to the ability of such stories to dictate people’s lives.

“Proverbs are one of the most common forms of oral expression. Ghanaian societies have thousands of proverbs that express the wisdom of communities and provide a means to

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80 Ibid., 43-44.
81 Ibid., 47.
82 Ibid., 47-48.
83 Ibid., 40.
understand life in the past and present,” Oduyoye writes.\textsuperscript{84} African proverbs, such as “A hen might step on her chick, but not with the intention of killing it,” “Women love where wealth is,” and “When a man is in trouble a woman takes it for a joke”\textsuperscript{85} directly convey negative messages about the female character. Although, there are proverbs that affirm women and men, however they seem to “get lost in the shuffle.” Judging by the still prevalent culture of patriarchy, men tend to ignore proverbs that do not match their interests on a daily basis. Women are unable to do this because of the submissive role they must assume in order to maintain social acceptability. Men are encouraged to be ‘self-creating’ and autonomous, whereas women are shunned if they demonstrate such characteristics. Oduyoye warns that blind adherence to the model of life suggested by proverbs and folktales in these tales would be like acting out a “male history rather than God’s history.”\textsuperscript{86} Indeed, they are as the myth says, “Anansesem.”\textsuperscript{87}

Oduyoye agrees that myths, folktales, and proverbs present the truth of how things are, and that these prescribed norms often resulted from practical concerns. For instance, in traditional African culture it was for the good of the community to encourage women to have children in order to increase the community laborers and gatherers of food. Oduyoye does, however, question how these traditional tales influence and shape current cultural practices and African traditions, dictating how things should be today and tomorrow in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century. She even describes how Akan wisdom supports such movements of counter-culture or forward-thinking as seen in the following proverb:

\begin{quote}
The ancient resting place is not necessarily the resting place of today.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

Yet, typical of African oral history, the Akan proverbs present the paradox of life by providing reason to discourage such action:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{84} Salm, 60. \\
\textsuperscript{85} Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 57-59. \\
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 54. \\
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 55-76. \\
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 73.
\end{quote}
Young people say the ancient resting places are not for them! Why don’t they take away one of the three legs that make up the cooking tripod and try to balance their cooking-pot on only two?”

Oduyoye desires women and men to value these stories for the historical and social commentaries that they are, but not as the transcendent social directives that they are often construed to be. She argues that each individual can live out God’s purpose for them individually. A woman can fulfill her purpose beyond the role of a biological mother. We describe God’s relation to us in a vast array of images including: Spirit, father, lamb, and lover. Men and women, thus, can fulfill God’s purpose for them in ways outside the biological parental role.

It is ironic that the concept that women should focus on what is life-giving for others, is not necessarily an individually life-giving framework for themselves. Indeed, everyone deserves the right to enhance and enjoy the life with which God grants them. A society where self-affirmation is seen as selfishness, stifles human development. Oduyoye suggests that exacerbated communal identity is equally harmful whether with male, female, or dual gender leadership. But, attention towards the ‘other’ or the community is also essential to every person’s fulfillment. Thus, by limiting the ‘other’ centered attitude as a duty solely for women, these African folktales deny men the opportunity to fully live their lives for God. The folktales similarly deny women the opportunity to receive God’s grace in their lives.

Culture

How To Rightly Speak on Culture

Mercy Amba Oduyoye asserts her right to speak about women living in current African culture and religion today because she is African and speaks specifically from her African Asante and Akan experience. Although her experience can parallel the lives of other Africans, she avoids making sweeping generalizations. She scorns generalization as fallacy when done by

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Ibid., 75.
her African sisters, and even more vehemently when done by her Western feminist sisters. She finds it intolerable how the latter often ‘study’ the African situation without reaching adequate understanding of the culture and often inscribing their own agendas onto the African woman’s world.\(^90\) Such studies also have negative impacts on the rising voice of an African woman whose challenge to oppressive cultural and religious norms may link her to the undesirable model of a Western woman. Thus, this study attempts to fairly represent how Oduyoye serves as a model for an honest and thorough conveyance of the situation of African women today.

In the previous examples of folktales male dominance permeates and negatively impacts women both in matrilineal and patrilineal societies. Oduyoye believes a deterioration of the situation of women in contemporary Akan and Yoruban culture has and is taking place. Victims of world classism as Africans, Western and African cultural patriarchy entrench women in sub-human living worse than her African brothers. Oduyoye names Western cultural and religious interference as the significant impetus for this dual decline, although she also condemns perspectives of traditional African culture. What separates Oduyoye from her Western feminist sisters is her dual affirmation and condemnation of everything. She observes that “‘Culture’s Bondswoman’ can be a two-edged sword, both liberative and oppressive.”\(^91\) Oduyoye believes that African and Western culture contain life-giving attitudes and practices. African women need to utilize those positive aspects to reverse the practices of sexism and world class exploitation. Specifically she feels that elements of the culture of Africa are indispensable to the liberation of African women. This section emphasizes her views on the positive elements of African culture. Yet Oduyoye does not hesitate to rebuke injustice wherever she may see it. Silence, she believes, is the most serious handicap of a woman or of any victim of oppression.\(^92\)

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 79 – 89, This admonition reminds us of the importance of the Circle as a forum to encourage African women to speak of their own experience. It also calls attention to the focus of this particular project, which seeks to report on a few examples of Circle achievement.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 141.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 82. Her passion to speak must also stem from her years of witnessing so much silence, which was her driving force to establish the Circle.
The following presents the significantly dehumanizing contemporary situation of Ghanaian African women in marriage, economics, and politics, economics. Coupled with each of these assessments is a presentation of what liberative aspects Oduyoye encourages Ghanaian women to remember from their traditional African culture.

*Marriage in Ghana*

The tradition of marriage vividly assesses the question of women’s autonomy in African culture. “Marriage in Ghana is seen as a requisite stage in life, rather than an option, and remains the most important social institution.”

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Marriage practices also expose women in Ghana to a higher risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Women are traditionally required to give birth to consolidate their marriages; as such, they cannot have protected sex all the time. Due to typical husband and wife power relations women are less successful at negotiating for safer sex with the men on which they depend. HDR statistics indicate that twenty per cent of Ghanaian women are estimated to use condoms during high-risk sex, while thirty-three percent of men do so.

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93 Salm, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 130.
94 Ibid., 140, 138.
95 Salm, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 138-142.
How Ghanaians view themselves as part of a community determines their world view. The Akan of Ghana are a traditionally matrilineal culture through which women define the limits of family community.

In the Akan matrilineal descent system, lineage membership is determined through the mother. Males and females are both members of the matrilineage (abusua), but only female links are used to determine future generations. The abusua includes siblings, the children of female siblings, and maternal uncles and aunts. Each lineage has a unique status and identity within society, represented by property rights and specific symbols. The branches of the family tree derive from a female founder, with each branch led by an elder or chief. Individual branches possess minor family stools (carved symbols of family and status), but a lineage stool that can be traced to the female head ultimately links the extended family together.

Oduyoye finds great power in the image of women so integral to community and continuance in the Akan matrilineal system. In keeping with her practice of dual affirmation and negation, Oduyoye does, however, recognize that patriarchy even leaks into the matrilineal system as men determine what behavior is acceptable and what is taboo. The traditional Akan woman must find it frustrating that although her children are known as her descendants, she cannot determine the cultural behavior that raises their children. As mentioned in the section on myths and folktales, Akan women must be married and with children for society to tolerably accept them! There is increasing social pressure in Ghana for women to conform to these patriarchal and conservative Christian aspects of tradition. Yet, Oduyoye believes that women of Ghana must keep alive those aspects of tradition that revere their place in the family and the community with high respect. Urbanization and westernization may further deteriorate marriage and the matrilineal system, but that does not mean that male domination needs to increase.

Reflecting critically on their situation in marriage today and the traditions of the past, Oduyoye encourages women to assemble the most inclusive and dignifying vision for marriage.

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98 Salm, *Culture and Customs of Ghana*, 37. And also “in their relationship to the spiritual and physical world around them.”
99 Ibid., 126.
100 An Akan woman who settles in her husband’s village, must adhere to her husband’s family’s taboos, as well as those of her own father. This actually subjects her to more restriction than her Yoruba sister in a
which they desire. She believes that women who seek to bring that vision to life will engender the practice of marriage that better resembles an equal partnership. By doing so women will break their silence and anonymity to "join together to define to what tradition they are being asked to return."\[^{101}\]

**Women in the Economy**

In the 1980s, J.J. Rawlings, a then authoritarian ruler of Ghana, instituted liberal economic structural adjustment. The economic liberalization benefited business groups with larger profit margins. External interest of multi-national corporations and other donor agencies increased. However, "bureaucrats, manual workers and low-income workers" suffered from "reduced purchasing power and the eventual removal of government subsidies."\[^{102}\]

Poverty declined significantly in Ghana between 1988 and 1992, yet, many remained poor. Today, 44.8 percent of Ghanaians live below the poverty line of one dollar a day.\[^{103}\] Women, significantly more than men, stay entrenched in subsistence living.

Ghana is an agrarian society. Export crop farmers experience benefits from liberal economic policies while those working in the informal sector remain poor.

The predominance of women in the informal sector and in food crop farming [makes] them vulnerable to poverty. Over 70% of food crop farmers, and 90% of those in internal agricultural distribution, marketing and processing in Ghana are women. About 80% of Ghanaian women in the labour force are employed in small, semi-formal and informal undertakings.\[^{104}\]

Today, women’s involvement in small scale farming and the market isolates them from the modernization process. Oduyoye describes how in the past similar roles held by Ghanaian women in the economy were signs of female empowerment.

\[^{101}\] Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 108.


\[^{103}\] http://www.undp.org/hdr2003/indicator/cty_f_GHA.html

Traditionally African women have been skilled processors, bakers, potters, weavers, farmers, and traders of their products. In west Africa, the woman has succeeded in business, even if only small-scale trading because of a traditional support system freeing her from housekeeping duties. Women maintain these trades without male management, apprenticing each other, and directing their own enterprises. African women and men need to recognize how successful women can be in business, argues Oduyoye. They also need to think seriously about why women are still using hoes to till their land. Oduyoye blames international exploitation as one reason. “Westerners have carried away Africa’s population, they have organized the remaining Africans to grow products for export to the West (mostly luxury food items), and they have gained control over large areas of land.”

Sexism in business opportunity and other areas of society offers another reason. The HDR estimates that 35.5 percent of women are illiterate – as opposed to 18.9 percent of men. The culture of patriarchy needs to disappear from all areas of society before women can participate substantially in modernization.

Concerning the situation of African women in the economy today, Oduyoye argues that “unless deliberate action is taken…the feminization of poverty will soon be a reality in Africa.” Women are the real breadwinners of Africa. They do the subsistence farming and trading that ensures the survival of African children. Women distribute goods from overseas (imported by men) or farm products and other goods that they bring in to urban markets from rural areas. Yet, these women are working like slaves to sustain Africa – in bondage to oppressive economic and cultural systems. There are positive elements in their culture from which women can draw to reshape their society. In Ghana, the communal support system, tradition of women in business, and allocation of national expenditure for

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106 Ibid., 100.
107 Ibid., 101.
education, (which far exceeds that of the U.S.)\textsuperscript{108}, can encourage women that they are not meant for sub-human living. Oduyoye does not dictate how women and men should respond to the crisis of women in the economy because she believes in a democratic or “two-winged” process. She hopes that, by thinking critically together, women and men in Ghana will develop a Ghanaian solution to the crisis of women in the economy that incorporates elements of traditional and modern values. She prays the same will happen in other African nations.

**Women in Politics**

Westernization abolished the bi-focal political administration that had given women a measure of autonomy and enabled them to contribute to the general discussion of national issues.\textsuperscript{109}

Ghanaian politics contributes to the disproportional amount of women living in sub-human conditions because women in Ghana do not have adequate political involvement with which to voice the concerns of their sisters. Ghana held its first multi-party democratic elections in 1992, although, the democratic system has yet to meaningfully incorporate women.\textsuperscript{110} In 1994, women made up about 3% of elected members in local government. In 1998, this proportion rose only to 5%.\textsuperscript{111} Women account for only nine percent of the Ghanaian legislature – against 24.7 percent in Uganda, and 29.8 percent in South Africa.\textsuperscript{112} These statistics are troubling given that women in Ghana constitute just about half of all registered voters.

Fears of challenging the politics of their male heads of households and/or needing to focus all their energies on sustaining their families discourage and prevent Ghanaian women from running for political office. Once in politics, women do not escape harsh realities of sexism. Not only do they face discrimination because of their sexuality, marital status, and

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\textsuperscript{109} Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 96.

\textsuperscript{110} Adedeji, “The Legacy of J. J. Rawlings,” Although J. J. Rawlings was elected democratically in 1992, the process was full of malpractice. So, the election of 1996 represents the first significantly uncorrupted Ghanaian democratic election.

\textsuperscript{111} Ofei-Aboagye, “Promoting the Participation of Women,” 4.
whether or not they have children, but during times of political unrest women candidates can find themselves being sexually abused.\textsuperscript{113} Oduyoye highlights traditional Ghanaian leadership to encourage women that they can have influence in societal organization, and to remind their African brothers that they once felt the same.

Traditionally a male and female leader, \textit{Ohene} and \textit{Ohemaa} respectively, organized and led the various villages within the nations of the Akan people. By 1700, the Asante Union was the most powerful Akan state.\textsuperscript{114} One chief \textit{Ohemaa} led all the other village Ahemaa,\textsuperscript{115} and subsequently all the Asante women. The \textit{Ohemaa} and \textit{Ohene} shared political responsibilities. The \textit{Ohemaa} controlled the female line sanctioning marriages and ensuring the observation of sexual morals, while the \textit{Ohene} governed the daily maintenance of the Union with the support and advise of the \textit{Ohemaa}. The \textit{Ohemaa} participated in the legislature, settled disputes in her own court, and even protected people from the judgment of the \textit{Ohene}. She was a recognized “power behind the throne” to the Asante people. However, the significance of this respected power often eluded the Westerners.\textsuperscript{116}

The Europeans only negotiated with the male leadership in the communities. The traders and colonists either were unaware of the \textit{Ohemaa}, or felt more comfortable dealing with the man. By not honoring the \textit{Ohemaa}, the British effectively deteriorated her importance. At the same time, the British undermined male traditional rulers by bribing them or replacing them with “puppet” rulers. Asante men noticed how Europeans “considered women of no account...not recognize[ing] them as we have always done,” but did nothing to involve women either out of fear of the hand of their oppressors or because the additional power suited them.\textsuperscript{117} Oduyoye believes that the British succeeded at introducing their systems of patriarchal

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[112]{Orhin, “Women Prepare To Make Their Mark In Elections,” 2.}
\footnotetext[113]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[114]{Salm, “Culture and Customs of Ghana,” 7.}
\footnotetext[115]{Plural form of \textit{Ohemaa}; Oduyoye, \textit{Daughters of Anowa}, 94.}
\footnotetext[116]{Ibid., 92-96.}
\footnotetext[117]{Ibid., 95.}
\end{footnotes}
governance primarily “because they suited the Asante men.” Female authority had been stifled by paternal authority in Akan culture, and the coming of the British “completed the strangulation of matriarchal voices as far as policy making was concerned.”

With little influence in politics, Ghanaian women and other African women in countries with minimal female political participation, cannot create and support policies that will help relieve the double yoke of suffering for women. If they were engaged in politics women could address the country’s battle with poverty and HIV/AIDS, advocate for legislated egalitarian marriage and economic laws, and even brainstorm solutions to stop the sexual abuse of female political candidates. Ghanaian women have organized tax strikes on the streets, yet the movement deserves more massive attention. Dzodzi Tsikata, a lecturer at the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana, advocates the development of a women’s manifesto to unite Ghanaian urban and rural women with common vision. Women deserve and desire to partner with men in governing the nation, as they once did in the Asante empire. Holistic African modernization requires the contribution of African women, hence it is time that women are politically, economically, and socially involved in its process!

Women in Traditional Religion

In my opinion, a certain hermeneutic of suspicion is required whenever an African male proclaims that the African female is powerful.

Religion in Africa often provides the mode through which people establish and articulate identity. Oduyowe’s attempt to understand women in contemporary African society requires research into the real involvement of African women in traditional religion. She aims to uncover how and why women participate in religion, what is distinctive about their participation, and any religious practices that particularly impact women.

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118 Ibid., 96.
119 Oduyowe notes that other societies in southern Nigeria and along the West African coast also had parallel female and male leadership which suffered similar fates with the coming of the British. (Daughters of Anowa, 96.)
Centrality of Religion and Gender Free God Language

Oduyoye describes Africans as “incurably religious.” 121 The Akan believe the primary component of human nature is the soul, or okra, which is the spiritual part of the human received from the Supreme God predating birth, surviving beyond death, and linking people to the Creator. 122 African atheists are almost non-existent. In Ghana, everyone ascribes to some religion. More than sixty percent of the population is Christian, twenty-two percent practice indigenous religions, fifteen percent are Muslims, and others follow Hinduism, Buddhism, or Judaism. 123 Women comprise the majority of religious participants. Religious feasts, festivals, and rituals mark particular times to express faith in a God recognized as active in all areas of life. Even the language about God affirms God’s transcendence above all human categorizations.

