

**Mary as an Inspiration for the Empowerment of Southern African
Christian Women Disproportionately Infected/Affected by HIV/AIDS**

by

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Abstract:

The thesis proposes a liberative Mariological model for southern African Christian women disproportionately infected/affected by HIV/AIDS. The first chapter argues that women are disproportionately infected and affected by HIV and AIDS impacts in southern Africa. It proposes the utilisation of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an inspirational symbol for the empowerment of southern African Christian women against HIV/AIDS. The second chapter explains the basic themes of the thesis of 'symbol', 'inspiration' and 'empowerment' in relation to Mary. It also illustrates how Mary is utilised as a symbol of empowerment within the chapters that follow. Chapter three considers some African theological writings on Mary, mainly by African women theologians and also reflects on how Mary interacts with some communities in southern Africa. Chapters four to eight are built on chapter themes of Mary as mother, as mother of sorrows, Mary's incarnational role, Mary as virgin, and as a revolutionary respectively. Within each chapter theme, the thesis considers how Mary could inspire southern African Christian women for empowerment against HIV infection and AIDS impacts. In chapter nine, a Marian healing ritual for women living with HIV/AIDS is proposed, using feminist ritual healing guidelines, for the women's empowerment, followed by the concluding chapter.

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Abbreviations

ABC	Abstain, Be faithful, use a Condom
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV	Antiretroviral
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
AWRC	Asian Women's Resource Centre
AZT	Azidothymidine (drug used to delay development of AIDS in patients infected with HIV)
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CHGA	Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa
CSSR	The Centre for Social Science
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
EDIAIS	Enterprise Development Impact Assessment Information Service
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GCWA	The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS
GMI	Global Mapping International
HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICAD	Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRW	The International Center for Research on Women
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LSE	London School of Economics
MRC	Medical Research Council
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisations
OEF	Oversees Educational Fund
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PEP	Post-exposure HIV prophylaxis

PLHIV	People Living with HIV
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SCTJM	Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
Stiwanism	Social Transformation Including Women in Africa
TB	Tuberculosis
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UCSF	University of California, San Francisco
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
US	United States
WCC	World Council of Council
WHO	World Health Organization
WOZA	Women of Zimbabwe Arise

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I basically set out what I am going to do in the thesis. I begin by giving an account of my personal experiences with HIV/AIDS and of how the symbol of Mary is used in Zimbabwe. I then explain why I refer to Mary as a symbol, state my aim and objectives, clarify the field under which my study falls and explain my method of study. At the end of the chapter I give a short description of the HIV/AIDS situation in southern Africa.

1.1 An Overview of my Personal Experiences with HIV/AIDS and with the Use of the Marian symbol

This study is about two areas that have been part of my life as a southern African and a Christian: the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and the use of the symbol of Mary in southern Africa. Ever since the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s, I have witnessed the growth of the pandemic in Zimbabwe. I have spent quite some time at mission hospitals as a pastor and have met people infected and affected by the disease in different environments, including their homes with their families and in hospitals. I have fresh and deeply-ingrained memories of young happy families at the prime of their life, who slowly turned into sad shadows of their happy past with the creeping in of the disease. I ministered to people who had long and agonising illnesses, and witnessed the usually slow and painful extinction of some families. Usually, it was one family member then another, with too little time in between to allow the pain to subside or a fresh start. I have witnessed the swelling of the

numbers of orphans and seen acres and acres of land turn into graveyards, with most of those who have died below the age of 40.

These tragic events have been imbedded within our cultural and social life patterns, religious beliefs, poverty and gender inequalities, some of which have contributed to the spread of the disease. From my experience, it comes as no surprise that statistically many more women receive HIV from men than vice-versa, and that women are overburdened with care and care-needs when infection happens.¹ Whilst it is permissible for men to 'roam' the streets relatively freely, on the lookout for extra-marital affairs, women cannot do so without facing the wrath of the husband, the family and the society. Cultural conventions dictate that 'good' women fall in love with only one man in their lifetime - usually an older man - and live under his rule. In contrast, men get greater leverage for extra love-affairs when they exercise their 'cultural privilege' to look for another wife or when they move from their homes in search of work. On his return home, the wife is expected to facilitate the husband's sexual needs. Refusal to be intimate with her husband or insistence on protective measures against infection can easily be construed to indicate the wife's unfaithfulness in the husband's absence. Due to factors such as younger age, poverty, lower educational status, lesser power in the family, and financial dependence on the husband, women often find it difficult to challenge their husbands.²

The husband usually falls sick first, and the wife often cares for the husband and the children as her own health begins to give in.³ Such care is expected by society, and women often do it without much support, and often under constant accusations by the

husband's family of bringing the virus into the family - even in very unlikely circumstances and without any proof.⁴

In all this, faith is usually not on the periphery. Most women, men and families in southern Africa belong to one Christian faith group or another. Whether still in good health or sick, southern Africans usually practise their faith to some degree. In sickness and death, prayers and faith rituals are carried out. I worked mostly with women who are the more religious statistically - it is mostly women who fill up the churches, pray for the sick, gather at funerals, console the bereaved and bury the dead. Both HIV/AIDS and faith are at the heart of the women's lives. Some of those who unquestioningly accept intimacy with their long-gone husbands on their return, who care for their sick husbands and neighbours, do so under the guise of fulfilling matrimonial obligations of faith.⁵

Hence moments of the AIDS tragedy are moments when women live up to the social, cultural and religious expectations placed upon them. When sickness or death occurs, women usually forget their differences in religious affiliation and work together.⁶ Though they normally visit the sick and attend funerals in their different church and guild uniforms, they unite under the banner of Christianity. At such moments, the guilds of Mary quite often dominate numerically and influentially,⁷ and it is not unusual that rosary prayers are an essential part of the journey of sickness or caregiving.⁸ I have seen rosaries hanging on the bedsides of some non-Catholic and non-Anglican patients both in homes and hospitals. Some seem to simply think rosaries somehow bring God's blessings, without even knowing how to use them. For others, rosaries are apparently more like tokens for good luck. Songs and hymnal prayers for

Mary's intercessions are quite popular with women at funerals, often regardless of religious affiliation.

Traditionally, many southern African women (and often men) wear bracelets, anklets, chains, or bands on their wrists, necks and other parts of the body. They use all sorts of ornaments to adorn themselves. While some of these are for leisure and fashion, many have their supernatural significance, such as prevention from attack by evil spirits and witchcraft, or good luck. Some ornaments are treated with traditional medicine and are believed to have magical and spiritual powers. They are usually worn after consultation with traditional healers and renowned medicine men or women and are often prescribed as part of spiritual and psychological treatment. The way southern Africans use such ornaments seems to be the way they also use Marian 'holy objects'. Apparently, the African tradition has made it easy for some Africans to wear the rosary, to collect and keep Marian 'holy objects' (such as her small statues, badges, scapulars, shirts, dresses, tablecloths and 'holy water' from her grottos) in their homes, on their bodies and in their pockets. Some of these objects replicate the spiritual role of traditional ornaments. The 'holy objects' are usually blessed by the priest or pastor before use. The Marian 'holy objects' are believed to invoke her spiritual presence, intercession for grace, spiritual support in a given challenging task, protection and inspiration for some needed strength or virtue. Though some Christian groups, such as some evangelicals, object to such collections and use, from my experience the objects are largely accepted within society.

My research is motivated by the practical problem of the disproportionate HIV infections and AIDS effects on women. From my experience, at the heart of this

problem is women's lack of power. This has prompted me to question, from a theological point of view, how women can be empowered against HIV/AIDS. Advocacy for women's empowerment is being stepped up on many fronts in southern Africa. There are some government and nongovernment-led long-term campaigns as well as some feminist pressure groups.⁹ Conspicuously absent in this campaign, however, is the articulation of feminine religious or cultural symbols of power that depict the image of woman as powerful, commanding, authoritative and self-determinant, individually or collectively as women-communities. The symbol of Mary could play an important role in making up this missing link.

Given that southern Africans have a strong religious outlook to life,¹⁰ and given my experience of how Zimbabweans in particular use the symbol of Mary, I have wondered if the symbol can help to change society's view of women and women's view of themselves as part of the solution to women's empowerment. My experiences have been shaped mainly by a Zimbabwean Christian background, particularly a Catholic and Anglican one. I do not have much experience of other southern African countries' way of life and their use of the symbol of Mary. However, research has established that the disproportionate effects of HIV/AIDS on women are widespread throughout southern Africa,¹¹ and that Christianity is dominantly the practised religion in the region.¹² I would like to suggest that the symbol of Mary could inspire Christian women's empowerment in Zimbabwe, and that, if so, there is also a possibility it could do the same to Christian women in other southern African countries, the epicentre of HIV/AIDS.

1.2 Reference to Mary as a Symbol

In general, when people talk about Mary, what they unconsciously refer to is the symbol of Mary. This is because very little can be ascertained or said of the historical Mary. Our main source of the historical Mary is the little biblical information available. Yet even the biblical Mary seems more symbolical than historical. The gospel writers narrate the story of Christ from the resurrection viewpoint. David Brown argues, for example, that the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and Nunc Dimittis (Luke 1:67-79) clearly stand for the clarity of faith and confidence of the post-Resurrection church, articulated through appropriate Old Testament passages.¹³ The doctrinal content, rather than the historicity of Mary or of the infancy narrative, was the evangelists' concern.

All four gospel writers seem to shape their narratives about Mary to varying degrees as they use her symbolically. When Mark gives Jesus' negative response to his mother and brothers' request (Mark 3: 31-5), this could be Mark's attempt to emphasise the priority of the eschatological or church family over the earthly. Mary seems to be part of that symbolic representational pattern.¹⁴ In Matthew's gospel, Mary is a passive instrument in God's plan for humanity, and the infancy story revolves around the actions of Joseph, while in Luke, Mary is active. She is the ideal representative disciple of the poor of Israel and the ideal hearer of God's word.¹⁵ In John, her symbolic involvement is more obvious. At the foot of the cross Mary is addressed impersonally as "woman" suggesting that John's aim is to give her a representative status, just like the anonymous "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 19:25-27).¹⁶ Some biblical attributes to Mary also have symbolic connotations. According to Brown,

Mary's virginity, for instance, was a sign of the new beginnings God was initiating through Jesus.¹⁷

This illustrates that very little can be ascertained about the historical Mary. When talking or thinking about Mary, it is not easy to avoid symbolic connotations or assumptions about her. Further, the Mary that people usually talk about is the one whose image in Christian history has been enriched and expanded by theology, devotion, art, poetry or myths. She is the end-product of centuries of people's imaginations and reconstructions of her image for their own purposes. This also means there is no clear distinction between the terms 'Mary' and 'the symbol of Mary'. Hence by 'Mary' I shall mostly mean the symbol of Mary as it has developed in Christian history, theory and spirituality. I will often use 'Mary' and 'Marian symbol' interchangeably as I find appropriate.

Theoretically, it should be possible to distinguish between many versions of Mary: the historical, biblical, theological, spiritual, legendary, artistic, apparitional and so on. Some scholars even speak of a thousand faces of Mary.¹⁸ This means one could concentrate on one particular representation or symbol of Mary. This however, is not my intention. In southern Africa, Marian followers emphasise different symbolic connotations and aspects of her, and apparently this enables her to appeal to a variety of people. The Mary I shall refer to is the figure of the woman singularly identified as mother of Jesus, but whose identity has been expanded by Christians through many symbolic connotations attributed to her.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

My aim is to propose a liberative Mariological model for southern African Christian women disproportionately infected/affected by HIV/AIDS. I intend to do this by suggesting Mary as a symbol that inspires the empowerment of women against HIV/AIDS. This inspiration is meant to happen basically at two levels: first, that of motivating women to seek their own uplifting, so that they can be in a position to withstand infection and overcome its causes and effects; second, that of motivating the southern African society to change their way of understanding the female gender, by bestowing women with the dignity and respect necessary for an empowered social status.

At the moment in southern Africa there is widespread understanding and appreciation of Mary as an important follower and powerful mother of Jesus,¹⁹ but not as a symbol of empowerment against HIV/AIDS. Besides guilds of Mary's followers in some Catholic and Anglican Churches,²⁰ Mary is revered by Christians from various denominations in southern Africa.²¹ Her recognition as an important biblical figure is largely across the board among Christians.²² For Fouda, the role she played as a woman in the bible makes her more appealing to women than to men in Africa.²³ This however, has not necessarily translated into an understanding of Mary as a symbol that inspires the empowerment of women, particularly within the HIV/AIDS context. In fact, some of her popularity and power has often been understood as oppressive to women, and as influential to their submissiveness in the society.²⁴ It is my view that though revered, popular and important to many southern African Christians, Mary remains untapped of many of her empowering possibilities. I

therefore suggest that Mary be portrayed in such a way as to become inspirational to southern African women's empowerment within the HIV/AIDS context, particularly the Christian women.

One of my objectives is to suggest the replacement of some symbolic imagery of Mary which appear to encourage submissiveness and the oppression of women with those that depict her as a powerful symbol of liberation. In the wider world, some theologians of feminist Mariology, both conservative and liberal, have already expressed determination to overthrow Mary's traditional oppressive images, such as that of her virginity and motherhood, and to replace them with new meanings that liberate.²⁵ The Marian symbol has allegedly been oppressive to women in the past,²⁶ and using the symbol positively for women's uplifting will be an important way of ensuring she does not work negatively against women in our society.

My other objective is to suggest Mary as a rallying point for southern African Christian women in fighting HIV/AIDS. I intend to suggest Mary as a feminine religious symbol which unites southern African Christian women so that they can better speak with one voice as one group, or as different groups motivated by the same symbol in various ways and to different degrees. Though the importance of Mary to Christians differs according to individuals and to different Christian groups, arguably most Christians do recognise Mary as an important figure in their faith. In his book, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus*, Scot McKnight, writes, "The real Mary is no offense to Protestants, but rather a woman for us to honour."²⁷ The common denominator that could unite most Christian women's views of Mary is their recognition of the role she played in

mothering Jesus.²⁸ In this way, she could be a symbol that different groups of Christian women could identify with in their values, self-esteem, self-confidence and aspirations, to the degree that suits them.

1.4 Field of Study

The thesis aims to be an exercise in African contextual theology inspired and shaped by feminist Mariology. Feminist Mariology is an attempt, generally by Christian feminists, to reinterpret the traditional theologies, doctrines, scriptures, and devotions related to Mary from a feminist perspective. It is usually critical of traditional Mariology for subjugating women, and usually seeks to rediscover Marian symbolisms that empower.²⁹ The thesis will attempt to show how such interpretations by feminists can help to inspire women in southern Africa for empowerment. It will apply some feminists' interpretations of Mary that concur with the thinking of some southern African feminists. Since my concern is with the HIV/AIDS context, it is a feminist Marian theology of HIV/AIDS. My concern is not with the historicity of the narratives of Mary in the Bible, but with drawing from the Bible and Christian experience imaginative ways of picturing Mary which can inspire and orient women in their struggles. It is not with doctrine, but with the way imaginative symbols play a part in the life experience of women.

The thesis is linked to third world feminist Mariology in a thematic kinship. Mary is well established as one of the models of women in Asian and Latin American feminist theology. In Asia, she has been hailed as a fully liberated human being.³⁰ In Latin America, some feminist theologians recognise themselves in Mary's experience and

see Mary not only as one who identifies with their struggles, but also as an active participant with them.³¹ In Africa, though a theology that links Mary and women has apparently not taken deep feminist roots, Mary is important because she is “in touch with the sorrow and suffering so familiar to African woman.”³² Oduyoye writes that like other third world women theologians, Africans see possibilities of empowerment in Marian motifs and imagery such as the Magnificat.³³ One of the themes of the Women’s Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians is the importance of Mariology and the Magnificat in the shaping of community in the church.³⁴ Third world feminist theologians have, as one, expressed the need for new images of Mary through new insights and interpretations of her life and role in the liberation of human beings. The theologians argue that through new images, Mary can be a catalyst in the liberation of all women.³⁵ The thesis attempts to bring to life some of these insights by third world and African theologians in the HIV/AIDS context.