Western feminist Christian theologians often feel stifled by the lack of female imagery among the Abrahamic faiths even though orthodox Christian belief maintains that God does not have a body. Oduyoye explains that African women are not as concerned about gender specific language for God, “The maleness or femaleness of God is literally immaterial” to African women because, as alluded to in the folktales, the language for speaking about God varies between using no gender specific pronouns suggesting androgyny and having divinities with specific genders in the traditional religions. 124 Examples include: the Ga name Ataa Naa Nyommo (Grandfather Grandmother God), Mawu Lisa of the Ewe (Female-Male), and Kwasi-Asi a daa Awisi, the Male-Female one. 125

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120 Oduyoye comments on some “superficial observations insisting that in traditional religions “both men and women have equal opportunity to lead and be led,” (Daughters of Anowa, 114.)
121 Ibid., 109.
122 Salm, Culture and Customs of Ghana, 35-36. Following this are three other components: 2) sunsum, the spiritual part determining individual character, intelligence, and personality 3) ntoro, elements of one’s father inherited through his semen 4) mogya, or blood, binds one to the mother and her lineage lines.
123 Ibid., 34.
124 Oduyoye Daughters of Anowa, 110-111.
125 Ibid., 111, 118, 158; and also West African Religious Traditions. Other Akan names for God include: Owoo, “Father” or “the One who gave birth to the multitude); Odehye “the Royal Parent, self-existing and self-
Even though Oduyoye observes that African women feel little need to focus on the “grammar of sexism,” she raises awareness of how the goddesses of African Traditional Religions can reflect the predicaments of African women.126 The Yoruba goddess, Osun, is a female divinity in a world of male divinities. She acts as a consort to a divinity, and preoccupies herself by trying to correct her inability to have children.” Yoruba women, like the Akan, only have status if they have children. Similarly, mediators for divinities among the Akan, abosomfo (chief priests and priestesses) and akomfo (mediums, ritual dancers), are designated by gender. As a general statement, Oduyoye observes, “that the lower-ranking functionaries, the akomfo, are mostly women while the abosomfo are predominantly men.”127 Again, like the folktales, females are involved in the stories and practice of religion, but often with assigned roles subordinate to males.

Ritual

African rituals lucidly depict the bifurcation of African religion based on gender. African religion gives major role to rituals associated with life’s rites of passage. “Through its provisions for ritual, religion operates in the human community as a determiner of power, influence, domination, and oppression.”128 Oduyoye discusses the rituals of Akan rites of passage to pinpoint how women’s participation is distinct from that of men.

At birth, boys and girls undergo similar rituals although the father has sole decision power in naming the baby. In the book she edited, The Will to Arise, Oduyoye explains that the gendered division of African society blatantly begins during the rituals conducted at puberty. Women perform fertility rites for the girls and men conduct rites that evidence bravery for the boys. At the wedding or marriage ritual, the bride eats eggs as a symbol of fertility. Once in

sufficient”; battan, a more female-specific term of the latter; and Afua Panini a ofiri tete, “the Friday Woman of ancient origins.”
126 Ibid., 111-113.
127 Ibid., 113.
98 Ibid., 16.
marriage the wife must often adhere to her husband’s authority, and fulfill her primary duty to procreate. While the rituals for death are the same for men and women, women and men undertake mourning significantly differently. Ritual custom does not expect a man to perform a rite after the death of his spouse. But, he is encouraged to remarry quickly. However, a widow must complete several specific purification rites before her husband’s soul can be considered at rest, making her available to marry again. The male spirit, or sexuality, exudes a “belligerent if not malevolent character” after death. A woman must not be touched after the death of her husband because her husband’s death leaves behind negative effects on her that may contaminate others. A widow may have to carry hot coals, burn her clothes, or shave her hair to purify herself. Emphasis on contamination, subservience, and following as opposed to leading must certainly affect a woman’s self-esteem and self-worth.

Since religion plays such a key role in enforcing societal norms and ethics, each [rite of passage] has a social significance and reflects the status of women in the society and the relationships that exist between men and women.

Fearful of what is inside them, women are more vulnerable to relinquish their autonomy. Oduyoye asserts that even though time has tempered some of these rites, “the fundamental religious belief of inauspiciousness still remains, as do the socioeconomic and legal consequences of a system that gives widows no official status.” Traditionally, women not only hold less influential religious and ritual roles than men, illustrates Oduyoye, but whom they are for religious communities, the family, and subsequently the social, political and economic aspects of society, is “regulated by their biology.”

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99 Ibid., 11 – 19.
131 Ibid., 16.
129 Ibid., 16.
132 Ibid., 16.
133 Ibid., 17.
“In the Akan view of life, blood is not only a physiological substance; it is also a theological substance, imbued with meaning for one’s being.” The fourth component of personal nature in the Ghanaian worldview is mogya, or blood. The mogya given by the mother signifies a child’s lineage status and continues lives as the person’s ghost after death. Although mogya holds inexorable status as bearing and continuing life, it cannot be literally present at any religious ceremony. Menstruating women, men who have shed blood, or anyone mutilated or with visible injuries are forbidden at religious ceremonies, and can rarely to never become a king or a priest. Women, again, are singled out as a result of their biology. “Some of the most significant taboos in African Traditional Religion are associated with the blood of menstruation,” as menstruation has the power “to annul all prayer and render all ritual ineffective.” A small boy may participate in a ritual while a grown woman may not during her time when she is untouchable. Blood is sacred and taboo in Africa making women sacred and taboo. This duality shows how men revere women and need women, but also keep her distant, maintaining their dominance.

African Initiated Churches (AICs) still curtail women’s involvement in their churches because of the inauspiciousness associated with female sexuality. The four categories of people not allowed in the church for fear of contaminating the holy place are:

…a woman who has just delivered a baby, a menstruating woman, men and women who have remained unwashed after sexual intercourse, and a woman with uncovered hair.

The same church gives pregnant women special ritual significance. The Aladura churches only ordain women who have reached menopause. Only when women no longer possess an experience which men do not have, when they are most like men then ever and are no longer threatening do these churches accept them as leaders into the church. These traditional practices

134 Oduyoye Daughters of Anowa, 115.
135 Salm, Culture and Customs of Ghana, 36.
136 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 119.
137 Oduyoye, The Will to Arise, 20.
combined with Western Christian attitudes toward sex create a double yoke of burden for the African woman.

Oduyoye suggests that Christian “fear of the flesh” has and does contribute to further degradation of the African women, leading to more negativity and fear around women’s issues. Oduyoye cautions that westerners tend to misunderstand African sexuality. She recognizes how the body of Western Christians retain the “Eve and evil” mentality where men are innocent victims of female sexuality.\textsuperscript{138} In contrast, in the Akan myth of human’s separation with God, Eve has not committed a sin for which her descendants must sin. Also, “There is no call for purification through childbirth, nor for submission to the male.”\textsuperscript{139} Western Christian women, Oduyoye observes, tend to be very prudish concerning their sexuality as a means to ward off male mal intentions. Traditionally, African women have firmly acknowledged their sexuality and its religious function. Although Oduyoye does not support such practices, most women do not mind limitations placed on them during their menses.\textsuperscript{140}

Even if African women find the restrictions surrounding their menses a tolerable annoyance, the real issue again “is the exclusive focus of the personhood of a woman on her biological functions.”\textsuperscript{141} Focus on the body is not a holistic formula for the woman to base her identity. It neglects recognition of the mind and soul, and the same functions of her body are both revered and shunned. An Akan woman finds wholeness through giving birth, yet afterwards she must undergo rituals of purification to cleanse herself of the “dark results” of the experience. If hygiene used to be a reason for the purification ritual, Oduyoye challenges that women in the modern age are now usually free of that concern and the damaging psychology of this ritual. Perhaps associating women overwhelmingly with her biology provides men with a distinct way to separate and elevate themselves from women.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 20-21.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 22.
Oduyoye suggests that the whole concept of sexuality in Africa and all of Christianity needs to be rethought. She observes that as “sexuality is a central factor of being human...It’s so much a part of us that we fear it might compete with our sense of the presence of the Divine.”

African myths and rituals integrate sexuality and spirituality. Yet, in practice, and due to Christian rigidity, fear prevents many from celebrating sexuality, even causing celebrations that are burdensome for females. An African woman desires to holistically integrate her sexuality with theology. But, the praxis of the theology does not dignify her, nor always allow her to realize God’s given grace. Perhaps Oduyoye’s concept of “two-winged” theology, that is inclusive of both women and men, could be applied to the development of a more holistic approach to sexuality. The wing of theology revering that which is life giving and wholesome needs the wing embracing sexuality in order to fly freely.

Women and the AIC’s

The church of the Greek Bible is a community gathered by God through Christ. The church, therefore, belongs to God and not to the human beings who constitute it, least of all to the formally acknowledged leaders of the institution. The covenant that holds the church together is made with God, not with the human leaders of the church.143

African Initiated Churches have grown rapidly in the last twenty years.144 AICs incorporate many indigenous beliefs and customs into the Christian framework. The theologies of AICs emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit in “faith healing, prophecy, and express a strong belief in signs and miracles.”145 Oduyoye focuses her research on these churches because they provide the most probable example of a truly African Christianity, largely devoid of Western patriarchal influence.146

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142 Ibid., 23.
144 Salm, Culture and Customs of Ghana, 47.
145 Ibid.
146 Oduyoye does not spend much of her writing describing the specific ways the western churches exhibit patriarchy because she feels it is an obvious reality, and value around which they are founded. She writes so that Western influenced churches would understand the Africa way...
Men and women act as mediators to divinities in traditional African religions. The Aladura Churches of Nigeria have many women led and founded congregations. Aladura Churches often reflect symmetrical leadership similar to the Akan Ohemaa and Ohene. Some assert that the Aladura Churches and other West African AICs incorporate more female leadership than the Euro-American missionary churches. At first glance it appears that AICs may be revolutionizing the role of women in African Christianity. Never assuming complete good, Oduyoye questions whether the greater inclusion of women in the AICs actually incorporates “women’s insights into the will of God for human beings.”

Rarely having pastors with theological training, African Initiated Churches tend to read the Bible literally and are often suspicious of historical or critical approaches. Unfortunately, this method often supports culturally sanctioned gender roles. Oduyoye quotes an expression resulting from AIC theologizing,

For women to aspire to become like men and reject their womanhood is not a genuine form of equality. Hence modern women’s liberation is not biblical, and is not African.

Somehow a celibate man is not perceived as “rejecting his manhood.” Women’s leadership in the Aladura Churches parallels the current, though limited leadership of African women in African Traditional Religion. Only a few Aladura churches have women as heads. Captain Christiana Abiodun Akinsowon became the head of the Cherubim and Seraphim societies of Nigeria, but under the title of “supreme head of all the women.” Such a title reflects the role of the Ohemaa in Ghana who is the leader of all the women in the tribe.

Men have more opportunities to lead formally in the AICs with nine ranks available to them, while women only have five. AICs adopt affirming practices of women in leadership

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147 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 133-134.
148 Ibid., 125.
149 Ibid., 127.
150 Bridget Monohan, “Extending Theological Education, Making Religion Relevant to Everyday South Africans.” 2003. Independent Study Project with the School for International Training. 6-7; 11-12
151 Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 125.
152 Ibid., 126.
153 Ibid., 127.
from traditional African culture, but also its taboos and restrictions. Undoubtedly, it is difficult for women to change a tradition that is centered on male superiority. Yet, the Aladura Churches are an encouraging example that women can be recognized as divine agents among communities that are crying for “the richness of this empowering and caring ministry.”

Since Western Christianity reinforces the male superiority and privilege that emanates from African Traditional Religions, Oduyoye maintains that the conversation about sexism has barely begun in African religion. She doubts that women in AICs hold greater level of leadership than those in Western churches. Women may be mediators of the Divine, but only confined within certain roles. Oduyoye questions why the Creator would encourage the suppression of women on the basis of their biology which He blessedly designed. African women comprise the majority of the congregation devoting themselves to the Divine to ensure abundant life for their communities. Yet, these numerous women fall under the leadership of a few men. The bifocal organization of African society, thus, spreads into the organization of religious societies. Men “appear to establish structures that ensure that their position in the ‘service of God’ is one of directorship.”

**Women in Historic or Western Implanted Churches**

*Whatever is keeping the subordination of women alive in the church cannot be the Spirit of God.*

Oduyoye grieves over how the church is a vehicle for patriarchy. “It is painful to observe African women whose female ancestors were dynamically involved in every aspect of human life define themselves now in terms of irrelevance and impotence.” Western churches implanted in Africa mirror Western Christian attitudes pre-1914 Europe. Few

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153 Ibid., 126.
154 Ibid., 130.
155 Ibid., 182.
156 Ibid., 175.
churches ordain women or allow significant female involvement in church leadership.\footnote{Even though their counterparts in the West do, most denominations in the African region, still do not ordain women. For those few that do ordain women, there is still huge disparities in their training, placements and wages. WCC’s eighth assembly. http://arc.episcopalchurch.org/women/harare02.html} Oduyoye seriously mourns over women’s lack of involvement, and how the suppression of women in the church diminishes the church’s ability to challenge the belittling treatment of women in society.

Attached to nineteenth century evangelical theology, the church in Africa sacrilizes the marginalization of women’s experience through literal interpretations of the Bible. Christianity and the socio-cultural Westernization of Africa orients women to accept the meaning of helper as subordinate. This attitude permeates into traditional African religions and encourages society’s sexism that curtails women’s mobility in marriage, the economy, and politics.

Oduyoye believes that “Visualizing God as male and experiencing leadership as a male prerogative have blinded the church to the absence or presence of women.”\footnote{Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 176.} African women like the Akan have no qualms with referring to God as “Mother” or “Father.” Oduyoye believes that Africans have complacently accepted the dominating male imagery in Christianity without considering more relevant contextual alternatives. Oduyoye urges African women to enter “the debate on the exclusive masculine language of Christianity”\footnote{Ibid., 180.} because it is better than continuing to mouth what they learned a hundred or more years ago by European and American missionaries.

Religion forms people’s attitudes and behaviors. The church, Africa’s community of Christians represents the most influential shaping institution of the core values and behaviors of Africa’s people. The church can be a witness of justice to the globe. Oduyoye implores religious bodies to obtain political and economic sagesse.\footnote{Ibid., 180.} She calls African Christians to conversion and commitment. Unfortunately, church practice in Africa still encourages perspectives that keep
women at lower levels of literacy, poverty, employment, and good health than their male counterparts. The church, thus, does not live its call to serve and liberate those whom “are the least among us” (Lk 9:48). “Few people will continue to take the church seriously if it persists in preaching Christ but does not live Christ.” Oduoyoe believes that a woman entering ministry now would be co-opting with her oppressors. Until the church values women’s creative energies and contributions they are better served elsewhere.

**Oduoyoe’s Response**

Oduoyoe does not spend much of her writing castigating church institutions about their gender inequality. Rather, her main purpose in doing theology as a member of the Circle is to encourage African women to be the church. Being the church, women can be the primary instigators to improve the lot of Africa’s lowest.

Oduoyoe encourages African women to assert their deserved autonomy as children of God and establish themselves in the modernization process. Women must be their own initiators of change if they expect the same of society. Disseminating their visions of God’s will, women and their male supporters can help shape new attitudes and values for inclusive and liberative communities. Women in Africa must utilize the life-giving aspects of church to mobilize their movement of justice, as Oduoyoe encourages them to do with African folktales and culture.

Indeed, what separates Oduoyoe from other liberation theologians is that she does theology as an African daughter. Her roots in the matrilineal Akan affirm her sense of partnership in creation. Oduoyoe believes that women will only overcome the negative aspects of African culture and religion by utilizing the positive. Oduoyoe reserves her most powerful message for her African sisters.

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161 Oduoyoe, *Daughters of Anowa*, 182.
Anowa, Africa’s Ancestress

Language, culture, and religion are painful and demeaning for women. The keep women believing they are meant to be second class citizens. They keep women believing that they do not deserve the right to contribute to the country’s governance. They keep women believing that they are meant to continue making baskets and hoeing the field even though the world scale market threatens to extinguish their work. They keep women believing that they must be mothers to be worthy in the eyes of God. All of these are false. Oduyoye emphasizes how God created each of us with our own unique gifts, our own unique shape for how we are meant to serve the world. People can be serving God as teachers, doctors, ministers, social workers, mothers, fathers, gardeners, and so on. To make this real for herself and for her other African sisters, Oduyoye draws on African myth to create an image of a life-giving, particularly woman affirming, Ancestress.

In Two Thousand Seasons, a radical epic on Africa, AyiKwei Armah names Anowa as a mythical woman representing Africa. In this account, Anowa is a prophetess. Armah’s epic describes Africans in the Sahara before their flight south from patriarchal ideological encroachments seeping in from the north that brought slavery and Islam. Anowa’s people were characterized more by a communal instinct than a ‘selfish urge for self-glorification,’ and more by ‘peace than clamor for heroic action. Like Anowa they learned to hunt for food, not for war; not for pleasure but for stopping the aged lion and the wild hog and to keep the hyena at bay.’ Both Aidoo and Armah portray Anowa as a woman who opposed slavery and slave trade...She was the epitome of a woman participating fully in what is life-sustaining and life-protecting, someone worthy of being named an ancestress.