1.5 Method of Study

As part of my method of study I use the contextual approach of feminism. The context is the HIV/AIDS situation in southern Africa where women are disproportionately affected and infected. I see Mary as one who could inspire the women in their struggle for empowerment in this context. For instance, I identify the southern African Christian women with the poor and oppressed with whom Mary expresses union in the Magnificat (Luke 1:52-53). I see Mary as a participant in their struggle for liberation against poverty and HIV/AIDS oppression.³⁶

I also use the hermeneutic of suspicion - a feminist method which argues that all theological interpretations are from a particular perspective and are coloured by the perspective of the interpreter. I try to keep this in mind in dealing with the way Mary is interpreted in southern Africa. I also consider some new observations that have resulted from the use of this method by feminists. For instance, in arguing for the ordination of women, I include the observation that the cross was often called the first Eucharist proper, so that Mary and other women who were with her near the cross (John 19:25-27) could be referred to as the first priests.³⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza³⁸ and Elizabeth Johnson³⁹ are noteworthy among feminist Mariology scholars who use this method.

Alongside the hermeneutic of suspicion I also use the feminist method of deconstruction and reconstruction.⁴⁰ Feminist deconstruction involves questioning and confronting theology which has traditionally been defined in masculine terms. According to Khezerloo, "deconstructing" is understood as the breaking down of the elements of traditional theological thinking in order to analyse them, destabilise them and disqualify them from speaking for women. Deconstruction helps to demonstrate that there can be no universal and privileged meanings and values between men and women. It also offers an opportunity for rebuilding, working out new models that can subvert the oppressive traditional theology and the culture to which it belongs.⁴¹ In the thesis, I suggest the scrutiny, critique and reconstruction of some images of Mary which I think are oppressive to women, such as her traditional 'Virgin' image.

I also apply analogy as a study tool for drawing parallels and highlighting points of resemblance between Mary and southern African women. For example, I highlight the

similarities between Mary's revered motherhood and that of southern African women in order to argue for their greater respect as mothers. The use of analogy between the empowered Mary and southern African women provides insight and visual awareness of how the women could be empowered. This method is often used in African feminism. In Femalism, one form of African feminism, for instance, analogy is made between Africa the colonised mother-land and women's oppressed bodies.⁴²

1.6 Feminist Theology from a Man's Perspective

I am deeply aware of the complex and sensitive issues raised and presented by the suggestion of speaking on women's behalf. I present the danger of pre-empting and taking over women's arguments, and stifling their concerns and voices. I could overshadow women's own theological voices. I also acknowledge the self-contained conflict in deconstructing male domination using male power, which has an inherent tendency to re-establish male hegemony.

However, it should be noted that some renowned western feminists have often expressed a desire to include men in women's movements.⁴³ This desire goes much further in African feminism. Most forms of African feminism, such as Africana Womanism⁴⁴ and Stiwanism⁴⁵ incorporate men's contributions. Many African women theologians have unequivocally invited male theologians to be allies in women's struggles from their oppressions. In *African Women, Religion and Health*, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians included a chapter from a man, Ogbu Kalu.⁴⁶ There is also a growing number of men being hired by African women's organisations as gender experts who raise funds for work on women's

empowerment and rights.⁴⁷ Some women's organisations have handed over their newsletters and documentation sections to males who "speak on their behalf."⁴⁸

Indeed, some African feminist theologians have argued for men's involvement in their theology. For instance, Oduyoye argues that gender ideology is not limited to biology or to power relations between women and men. In womanist theology, she contends, colonies are considered females in relation to the colonising nations; male slaves are females in relation to women in the master's household and white women are gendered males in relation to black women.⁴⁹ As part of their statement, a group of Black Feminists from South Africa also states:

Although we are feminists, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. . . . we struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism. . .⁵⁰

I also agree with Maurice Hamington, who brings in the argument from social construction theory, that notions of 'male' and 'female' are socially made and not biologically determined. He argues that a feminist consciousness can be developed in some men and not be available to some women. For example, in terms of gender, while most women can be associated with the ethic of care, and men with that of justice, this can be, in some cases, vice-versa. For him, like gender, feminist consciousness is not an unqualified determinant of behaviour or moral construction. He adds that although women must take the leading role in Mariology, "Mary 'belongs' to women no more than Jesus 'belongs' to men."⁵¹

I believe this inclusion of men in feminist circles is a healthy thing. Women's theology, which is not just for women but for society as a whole, needs to include men in the debate on equality so as to change men's lives. I locate my stance within pro-feminist African men – who actively support feminist struggles for a society non-oppressive to women and providing equal opportunities for men and women.⁵² I hold African feminist beliefs that there are disproportionate effects of HIV/AIDS on women. Nevertheless, as a male, I cannot speak for women's experience except humbly by way of suggestion and through empathy.

1.7 Main Sources Used

My basic research material comes from books and writings of some renowned feminist authors on Mary. Some of them reflect concrete local situations in different parts of the world, and others are quite theoretical. To support my feminist arguments, I have occasionally included opinions from non-feminist authors on Mary, such as traditional Christian theologians. Some traditional Mariology views which do not appeal to western feminist theology, such as those on motherhood, often concur with the African feminist stance. I have also been informed by some African feminist and feminist theological writings. On the other hand, HIV/AIDS is a subject for sociological research, particularly by the United Nations (UN) and some women's organisations. I have utilised their studies, including some empowerment theories in HIV/AIDS contexts often published online. I have also visited some southern African places of interest to the study and done some person-to-person interviews with people on site. I have done some personal observation on ground of how some of the places and organisations work. This has included some photo-taking.

1.8 Lack of Qualitative Research

However, I have not been able to do an in-depth qualitative research of the thesis. During my ministry in Zimbabwe in 2003, I once challenged the political leadership for perpetuating violence against the people I was ministering to. This led to regular threats of violence against me, and partly led to my departure from the country. Since then I have not had the freedom to go about freely in the country. This has curtailed my ability to do in-depth interviews in southern Africa, to focus on small groups, to be a participant observer or to take videos and more photos for study and analysis. I understand that I could have missed out, for instance, on some culturally-specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of the southern African people which could have enriched the thesis. An in-depth study of the people's life styles, of how Marian groups engage the symbol, or how they exercise their apostolate within a HIV/AIDS situation could have given me greater insight into how empowerment could happen through the symbol.

1.9 The Southern African HIV/AIDS Situation

Southern Africa is the epicentre of HIV/AIDS in the world and HIV infections happen a lot more to women than to men. Women are the ones mainly at the centre of regional poverty, gender inequality and HIV/AIDS. Up to 52% of all women (15 years and older) who lived with HIV globally in 2010 were in southern Africa, though the region has less than 3.5% of the global population.⁵³ Three in every four young people living with HIV (15-24 years) in the region were women.⁵⁴ This has resulted in the use of the term “the feminization of AIDS.”⁵⁵

Due to discriminatory customary and substantive laws, most women own little land and property.⁵⁶ According to Gladys Mutangadura, women are often discriminated against in courts, and often face political and domestic gender based violence, including sexual violence.⁵⁷ The women are usually less educated than men, and due to poverty, they often cannot afford transport to hospital, HIV medication, and a fair representation in the justice system. Women are expected to know little about sex, to prioritise the man's sexual needs, and face more stigmatisation than men if they contract HIV.⁵⁸ Southern Africa also has a huge number of women refugees who live in very insecure environments.⁵⁹

Research suggests that most women get the HIV infection from their only regular male sexual partner.⁶⁰ Besides being the most infected, women are the more widely affected by HIV/AIDS impacts. They are ones who become much poorer, who do most of the care-work, who provide for the family and take in AIDS orphans.⁶¹ Apparently southern African governments are doing too little to help women out of the HIV/AIDS situation. For instance, Mutangadura argues that the government budgets poorly reflect the disproportionate HIV infections and impacts on women, and there is little recognition of the work women are doing to alleviate the AIDS burden.⁶² A more detailed account of this section is in Appendix A.