The image of Anowa captures all that Oduyoye values, all that she envisions, and all her purposes in doing theology.

If Anowa is Africa’s ancestress, then all Africans are her children. Oduyoye and all of her African sisters are daughters of Anowa who receive needed affirmation and guidance from the image of this ancestress. The image of a common womb particularly affirms that the bodies and persons of African women are blessed images of the Divine, essential to creation. Within

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163 Romans 12:6-8
164 Ama Ata Aidoo recounts in Anowa, (London: Harlow, 1970), that Anowa was born to be a priestess but was not formally apprenticed.
the *abusua*, or the lineage, of this ancestress, “there are no distinctions between siblings and cousins, mothers and aunts, fathers and uncles.”\(^{166}\) Much like the body of Christ, “the *abusua* is an indivisible unity from which one cannot separate oneself.” A childless woman, like herself, is therefore respected as a mother, being a member of a larger interdependent family unit. The Circle, committed to mutual support of theological research and publication, similarly reflects the interdependence of descendancy from a common womb. Oduyoye’s emphasis on the image of Anowa, Africa’s common ancestress, crucially illustrates her vision for an African holistic future.

Anowa is one of “Oduyoye’s most original theological developments.”\(^{167}\) Anowa encourages her daughters that they too can be mythical women, prophets and priests, who live daring lives of suffering and determination working for justice. Oduyoye does not want the crafting of such imagery to end with her. Oduyoye encourages African women to create new language in culture in religion and “weave new myths for [them]selves”\(^{168}\) that focus on “human interconnectedness as part of becoming human.”\(^{169}\) She hopes African women will help overcome the Western idea of the “superior man” and “inferior woman” that she feels has “captured the African mind.”\(^{170}\)

Oduyoye proclaims that for women to move from their feelings of inferiority or accompanied complacency they must provide the primary impetus. Women need to believe that they are the church. Women need to hear self-affirming language. Women need encouragement that their dreams of having value and significance as they envision are valid images from God. Oduyoye provides that encouragement. Oduyoye’s creative and original

\(^{165}\) Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 6-7.

\(^{166}\) Pemberton, “Harmony in Africa,” 105.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 104.

\(^{168}\) Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 212.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 215.

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 158.
approach to theology, as encompassed in *Anowa*, gives hope and zeal for action to her sisterhood.

**Conclusion**

Mercy Amba Oduyoye effectively conveys how past religion and culture have shaped African women’s present situation of oppression and cause for hope. While Ghanaian folktales affirm women as nurturers and selfless, passive beings, they do not allow women to act outside of those roles. Ghanaian women have traditionally held high value within the family and significant economic and political influence. However, patriarchy and international laws prevent her from progressing with men in modernization. Traditional religion recognized women as mediators of the divine, but established disaffirming practices that confuse today’s views about female sexuality. Christianity bears a message of gender liberation, but the churches in Africa fail to realize this within their own communities. Africans are “bound by Euro-centric international laws we did not help to craft,” and African women are bound by patriarchal customs they did not choose, Oduyoye points out.\(^{171}\)

Oduyoye believes African women can draw from holistic roots of their heritage and Christ’s holistic vision of God’s kingdom on earth to create a new gender balanced reality. Indeed she claims, “When we have learned more about humanity, perhaps we will also be able to understand what God is telling us about divinity.”\(^{172}\) She challenges her sisters to recall those aspects of tradition that have been lost in modernity: the joint responsibility of authority among the Akan Ohene and Ohemaa, the significance of matrilineal descent, women’s success in

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\(^{172}\) Oduyoye, *Will to Arise*, 24.
business, and the African concept of sexuality and spirituality.\textsuperscript{173} However, Oduyoye does not condone experience past or present to stand as authority.

In an essay entitled, “Letter to My Ancestors,” Oduyoye writes, “Was it not you who said ‘Tele wo bi ka, tete wo bi kyere? (the past has something to say: the past has something to teach’). But the past has nothing to impose.”\textsuperscript{174} Indeed, Oduyoye does not regard the traditions of any one time period to hold the blueprints for how to live life. Oduyoye believes that God transcends time, place, and people bearing the model of Truth, Justice, and Love for how we all should live. “I seek the quality of life that frees African women to respond to the fullness for which God created them.”\textsuperscript{175} Fundamental to Oduyoye’s theology, is her desire to explicate a theology of Africa, separate from western theologies and contexts, created for Africans. African women can honor their precursors while forming their own identity: deciding what to keep, what to leave behind, and what to create.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye expresses the pain of a “one-winged bird” through the longings of African women to believe in the sacredness of their desires, their callings, and their bodies. The language and tradition of culture and religion “minimizes women’s presence and creates a seemingly impenetrable crust for African women to break through.”\textsuperscript{176} Speaking for Africa’s women and Africa herself, Oduyoye says, “We need a totally new vision of ourselves and a positive outlook that will generate innovative perspectives.”\textsuperscript{177} Providing space for the theology of women such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the Circle of Concerned Africa Women Theologians progresses towards a steady “two-winged flight” capable of soaring across any skies.

\textsuperscript{173} Oduyoye, \textit{Daughters of Anowa}, 118, 158.
\textsuperscript{174} Oduyoye, “Letter to My Ancestors,” 2.
\textsuperscript{175} Oduyoye, \textit{Daughters of Anowa}, 9. Also “Either women and men are of equal value before God, both created in the image of the one God, or else we declare Genesis 1:26 a lie” (181). “we must respond to God with our own voice” (189).
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 3.
IV. Cultural and Biblical Hermeneutics

Feminist biblical readers must also become Decolonizing readers: those who demonstrate awareness of imperialism’s pervasive exploitative forces and its literary strategies of domination, who demonstrate a conscious adoption of feminist Decolonizing strategies, and who demonstrate a genuine search for liberating ways of interdependence between nations, races, ethnicities, classes, genders, and sexual and religious orientations.

Musa W. Dube is the chair of Biblical Studies Research for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Her most recent publication is a compilation of essays by African women which she edited entitled, Other Ways of Reading African Women and the Bible. Within the last four years she has authored Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, edited a massive collection of African and African Diaspora theologians, The Bible in Africa, Transactions, Trajectories and Trends, and written several articles and essays for various journals. Exploring the life and work of Musa W. Dube will reveal what the third goal of the Circle yields.

Background of Musa W. Dube

Musa W. Dube is a Motswana by birth, although her family originates from the Ndebele, a tribe originally part of the Zulu people in South Africa. During a period of expansion by the Afrikaners in South Africa and intra-African warfare in the 1820s and 1830s, the Ndebele people fled to Zimbabwe. The Dube family stayed there until the 1950s when enroaching white farm settlers forced Musa Dube’s parents to move to Botswana.

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178 Hermeneutics is a branch of theology that deals with principles of exegesis, or critical interpretation and explanation.
179 Musa W. Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), 43.
at least have land, the Dube’s experienced discrimination as black foreigners\textsuperscript{184} and anticipated little prosperity in the crowded, sandy region of Botswana.

In 1885, the British had declared Botswana a crown colony. The British sought to use the land as a passageway between the profitable mining and farming yields of central and southern Africa. Hence, the British government put little effort into developing this passageway of semiarid basin of the Kalahari.\textsuperscript{185} The Batswana did not voluntarily choose to become economically and politically dependent on the British crown. Because of colonial negligence, Botswana was one of the twenty poorest country’s in the world and largely dependent on British aid and meat exports when it finally became an independent republic in 1966, soon after Dube was born.\textsuperscript{186}

The diverse Batswana chiefdoms offered the people a flexible, though likewise largely unaccountable, means with which to face their hardships. Batswana chiefdoms comprised several different groups.

The Botswana chiefdoms were not closed communities. Rather, even though they possessed what might be called a patrilineal clan core, like most chiefdoms the polity was, ‘an association into which people may be born, absorbed by conquest, or enter of their own accord, and from which…they may depart voluntarily or be expelled.’\textsuperscript{187}

Musa Dube overcame obstacles involved with living in postcolonial poverty, underdevelopment, and patriarchal gender discrimination. She received an education and traveled to the UK and the US for further study ultimately receiving a Ph. D. from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Now a New Testament Senior Lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Botswana, Dube’s life experience motivates and informs her research interests of feminist theory, the gospels, and postcolonial studies.

\textsuperscript{184} “Batswakwa,” means “foreigners,” and “makwerekwere,” means “black foreigners.” Ibid.
\textsuperscript{185} Parson, Botswana: Liberal Democracy, 18 – 26.
\textsuperscript{186} Stevens, “Botswana,” 328.
Dube affronts interpretations of the Bible that justify gender discrimination, colonial calamity, and suffocating postcolonial international relations. Dube is an intellectual in her grammar of analysis and her perception of the people of Botswana and other Africans by correlation. Yet, she is also an active realizer/motivator of real African social change.

Dube is a biblical skeptic with an imagination. Due to her witness of racism, gender discrimination and world class exploitation, Dube says that she travels reluctantly through her readings of the bible. Sensitive to passages that promote inferiority and even imperialistic goals, Dube questions whether she really is part owner of the biblical stories meant for all people. She distrusts “the narrator’s masterful invitation to travel with him/her.” Just as Oduyoye encourages African women to create new images and practices to coincide with a “two-winged” life-giving prophecy, Dube desires readers of biblical texts to “take different paths, to plot new journeys, and to draw new maps and to establish new rules for travelling and hosting others.”

The Problem of Postcolonial Oppression and Patriarchy

“Two-Thirds World” women struggle to deal with both patriarchy and imperialism. Dube terms them, “doubly colonized.”

In her discussion of the postcolonial state, Dube verifies that even though the formal titles of ruler and ruled do not exist in the postcolonial era, the economic dependence, political manipulation, and entrenched poverty remain sustained realities. 70% of the world’s estimated 42 million people infected with HIV live in sub-Saharan Africa. The decisions of international economic institutions rarely consider the relief of Africa’s most oppressed as a primary concern. The U.S. alone produces enough food to feed the world six times over and holds enough resources to put unmatchable energy into HIV/AIDS prevention and anti-retroviral

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188 Oduyoye was similarly critical of African religion and culture in the previous chapter.
190 Ibid., 162.
191 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 113.
treatment. Western countries push poor countries to eliminate trade barriers, while they rigidly maintain their own. Patriarchy leaves two-thirds world women immobile, prone to sickness, and voiceless. The women in sub-Saharan Africa suffer the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection, being fifty percent more likely to contract the virus than men. Frustrated by gender discrimination, they also recognize that their patriarchal oppressors are victims of postcolonialism also.

Western feminists feel the pain of patriarchy in the Bible, and that pain inhibits them from knowing the healing power of Christ. Feminist critics have done an excellent job at creating gender inclusive language, new images and symbols, and have found ways to reinterpret texts in order to develop a usable past for women. Reading the Bible, two-thirds world biblical feminists have at least twice as many reasons to grieve, and they encounter at least twice as many stumbling stones in receiving Christ’s healing, liberation, and redemption.

Two-Thirds world biblical feminists have had little space in the theological world to express the double yoke of suffering they face. The promotion of cultural and biblical hermeneutics by the Circle offers Dube the opportunity to educate her Western counterparts about the experience of African women, and to invite them to participate with her in either’s redemption.

Dube engages in theology to challenge people to live more justly inclined to interdependence between the one-third and two-thirds world. Dube’s evidence of imperialism and patriarchy within the bible, her critique of western theologians for overlooking those themes, her delineation of a decolonizing method of biblical interpretation, and her mediation of meetings between the one-third and two-thirds world unravels some of her contribution to cultural and biblical hermeneutics.

**Imperialism and Patriarchy in the Bible**

To put it in Christian germs, the affirmation of suffering is part of the great yes to life as a whole.194

Liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Cornel West, Johann Baptist Metz, Dorothee Soelle, and even South African Allan Boesak tend to present examples of what to emulate in the Bible to overcome oppression. Dube’s theology ironically begins by explicating how the Bible promotes oppressive themes of patriarchy and imperialism – precisely that which she wants the world to avoid! Dube provokes her readers to take notice of imperialism and patriarchy in the bible and to take the references and allusions to both seriously. “Many narrative plots,” Dube says, “are designed to empower some travelers over their native hosts/hostesses and/or to suppress other travelers.”195 Dube describes how the books of Exodus and Joshua exude painful themes of conquering foreign lands and gender domination in her book, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible.*

Dube’s theology conveys how the book of Exodus can validate a moral claim to colonize foreign lands. In Genesis, Egypt represents a generous empire feeding victims of famine.196 However, the Egyptian empire enslaves the Israelite people in Exodus. So, God commands Pharaoh to “Let my people go” (Ex 5:1). Dube notices that the Israeliite bondage offers God the rationalization to free His people from Egypt and direct them towards the occupied Canaan. “Egyptian slavery reminds God” of His already existing plan “to send the Israelites to a promised land.”197

Land is the principle topic of imperial narratives. The land is available for the conqueror to either enrich or expend.198 The promise to give “the Israelites the land of Canaanite is, therefore, not peripheral or separable from their redemption from slavery in the book of

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195 Dube, “Batswakwa,” 156.
196 See the story of Joseph in Genesis 30 – 50.
Religious superiority and gold are often incentives to take land in colonizing literature. Indeed, the Israelites continue towards Canaan expecting to proclaim Yahweh as the one true God, to live financially secure in the “land flowing with milk and honey” (3:8), and to glorify their freedom and life as Yahweh’s chosen people. The land of Canaan is admittedly occupied, so the Israelites justify the conquerors’ ability to vanquish another people and land.

The moral claim for conquering Canaan in Exodus also promotes the act as a “duty to the natives.” Colonizers and the colonized are described as exclusive opposites,

Godly and ungodly, civilized and barbaric, manly and womanly, adult and childish, developed and underdeveloped, Christian and un-Christian, white and colored, and so on…

God’s people are specifically instructed to not have other gods or make idols in God’s covenant with them. (20:2-6, 23; 23:13). The Israelites must punish those who violate God’s covenant. The people of Canaan are idolaters (34:15) placing them in ignorance of the one true God of the universe and inferior to the Israelites. Thus, God commands the Israelites to “tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles” (34:13).

These images are painfully reminiscent of colonial invasions when European powers would overwhelm and ransack a village. Once masters over their subjects, the Europeans would force the Africans to adopt the European “civilized” culture and religion. The British punitively discouraged the Africans in Botswana to practice their native rituals and customs. Indeed, the Europeans felt, like the Israelites of Exodus and Joshua that they were, God’s “treasured possession out of all the peoples” (19:5).

God’s purpose of bringing the Israelites to Canaan continues in the Book of Joshua where the Israelites receive God’s direction to utterly demolish the native habitants of the promised land (Ex 23:24, Josh 8:26-27)! From Jericho to Negeb, “Joshua took the whole land,

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199 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 63.
200 Ibid., 60.
201 Ibid., 65.
202 Ibid., 65. emphasis is Dube’s.
according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses” (11:23). In the city of Ai, Joshua and his troops first burn down the city in an ambush, and then pursue the inhabitants that had fled eventually killing all twelve thousand of them. The King of Ai received the special treatment of death by hanging (8:1-29). All of this is done “according to the word of the Lord” (8: 27). Not all the native populations in Exodus are utterly destroyed as some, like the Gibeonites (9:21-23), “are allowed to survive as suppressed entities.”

Dube’s analysis of Exodus and Joshua presents the narrative as a story of imperializing rhetoric all too similar to colonial imperial subjugation and the continued domination and exploitation of the postcolonial era. Such arguments challenge the justice of actions by those among the world’s powerful class, and contest the capacity of sacred texts to provide an inspiring message for all people. These affronts intensify as Dube highlights gender and empire-building in Exodus.

Colonized Women and The Story of Rahab

Under Egyptian colonization women suffer under two systems of patriarchal oppression, but in the struggle for independence the roles of gender are overlooked. Yet in the Exodus story explicit patriarchal division of Israelite men and women resurfaces. As in 18th and 19th century imperialism, the woman has almost no role as the colonizer in the Exodus story except in how she may indirectly affect the goals of the male colonizers. Israelite women ensure that the men are not affected with sources of pollution in their days before battle. This task is far from dignifying since the source of unholiness capable of polluting her male counterparts is the woman herself! (19:15) Comparable to the relationship between Western women and Two-Thirds World women, the colonizing women in Exodus bear a significantly less degree of oppression than the colonized women.

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203 Exodus Ch. 14 – 40, These chapters are dedicated to emphasizing the holiness of the Israelites through the hewing of laws, covenant, purity rites, rituals, buildings, and God’s mighty acts.
204 Ibid., 69.
Dube highlights the story of Rahab in the book of Joshua to demonstrate imperial and patriarchal themes that are especially painful for African women to encounter. In the book’s second chapter, Joshua sends two spies to assess the scene at Jericho. The spies stay with Rahab, a prostitute. Rahab hides the men from servers of the King of Jericho who knock at her door looking for the Israelite spies. Being a harlot, Rahab carries the image of being open for any man’s taking. “She reflects the colonizer’s desire to enter and domesticate the land of Canaan.”