1.10 Conclusion

The HIV/AIDS situation portrayed above gives the impression that the southern African society is heavily biased towards men and against women. They give credence to the claim by feminists and women's organisations that southern Africa is

a patriarchal society in which women suffer disproportionately against HIV/AIDS due to lack of power.⁶³ While there are many feminist ways of working towards the needed gender justice, in this thesis I choose to respond to women's oppression by promoting empowerment through the Marian symbol. I argue along the feminist theory which states that the promotion of feminine symbols of power in society is essential for the empowerment of women.⁶⁴ The following chapter explains in detail what it means to speak of Mary as a symbol that inspires empowerment.

ENDNOTES

¹UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, A Joint Report by UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2004), 31.

²UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 28.

³UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15.

⁴UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15.

⁵UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, *Facing the Future Together* (Geneva, 2004), iv

⁶African Women Organisations, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.african-women.org/index.php>

⁷*Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (Dublin: Concilium Legionis Mariae, Revised Edition, 2005), 12. A guild is an association, solidarity or confraternity of Christians who join together to foster a more spiritual life, perform charitable acts, or promote public worship or Christian teaching. Each guild has a peculiar religious purpose, usually inspired by a particular saint the guild is devoted to. In southern Africa there is a variety of Marian guilds, such as the Legion of Mary and Mary Queen of Heaven. Each guild emphasises different spiritual aspects in their devotion.

⁸Herbert Thurston and Andrew Shipman, "The Rosary" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, vol. 13, 1912), 1077. The word 'rosary' comes from a Latin word *rosarium* which means a garland of roses. The rose is one of the flowers used to depict the Virgin Mary. The term 'rosary' denotes prayer beads used mainly by Catholics to count the sequence of prayers that make up the rosary. The prayers consist of repeated series of the Lord's Prayer followed by ten 'Hail Mary' prayers and a single 'Glory Be to the Father' prayer. A set of these prayers is known as a decade. The praying of each decade is accompanied by meditation on one of the Mysteries of the Rosary, which usually recalls the life of Jesus Christ.

⁹African Women Organisations, accessed on 23-09-2010.

¹⁰The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*, University of Dayton, Ohio, May 2007. This article notes that very few Africans are non-religious.

¹¹UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15

¹²NationMaster, Country population, accessed 28-09-22011

http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/peo_pop-people-population;

US Department of State, accessed 28-09-22011 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>

Solidarity International, accessed 28-09-22011 <http://csi-usa.org/>

Statistical data on the predominance of Christianity in southern Africa differs with different research organisations.

The two separate sets of statistics in table 1 bellow, one from the US Department of State and the other from NationMaster, highlight how statistical data and classification of Christians can differ among different organisations. Note that except for the country population figures, all other figures are a percentage of the total population. Such country statistics on religious affiliation, however, are usually estimates subject to observational errors. Some sources of the data are religious affiliates prone to biased estimates. The criteria for classifying or defining a Christian may also vary among organisations. For instance, there is no standard measurement for church attendance or for one's belief in God. What is consistent in this varied data, however, is that Christianity is the predominant form of practised religion in southern Africa.

**US Department of State: Diplomacy in
Action, 2010**

**NationMaster's Religion Statistics, 2010.
(Percentage of total population)**

Country	Country Populatio n	Christ ianity	Isl am	Traditiona l and other religions	Country	Christ ianity	Indigenous (Christian, and Traditional)	Isl am	Traditio nal belief
Angola	20,589,000	53	1	46	Angola	53	0	0	47
Botswana	1,735,000	95.6	1.5	2.9	Botswana	50	0	0	50
D. R. Congo	59,293,000	79.9	12.8	7.3	D. R. Congo	70	10	10	10
Lesotho	1,811,000	56.1	17.9	26	Lesotho	80	0	0	20
Malawi	15,081,000	62	35	3	Malawi	75	0	20	5
Mozambique	19,318,000	57.1	17.9	25	Mozambique	30	0	20	50
Namibia	2,235,000	71.6	0.3	28.1	Namibia	85	0	0	15
South Africa	48,770,000	90	0	10	South Africa	68	1.5	2	28.5
Swaziland	990,000	90	0	10	Swaziland	60	0	10	30
Tanzania	39,204,000	79.7	1.5	18.8	Tanzania	45	0	35	20
Zambia	12,138,000	90	1	9	Zambia	62	0	37	1
Zimbabwe	14,580,000	84	1	15	Zimbabwe	25	50	1	24

Table 2 below offers different statistical evidence of Christian groups and Christian dominance in southern African countries. Note that all figures are percentages. The total percentage of Catholics, Protestants and Indigenous Churches equals the percentage of Christianity to the population of the country.

**Table 2 Christian Solidarity International: World Map Religious Freedom
Africa, 2010: Christian Groupings in Southern African Countries**

Country	Christianity % of total population	Catho lic	Protestant	Indigenous Churches	Musli m	Traditional	Other Religions
Angola	53	38	15	0	0	0	47
Botswana	50.2	9.4	29	11.8	0	49.8	0
D. R. Congo	94.6	48.5	29	17.1	0	3.4	2
Lesotho	80	44	30	6	0	0	20
Malawi	75	30	20	25	20	5	0
Mozambique	29	12	17	0	23	48	0
Namibia	82	20	62	0	0	18	0
South Africa	73	8	30	35	2	9.3	15.7
Swaziland	77	10.8	37.3	28.9	0	20.9	2.1
Tanzania	46	33	13	0	35	19	0
Zambia	72	27.3	35.3	9.4	0	27	1
Zimbabwe	43	12	17	14	0	40	17

¹³David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 228.

¹⁴David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 238.

¹⁵David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 238.

¹⁶David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 238.

¹⁷David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 241.

¹⁸George H Tavad, Monika K Hellwig, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996).

¹⁹Directory on Ecumenism for Southern Africa, accessed on 24-18-2011

<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=293> Mary is openly revered or honoured in some non-Catholic and non-Anglican churches such as the Nazareth Baptist Church of South Africa, the Marian Faith Healing Ministry of Tanzania, St. Mary's Episcopal Churches of Malawi and Zambia, St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Churches in south Africa, Zambia and Angola, and the evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe.

Antoine Fouda also describes Mary as “mother” and “Queen of Africa.” She sees devotion to Mary as characteristic of African Christians in general. She writes that the cult of Mary and devotion to Mary “is characteristic of African Churches,” and Mary is a refuge of Christians in Africa. She points out a number of countries where Mary is venerated at major Marian sanctuaries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and South Africa. Fouda concludes that “Mary is the image of the perfect disciple whom Africans are called to imitate” (94). [Antoine Essomba Fouda, ‘Veneration of Mary in Africa’ in Diego Irarrazabal et al (eds.), *The Many Faces of Mary* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 87-94].

²⁰Antoine Essomba Fouda, ‘Veneration of Mary in Africa’, 91.

²¹Nancy Schwartz, “Dreaming in Color: Anti-essentialism in Legio Maria Dream Narratives, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2005), 159. One example is the Legio Maria (Legion of Mary) Church found in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda and DRC. This is an African Indigenous Church which incorporates traditional religious customs into a Catholic Christian framework. It is today estimated to have about three million members.

²²Pope John Paul II, ‘Separated Brethren also Honour Mary’ in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19 November 1997, page 7. According to John Paul II, “Today many Anglican and Protestant Christians venerate Mary, and the Orthodox have always loved and revered her with ardent devotion.” This sentiment is also echoed by Ella Rozett, an MA graduate in Buddhist Studies with an emphasis on Christian-Buddhist Comparative Studies who was raised as a Lutheran, and now runs a website called Interfaith Mary Page (Interfaith Mary Page, accessed on 09 -08-2011 http://www.interfaithmary.com/pages/tour_guide.html.)