She also conveys a sense of her own inadequacy in how she welcomes the colonizers as a means to ensure her safety. These foreigners offer better protection than her own people! Rahab says that she has heard of what the Israelites did to the people of Ai, and that their Lord must be the one of heaven above. In return for the protection she gives them, she asks that they “in turn will deal kindly with my family” (2:12). Colonizers ideally dream that the colonized will proclaim the colonizers’ superiority or that “all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us” (2:24). Indeed, Dube describes how Rahab’s story contains the demeaning attitude of colonizers that colonized people, “require and beseech to be dominated.”

Biblical readers of the One-Third World exemplify Rahab as an example of a faithful woman submitting to the will of God, while the Two-Thirds World cringes at the story’s implication. Despite the risk of losing her local relationships Rahab follows the will of Joshua’s spies (representing the will of God). Dube says that for her and other victims of imperialism, “Rahab reminds us of our own stories–stories written about us, not for us, stories that are a nightmare to read.” Rahab is a sellout, advancing the promise of the colonizers, an unwanted model for this world’s victims of imperialism. At this point, Dube’s theology poses a significant quandary. If the Bible is so painful for African women and all those in the Two-Thirds World, then what does that imply about the Judeo-Christian text as a source of revelation?

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205 Ibid., 76.
206 Ibid., 78.
207 Ibid., 80.
Is it Possible to Read the Bible for Interdependence?

Finding imperialism in the Bible shocked me, a One-Third World Western white woman. If the Bible can be so wrong what does this say about how we should read the rest of the text? I found myself asking the following questions: Does Musa Dube want to completely scrap the stories of the Bible in favor of other more life giving and holistic narratives? If the Bible is so tainted does it offer any goodness at all? In her essay on knowing one’s “traveler” identity, Dube asks herself, “As a traveler who realizes that the world consists of story-maps of unequal power, what journeys am I prompted to take?” The book of Joshua, replete with violent ambush, is most known for its historical contribution. Still, the Bible, a composit work of God’s revelation, includes this “historical work.” How does Dube reconcile her opinion of the Bible as God’s Divine revelation for how to realize His glorious kingdom when it includes imperialist texts like the book of Joshua?

Though I was challenged to recognize imperialism in the Bible, I had few problems acknowledging and disregarding patriarchy in the Bible. Perhaps it is easier for me to reject gender discrimination in the Bible rather than imperialism because the former does not require a reformation of my own behavior. Indeed, Dube holds the West accountable for the “displacing power of the Bible,” and the displacing of the Two-Thirds World. My decisions as a consumer and voting U.S. citizen have far reaching effects on the world’s already marginalized and displaced. I need to apply my method of rejecting textual gender domination to textual imperialism. My unconscious bias demonstrates the importance of Dube’s call for interdependence between theologians of all worlds. Dube demonstrates the necessity to learn about stories other than our own in order to develop our compassion, understanding, and ability to become a world team and a world body, healing the world through Christ.

Dube is far from pronouncing the Bible obsolete. Indeed, her very conviction of the injustice of imperialism, gender, and all sorts of inequality stem from her belief that they are all
contrary to the will of God. In her analysis of Exodus, Joshua, and other biblical texts, Dube does not intend to mandate one standard interpretation. Rather she conveys how to read the Bible so that God’s truth shines forth over and above imperial and patriarchal ideologies. Throughout history, imperial powers have used the Exodus story to justify “condemnation and replacement of all that is foreign.” Yet, Dube explains how the same story can convey a biblical hermeneutic that adopts “a method of dialogue and mutual interdependence.” People today could still use biblical texts to justify cultural, social, and gender oppression. African women still read them with a painful heart wondering if the will of God commands them to willingly accept inferior status. So, Dube offers a solution. She hopes to inspire other feminist readers to develop skills of how to identify patriarchal and imperialist themes in narrative texts. One can almost hear her shout that ‘Redemption will be found for all’!

Stop and Listen

There is something wrong when analytical frameworks always come from outside…”

Unlike Dube who comes from a life story that makes her particularly sensitive to allusions and references to foreign domination and female victimization, many Western intellectuals tend not to read the bible with such baggage and resultant sensitivity. Dube calls herself a skeptical reader because she takes particular concern to decipher hope and inspiration in those texts that convey oppressive ideologies. Western readers, on the other hand, often do not name allusions to imperialism or patriarchy. Western feminists do emphasize patriarchal themes in narratives, yet still often fail to explicate references to imperialism. “Feminist readings have also bracketed the challenge of exposing and critiquing imperialist ideologies in cultural texts, hence participating in their maintenance.” By not recognizing the presence of either imperialism or patriarchy in written texts, readers indirectly promote their existence.

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208 Dube, “Botswana: Which traveler are you?” 156.
209 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 67.
210 Ibid., 67.
211 Dube, Other Ways of Reading, 18.
212 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 25.
Thus, Dube intends to use her work on biblical and cultural hermeneutics to challenge Western intellectuals to recognize imperialist and patriarchal ideologies within texts. She wants this recognition to lead to implications for how Westerners subsequently do theology and for how they live in contemporary society. Dube’s second purpose is to convey “decolonizing” methods of reading the bible for postcolonial subjects that lead to paradigms of interdependence which invite conversations and negotiations between “males and females, Two-Thirds World and One-Third World economic/political systems, black and white races, Christian and non-Christian cultures, the past and the present, and so on.”

Through her “missionizing” of the West and creating new space for biblical interpretation, Dube presents her solution to reconcile world disparity which is contrary to God’s will. Thus, readers, especially those from the One Third World need to “stop and listen” to find oppressive ideologies in Matthew; and evidence Western readers who have failed to recognize them.

**Patriarchy and Imperialism in Mt 15:21-28**

In this section of Matthew Jesus travels to Tyre and Sidon where he encounters a Canaanite woman. The woman shouts at Jesus to heal her demon-tormented daughter. Jesus ignores the woman. Instead he says to his disciples how he comes for those of “the house of Israel,” and that “it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (15:24,26). When the woman then proclaims that “even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table,” Jesus commends her faith and heals her daughter (15:27,28). Any remotely sensitive feminist must feel alarm hearing this story. The Canaanite woman does not even dispute the categories of dog and child potentially associated with her, but rather appears to insist on being helped as a dog! Dube does not simply read this story as an example of a man justifying the domination of women. She also recognizes that a Jew from Jerusalem associates the Canaanites, those from Tyre and Sidon, with dogs.

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Ibid., 198. These readings place self-serving interpretations above those advocating interdependence.
Within the context of Matthew’s whole gospel, Dube explains how Matthew 15:21-28 conveys imperialist ideologies. She reminds her readers that “Matthew is a rhetorical text engineered within and by a particular historical setting.”[214] This text of Matthew occurs within the Roman imperial occupation. The gospel portrays the imperial powers as holy and acceptable throughout the book. Seven chapters previous to Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman, Jesus responds immediately to the request of a Roman centurion to heal a distress at his home (8:5-13). Upon the trial of Jesus, Pilate, one of the highest Roman officials, wipes his hands “of this man’s blood” (27:24). The author’s prevalent desire to connect Jesus to his Hebrew tradition distinguishes the gospel of Matthew from the other gospels. Several references to Jesus’ descendence from Abraham associates Jesus with the biblical father’s inheritance, “that by his seed all nations of the earth shall gain blessing” (Gen 22:3). At the end of the gospel Jesus commissions his disciples to “make disciples of all nations” in order to teach them to “obey everything” that he has “commanded them” (Mt 28:19-20). Dube emphasizes that this vision not only advances the right for Israelites to expand to other nations, but to do so in a dehumanizing fashion. Talking to the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:24, Jesus again accentuates his connection to the Israelite community saying that he is “sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

The author of Matthew introduces Jesus as “the Messiah, the Son of David” recalling God’s promise to raise up David’s offspring and to establish the kingdom of his throne forever.[215] The allusion to Jesus as the son of David pervades the whole gospel including the recognition by the Canaanite woman that Jesus is the “Son of David” (15:22). As the awaited King of the Jews, Jesus is a potential threat to the Roman empire. However, Dube notes that the author of Matthew conveniently portrays Jesus as politically harmless to the massive Empire by taking particular effort to demonstrate that Jesus is a “meek and lowly king” who dies silently.

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[214] Ibid., 127.
Knowing the message of Jesus corresponds with God’s purpose in the Hebrew Bible strengthens a Christian’s faith. Yet Jesus is not a typical leader who desires power and riches for himself. Dube explains that the explication of these themes can be painful for Two-Thirds World readers, especially African women. Mt 15:21-28 embraces “imperialistic values and strategies” as well as employs “gender images that reinforce the oppression of women.”

Dube’s exegesis of Matt 15:21-28 makes the imperialist and patriarchal overtones of the passage blatantly obvious. Although, Western readers often ignore these overtones, and thus overlook the pain of the Two-Thirds World readers.

**Western Silence**

Dube explains that within white western male readings of the Bible, “the positive and negative comparisons of social status based on class, gender, and race, are swiftly passed over.” The readings do often recognize the distinction between Israelites, Canaanites and other Gentiles as serious, however, in order to emphasize the mission for Israelite Christians “to create more people like themselves…that these (Gentile) people must be taught to obey.” Dube does not suggest that these Western readers are not articulating theological truths, but that they are not inclusive of the whole truth.

Dube uses the work of Jack D. Kingsbury as an example of Western white-male theology. Kingsbury explains that Jesus rejects the Canaanite woman during a time when his ministry is still limited to Israel. The mission extends to all people only after Jesus’ resurrection. Dube argues that by addressing the implications of the missionizing of people in a spiritual sense, and not a cultural, gender, or political sense, Kingsbury “brackets,” or neglects, the presence of imperialism and patriarchy. He does not consider how people use such readings to

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215 2 Sam 7:12-16; 1 Chron 17:11-14; Ps 89:3.
216 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist*, 140.
217 Ibid., 155.
218 Ibid., 165.
justify the oppression of others. By not addressing these issues, Kingsbury effectively endorses the mission model. Similarly, even though many western readers stress Jesus as a “servant king” his believers follow him as the dominant authority. Referring to Jesus’ rejection of the Canaanite woman, Matthew Henry’s online concise biblical commentary points out, “that there may be love in Christ’s heart while there are frowns in his face; and it encourages us, though he seems ready to slay us, yet to trust in him.”

Dube, a sensitive postcolonial reader, would immediately recognize how such a reading justifies a victim’s acceptance of brutal treatment by an oppressor. It seems, that Dube asks for such interpretations to be coupled with a distinction between Christ’s heart and that of exploitive economic structures, imperial practices, or an abusive husband. At minimum, she challenges western readers to be notably aware of the history of one’s neighbors. In this globally interconnected society, one’s neighbor includes someone from Africa to Mexico.

Even Western Feminist biblical readers fail to address how texts inform international and gender relations today. Janice Capel Anderson praises the faith of the Canaanite woman for being able to expand Jesus’ mission to the Gentiles and to heal her daughter. She does not consider the imperial context at all. She does not deconstruct the power relations between the Israelites and Gentiles in comparison with today’s power relations. In her reading of Matthew 15:21-28, Amy-Jill Levine emphasizes how the universalistic mission brought by Christ complements the exclusive mission of the Jews. With Christ, the privilege of Jews as God’s people extends to include all people. Levine neglects to articulate what she means by universalistic. Must the concept of a long haired Jesus be fitting for everyone? Must the best thing for all people be to attend church inside a building every Sunday?

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220 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 171.
Dube argues that biblical texts and some interpretations on their own are not universally meaningful for all cultures. Unquestioned universalism promotes the right of privileged classes to dictate what is best for the rest of the world’s classes. Blanket universal statements read danger to Dube who senses how they threaten a person’s dignity to choose her own faith, practice of religion themselves, or their own economic, political, and social structures.

The social locations of biblical studies in the Western metropolitan centers, which also represent the imperialist centers, are instrumental in the bracketing of imperialism as a systematic social evil that takes up organized forms of textual constructions and that depends on literary practitioners who maintain the power relations they propound.222

According to Dube, theology that does not address how biblical texts are not meant to justify oppression of the past and present is not only incomplete theology, but theology that promotes the oppression and victimization of others, particularly those in the Two-Thirds World. Not naming imperialist and patriarchal ideologies within texts silently okays the DeBeers bloody monopoly on the diamond trade, the devastating insistence of the IMF for Russia to achieve “privatization at all costs,”223 the exploitation of Two-Thirds world workers by multi-national corporations, the Rwandan genocide, and the inaction towards relieving the high percentage of African women infected with HIV/AIDS. Dube believes that such silence is an attempt, unconscious or not, by readers to maintain their privileged living. But what they do not say makes their theology false, contrary to the will of God and redemption of Christ.

Dube wants all people hearing the Bible to recognize the life transforming power of yielding completely to Christ. Dube wants all readers to form interpretations free from any potential acceptance of demeaning human subjugation. To remove colonizing themes from texts and interpretations, or to “decolonize them,” requires simple contextual clarification. The following section describes this process of Dube’s “decolonizing methods.”

Rahab’s Prism: A Decolonizing Method

222 Ibid., 169.
223 Stiglitz, Globalization, 54-58.
Since not all readers instinctively recognize imperial and patriarchal ideologies in texts, Dube has developed methods to help make readers aware of such allusions and how to subvert their oppressive implications. Rahab’s reading prism represents Dube’s most imaginative vision for how to read for equity, liberation, and interdependence.

The decolonizing method of Rahab’s reading prism uses stories like that of Rahab as different lenses through which to read other texts and invoke needed action. As a harlot, Rahab’s body is open for any man’s taking. She reminds political gender readers that patriarchal oppression affects women of different cultures, though at varying degrees. Yet Rahab’s body is also particularly open to foreign men. Their “power includes taking possession of her permanently, destroying her native compatriots, and possessing her land—that is, historical imperial oppression.”

“Women of different cultures may be able to speak of various forms of discursive colonization (patriarchy), but not all of them experience double colonization.”

Firstly, Rahab’s prism “highlights the historical fact of colonizing and decolonizing communities,” opening the reader’s identity interests to “feminist practitioners of different classes, races, cultures, religions, nations, ethnicities, sexualities, and worlds.” Feminist readers of colonizing nations can then choose to read for decolonization, while doubly colonized women can resist prioritizing the struggle against imperial oppression over that of patriarchy.

Secondly, Rahab’s prism encourages looking through the lens of other “Rahabs” who have witnessed resurrection. The decolonizing Rahab “knows and recognizes the pen that contructed her and intertextually subverts it.” She rises against imperial annihilation and patriarchal oppression by demonstrating how it is false, creating new language, retelling history, and “constructing radically decolonizing hybrid narratives.”

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224 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 121.
Another lens of Rahab’s prism offers a view of resurrection from outside of the biblical texts. This could be through “new narratives of native and international relations of equity, difference, and liberation.” Another lens could be the AIC practice of “listening to the Spirit of God speaking to them about the current needs of their society.” Indeed, Rahab’s prism affirms that God can reveal the power of His resurrection in ways unique to each individual.

Rahab’s reading prism is a postcolonial feminist eye of many angles. It encourages women to see the world as God does: transgressing boundaries and embracing all cultures. Rahab’s prism challenges women to utilize new spaces and form political coalitions to cultivate liberative and interdependent hermeneutics and structures. How the world would change if biblical readers regularly “looked through the lens” of a child in Afghanistan, migrant worker in Mexico, or the Queen of England! Dube does not simply want readers to articulate themselves mindful of the painful oppression of others, she wants them to so mindfully act to change the world.

The previous sections on apprehending ideologies in Matthew 15:21-28 and examining the influence of Western theologians have already employed Rahab’s prism. The following conveys how African Initiated Church women “move toward decolonizing feminist practices,” and “cultivate a vision of liberating interdependence.”

More African Readers

Due to its cultural, social, and political biases Western biblical interpretation must not be the assumed standard for all. Hence, even though it helps to encourage westerners to do more interdependent and just readings of the Bible, Dube underlines the significance of encouraging more Africans to do their own readings. In a book she edited, The Bible in Africa, Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends, Dube compiles various works of African biblical scholars in order to develop answers to the questions of: What is African and African biblical scholarship and how

225 Ibid., 122.
is it distinct from the West? What is happening with the Bible in Africa and what is available to ordinary Africans? Dube’s contributions include an essay on the Lord’s Prayer in the global economic era that calls Christians to implement just rule. Despite the recognized benefit of these works to theology in Africa, Dube apprehends how “socially engaged” African biblical scholars, who have often had some experience of higher education in the West, do not represent all that is completely African. Thus, finding ways for those in the African Initiated Churches (AICs) to have their readings heard by the greater scholarly and lay realm, steers a substantial trajectory of Musa Dube’s theology.

Liberative Readings in the AICs

Christianity has modified the African worldview, on the other hand, Africans reinterpreted the Christian message.

African Initiated Churches have historically fomented suspicion among the Mainline and European established churches. Their dramatic incorporation of healings, visions, color symbolism, and high rates of illiterate members and ministers are uncomfortably too reminiscent of African traditional religion for some in Mainline churches. Yet, it is exactly this distinct allegiance to that which is African that engages Musa Dube’s alert attention.

The seeds of African Initiated Churches began to sprout at the turn of the 20th Century. The founders and members did not accept the insistence of the inferiority of African culture and religion as imposed by Western colonialism. Native Africans had already established what are known as Ethiopian churches that, besides an “African face,” were really replicas of their mother Protestant or Pentecostal churches in polity and liturgy. Zionists, in contrast, one of the first African Initiated Churches, integrated African religious methods and techniques into

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226 Dube uses the example of Mary Magdalene.
Christian categories.229 Some established theologians believe that AICs represent a truly African Christianity.230

Today the AICs represent the largest growing Christian community in Africa.231 Indeed, Dube cannot hide her enthusiasm for the AICs unashamed challenge to imperialism and patriarchy, that champions the interdependence of their history, relationships, and cultural experience. Even though in the last chapter Oduyoye criticizes AICs for limiting formal leadership roles available to women, Dube recognizes these women as central contributors to the foundation, leadership, and spiritual renewal of the African Initiated Churches.

Women in AICs testify to how Africans were connected with the Holy Spirit before Westerners brought the bible to them. Their assertive proclamations and methods of demonstrating the Bible’s advocation for their liberation as African women connected with “socially engaged theologians” around the globe could ignite the revolution of interdependence that Dube envisions. Working towards this vision in her own theological work, Dube provides ample space for the readings of her sisters in AICs.

**AIC Women’s Reading of Matthew 15:21-28**

*I always tell people that when God spoke to me through the Spirit, God never opened the Bible to me. Instead, God’s Spirit told me to begin a church and heal God’s people which is what I am doing.*232 Bishop Virginia Lucas

Having interacted with AIC Women leaders, Dube notes that the women credit their leadership abilities and roles to divine revelation or vision. “The Spirit that reveals and gives one a vocation and power operates with significant independence from the written word.”233

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232 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist*, 42., the emphasis is Dube’s.
233 Ibid., 42.
Dube asks Bishop Virginia Lucas how she defends her position as a female leader in the church when the bible seems to advocate otherwise. The Bishop replies, as in the above quotation, “God never opened the Bible to me.” AIC women and men, rely heavily on Moya, or the Spirit, to discern God’s activity in their lives. Moya is the sensed presence of God in the human spirit. The Bible serves as one of God’s avenues of communication mediated through Moya. In their theology of Moya, AIC women assert that lack of formal exposure to the Bible does not prevent a relationship with the Divine.

Moya affirms the women’s abilities to create and envision transformative interpretations that resist discrimination “of race and gender relations; of individuals, classes, and nations.” In order to gather interpretations of Matt 15:21-28 from various AIC women, Dube administered a questionnaire and recorded sermons during the summer of 1994. All the women responding to the questionnaire assumed that Jesus traveled to Tyre and Sidon (v.21) to do good. This assumption leads them to healing interpretations of the story that are anti-imperialist, feminist, and inclusive of distinct religions and cultures.

The readings of Matthew 15:21-28 by AIC women demonstrate how the women use the bible as a means to justify political resistance and hope for individual and communal survival. Eleven of the women interviewed recognize the story on one level as an incidence of racism. Jesus, the Israelite, rejects the Canaanite woman, even comparing her to a dog. One woman parallels the situation to the system of apartheid in South Africa. Yet because of how they choose

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235 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 192.

236 For a detailed description of the methods used to collect their interpretations see “Reading with African Overtures,” Semeia 73.

237 Unable to access the detailed description concerning the questionnaire, I do not know how many total women were interviewed. My estimate is 15 to 20.
to read the references to Canaan and Israel, all of the women affirm that Jesus was here for all people.

All of the women interviewed interpret “Israel” as a reference to “those who believe.” Accordingly, Jesus’ statement that he is sent “only to the lost sheep of Israel” (v. 23) refers to lost believers. Because of the Canaanite woman’s strong faith (v. 21, 28) Jesus does not need to “waste his time” with her. The only reason that the AIC women believe why he eventually does give her heed is because her daughter is a lost sheep being possessed by demons (v. 21). The AIC women overcome claims to racism and cultural superiority by distinguishing people according to levels of faith. Similarly, the AIC women interpret Jesus’ reply to the woman, “It is not good to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs,” (v. 26) as one of Jesus’ parables. The children refers to those who have faith and the dogs as those who do not. The women refuse to definitively associate the terms “children” and dogs” with either Canaanites or Israelites.

This space of healing becomes their political discourse for confronting social ills, not as helpless beings who are neglected by God, but as those who are in control and capable of changing their social conditions. This confrontation of social ills has undoubtedly made the AICs the biggest and most popular movement, for its members address the political struggles of Africa and offer solutions.

By not distinguishing between the culturally different Canaanites and Israelites, and thus recognizing faith as the central concern of Christ, the AIC women decolonize or remove issues of imperialism and racism from the text. Many of the women attest Jesus’ harsh reaction to the Canaanite women as a means to test her faith. Focusing on the concern of faith also affirms to the women that Africans can be holders of exceptional faith. Africans can be loved preferentially by God even though their historically white or wealthier neighbors would never associate them with greatness.

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238 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 188.
239 Ibid., 195.
Dube never directly asks what the African’s faith implies for daily life. Although it appears that faith makes one want to live holistically in loving fair cooperation with all people as Christ did. One woman specifically mentions that since Christ overcomes racism in the story “we should overcome racism.” These women may not be offering or influencing specific policy or structural adjustments, but they offer a means for African women and men to affirm their God given dignity – which is the foundation for positive anti-imperialist social, political, and economic change.

The AIC women’s readings of MT 15:21-28 undoubtedly endorse their dignity as women. Believing in Moya’s communication over everything allows the AIC women to use the scripture of Matthew 15:21-28 as a means to confirm what they already sense as Divine inspiration in their lives. They already recognize women as leaders over communities of faith and capable of exemplary faith, hence the bible must maintain that as well. Eight of the AIC women specifically ascribe the Canaanite woman with the “children” of Jesus’ comment, on account of her faith or process towards greater faith. The majority said that “dogs” refers not to the woman, but to demonic spirits.

One of the respondents, Bishop Mmangwedi, gave the saying of Jesus in v. 26, “It is not good to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs,” an ironic interpretation. She believes Jesus agrees with the woman’s plea for help saying “Indeed it is not good to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs. Rather, it must go to those who deserve it, like you!” Bishop Mmangwedi substantiates her reading with evidence from the whole ministry of Jesus. She then interprets the woman’s response, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” (vs. 27) as underlining and even surpassing the words of Jesus. At first the disciples shun the Canaanite woman. Some of the women articulate that Jesus could, therefore, be reprimanding the disciples as dogs in verse twenty-six because of their misconduct.

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Ibid., 190.
There are a number of ways Jesus’ treatment of this woman could be used to justify gender or cultural oppression: He ignores her, he says he is here only for the lost house of Israel knowing she is a Canaanite, her refers to her potentially as a dog, and ultimately affirms of her self-condemnation. Even if Jesus’ statements previous to verse twenty-eight are meant to reprimand the Canaanite woman, the AIC women do not interpret it as potentially justifying gender inferiority. They feel that “the Canaanite woman was insisting that, regardless of the nature of her inadequacy, she was not incapable of improving, that is, of picking up the crumbs.” The Canaanite woman must have been acknowledging her ability to overcome all odds through faith in Christ, since Jesus rewards her great faith by praising her and healing her daughter (vs. 28) Thus, Dube highlights how the AIC women read the story so that a woman’s divinely inspired dignity and empowerment are not limited to prescribed roles but praised for her endless possible contributions.

The interreligious reading strategies of the AIC women offer “a radical transgression of boundaries” and inspiring model of liberating interdependence. These women “fearlessly yoke biblical texts with African religions traditions.” Besides integrating African religious worldviews of Moya, or the Spirit, to act as a divine agent that heals and empowers women and men, sermons by AIC women exemplify other interreligious fusion.

In general, the presentations of scriptural interpretation in sermons among AICs are viewed as more important than the actual content. Communal and participatory interpretation, described subsequently, are common practice in AIC churches. During a service all members have the right to address the congregation through preaching. Other members may also contribute to interpretation by occasionally interrupting a preacher with a song or related prayer. Most of the sermons Dube observes, assume that “a story well told is a story well

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241 Ibid., 189.
242 Ibid., the emphasis is mine.
243 Ibid., 194.
244 Ibid.
interpreted.’” Some women and churches thus employ indigenous methods of “graphically bringing the story to life through a dramatic narration,” supported with songs as opposed to explicitly defining its meaning. Repetition of verses and inflections of tone are also used as means of interpretation simply by accentuating particular themes.

Not every church Dube encountered employed communal, participatory, dramatic, or repetitive modes of interpretation. In churches where one preacher spoke to a silent community, the preacher would be more likely to incorporate examples from every day life and other biblical stories to interpret the passage. The women of the AICs are clearly not afraid to incorporate a distinct religious tradition into their experience of understanding God. The wise and creative integration of a different religious tradition offers a “liberation vision for today’s multicultural and multifaith global village—it shows how difference can be encountered, nurtured, and critically reappropriated.”

Questions

The readings of the AIC women do raise inevitable questions. (1) Is Moya simply a term or conception utilized to defend what makes them feel good, as imperialist readings make the heads of power feel justified in their actions? In other words, do they simply offer a relativist approach that advocates whatever the individual determines is best for her? (2) What is the importance of the contextual background in the biblical text that the AIC women are in effect ‘bracketing’? (3) Is Dube merely replacing one standard interpretation with another? (4) Dube supplies a framework for how to tell if a reading is imperialist, but do the AICs require a framework to check if they are being exclusive?

Firstly, the Moya readings do not leave the women in contented complacency with a boost of superficial positive energy. The faith of the Canaanite woman serve as a challenging example for these AIC women to face suffering and sorrow so as not to gloss them over, but to

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245 Ibid., 192.
live transforming them into peace and joy. Affirming that they are capable of great faith does not delude the AIC women that the path of faith is easy or assures that one gets what one thinks one wants. It is not easy to overcome racism, yet the Moya reading of the Bible challenges them to do so. Those in the AICs earnestly attempt, as other readers of sacred scripture, to read what is there in context of the whole story. As one woman quoted Rev 22:18, “to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book.” Yet, what about how they seem to overlook things that may be in the text?

The AIC women ‘ bracket’ innuendoes of the text that have been used to justify man’s sinful patriarchal and imperialist practices. Despite limited theological education, they do not overlook significant cultural context of the texts. The women perceived the significance of Jesus’ travel to Canaan as an Israelite. In ‘ bracketing’ the women are choosing to ignore how the story could be used to justify gender or imperial oppression. However, further relevant contextual information should not be guarded from their access. Perhaps one of Dube’s goals in suggesting partnership between “socially engaged” and independent, often secluded, theologians is to encourage theological education among these more often isolated communities.

By promoting the AIC women’s readings of the bible, Dube is not promoting an interpretation that all people across the globe should adopt. Rather, she is promoting a manner of interpretation. Their methods of reading biblical text or giving sermons while insisting on the authority of the unwritten word of the Spirit allows the Bible’s message of liberation and freedom to speak to their experience.

Dube does not provide a specific framework to check that the AIC women are not advocating their own cultural superiority. However, for all matters of faith, the surest way to ‘ check’ if one is on God’s path, or if interpretation accords with God’s will, is to look for the

247 Ibid., 194.
fruits of the Spirit. (Gal 5:16-26) The readings of the AIC women do not result in vengeance, bitterness, arrogance, jealousy, hatred, or discord. But the Moya readings do promote “love, JOY, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Gal:5:22-24). Yet, Dube must recognize that like all things human, the readings of the AIC women could become tainted by sinful nature. Corresponding to Dube’s insistence on interdependence, reading while in dialogue with others limits misinterpretation.

Dube responds to the questioning of AIC interpretation by pointing to John 14:26. “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” The reading of the AIC women is Godly, she declares, since the Bible calls all people to depend directly on the Spirit.

Summary
It is against this historical background—political protest of racial and religious discrimination, a search for cultural liberation through integrating biblical views with African religious views, and an experience of God’s spirit empowering both women and men of various races to serve creation—that the interpretive practices of Botswanan AIC women should be understood. Their approach should be seen not only as a mode of political resistance but also a demonstrated will to cultivate a space for liberating interdependence in God’s creation. Their approach resists both patriarchy and imperialism.

Erasing history, even if it is painful, is never a good idea. It is important that African women remember how they have been and are oppressed as a means to develop appropriate affirmations for themselves. Their biblical readings affirm that they, as African women, have the potential to have great faith, and are worthy in the eyes of God. Dube’s theology moves beyond avoiding negative hermeneutics. Dube reads and develops frameworks for others to read for interpretations of the Bible that initiate progressive responses to scripture and that offer truly human fulfilling alternatives.

Dube affirms both scholarly “socially engaged” and Semoya readings of the bible as valid methods of interpreting scripture. She does not try to highlight one’s importance over the

24 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 192.
24 Ibid., 42, the emphasis is mine
other by laying guilt or emphasizing who has the larger ‘burden’ in interpretation. She recognizes how every reader must challenge themselves to allow for messages that disrupt their comfort level, to advocate liberation for specifically economically and politically oppressed individuals in Africa, and to overcome obstacles to having their interpretations heard and understood. To be liberated from postcolonial oppression, African women and the rest of the Two-Thirds world community need to have cooperation with the One-Thirds World. Contact with women of AICs can liberate the One-Thirds World. Dube could not be more sure of her conviction that defeating patriarchy and postcolonialism requires interdependence. Dube suggests that scholars need not “unlearn” what they have learned, but rather embrace new methods of mapping liberating interdependence. Dube tellingly admires the assertive subversion of postcolonial and patriarchal oppression by the AIC women and herself works for interdependence with enthusiasm.

What does Dube’s interdependence between socially engaged biblical scholars and Semoya readers, or between the Two-Thirds world and the One-Thirds world practically involve? Dialogue, conversation, humility, boldness, and action must all occur in order to realize true interdependence. Besides achieving scholarly and interpretive interchange through publications such as The Bible in Africa, Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible, and Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible, Dube participates in local and global initiatives to fight HIV/AIDS.\(^{249}\)

The next section will complete the presentation of the Circle agenda. Having assessed and formulated ideals about women in culture and religion and liberative biblical interpretation, how do members of the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians make their ideals a reality?

V. Ministries and Theological Education and Formation

*Linking Faith and Life*

The other three goals of the Circle focus on African women in religion and culture, biblical hermeneutics, and stories of past and present female ‘ministers’ and theologians. The fourth goal encourages the Circle member to put her theology into action. By promoting Ministries and Theological Education and Formation, Circle members are being the church and recruiting others to live and be the church for Africa.

In the Bible ministry is anything and everything done for the glory of God. For Circle members ministry means taking their concerns and yielding them into programs of practicality and efficacy that directly strive to change those situations of concern. Ministry means managing, staffing, or supporting a local counseling center for female victims of abuse. Ministry means providing extra food and shelter to those women and families who do not earn enough to cover their basic needs. Ministry means providing women in their communities with knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention, what to do if they become infected, and how to rally governments and international organizations to put more of their resources and energy into the fight against Africa’s plague. Ministers selflessly reach out to the poorest and most dehumanized members of the community. Circle members in ministry pray that through their example men and women will recognize the leaders of faith which God has assigned.

The 2002 conference for The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Addis Abbaba, Ethiopia, focused on “Sex, Stigma and HIV/AIDS –challenging religion, culture and social practices.” Dr. Kanyoro Musimbi, coordinator of the Circle, “challenged church leaders to teach their faithful adherents that God created our bodies as they are and we do not need to

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250 Centre for Constructive Theology (CCT) Brochure.
251 Rom 12:6; 2nd Cor 12:9.
http://www.worldywca.org/news_items/archive/circle.html
transform them to please anyone under the guise of culture.”

In the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, its treatment and root causes are the primary focus of Circle ministry.

Dr. Musa Dube has highly involved herself in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. She has also compiled “Africa Praying: a Handbook on Sensitive HIV/AIDS Sermons and Liturgy,” designed to help pastors incorporate “a theology of healing and compassion into worship services.” Such work is revolutionary for church leadership which, over the past ten years, has condemned HIV/AIDS as a plague for sinners, and for a people that have feared acknowledging its existence. In September, Dube designed a simple service for those in Nairobi, Kenya to speak the name of a dead loved one and light a candle. Dube has also edited a work for the WCC entitled, HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes. She and other Circle theologians believe Theological Education must integrate the causes, preventions, and complications surrounding HIV/AIDS into biblical studies for the holistic formation of more leaders for today.

Nyambura J. Njoroge, Circle theologian, wrote an article for The Ecumenical Review in July of 2001 entitled “Transforming Ministerial Ecumenical Formation.” In the article she outlines a holistic approach to theological education and formation while emphasizing its crucial significance for creating critical engagement of the church in the world. Njoroge believes holistic theological education and formation requires: creative community engagement, in-depth research, wrestling with the bible or ecumenical and liberative biblical hermeneutics, attention to institutional church leadership including a critical self-evaluation of formation in

253 Ibid.
256 “Children and young people should be recruited, taught and encouraged to take up leadership in God’s vineyard, however small the task might be. They are not the leaders of tomorrow or the church of tomorrow, as some say: they are full participants today in the life and mission of the church including exercising leadership,” writes Njoroge, “Transforming Ministerial Ecumenical Formation,” The Ecumenical Review, (July, 2001), 7.
theological institutions and management which are typically for full time ordained and commissioned workers of the church, and equipping the mass numbers of church volunteers.\textsuperscript{257} For all of this to happen, Njoroge acknowledges that those in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, “whose main objective is to recruit and guide women to research, write and publish,” must sacrifice some of their own publishing time for the raising up of new leaders.\textsuperscript{258}

In South Africa, the Centre for Constructive Theology models the Core of the Circle’s fourth mission: to encourage new leaders to write theology for Africa and to minister directly to the needs of Africa. The following section describes the needs of South Africa, how the mission of the Centre desires to meet those needs, and an in-depth look at two of the Centre’s programs.