²³Antoine Essomba Fouda, ‘Veneration of Mary in Africa’, 92.

²⁴Nomsa Hani, *Virgin Symbol and Body: Christian and African Traditional Beliefs on Sexuality in Relation to the Problems of HIV/AIDS*, accessed on 23-09-2010, <http://www.heart-intl.net/HEART/100507/VirginSymbol.htm>. For Hani, the popular view of Mary as a pure virgin has contributed to the belief that sex with a virgin cures one of AIDS. This has led to the rape of some virgins in South Africa. I would like to suggest, however, that Hani’s apparent consciousness of the ‘negative’ power of Mary on men and women in society, regardless of one’s individual religious affiliation, is nonetheless a consciousness of the power of the symbol. I would like to argue that this apparently ‘negative’ power could be reinterpreted for the good of society in

general, regardless of religious affiliation. Such a consciousness of the power of the symbol society in general has also been exhibited in claims such as that of Mary's apparitions in the sun to individuals and to multitudes in Africa (South Africa: Church Clips Wings of Virgin Mary Teen, accessed on 24-08-2011 <http://wwrn.org/articles/25435/?&place=south-africa§ion=christianity>; Virgin Mary Shows Herself In Center Of Gleaming Sun In Africa, accessed on 24-08-2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgcg81137w0>).

²⁵Mary Thomas, 'Down from her Pedestal: Elizabeth A. Johnson's Truly our Sister' in *East Asian Pastoral Review*, vol. 41, no. 4, (2004) 358.

²⁶David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). David Brown, for instance, argues that "Certainly, Mary has often been used both consciously and otherwise as a means of controlling women" (240) and also accepts that in Anglo-Saxon England, the notion of Mary's virginity came to symbolise freedom, power and dedication (246).

²⁷Scot McKnight, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus* (Orleans: Paraclete Press, First Edition, 2006), 6.

This objective is in line with the resolve of Asian feminist theologians from different Christian backgrounds, in their 1987 statement, to reinterpret and utilise Mary as a symbol that drives them towards their empowerment as women [The Conference Statement of the Asian Women's Theology Consultation' in *Asia Journal of Theology*, vol.2, no.2 (1988), 555].

²⁸Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Mary, Mother of God* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004). This common recognition of Mary was demonstrated, for instance, by Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant scholars who contributed to the book *Mary, Mother of God*. A result of many ecumenical dialogues on Mary in the United States, the book seeks to make clear that Mariology is properly related to Christ and his church in ways that can and should be meaningful for all Christians. The aim of the book is to "understand and honour Mary in ways. . . that are Scripturally based, evangelically motivated, liturgically appropriate and ecumenically sensitive" (101). The theologians' first acknowledge Mary's important presence in scripture. In the book, Mary is then also sensitively honoured liturgically, in theological writings, creedal formulations and official doctrine. The editors of the book note that the several denominational views on the dogma, person and role of Mary show that it is possible in the Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist and other Protestant traditions to have Mary as a unifying figure who brings their often discordant voices to harmony (6).

²⁹Ursula King, 'Introduction' in Ursula King (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 1994), 271.

³⁰Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology* (Geneva: WCC, 1979), 23.

³¹Elsa Tamez 'Introduction: the Power of the Naked,' in Elsa Tamez (ed.) *Through her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989), 5.

³²Loreen Maseno, *Feminist Theology in West and East Africa: Convergences and Divergences*, accessed on 24-04-2009 <http://folk.uio.no/marianbk/nktf/sunniva/tekster/2004/maseno.html>

³³Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introductions in Feminist Theology: Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 58.

³⁴Ursula King (ed.), *Feminist Theology From the Third World: a Reader* (London: SPCK/Orbis, 1994), 31.

³⁵Elsa Tamez 'Introduction: the Power of the Naked', 11.

³⁶Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). As part of the contextual theological approach, for instance, the thesis uses the counter-cultural model of Bevans to critique polygamy as a cultural aspect antithetical to the Christian social teaching, and argues for social change. In other contexts, it also employs his anthropological model, which is based on the understanding that God's grace is already at work in different cultures and, which cautions against undermining any cultural values. It argues, for instance, that the African traditional respect afforded motherhood has true Christian value and is beneficial to women's drive for empowerment.

³⁷Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation: The Story and the Text* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 72.

³⁸Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiozenza, "Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutic," in B. Mahan, L. D. Richesin (eds.), *The Challenge of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981), 107.

³⁹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 289-290.

⁴⁰Elisabeth Schussler Fiozenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 160.

⁴¹Rasool Khezerloo, 'Winking at Derrida: The Happy Union of Deconstruction and Feminism' in *An Ambilingual Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (2010), 126.

⁴²Chioma Opara and M., Eboh, *On the African Concept of Transcendence: Conflating Nature, Nurture and Creativity*, Institute of Foundational Studies, accessed on 4-09-2007 <http://www.isud.org/Chioma%20Opara%20and%20M.%20,%20Eboh.doc>. According to Chioma Opara and M. Eboh, Femalism relates to the politicisation of biological issues of production and reproduction of women. It is committed to the freedom of Mother Africa that takes the female body and mothering as a background and a systemic biological site for feminism. The female body is seen positively (in contrast to Simone de Beauvoir's theory) as the root for arriving at essential metaphysical and transcendent elements. In the pursuit for African freedom, the theory depicts similarities between the lacerated female body and the disfigured African nation troubled by wars, poverty, disease, colonialism and postcolonial difficulties. "The scarred body not only aligns with the spiritual in the representation of the natural and the cosmic but also manifests the dents of a scrambled and ailing nation."

⁴³Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Patriarchy and the Men's Movement: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?' in Kay Leigh Hagan (ed.), *Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection* (San Fransico: Pandora, 1992), 14. The invitation of men, according to Ruether, is on condition that men "have come to understand the evils of patriarchy, the injustice that has been done to women, and the way that this has distorted all social relations." (See also, an earlier Mary Daly in *Beyond God the Father*, 169, and The 2000 evaluation of Beijing +5 in International Forum on Gender, Humanitarian Action and Development Working Group: *Gender*, accessed on 20-05-2010 http://www.europrofem.org/contri/2_04_en/en-masc/56en_mas.htm)

⁴⁴Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Nairobi: Africa World Press, 2008), 154-155. In this influential writing, Hudson-Weems

comes up with eighteen features of the Africana woman's existence. She writes that “the Africana womanist is 1) a self-namer; 2) a self-definer; 3) family-centered; 4) genuine in sisterhood; 5) strong; 6) in concert with the Africana man in struggle; 7) whole; 8) authentic; 9) a flexible role player; 10) respected; 11) recognized; 12) spiritual; 13) male compatible; 14) respectful of elders; 15) adaptable; 16) ambitious; 17) mothering; and 18) nurturing.”

⁴⁵Miriam C. Gyimah, ‘Aspects of Feminism and Gender in the Novels of Three West African Women Writers (Aidoo, Emecheta, Darko) by Edith Kohrs-Amissah’ in *West Africa Review*, vol 4, no 1 (2003), 64. Ogundipe-Leslie, a Nigerian feminist who coined the term ‘stiwanism’ (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) makes the following points regarding African feminism: “1) feminism need not be opposition to men, 2) women need not neglect their biological roles, 3) motherhood is idealized and claimed as a strength by African women and seen as having a special manifestation in Africa, 4) the total configuration of the conditions of women should be addressed rather than obsessing with sexual issues, 5) certain aspects of women’s reproductive rights take priority over others, 6) women’s conditions in Africa need to be addressed in the context of the total production and reproduction of their society and the scenario involves men and children and 7) the ideology of women has to be cast in the context of the race and class struggles which bedevil the continent of Africa today.”

⁴⁶Isabel Apawo Phiri, Sarojini Nadar (Eds.), *African Women, Religion and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006) 261-278.