\textbf{Circle Initiative in South Africa: Centre for Constructive Theology}

Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Circle member from Malawi, is the Director of The Centre for Constructive Theology (CCT) in Durban, South Africa. Phiri has edited and written various publications for The Circle including: \textit{Her-stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa} 2002; “Doing Theology in Community” 1997; and the Centre’s annual \textit{Journal of Constructive Theology}.

The Centre for Constructive Theology (CCT) was created in 1996 by the faculty of Theology at the University of Durban Westville to provide a positive response to “the challenges of transformation and reconstruction in the new South Africa.”\textsuperscript{259} The Centre’s objective is “to bridge the gap between formal theological education and the practical concerns and needs of the peoples of South Africa, through research, advocacy and outreach.”\textsuperscript{260} Beneficiaries of CCT’s programs are almost all from African Initiated Churches. Located in an

\textsuperscript{257} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{259} CCT Brochure
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
office at the Ecumenical Center in downtown Durban, spacious enough for their desks, Prof. Phiri and three staff members work long hours to achieve the Centre’s goal.

CCT is located in a country and a province battling severe socio-economic struggles. In 1994, South Africa made, what has been called, a *miraculously peaceful* transition from the brutally oppressive minority ruled apartheid government to a democratic government representative of the majority of South Africans. Julian Kunnie’s book, *Is Apartheid Really Dead?* examines the political contradictions and social inequality of contemporary South Africa. He challenges that change in post-apartheid South Africa “has been *cosmetic* in character and more *symbolic* than substantial.” Indeed, 13 Rand had the value of one dollar in 2000, and unemployment measured 40% in 2002. Using statistics from 2000, Kunnie outlines that South Africa is still far from fully actualized reconciliation and development:

> The new government has constructed houses that are defective and woefully small to address Black family needs in 90 percent of the cases. The electrification of townships has not addressed the fundamental structures of overcrowded urban townships...Over 5 million people either still live in shacks or are landless...The Bank of England’s recently auctioning 25 tons of gold with plans to sell off another 80,000 jobs has threatened to be lost as the gold price rapidly falls. Ironically, South Africa had agreed to the planned sale of 300 tons of gold by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

If that were not enough, South Africa bears 12% of the world’s HIV/AIDS infected population with less than one percent of the world’s total population. There are an estimated 5,000,000 people infected with HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), the province within which CCT operates, suffers its own extreme of hardships. One of the nation’s poorest provinces, it is home to the nation’s highest

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261 Apartheid was a system of total racial separation. From 1948 until 1994 the South Africa was under this dehumanizing system of government. For further information about the apartheid system, the liberation struggle, the Church’s response, and efforts for post-apartheid reconciliation and reconstruction see: *The Mind of South Africa* by Allister Sparks; *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, (1994); *Christian Resistance to Apartheid* by Daryl M. Balia (1989). No Future Without Forgiveness, by Desmond Tutu (1997.) Many other resources including films, textbooks, and journal articles exist.


263 [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za) Today 6.5 Rand equal a dollar, although unemployment is still high.

264 Kunnie, *Is Apartheid Really Dead?*, 46.

265 UNAIDS/WHO Epidemiological Fact Sheet on South Africa: 2002 Update;
infection rate of HIV/AIDS.\textsuperscript{266} Aswhin Desai echoes the study of Julian Kunnie in his book, \textit{We Are the Poors}, by presenting community case studies to argue that since 1994 economic disparity in South Africa has deepened and new forms of political solidarity and resistance have formed. Desai includes a case study on the township of Mpumalanga, an area of outreach for The Center for Constructive Theology.

Mpumalanga, historically a seed of independent governance, was a war ground of AK47s, G3s, handguns, and 9mm pistols during the 1980s when residents fought for or against “national liberation” or Zulu self-determination.” Today, the former ANC\textsuperscript{267} and IFP\textsuperscript{268} enemies unite against social issues. Although the resistance is less violent consisting more of dynamic community meetings and “ten rand marches”, a student at University of Durban Westville was shot in May 2000 during a peaceful protest against the exclusion of poor students from the university. Some feel the government has responded with apartheid like ruthlessness to the township’s resistance. Commenting on the UDW incident a black newspaper writer called for “tougher” action against the student protesters.\textsuperscript{269}

KZN is also home to the Zulu warrior culture that traditionally constrains women to roles of subservience. Gender inequality manifests itself in economics, politics, and the AIDS crisis. Even though one-hundred of South Africa’s four-hundred parliamentary members are women Kunnie argues that “the question of justice for women…since 1994 essentially has been rhetorical.”\textsuperscript{270} “Close to 2 million Black women are still forced to work as cooks, maids, gardeners, and nannies for the white community and for elitist Black families, earning an

\textsuperscript{267} African National Congress
\textsuperscript{268} Inkatha Freedom Party
\textsuperscript{269} Above paragraph information taken from p 1-14 and p.82-91 of Ashwin Desai, \textit{We are the Poors}, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 1-14 and 82-91. Between 1998 and 2000 some 3500 residents of lost their jobs in Mpumalanga. In 2000, the Durban UniCity Council installed water meters in Mpumalanga forcing residents to increase their accustomed flat rate of R10, and inflating bills for lights and rates from R26 to R200!
\textsuperscript{270} Kunnie, \textit{Is Apartheid Really Dead}? 232.
average of R300 ($50) per month for a forty-hour plus workweek.” In the rural areas, 42% of women are heads of households, and the majority of them live in poverty. Women suffer the highest rate of infection, being fifty percent more likely to contract HIV/AIDS than men. A startling 36.5% of women in KZN have HIV/AIDS. Twenty to twenty-four year old women in the province suffer the highest infection rate, with 39.3% of them estimated to have HIV/AIDS. The number of women church leaders and those involved in theological formation is parallels anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. Women no doubt experience double layers of suffering in South Africa.

The Centre’s programs encourage practical Christian thinking among Kwa-Zulu’s most oppressed populations: women, and the poor (both of which are typically from AICs). In bridging the gap between theology and everyday contexts, CCT must address topics such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, and general frustration with the government’s seeming lack of response within its programs.

CCT currently has four main programs.

i. The Program on Women in the Church and Society
ii. The Program for Theological Education by Extension (TEE)
iii. The Program for Economic Renewal in African Initiated Churches
iv. The Program for HIV/AIDS

Prof. Phiri is the Coordinator of the Program on Women in the Church and Society. Through scholarships and the dissemination of researched information, the program encourages “African women, to engage in theological studies,” and to realize how their culture and theology can empower them for leadership. Phiri believes that providing “scholarships for more African women to study theology within the African continent” will develop the most effective responses to the issues that affect women. CCT acts as a centre for the TEE students in the TEE program offering a unique opportunity for women and men with minimal education.

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271 Ibid., 234.
to receive nationally accredited theological education that is contextually relevant for South Africa. The program for African Initiated Churches promotes income generating projects for members of African Initiated Churches. In response to the government’s resistance to provide anti-retrovirals for HIV/AIDS patients on the basis of the lack of trained counselors, the Program for HIV/AIDS provides education and counselor training. All of CCT’s programs are subsidized or at low cost for participants made possible by the support of CCT’s foreign donors: the EMW; the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, and the Council of World Missions.

The missions for CCT’s four programs parallel the fourth goal of the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians: to promote Ministry and Theological Education and Formation. CCT’s programs for Women in the Church and Society and the TEE program are direct initiatives to promote Theological Education and Formation. Likewise the economic program for African Initiated Churches and the HIV/AIDS program serve as direct ministry for the needs of the greater Durban communities. Studying the TEE and HIV/AIDS programs of CCT more in depth will reveal how they attempt to fulfill the Circle’s goal to realize Ministry and Theological Education and Formation. The study will relay how the CCT program operates, how available the course is for the poor, especially impoverished women, the course content, and what participants gain from their training after completion of the course.

In short, do the programs of CCT advance:

a level of leadership that is deliberately and intentionally trained to be passionate and courageous in the face of a never-ending litany of life-destroying practices with which we have to contend on our continent.

Methods

275 CCT Brochure
276 Prof. Isabel Phiri. 3/28/03.
I spent four and a half months in the spring of 2003 in Durban, South Africa. During my time there I completed a study project on the Program for Theological Education of the Centre for Constructive Theology. The majority of my research on the Centre was conducted there.

I interviewed the class teacher, the director of CCT, a TEE College regional representative, and ten students in the class. The availability of those interviewed restricted the number of interviews done. In the case of the students, my only opportunity to interview them was on two separate class days. Thus, I was unable to interview those not at class who could have stated different opinions about the class than those actually present. Language presented a barrier in a number of the interviews. This was especially an issue among the students, since Zulu is the primary language for many. For a few students I had the help of a translator, and when I did not I only report here what I am sure was said.

My observation of the classroom environment was also restricted by language as it was conducted completely in Zulu. I could pick up a few Zulu words here and there, but only to have a vague idea of what was being discussed. I was able to measure the level of active and attentive participation of the students. As well, I noted the charisma of the teacher, and reactions of the students to the teacher. Looking over the registration material and class lists I obtained basic demographics of the three classes. The course materials were essential in developing an assessment of the depth, applicability, and objectivity of the curriculum.

During my time I was unable to observe or do extensive research on the program for HIV/AIDS. Most of my information concerning the program stems from questionnaires over email with the program director. All the conclusions from this report are to be made with caution, but especially those concerning the HIV/AIDS program.

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279 For further information concerning my methods of research including interview questions, demographics of those interviewed, a listing of the students’ respective churches, and various pictures of Durban and CCT refer to Appendixes A, B, and C.
THE TEE Program

I consider my ecumenical engagement as an accident, because nowhere in my Christian upbringing or theological education was I made to understand the ecumenical calling of the church and its implication for ministry and my own journey of faith. This awareness has made me a passionate advocate for ecumenical theological education, which in my understanding is a holistic approach to the recruiting, nurturing, guiding, equipping, training and preparing, in short the ministerial ecumenical formation of children, youth, women and men for a life of faithfulness in God and of critical engagement in the church and the world.\(^{280}\)

Circle Theologian, Nyambura J. Njoroge

Correcting Past Mistakes in Theological Education

CCT theological education by extension seeks to surmount the cycle of deficient theological education offered to native South Africans. Attempts to adequately train native South African ministers have historically been overrun with non-existent and faulty approaches. In 1894, Cecil John Rhodes, as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, argued against any mission schools for African natives since he felt they were "turning out kaffir parsons," maladroits who later developed into "agitators against government."\(^{281}\) Under apartheid, the government tried to ban Black Theology which spoke to "suffering, hope, love, peace, reconciliation, justice, oppression, and liberation."\(^{282}\) The state controlled theological education forbidding anyone from the majority population of South Africa to teach. For the suppressed majority, learning about concerns relevant to the oppressive minority government was futile.\(^{283}\)

Who is to say that those in the African Initiated Churches, who make up almost 100% of those in CCT programs, need any theological education now? CCT offers meaningful theological education that not only exposes the learner to the bible, but to how God desires to work in the current social, political, and economic spheres. In a province overrun with unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and political tensions such education could initiate substantive change.

\(^{280}\) Njoroge, “Transforming Ministerial Formation” 1.


Wanting to be themselves and “relevant in the changing world in which they find themselves,” the AICs have often been uninterested in past formal theological education offered by foreigners.\textsuperscript{284} Yet, certain myths about AICs and some real dehumanizing practices within them suggest that theological education could offer them the opportunity to promote more holistic living within their communities. The following presents how CCT’s TEE program could benefit those in South African AICs.

1) They cannot afford theological education themselves. Members of AICs in South Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, are poor. From lack of financial ability or desire they have little to no formal theological education. Due to the illiteracy of its members, transmission of AIC theology and tradition has been almost exclusively oral.\textsuperscript{285} Some scholarly theologians who depend on written creeds and texts, questioned the consistency of the AICs oral theological tradition. The lack of written creeds has not impeded the development of AIC theology, however. To find out what the prophet’s role is in African Initiated Churches for his book \textit{The Healer Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches}, Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen simply interviewed prophets within AIC churches. M.L. Daneel describes how African Initiated Churches practice contextual theology par excellence through “emotionally uninhibited dance, song, vivid proclamation and social action, all based on predominantly literal interpretations and applications of scripture,” responding “to comprehensive needs in pleasant society, instead of being imposed by written dictates from above.”\textsuperscript{286}

2) They are not political or social agitators. AICs in Zimbabwe are known for their socio-political and environmentally responsive theologies.\textsuperscript{287} Twentieth century governments of South

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 234.
\textsuperscript{285} Martin West, \textit{Bishops and Prophets in a Black City}, (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1975), 10.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 1-59.
Africa associated AICs with independency and separatism. However, the typical positions of AICs in South Africa are non-violent and apolitical tending to “accept the rather unprofitable social and political circumstances they share with other Black South Africans.” During the 1970s SASO and SACC leaders attempted unsuccessfully to stimulate black consciousness among the African Initiated Churches Association for the anti-apartheid struggle. Since the start of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the mid-1990s, AICs have done little to effectively curb the spread of the virus. Part of the reason for this is that AICs have sustained condemning teachings towards those with HIV/AIDS. Their response is especially tragic since the majority of those infected come from their church communities.

3) Women suffer discrimination. Some outsiders hail AICs for their high involvement of women into various roles of the community. Yet, some research questions whether women have complete freedom to share their gifts as they are called. African Initiated Churches still curtail women’s involvement in their churches because of the inauspiciousness associated with female sexuality. Often times women do not receive ordination until after menopause, and there are very few examples of female church founders.

Hence, theological education within the AICs could at least respond to: the further development of AIC theology sensitive to what is already there, the acceptance of political and social ills, dehumanizing treatment of those with HIV/AIDS, and the inhibition of a woman’s dignity by limiting her formal roles in the church and defining her identity and purpose on the basis of her biology. Relevant theological education could also increase understanding among

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291 This could add credence to Oduyoye’s theory that AIC women do not have equal leadership influence as men. If women, the most infected with the virus, had equal influence in the church would they not encourage the church to be more sympathetic of the ill?
292 See Sections “Blood is Sacred and Taboo,” and “Women in the AIC” in Chapter III.
society and “socially engaged” theologians about AIC practices and the role of women. Due to their lack of “a systematic, written ‘rule of faith and practice,” “Zionists naturally become the subject of gossip and rumors” among members of historic churches. Given the history of South Africa, contextual and holistic theological education available to all in the AICs would be transformatively life-giving!

**Making It Available**

The CCT Program for Theological Education Program by Extension has taken several steps to ensure their programs reach out to the poor, women and AIC communities.

1) **Class Cost** – The class is free for women and men pay only a small fee. The distinction is made to encourage women to take the course while not excluding men. Funding from CCT donors subsidizes the TEE courses that generally cost R 200 – 300 each.

2) **Zulu female teacher** – Teaching in Zulu, Lindiwe Mkasi makes the course available to non-English speakers. Having grown up in the greater Durban area she can relate to the context of her students. She has less of a chance of being a dominating threat to the students. Her presence helps especially to welcome women to the class.

3) **Materials in Zulu** – CCT translates all the course materials into Zulu.

4) **Curriculum** – The curriculum is made for those with no more than standard 7 level of education. The class is also taught in a way that accommodates those unable to read.

5) **Class location and transportation** – The three classes meet once a week in two townships in the outskirts of Durban and in the city of Pietermaritzburg. Many of the students live in the areas of the classes. For those who have to travel, the teacher often offers them rides. Sometimes Mkasi drives an hour and a half out of her way, so that her the students do not have to take the time and money for transportation.

Analysis of the following data will assess to what extent CCT realizes its goals of uplifting the lives of women and the poor through providing contextual and ecumenical theology to those in AIC communities.

**The Students: Class Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Mpumalanga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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295 N/A = No Response; Main = Mainline Church; AIC = African Initiated Church.
*The locations of the three classes. The average per capita income of people living in Unit 1 of Mpumalanga is a mere R23.70.26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ZULU SPEAKERS | 63 |
| ENGLISH SPEAKERS | 15 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38 yr. old Reverend)</td>
<td>Matric-high school equivalency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since education correlates to earned income, these students likely come from poor backgrounds that would not be able to afford formal theological education.27 As well, few students have graduated from standard twelve (Matric), the required entry level for a university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Main</th>
<th>AIC</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.05 %)</td>
<td>(95%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(See Appendix B for the full listing of churches)

The TEE course is reaching out to those in AICs, those who could normally not afford theological education.

| Number of Ministers | 10 |

There were ten men who identified themselves as either a minister, Reverend, Pastor, or Deacon. Although from talking with the teacher, Mkasi, it seems that there be quite a few more men who act as ministers in their church, but who do not use the formal title. Could that be true for women too?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages of the Ministers</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Level of Education of the Ministers |

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26 Desai, *We Are the Poors*, 86.
It is significant that the course is available to ministers in AICs of all ages and all education levels. Does the TEE course provide these ministers with church leadership training capable of facing the ecumenical and socio-economic realities of their communities?

### Level of Education for the Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of the Data**

With only one teacher, TEE reaches an impressive number of students. A significant number of women are taking the course. Although there are thirteen percent less women than men in the course it still represents a remarkable achievement in encouraging AIC women in theological education. With those from age eighteen to sixty-eight and twenty-eight churches, the classes reach out to a diverse group who are capable of serving their communities at a variety of levels. The number of Zulu speakers, majority of students from AICs, and level of education of the students demonstrates that those in situations of poverty, illiteracy, and little English knowledge are able to take the course.

**The Course Content**

An evaluation of the overall course content and given sample endeavors to answer the following question: Does the course material provide sufficient background and skills for reading the bible and leadership in church ministry while allowing room for decolonizing readings, the incorporation of the student’s traditions, and the students own critical thinking for how the content applies to their contexts?

The Centre uses curriculum from the Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC) for its theological education classes. With representatives from nine member churches in its College Council, TEEC “represents the fullest ecumenical co-operation in theological
education yet achieved in Southern Africa.” An international movement, TEEC offers courses at four different program levels from non-accredited short courses for parish groups to a program offering a Diploma in Theology. The courses are available for the following kinds of people:

1) Those preparing for various lay ministries
2) Those already in lay ministry needing further training
3) Lay people who need to be equipped with a theology which will enables them to work out a Christian response in their situation
4) Those whom the churches have chosen for training for the ordained ministry outside the residential seminaries.

People in the suburbs typically take the TEEC courses by extension. Almost half of the participants enroll in the Diploma program. However, in partnership with the Centre for Constructive Theology, TEEC repackaged its second level of curriculum, the Award program, with an entirely new assessment and group work material. CCT, along with their translation of the material into Zulu, has then been more able to adapt the course material to their weekly classroom or group discussion settings.

The Award program of TEEC “introduce[s] the Christian learner to theological education.” The course is written at the Standard Seven reading level, although no minimum education is required for course registration. Students who graduate from the course receive an Award accredited by the South African Qualifications Association (SAQA). Students are then eligible for the TEEC Certificate program, upon whose completion the Diploma program or entrance into a university are available to the student.

The Award program offers one credit (quarter year) and two credit (half year) courses. Twelve credits are required to complete the Award. The Centre for Constructive Theology organizes the courses in a three-year cycle to enable first and third year students to be in the same class. Current available courses are:

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298 www.tee.co.za
299 Ibid.
300 http://www.tee.co.za/ANNUAL%20REPORT%202000.htm#KZN
Course 102, God and God’s People, is one of the two courses that the CCT students were taking in 2003. Course 102 provides an introduction to the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible. Fifteen thematic sections and thirty-seven chapters divide the course content. The course covers from the creation and fall of man in the beginning of Genesis to the wisdom and eschatological writings that connect ideas of hope for Israel in the coming of Jesus. Moving chronologically through the major books of the Hebrew Bible, Course 102 mimics a similar semester or year course in Biblical Heritage at a university or seminary. How do the TEEC course books present the material? Does Course 102 provide sufficient biblical history and formation and various techniques and skills for reading the bible critically? Is it biased to certain interpretations or does it allow space for feminist or decolonizing readings? Analysis of a sample lesson from one of the chapters will attempt to answer the above concerns.  

**Sample from Course Book**

Chapter twenty-six of Section Eleven in Course 102 studies the first half of the book of Isaiah. The introduction to Section 11 outlines what students should be able to do after completing the section. The first expected outcome of the student is to “relate the call of Isaiah to God’s call to people today.” Immediately, the curriculum highlights the importance of connecting the messages in the bible to modern day life. Expected outcomes two through four make sure that students understand the basic facts, content, and story lines of the biblical

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301 [www.tee.co.za](http://www.tee.co.za)

302 The following assessment is taken from my previous work: “Extending Theological Education: Making Religion Relevant to Ordinary South Africans. An In-depth look at the unique programme of Theological Education by Extension of the Centre for Constructive Theology.” Unfortunately the actual samples from the course material have been lost. Thus, former assessment provides basis for my conclusions.
material. Point five explains that students should be able to relate the biblical content to the
history of the time in which it was written, and point six indicates that students should be able
to convey how old testament messages can relate to those of Jesus in the new testament. From
its objectives the curriculum appears to cover several areas of concern in theological education,
but a look at a specific lesson and assignments will demonstrate how the curriculum attempts to
achieve these aims.

Chapter twenty-six does provide the students with significant new knowledge of
biblical historical background and literary criticism. It does so straightforwardly and succinctly.
The beginning of chapter twenty-six describes what the Kings and rebels of the Kingdom of
Judah (East of the Mediterranean Sea) were doing during the time that the author wrote the first
thirty-nine chapters of the Book of Isaiah. Such geographic visuals and historical background
are necessary for complete understanding of biblical texts, and helpful to students in CCT’s TEE
program who are potentially unfamiliar with such history.

Two students described how the acquisition of biblical historical background is a
memorable benefit of what they have received from the class. Before taking the class, twenty-
eight year old Vuyani Mbadu and sixty-one year old Mathews Khumalo both thought that
Jerusalem and Israel were only spiritual concepts meant to signify that which is in heaven. Only
after learning about the historical information which the TEE workbook provides, did both men
understand that they could actually “take a bus” to Jerusalem!\(^{303}\)

Chapter twenty-six of “God and God’s People” acknowledges that different opinions
exist about the compilation of biblical texts and interpretation of scripture. Section A of the
chapter explains the theory that multiple authors contributed to the book of Isaiah over a
number of centuries. The course book explains that literary criticism techniques display the
differences in the writing and reference to historical periods between the first half of Isaiah and

\(^{303}\) Matthews Khumalo, 4/12/03. Vuyani Mbadu, 4/12/03.
later sections of the book. Although the TEEC course material mentions that most scholars believe that multiple authors contributed to the Book of Isaiah, it does recognize that “some scholars believe that Isaiah of Jerusalem” wrote the whole Book, and that the Holy Spirit helped him to write about events in the future. Even though these are not all the opinions concerning Isaiah authorship, they are two main ones. Such recognition of at least these diverging opinions is certainly relevant to South Africans enrolled in CCT’s TEE program who come from both viewpoints. Eighteen year old Sifiso Sibiya from the Ekuphumuleni named church relies on the Holy Spirit for interpretation of scripture.\(^{304}\) Whereas, Nomonde Mbobo, a twenty-nine year old member from another AIC, describes how because of the class she feels “now clear how to analyze the Bible.”\(^{305}\)

Learning activities and assignments do provide opportunities for students to reflect on the course material and apply it to their lives. The first learning activity of chapter twenty-six in Course 102 requires the student to ask ministers, pastors, or priests, of different denominations if possible, how she or he “came to be a minister.” It then asks them to compare it to Isaiah’s call to ministry in the Book of Isaiah. Not only does this encourage them to dialogue with people of other denominations, but also it encourages them to reflect on how the bible can speak to situations of people today.

Assignments for the Preaching Course 172 have students apply skills advocated in the workbook. In an assignment to practice writing a sermon it tells the student to:

- Not assume that you know the meaning of the parable
- Think about what the sermon would have meant to the people who heard it first and then think about what it says to us today
- Try to read a commentary on the parable and discuss it with your minister first. [A commentary is a book that goes through a particular Bible book, verse-by-verse explaining it and giving any necessary background.\(^{306}\)]

\(^{304}\) Sifiso Sibiya, 4/12/03.
\(^{305}\) Nomonde Mbobo, 4/12/03.
\(^{306}\) Course 172 Assignments, 4. Copy not available.
This assignment makes it clear that to adequately interpret a Bible passage the student must give sincere effort. They must look at the passage within its historical context, attempt to personally see how it applies to today, and read and consider various views and interpretations of the passage. First Isaiah, (chs-Isaiah. 1-40), is renowned for its themes of justice and condemnation of those who exploit the poor.\textsuperscript{307} Yet, from perusing other course material it does not appear that there is explicit mention of reading against imperialist and patriarchal themes. Musa W. Dube would criticize such a lack of recognition. However, the course book leaves interpretation of scripture open ended for the students. The TEEC course material does assume a student’s belief in one God that works in history and inspires biblical material. Thus the material does not condone students to question if God does act in history, but leaves the question of how God acts in history open ended. Analysis of the classroom environment and student interviews may demonstrate to what extent students formulate liberative readings of the bible.

\textit{Summary of TEEC Curriculum}

CCT adapts normally structured independent student material for use in their classroom and group discussion environment. The course books offer sufficient basic historical background and literary criticism techniques while acknowledging varying viewpoints. TEEC ‘Learning Activities’ and Assignments encourage the student to apply the knowledge, skills, and values that they learn through the course material. Lindiwe Mkasi, the CCT teacher, says that the students do “relate to their books.”\textsuperscript{308} In a course about South African Church history she notices how her students enjoy learning about the roles their grandparents played in the development of South African Christianity. The assignments reinforce that the reading of the bible is a serious task not


\textsuperscript{308} Mkasi. 4/28/03.
to be done without personal reflection and contextual background. Encouragement for liberative or feminist biblical readings are left to the teacher and the student’s own interpretative practices.

Classroom Environment and Student Response

Each TEE program class begins with the students worshipping harmoniously “Thank you Father.” On the wall at the front of the class hangs a poster made by the Methodist Church of South Africa. “The Church has HIV/AIDS and We Care.” The teacher, Lindiwe Mkasi, confidently catches the students’ attention with an amusing tale about her week. The students respect her authority to take out their books and then sit quietly and attentively awaiting her instruction. It is obvious that students are engaged as Mkasi leads them through the lesson on “How To Write A Sermon” in their TEE workbooks. As time progresses the class really becomes student led as they raise questions and have serious and emotive discussions. But an outside observer can pick up on only so much. What do the students and teacher have to say about the classroom environment and what students gain overall from the TEE program?

Different Levels of Education:

Mkasi admits that there is some competition between people with more education than others. She has noticed that those with less education do sometimes feel intimidated. She says that the students have had to “learn how to answer diplomatically,” so that they can come closer to answers they may be looking for. Mkasi indicated that at times she needs to take charge, and tell the students to allow others to have a chance to speak. Commenting on her student’s occasional drive to simply arrive at answers, Mkasi maintained, “I don’t think education is like that. We don’t need to come to the answers right away all the time.” Often, it seems, people can get more out of each other than merely by what they say. Such an attitude

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309 “Nigiyabonga baba, ngiyabonga baba, nigyabooongaaa…”

310 Mkasi, 4/28/03.
not only promotes understanding of the other, but also encourages the student to continue thinking about things beyond class.

**Different Ages:**

During the three class sessions observed, those thirty and older seemed to be doing most of the talking. In two class sessions, the eighteen year old youngest member of the class did not speak at all. Yet, according to one student and the teacher, the different ages of the students are not a hindrance to the class but really a blessing. Twenty-nine year old, Nomonde Mbobo, describes how discussions relating to people’s home lives are quite enlightening with people of all different ages. She now has a better understanding of why “parents see things differently.”

The teacher even feels like she has gained from the diverse age group. Mkasi has gained from the older people’s “traditional wisdom.” As she teaches she learns from them as well.

**Different Denominations:**

Mkasi has observed that new students rarely have attitudes of openness towards those from different denominations and churches. Tension most obviously exists between those students who believe that since they are ‘saved’ they should stop participating in traditional traditions, while there are others in the class who still incorporate traditional practices into their lives. When tension rises amongst students about this issue in class, Mkasi says that as a teacher she tries “to be very neutral,” and depends on the Holy Spirit to guide her with wisdom of how to handle such situations on the spot. As difference among denominational practice has increasingly shown to be a concern amongst her students, Mkasi plans to have a big workshop about it for all the students.

Yet students seem to be growing in understanding because of their interdenominational experience. Five of the students interviewed mentioned that new knowledge about other
churches from their course material and student interactions has opened their minds about Christians from other churches. Forty-three year old, Zuma Bongekile, has gained respect for Roman Catholics after a field trip to a Catholic church where she learned about the many ways that Catholics have helped South Africa by providing nurses, or caring for orphans. Because of the CCT theological education course Nomonde Mbobo finds herself feeling that “I am not only Moravian now because I know what is happening outside my church.” When asked about what has been beneficial to him in the class, Reverend Elliott Mbatha immediately spoke of his new understanding of other Christian denominations. “I am now free to accept another from other congregations. I don’t judge people by the uniform they wear...we are all equal.” These students will carry their new attitudes into their homes and churches, lessening divisions and promoting understanding and respect in their communities.

**Different Genders:**

The most observable gender distinction in the class concerned the seating arrangements. At the Mpumalanga location, the women sat in the first row of seats, with a few overflowing into the second row, while all the men sat behind them. The students sat in a circle in Pietermaritzburg, but women and men still sat separately. Yet, men and women equally contributed to discussions, and Mkasi did not notice any trends of class participation along gender lines. She admitted that there are definitely people who are more passive than others, but that this happens “across all lines,” and that a person’s participation depends on their personality. During the time of my class observations, discussions sorted out peacefully and

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314 Mkasi, 4/28/03.
315 Zuma Bongekile, 4/12/03.
316 Mbobo, 4/12/03.
317 Elliott Mbatha, 4/12/03
318 Mkasi, 4/28/03
respectfully. “Each (student) is special in their own way,” said Mkasi. If the teacher respects everyone’s opinion, then it encourages everyone else to do the same.

**New Theological Knowledge:**

Students mentioned various types of new knowledge and understanding that they have received from the class. Two people mentioned new knowledge about biblical content. Sifiso now understands the covenant made between Noah and God, and July is now familiar with the story of Exodus. Both of those stories are a crucial foundation for an understanding of God’s character and the Christian faith. Four people mentioned increased or new historical knowledge because of the class. Elliott Mbatha credits his new knowledge about the Reformation as part of the reason for his newfound embrace of other churches. Previously mentioned were the two men who only just learned, because of this class, that Jerusalem is a real city! Five people value their improved abilities to analyze the bible, and preach. Nomonde Mbobo is now clear that “the Bible is about interpreting.” Along the same lines, Vuyani Mbadu, Matthew Khumalo, Mbobo, and Princess Gasela gained a value for making sure that one is “approaching Christianity in the right manner.” All of this is only what these students could remember when they were questioned on the spot. Their answers certainly indicate that the students are receiving with more knowledge about Christianity and the world around them than they could have imagined!

**HIV/AIDS Curriculum:**

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319 Ibid.
320 Sibiya; July Nguneni, 4/12/03.
321 Mbatha, 4/12/03.
322 Ibid.; Khumalo, 4/12/03.
Besides the poster in the classroom there was not too much on this. However, students are required to complete CCT’s program for HIV/AIDS, and Mkasi said it often comes up in classroom discussions.

_Awareness of other CCT Programs:

One of the extra benefits of the theological education class is that students become aware of the other programs offered by CCT. Besides the compulsory HIV/AIDS counseling training, many students have become involved with the business training and grants offered to members of African Initiated Churches. Meetings are often held after a theological education class session. Some men are trying to establish a business of selling fruits and vegetables, while another young woman would like to establish herself in her own business of fashion design. These connections offer more opportunity for self-empowerment and/or community enlistment.

_Impact on Life Outside the Classroom:

Young Sifiso Sibiya exclaims how his friends respect him now, “because at least he knows something about God.”323 Princess mBekeli values her new confidence in telling others about God, and Elliott Mbatha says that his congregation seems to show more interest in his sermons now that he has much more information to share with them. Bongekile and Vuyani Mbadu desire to really do something for their communities as a result of convictions formed after applying the messages of the bible to their community’s needs. Though discouraged by her inability to preach in her church, Bongekile looks forward to practicing HIV/AIDS counseling within her community. Vuyani vehemently believes that the church needs to help out the rural poor where living conditions are quite horrendous. He notes how a person’s job often forces them to work on Sunday and miss church. He wants to brainstorm with his

323 Sibiya, 4/12/03.
congregation about what they could do for the poor “so that they can come to church.” These students bring new hope, peace, love, understanding, and projects of good to their communities. All of them justify their ability to do so from their new foundation in theology, or their more complete understanding of their faith as related through the CCT theological education course. Perhaps so many more people desire to register for the program because of how they see their participating friends and family change.

Even though the students have workbooks that provide probing questions of how the bible can relate to our everyday world, in the classroom, the teacher is responsible for encouraging this to happen. On one occasion I heard Mkasi mention to the class in English, “Practice what you preach.” During class discussions, students or Mkasi will connect the lesson to relevant issues of concern. When asked, Mkasi said that the following topics come up most in discussion: living among people from different religions, the changing of South Africa from an oppressive government to a democracy, women in church leadership, HIV/AIDS, and poverty. Such a list indicates the importance of allowing the student to connect the bible to the changing concerns of her or his community.