⁴⁷Elisabeth Hofmann, *The 2008 AWID Forum in Cape Town – A Catalyst for Overcoming Spatial Divides in African Women’s Movements?* Accessed on 20-05-2010 http://www.feministafrica.org/uploads/File/Issue%2011/11_11_Profile%201.pdf

⁴⁸Patricia McFadden, *Why Women’s Spaces are Critical to Feminist Autonomy*, accessed on 20-05-2010 http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=630&Itemid=142

⁴⁹The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, *Gender and Theology in Africa Today- Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, accessed on 20-05-2010 http://www.thecirclecawt.org/focus_areas?mode=content&id=17292&refto=2 For Oduyoye, even though African nations have declared themselves independent from colonial domination, they are still under western domination because of neo-colonialism, economic dependency on the West and neo-liberal economic relations. African women are double oppressed as Africans under economic colonialism and under patriarchal cultures.

⁵⁰The Combahee River Collective Statement, ‘Black Feminist Organising in the Seventies and Eighties: A Black Feminist Statement,’ in *AfroSpear, A Think Tank for People of African Descent*, accessed on 20-05-2010

<http://afrospear.wordpress.com/2008/01/31/black-feminism-combahee-river-collective-statement/>

The same point is also echoed by many others. For instance, Nyambura J. Njoroge, ‘The Missing Voice: African Women Doing Theology’ in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, vol. 4, no.8 (1997), 77-83.

⁵¹Maurice Hamington, *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 169.

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- ⁵²Pro-feminist Men's Voices, accessed on 31-05-2007
http://www.feminist.com/resources/links/links_men.html
- ⁵³UNAIDS and WHO, *2010: AIDS Epidemic Update*, 21.
- ⁵⁴UNAIDS and WHO, *AIDS Epidemic Update 2010*, 16.
- ⁵⁵UNAIDS and WHO, *AIDS Epidemic Update 2010* (A Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2009), 16.
- ⁵⁶FAO Fact Sheet, *Focus: AIDS a Threat to Rural Africa*, accessed on 12-02-2007
<http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/aids/aids6-e.htm>
- ⁵⁷Gladys B. Mutangadura, 'Gender, HIV-AIDS and Rural Livelihoods in Southern Africa: Addressing the Challenges' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 7 (2005), 367.
- ⁵⁸UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 44.
- ⁵⁹UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 10.
- ⁶⁰UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 44.
- ⁶¹Gladys B. Mutangadura, 'Gender, HIV-AIDS and Rural Livelihoods', 9.
- ⁶²Gladys B. Mutangadura, 'Gender, HIV-AIDS and Rural Livelihoods', 9.
- ⁶³UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 35.
- ⁶⁴Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Introduction', 7.

CHAPTER TWO
THE CONCEPTS OF SYMBOL, INSPIRATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN
RELATION TO MARY

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter lays the background to my more detailed response to the HIV/AIDS situation in southern Africa. It explains the basic themes of the thesis, namely ‘symbol’, ‘inspiration’ and ‘empowerment’ in relation to Mary. It briefly explains how symbols work in human life, how gendered symbols impact on women in Southern Africa, and how the symbol of Mary has been promoted for women’s empowerment in feminist Mariology. It also illustrates how Mary is utilised as a symbol of empowerment within the chapters that follow.

2.2 The Work of Symbols in Society, and of the Marian Symbol in
Feminist Mariology

2.2.1 The Work of Symbols in Society in General

By explaining how symbols generally work in life, I hope in the process to give some general background ideas to how the Marian symbol could function for us in society as different groups and as individuals. The working of symbols runs all through human life wherever humans are. Our lives are shaped by symbols that are passed to us or inherited from our culture, peers, social groups and family.¹ They are devices by which people sharing a common culture transmit ideas between themselves. Some we are conscious of, and others we are not, yet they still affect us. Symbols are one of the main components of culture, an embodiment of people's identity, values, space and

pride, which reflect communal heritage and common aspirations. According to Clifford Geertz, symbols shape a cultural ethos, delineating the innermost values of a civilisation and its people.² All human cultures use symbols to articulate the underlying composition of their social systems, to signify ideal cultural characteristics, and to make certain that the culture is passed on to new generations.³

A symbol is something that stands for something else, especially an object representing an abstraction. It is “a visible sign or representation of an idea; anything which suggests an idea or quality, or another thing, as by resemblance, association, or convention.”⁴ A symbol can be an emblem, a type, a character or a figure that represents something else. It can also be an object or image that an individual subconsciously uses to represent repressed thoughts, feelings, or impulses.⁵

A symbol works as a concentrated form of communication that illuminates the object it symbolises, like a sketch-map illuminating a geographical site.⁶ More is said to us more quickly through symbols on a conscious or subconscious level than with language. According to Paul Tillich, a symbol can mean two or more things at once to different people, or in different contexts.⁷ It points beyond itself and participates in the reality to which it points. It goes beyond the visible and tangible and opens the door into a larger world. It can connect us to something greater than ourselves, to the unknown, the ultimate and the deepest mysteries. It takes on some of the nature of what it points to,⁸ though it has an inherent value separable from what it symbolises.⁹

When we focus on a symbol, we tend to awaken its quality in our lives. For example, meditating on the autonomy, courage and perseverance of Mary could increase those

qualities in our own mind and feelings. When we read or listen to Mary's story, the virtues therein could develop in us. A symbol manifests a certain state of consciousness and meditating on it can create in us the same state of consciousness.¹⁰ When using a symbol for motivation to a goal, the symbol acts as a catalyst or a road map, leading one toward the desired goal. The consciousness made manifest in the symbol releases and hones-in energy patterns necessary to bring about the desired goal. The energy released, like a roadway, can twist, bend and connect two things together that normally would be difficult to connect.¹¹

If a symbol continues to impact on us, it can sensitise our conscience, wield influence over our mind and life, and mould our life patterns to fit the message. Symbols affect and alter our mood, our sense of possibility, and our sense of confidence. They also influence our brain state, which can alter chemical production in our bodies. They have the power to engage the feelings and to rouse the will to action.¹² Association with religious symbols can also lead to spiritual union, particularly within a ritual context.¹³ In this way symbols shape our values. They are powerful instruments for extending our vision, stimulating our imagination and deepening our understanding. They can encourage, inspire, transform, enlighten and help us to heal.¹⁴

Symbols are essential tools for 'soul-searching'- they unlock levels of reality which are otherwise closed to us.¹⁵ For instance, poems, songs and paintings, reveal things about reality which science cannot, and open new dimensions of inner life within us.¹⁶ According to Paul Tillich, "man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically, because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate."¹⁷ In this sense, the symbol stands for openness, for pointing towards alternative possibilities, for

readiness to experiment in the hope of gaining a fuller understanding of reality. Symbolic expression is an important way to creative freedom.

Symbols are also important tools of group mobilisation, partly because they provide a shared platform for communication, elicit strong passions and provide easy means of branding a political or social movement. For Clifford Geertz, symbols have motivational, mental and political impacts because they construct deep-seated attitudes and feelings that make people accept social and political structures matching with the symbolic system.¹⁸ They evoke emotions and longing which can work on people's minds towards political decision-making.¹⁹

The symbol also acts powerfully to facilitate the preservation of a group and to keep patriotism and the emotional basis of a social organisation alive. Uniforms, badges and flags keep a common spirit of comradeship, enthusiasm, devotion and a sense of pride to a cause among group members. Symbols further promote unity within a group, though they can also strengthen barriers between people and groups.²⁰ When the symbol appears to be similar for all, this blurs over variations of interpretation and supports social harmony.

The symbol also powerfully preserves the capacity of a group to act swiftly, decisively and unanimously. It preserves the sentiments and ideals which are the basis of group organisation.²¹ It provides a specific picture for a general meaning, thereby providing common ground for quick decision-making and unanimity.

Symbols mainly work on a deep level of the unconscious, and accomplishment through symbols happens from within us. Yet it is important to consciously choose what symbols we want to associate with as a way of choosing what ideas we wish to fill our minds with, and what values to enrich or empower ourselves with.²² Some symbols are more powerful than others at social level. The strength and richness of the Marian symbol lies in the many ways she can be interpreted and used. As explained below, many symbols are also gendered, and this deeply affects women in southern Africa.