Reading the Bible for Postcolonial Feminist Liberation:

No direct information about the interpretations of scripture of those in the class was obtained. However, based on indicative openness towards ecumenism, HIV/AIDS and poverty, and discussions concerning government policy and women in church leadership there is space for liberative biblical reading.

General Participant Impressions:

The students tell Mkasi “We are better than before. We are not the same. We are proud to stand in front of our people and speak as academics would.” When asked about her vision

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324 Mbadu, 4/12/03.
325 Mkasi, 4/28/03.
and goals for the class, Mkasi explained that she wants to avoid the faults of past theological education in South Africa that would leave the student unprepared for the challenges of the world outside. “I would rather see them use the education I give them, then simply passing the classes.”\textsuperscript{326} Mkasi explicitly encourages her students to “relate what’s in the books to the life they are living now.”\textsuperscript{327}

Mkasi believes that the class is achieving CCT’s goals’ by how excited students are for class. “They enjoy my class very much. They take it seriously. They love it. I feel the same about them.”\textsuperscript{328} Every day students are asking more and more questions, and Mkasi increasingly feels more like a university professor. People are beginning to demand that CCT add new sections of the course in other towns!

\textit{Summary of Class Environment}

Although some tensions arise in the classroom, the students and teacher develop their openness to those of different ages, education levels, denominations, and genders. Students gain real knowledge about biblical content, history, and improved skills for how to analyze the bible and preach. The class has notable impact on the student’s lives outside the classroom involving them in HIV/AIDS counselor training and other programs of CCT, providing their congregations with more meaningful sermons, and on the whole increased self-esteem. The classroom allows space for liberative biblical interpretation through discussions about ways to reach out to poor, ecumenism, government policy, and other relevant concerns. Overall, the students feel better prepared for effective and meaningful ministry within their communities.

\textbf{HIV/AIDS Program: CCT Direct Ministry}

\textsuperscript{326} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid.
All departments, disciplines, all of us...should ask how we are contributing now and how we can contribute in the future to the lessening and the final eradication of HIV/AIDS. It is our moral obligation as biblical educators...

There are a number of reasons contributing to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, discussions. Some of them are:

- **The Legacy of Apartheid** –
  South Africa was so pre-occupied with the struggle for democracy and the subsequent reconstruction that it did not appropriately attend to the initial spread of the virus, and when the virus had reached epic proportions, the country was not prepared to respond effectively. Various obstacles relating to the legacy of the apartheid system, such as hospitals distributed throughout the country according to racial neighborhoods and not population proportion have significantly hindered the country’s ability to respond to the crisis.

- **Poverty** –
  Poverty reduces choices such as mobility and profession. Women in poverty have fewer choices than men. A women in a rural area, squatter settlement, or impoverished township, often assumes significant household duties and family responsibilities at an early age forcing an early end to her education. Women in these areas are often the ones left to take care of the sick and dying – including the children left behind. “Grandma orphanages,” where one or two women look after a handful of children is not uncommon in South Africa. This type of homecare and/or lack of education leave women unable to work a regular job. In these cases women may feel forced into prostitution in order to feed their families. Tragically, such practice makes them extremely susceptible to HIV/AIDS infection.

- **Patriarchy** –
  Dr. Musa Dube says that “Every culture that is patriarchal exposes women to HIV,” because the lack of gender equality does “not allow women to make choices about their lives.” The above alludes to how patriarchy helps to keep women in poverty. The culture of patriarchy in South Africa also affects how men and women view their relationships. Young South African women often feel an overemphasized pressure to please their boyfriends. This is encouraged by views that men must be the more important and dominant partner in a relationship. Such a mindset lends a woman to acquiesce if using a condom is too disturbing for the man, or if he occasionally seeks the pleasure of other women.

- **Lack of Education** –
  Impoverished and illiterate South African women and men have limited if any access to education about the spread and prevention of HIV/AIDS. The lack of education contributes to myths and stigmas attached to the disease in some instances causing those infected to be cast out from their communities and families. The lack of effective permeation of cultural and faith values relating to respect for the other may contribute to the above mentioned behavior, and vividly manifest itself in the occurrence of rape in South Africa. Women in

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328 In 1990 .7% of the population was infected. Today it is at a high of 33%. International Programs Center, Population Division, United States Census, (HIV/AIDS Surveillance Data Base, June 2000).
South Africa are three times more likely to be raped than a woman in the U.S. According to a study in 2001, one South African is raped every twenty-six minutes.\textsuperscript{331}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Government Indifferentism –
  For a long time the government refused to acknowledge that HIV caused AIDS. Only in the summer of 2003 did the South African government finally approve a Treatment Action Campaign which plans to treat three million with anti-retrovirals by 2005. However, as of April 2004, only 20,000 are receiving such treatment. (Dowling and Caeler’s Cape Article)\textsuperscript{332}

  \item Negative Response of the Church –
  Seventy-five percent of South Africans are Christians shaped by the beliefs and traditions of their church communities. Churches and faith based groups are the closest institutions to the South African people and most capable of influence. Yet, until the past few years, the Church has responded with condemnation and negativity towards those associated with HIV/AIDS. Historic and African Initiated Churches “looked upon those living with HIV as sinners who could be ‘written off.’”\textsuperscript{333} The church and religious leaders have been part of the problem.

Tackling HIV/AIDs involves a committed multi-faceted struggle. The people of South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa are the most qualified to discern various cultural reasons for the spread of the virus,’ and to mobilize the various positive elements of South African culture and institutions to mitigate the crisis. The following presents CCT’s local, faith based, and female attentive response to HIV/AIDs in Kwa-Zulu Natal South Africa.

\textbf{HIV/AIDS Program Structure and Content}\textsuperscript{334}

\textit{General Mission of the Program on HIV/AIDS}

The Center for Constructive Theology launched its program on HIV/AIDS in 2000 as a means of providing the Church with accurate information about HIV/AIDS. CCT established the program to help the Church in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa see that HIV/AIDS is an incurable sexually transmitted disease, which needs to be fought with all means. In some sectors of the community the Church still distances herself from the responsibility of

\textsuperscript{333} “PanAfrica; Religious Leaders Expose Damning Attitudes Towards HIV/Aids,” \textit{Africa News}, (September 21, 2003).
\textsuperscript{334} The following comes from a questionnaire completed by the program director, Moses Mcabe 11/03, and an interview with CCT’s Director, Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri 3/28/03 supplemented by my own analysis.
compassion towards the dying because of HIV/AIDS. The program on HIV/AIDS helps the Church realize that she has a major role to play in the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and empowers her with skilled counselors.

The program is also a response to the inability of the provincial Department of Social Welfare to meet the demand for counseling. At the program’s inception the government refused to allocate more resources to those susceptible and sick with AIDS because there were not enough counselors to reach people. So, besides encouraging the Church to get involved like a Samaritan woman, CCT hoped that by helping to fill the gap of counselors it could encourage the government to allocate more resources to the struggle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

**Availability to the Poor, Especially Impoverished Women**

The course is free made possible by CCT’s donor organizations! CCT uses its relationships with church pastors in townships, rural areas, and informal settlements to advertise the program. CCT encourages pastors to especially encourage women to participate. Some pastors have to be patiently “won over” by the CCT staff before they become supporters of the programs or for the involvement of women. The majority of the people receiving training are illiterate isiZulu speakers. Hence, the training is offered in their language, isiZulu.

**Implementation of the Course**

The program on HIV/AIDS collaborates with the McCord Sinikithemba Christian Care Center, a hospital, to train men and women from different denominations to be lay church counselors for those living with HIV/AIDS and those affected by it. Over a two year period, trainees must meet weekly at the hospital. The unique partnership with the hospital provides the trainees with up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS concerning their communities around Durban.

**Course Content**

The training is divided into two sections: a Basic and Advanced Course.
The Basic Course covers the following aspects:

- HIV/AIDS information which focuses on how HIV is transmitted
- Living with HIV/AIDS which focuses on coping with the virus, healthy lifestyle
- Counseling which focuses on all relationships and HIV/AIDS and stigma
- Caring for those living with HIV/AIDS which focuses on infection control, home based care, guilt and dying

The Advanced Course addresses the following:

- Community Counseling which addresses the mental health, supportive and referral counseling, crisis counseling, ethical issues, children and orphans and bereavement care and counseling.
- HIV/AIDS which looks at marriage and family counseling, pre and post test counseling, legal issues, Biblical and moral values of the Church’s involvement.
- Community development which is the last phase of our focus, and this phase looks at the socio-economic and cultural contexts, socio-economic development, poverty related issues, networking and resource development

**Addressing Inappropriate cultural practices and myths about HIV/AIDS**

The program says NO to:

- Men’s manipulation of women’s emotions.
- The supposed right for a man to have multiple partners as it proves his manhood.
- Men’s exploitation of women for sexual desires.
- If you have sex with a virgin you will be cured from HIV.
- Other myths about HIV/AIDS and examples of gender exploitation.

The training then provides counselors with mechanisms to overcome these bad social trends.

It is important that the course is inclusive of women without excluding men. The liberation of women from the chains of gender discrimination involves the liberation of men from binding women to those chains. Together in conversation during the course, men and women have the opportunity to learn from each others’ shared experience, and hold each other accountable to overcome the gender discrimination and other factors that increase the spread of the HIV virus.

**Strategies provided to the trainees**

- Abstain from sexual practices
- Be faithful to your partner
- Condomise should you fail to control yourself

**Equipped to Serve the Specific Needs of their Community:**
Before completing the course, trainees must do a community profile which makes them research about the specific situation of HIV/AIDS within their own communities. Trainees must communicate with their pastors about the content of the course they have done on HIV/AIDS. They must seek the pastor’s support to make the congregation aware of their services to offer counseling, prayer, and home based care to those with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

At the end of the course CCT issues the trainees two certificates: one for Basic Course and one for an Advanced Course. The trainees are not paid for availing themselves to the church and community, they do so as a Churches’ act of compassion and ministry to those living and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Although no interview questions asked the TEE program students about the HIV/AIDS program, one woman mentioned how grateful she was for her new awareness about HIV/AIDS specifically how the counselor training “opened (her) eyes” to the injustice of the discrimination that those with the disease face.\footnote{Mbobo, 4/12/03.}

The program enables counselors to provide individuals, the church, and the community with compassion for those with HIV/AIDS, actual facts about HIV/AIDS, and resources available to those infected and their families. CCT hopes that the work of the counselors will offer a sense of belonging and support to those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

**Assessment**

The Centre for Constructive Theology acts as the Church for the worst victims of South African postcolonial and post apartheid oppression. The evidence from curriculum and course content, observation, and student, teacher, and Director interviews is indisputable. The TEEC curriculum combined with student-teacher and student-student interaction conceives meaningful formative ecumenical theological education. The HIV/AIDS program “meaningfully address(es) the age-old, revered, cultural, social, and sexual practices which are
putting women at risk.” The only remaining question is how to expand and improve these two programs which have reached over thirty-four women, and over eighty total Zulu speakers in poor communities of African Initiated Churches around Durban. It is groundbreaking that the program requires the TEE students to complete the program on HIV/AIDS. The programs nurture the students with compassion not only for those affected with HIV/AIDS, but for all types of people within their communities. In her HIV/AIDS curriculum for theological education, Musa Dube outlines the following issues a course should deal with wherever possible:

– socio-economic issues (poverty);
– gender (men and women relationships in the society);
– age (impact of HIV/AIDS on children, youth and the elderly);
– PLWHA (their involvement in prevention and care);
– stigma (examining its impact and planning for it);
– cultural perspectives (the advantages and disadvantages of culture);
– biblical and theological perspectives (to use the church’s resources);
– liturgical approaches (to speak to the heart and change attitudes).

Besides specific mention of advantages of cultural perspectives and liturgical approaches, the Centre’s programs penetrate every subject. Dube would probably say that within the TEE classroom, in the midst of theological study, discussion could be even more intentional about the above issues. It is unclear whether a measure of accountability occurs with those participants of the program for HIV/AIDS after their completion of the course. Whether the Centre feels that would comply with their mission and abilities, students are assuredly leaving as more informed and skilled individuals capable of leading their communities in care for the HIV/AIDS infected, but in developing creative strategies to reduce poverty, improve education, participate in policy making, and overall progress their province and nation towards a consolidated democracy.

Prominently favorable to the Centre’s programs is the freedom of the Director, student, and teacher to direct the discussions and determine for themselves what topics and skills are

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most relevant to their situation. Encouraging affirmation, adjustment, or rejection of cultural, social, or political norms is a delicate task. A local person will be more likely to have an appreciation for how the current moral and cultural attitudes and behaviors are significant to the lives of the suffering individuals. Indeed, CCT’s local response parallels the work of the circle. The Circle lives to cultivate African women to lead the theological education and formation of African women – to do ministry for African women and men – to replenish the vacancy from their stolen dignity.
VI. Conclusion

“Where she behaves herself according to prescription and accepts an inferior position, benevolence which her poverty demands is assured, and for this she shows herself deeply and humbly grateful. If for some reason she takes it into her head to be assertive and claim a footing of equality, then she brings upon herself a frown; she is called names; she is persecuted openly or by indirect means; she is helped to be divided against herself.”

E. B. Idowu’s uses the above feminine imagery to define what powerful nations expect of Africa. Forgiving his sexism for describing Africa as a woman, Mercy Amba Oduyoye decrees that “As women resent these stereotypes so Africa must refuse this female typology.”

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians listens to the bleeding woman and the dead young girl in the Gospel of Mark (5:24-43). The Circle listens to the woman taking care of the ill at home dreaming of her desired business ventures. The Circle listens to the woman frustrated with her limited role within politics and her church. The Circle listens to the woman wanting to study theology. The Circle listens to Africa as powerful nations attempt to define their expectations of an enormous and complex continent. Listening inspires the Circle to advocacy and action. The Circle brings Africa closer to the holistic vision meant for life on earth, life free from patriarchy and imperialism. The Women of the Circle do theology by living out their faith in contemporary society and encouraging the people in the pews to do the same.

Sharing the stories of their sisters, daughters, mothers, and grandmothers those of the Circle reject silence, marginalization, and exclusion. Oduyoye proclaims the double suffering of African women years after liberation from colonialism. Musa Dube calls on biblical readers to demonstrate awareness of not only patriarchal literary strategies within the Bible, but those of imperialism as well. She hopes this decolonizing feminist conscious will foster “liberating ways of interdependence” or Oduyoye’s cooperation of “two-wings” between the world’s nations and small social communities. At the Centre for Constructive Theology, Isabel Phiri improves the opportunity for women to form and assert their own identity and autonomy through

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337 Oduyoye, Letter to My Ancestors, 4.
338 Ibid.
programs that “bridge the gap between formal theological education and the practical concerns and needs of the peoples of South Africa.” Women of the Circle are not afraid to challenge the West to reverse its dehumanizing agenda. They create space for women in theology. With boldness and courage these theologians envision a world where women are free to receive and fulfill their calling from God, to discern and realize their purpose.

~Coming Full Circle~

Listening to these theologians I heard a calling to examine my own community’s articulation of the needs of women of faith. I gathered with fifteen other women in one of their homes for remembrance of the Last Supper entitled “The Next Supper.” We each brought a contribution necessary for the meal or ritual. We felt healed by the creation of this ritual that included: inclusive language and imagery, sharing and hearing of our own voices on reflections along the spiritual journey, symbolic acts of cleansing and community, and several generations of women. Together we created what was needed. Then, I gathered with other women at a conference to envision a Catholic Church more inclusive of the gifts of women of faith. We promoted, like the Circle, writing and research, ministry and formation, dialogue, and the sharing of stories of women of faith past and present. I also visited Seneca Falls, the home of the first women’s rights convention in the U.S. With fresh appreciation I acknowledged the struggle in this country for women’s political, economic, and racial equality. Could it be that the Circle lives in my backyard? Could it be that my search for models of inclusion and wisdom have existed at home all along?

This study has come full circle. Although it is only a tiny circle in the grand sphere of Circles, it serves to remind us to live out our faith, to embrace the beauty of this life and those past, to inquire into the future, and to be the change.

339 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist, 43.
340 CCT brochure.
341 Check out: grass/roots: Women’s Spirituality Center http://www.grassrootscenter.org/index.html
For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.
Romans 12: 4-5
A call to conversion and commitment

Return to ourselves as we Turn to God so we can move forward with integrity.
Never again shall we walk on tiptoe.
Never again shall we suffer humiliation.
Re-assert indigenous African ways that have seeds of humanization for all humanity.
Refuse laws that serve the interest of lawmakers to the woe of the people
Never again shall we be plagued with coups and religious strife.
Never again shall we condone the cultural de-Africanization from outside.
Refuse westernization that comes in the guise of Christianization.
Never again shall we be silent in the face of opportunistic foreign policies as in open
markets and liberalization that sell our heritage to all bidders for a pot of porridge.
Never again shall we buy into the transplantation of foreign life styles without the
appropriate soil in which they can make us prosper.
Recoil from inefficiency, mismanagement corruption and our narrow definitions of who
belongs and who is our community.
Never again shall we be satisfied with living as hunters and gatherers with no
maintenance and creative culture and a resignation to death and decay of infra-
structure.
We vow to you and to ourselves before this great cloud of global witnesses seen and
unseen.
Never again shall we walk on tip-toe around the globe which is God’s world and our
common heritage.

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