2.2.2 Southern African Masculine Symbols of Power and their Impact on Women

The reasons for the feminisation of HIV/AIDS explained in the first chapter support claims that Southern African societies are largely patriarchal.²³ The male dominance and bias in the society is also reflected in the social symbolic structure. While there are many national symbols that are gender neutral, the political, cultural and religious symbols of power are predominantly male. Political symbols, such as a raised fist, an armed male figure for liberation war heroes; and cultural symbols such as a spear and shield, a knobkerrie, a leopard or lion's skin are prominent icons of power, while feminine symbols that reflect power in the society are rare.²⁴

This symbolic structure, according to Whitehead's theory of symbolism, is repressive to women. The theory asserts that symbols articulate, support, strengthen, underpin and fortify cultural notions of gender.²⁵ Whitehead is supported by other symbolic anthropologists, such as Clifford Geertz, for whom symbols reflect, shape, question,

invert, reject and reinforce the gender principles and gender constructions of society.²⁶ While social values shape the meaning of gender symbols, symbols in turn convey messages about gender. They help to generate resonant myths that express the moral standards of gender relations in society.²⁷

Ortner and Rosaldo also hold that in a patriarchal society, women's viewpoints are largely held back and limited by dominant male-biased ideology.²⁸ Because men control the symbolic production and are the main creators of the society's overriding worldview, women's views are suppressed. A predominantly male notion of gender in practice thwarts the expression of women's experience.²⁹ The male symbols of domination sustain, reproduce and reinforce a worldview in which men own all respect, virtue and authority as distinct from women who are depicted as substandard or second-class.³⁰

In southern Africa, this dominant male symbolic expression is also widespread in our Christian way of life. In Zimbabwe, for instance, representations of God are masculine and fully autonomous female images of God are absent. The Father and the Son are clearly masculine, and the Holy Spirit is gender neutral.³¹ According to the symbolic anthropological view above, this imbalance of symbolic representation in worship helps to denigrate women in the wider social, cultural and political life.

Anne Carr explains what happens when masculine symbols predominate in societies where Christianity is hugely influential:

Boys grow up believing that they really do - or should - represent God on earth in roles of authority, knowledge, dignity, and power. If they

succeed, they reinforce structures of male superiority, both socially and privately. Girls internalize images of themselves as inferior, wrong, incomplete, guilty, unsure, incapable. This continues to hold women in secondary, subordinate roles in church and society while their implicit messages of inferiority are internalized by women and are continually reproduced in succeeding generations of mothers and their daughters and sons.³²

In southern Africa, the symbolic representational imbalance seems to be reflected in the social life as explained by Carr above. According to the Task Force, many women cannot freely and constructively speak or voice out their concerns and fears about the dangers of their infection to their husbands or partners.³³ They cannot openly and directly challenge their husbands' sexual misconduct, for this would appear to challenge their husbands' authority. Culturally and religiously, women are programmed to forgive men well before the wrong is done, even where men's behaviour endangers the women with infection. Women often blame themselves for violence perpetrated against them, and feel powerless to express anger or fight for justice.³⁴ As a result, the HIV/AIDS status of women generally depends on the behaviour of the males in their authority. This lack of power by women could be a reflection of the patriarchal symbolic structure in southern Africa.

There are also some cultural taboos, such as the denial of the right for women to contribute to men's debates or discussions unless invited, even where the debates concern women's wellbeing.³⁵ At the wider societal and political levels, as in many other areas of livelihood, women are led by men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Women are dominated in decision-making positions, and their voices concerning their protection, support in care-giving and medical treatment can hardly be heard. The political systems are basically man-led. Currently all the country presidents in southern Africa are men, with a woman vice-president found only in Zimbabwe.³⁶

This picture of women's dependence on male authority is generally reflected in church leadership as well. The Catholic Church - which is the single largest Christian organisation in southern Africa³⁷ - has exclusively male leadership. Women are not ordained and do not have the leadership advantage that ordained ministers enjoy. This absence of women from political leadership and the ordained ministry symbolises their absence in important decision-making positions and in effective policy formation on HIV/AIDS.³⁸ In such ways, women are treated as unequal and women's intelligence about their infection is belittled by men and society.

The monopoly of male symbols for God and culture also seems to deeply dictate how society understands women's power over their own bodies. Through customs of marriage, men determine how, when and where women's bodies should be used and who should use them.³⁹ During the onslaught and ravaging frenzy of the pandemic, such a body, with value only in relation to a man - sometimes a promiscuous husband - stands little chance for survival. When they live as subordinates, helpers and shadow reflections of men's self-fulfilment, women cannot assert their own authority over their bodies and sexuality and cannot stand up to the reality of HIV/AIDS.

2.2.3 Feminists' Promotion of the Symbol of Mary for Women's Empowerment

Prompted by such suppression and exclusions of women's world view in the wider world, there has been concerted feminist efforts worldwide to push for the analysis of prevailing social, cultural and religious symbols from the point of view of women's experience. Marilyn Thie points to a growing call by feminists worldwide for the transformation of imagery, speech and ideas as a tool for changing what women

experience.⁴⁰ After critically analysing cultural, religious and political symbols, the feminists intend to come up with new imagery and ideas of women's reality and struggle. Through a continuous process of pruning and adaptation to new forms of expression, they hope to adapt and revolutionise some old symbols for women's empowerment. One powerful symbol that has been proposed for such an adaptation and revolution is that of Mary.

Some radical feminists,⁴¹ however, have been quick to argue to the contrary - that Mary is at the least an ambiguous and ambivalent figure for women's empowerment today. They contest that in Christian history, Mary has been used to make women more submissive than authoritative.⁴² Four images of Mary in particular - as a foil to Eve, virgin, handmaid, and mother - are said to have pooled together in many ways to form the feminine ideal of man-controlled structures which degraded, underpinned and demeaned women.⁴³ Women who could not match this ideal were considered sinful like Eve. For such feminists, Mary has been totally corrupted by patriarchy and is non-recoverable for women's empowerment.⁴⁴ Mary continues to function for the dehumanisation of women. Examples of such feminists are Mary Daly,⁴⁵ Mariner Warner⁴⁶ Kari Borresen⁴⁷ and Marcella Althaus-Reid.⁴⁸

In southern Africa, one research proposal entitled *Virgin Symbol and Body: Christian and African Traditional Beliefs on Sexuality in Relation to the Problems of HIV/AIDS* has also criticised some religious depictions of Mary's virginity as "irresponsible" within the HIV/AIDS era. The proposal argues that the cultural and religious value and respect given to virginity, particularly Mary's virginity, is responsible for the

vulnerability of women because it creates and exacerbates the belief that virgins are sexually capable of cleansing HIV-infected men.⁴⁹

There are feminists, however, who stand in defence of the symbol of Mary for women's empowerment. Currently, according to Marianne Merckx, there is a strong drive in feminist theology for Mary as a figure of empowerment.⁵⁰ Elina Vuola writes about a whole new stream of mainly feminist women of diverse and world-wide Protestant background writing about, seeking, re-imagining and re-constructing Mary and building their theology around her.⁵¹ These feminists are part of a global, interfaith, and multi-cultural feminist theological attraction to Mary.⁵² They expect this drive for Mary to result in a positive impact on women's empowerment in the church and in society worldwide.⁵³

Some of these feminists are reluctant to depart from the symbol of Mary because it has layers of meaning for them and it has been part of their faith for long.⁵⁴ They argue that feminists must not "throw the mother out with bath water."⁵⁵ Monica Furlong asserts that no symbol that has contributed so intensely to human imagination can be thrown away or be forgotten. Whereas God saves us in Christ, and the Holy Ghost fires up the church's response in worship, according to Anne Carr, "it is Mary who is the sign of the final transformation of the world."⁵⁶ For Jorunn Okland, in terms of women's empowerment through feminine symbols, it is easier to correct old symbols whose inaccuracies we are already familiar with than to start working on new concepts.⁵⁷ Okland argues that basic symbols in a culture usually exhibit the capacity to undergo transformation. Old symbols live on by adopting new upturned interpretations, and most of what we think is new is simply the old reinvented.

Further, neglecting old inaccurate ideas about Mary will not help to bring to an end their negative impacts on women.⁵⁸ Kathleen Coyle also cautions that since each era has found different meanings in Mary's image, the present age must take time to appreciate the image to avoid shallow or hurried conclusions against it.⁵⁹

Rosemary Radford Ruether also argues that feminists should use Judaic and Christian language, cultural and religious traditions to imagine new symbolic meanings.⁶⁰ For her support, she resorts to the expertise of symbolic anthropologists Ortner, Whitehead, and Rosaldo for whom "the meaning of symbols, myths, and rituals are too multilayered, too complex in its relationship to social structure and social values" for one to suppose that new symbols easily work for a society or that established symbols can be radically eliminated.⁶¹ They hold that an old symbol is usually invested with different meanings for men and women, and reinvestment in the old symbols by articulating their desired meanings can be helpful to society.⁶²

Elina Vuola appeals to women's experience. She contends that many women worldwide do, in fact, see Mary as a basis of independence, respect and power. Mary helps women even in matters she supposedly knew nothing about: "sexuality, abortion, violence, ordinary motherhood."⁶³ For Vuola, if one asks ordinary women, they do not speak of Mary as oppressive, but as a holy feminine symbol, which sustains them, pays attention to them, and yet rises above earthly experience.⁶⁴

At least two feminist theologians' trends of thought have emerged focused on redefining Mariology for women's empowerment. One is conservative and seeks to preserve Mary's exalted symbol. It attempts to reinterpret her empowering potential

from the position of her traditional pedestal.⁶⁵ The other is liberal and looks to the historical context of Mary. It stresses that Mary has the empowering potential only if she is brought down from her pedestal and if she is considered an ordinary believer just like other women.⁶⁶ Such feminists are determined to overthrow Mary's traditional oppressive image and to replace it with new meanings that liberate.

2.2.4 The Potential of the Marian Symbol to Inspire Empowerment in the Southern African Society

If the advice of symbolic anthropologists noted above is to be heeded, there is a serious need to balance the biased symbolic system in southern Africa to help set women free.⁶⁷ There is need to reclaim, engage and utilize feminine symbols with potential to inspire liberation, such as that of Mary. Both the conservative and liberal forms of reinterpreting the Marian symbol for women's empowerment could be helpful in southern Africa.

Scholars such as Elizabeth Johnson and Clodovis Boff claim that the Marian symbol has helped to shape the cultural ethos of many societies in Christian history, thereby delineating the innermost values of civilisations. Clodovis Boff writes that, throughout Christian history, the figure of Mary has had a great, though not consistent, social significance.⁶⁸ She has “undeniably” left deep and indelible marks on the Christian West, where “after the cross, the Virgin is the most powerful and widespread symbol.”⁶⁹ Elizabeth Johnson also writes that Mary “is the most celebrated female religious figure in the Christian tradition.”⁷⁰ For Johnson, she is the

single most influential, most sought-after and most respected feminine symbol in Christian tradition.⁷¹

Boff argues that Mary's social significance is still very strong today. Presently, there is a religious-cultural identification of Mary with Latin America. In the West, she is present everywhere and is invoked in a thousand ways: "in images, in houses, in medals and scapulars, in shrines spread throughout cities and rural areas, in artistic representations."⁷² Besides this, 'Mary' with its variants, is the commonest name given to girls in the West.⁷³ Further, several modern states are consecrated to Mary: Bavaria (1620), France (1638), Austria (1647), Portugal (1648), and Poland (1656) and many other nations still have Mary as their chosen official patron and publicly use that title.⁷⁴ Boff adds that Mexico and Poland are emblematic cases, which demonstrate how Marian devotion shaped their history and the founding of their national identity. The history of Mexico "irrefutably" demonstrates that its national independence and the peasant revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century were achieved primarily under the banner of Mary.⁷⁵ Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland has also been a key symbol in the struggles of the Polish when under invasions and colonisation. She is called the Queen of Poland, and the commander-in-chief of the Poles, who reflects the Polish national mood.⁷⁶ Elina Vuola also makes claims that Mary is viewed as a liberator for Finnish Russia Karelia,⁷⁷ while Asian women theologians report that protests which were led by a huge picture and statue of Mary forced the repressive Marcos regime to collapse in 1987. She sustained and empowered the protesters.⁷⁸

Besides inspiring different peoples to independence, Mary is also known as a source of unity. In Binghamton, New York,⁷⁹ and in the Middle Eastern country of Lebanon,⁸⁰ Muslims and Christians have been coming together annually and celebrating their common recognition of Mary. Her crown of stars is also said to adorn the European Union flag.⁸¹ Mary also continues to operate powerfully in the world of popular devotions, for example, in Lourdes and Fatima. Kathleen Coyle notes that recently there has been an increase of interest in Marian devotions and places of pilgrimage, which she interprets as proof that the Marian tradition still holds profound “symbolic truth.”⁸² For Coyle, in many places and nations, there remains interplay between nation-building and Marian devotion as people unite and join with Mary to fight against social inequality, oppression, violence, and occupying forces.⁸³

Such interactions of Mary and society suggest that her influence often overlaps individual, denominational, devotional and Christian boundaries. It appears whole societies can be affected by the religious, political and economic implications of the roles she plays. No wonder Marcela Altheus-Reid argues that Mary is responsible for over 500 years of the denigration of women in Latin America.⁸⁴ Her influence can be felt as good or bad to society as a whole. Because of such social power of the symbol, Clodovis Boff argues that all the biblical passages that refer to Mary can and should be interpreted from a social viewpoint,⁸⁵ and the interpretation of Marian attributes, such as her virginity, should have social relevance with empowering possibilities.⁸⁶

Though the regions discussed above are different from southern Africa, there are some similar uses of the symbol at societal level. In Zimbabwe, for instance, besides the use of her holy objects in society, there are some schools dedicated to Mary, some

which bear the name St Mary's, a name also common to roads, locations, churches, suburbs and people. Mary is also associated with works of public charity, and some Marian organisations run schools, while others provide teachers in different schools. Some Marian organisations, such as Silveira House in Zimbabwe, provide different practical skills for economic self-sustenance to the poor in society. Mary is often found in prayers for healing at homes and in hospitals, particularly church-founded mission hospitals.⁸⁷

Such similar uses of the symbol in society persuades me to think that the Marian character of inspiring people to fight oppression and achieve freedom elsewhere also has the potency to motivate southern Africans to change their attitude towards women for women's advancement. In the HIV/AIDS context, if she inspires changes in the way we understand the feminine gender, this could contribute towards an end to the many reasons for the feminisation of HIV/AIDS. Changes could result where there are oppressive impacts of AIDS, such as the stigmatisation of women and taking for granted the palliative work they do. The hierarchical and dominating structures in family, communal, and political systems could be seriously questioned. Women could be considered equal to men in dignity, intelligence, and decision-making powers. They could be regarded as people equally capable of political and religious leadership and as policymakers on equal footing with men in all areas. Matters of interest particular to women could be attended to and promoted with the utmost sensitivity and respect that befits Mary's mirroring of women's power, goodness and potential.

As in other regions, in southern Africa, if the regressive and denigrating meanings of Mary's symbol are adequately unmasked and removed, and her meaning which

restores the authentic selfhood and self-transcendence of women re-established, she could genuinely inspire women for empowerment against HIV/AIDS. Regardless of place, Elizabeth Johnson advocates “a theologically sound, ecumenically fruitful, spiritually empowering, ethically challenging, and socially liberating interpretation of Mary for the twenty-first century.”⁸⁸ For her, such an image of Mary can help to reflect, shape, question, invert, reject and reinforce gender principles and gender constructions of societies. She speaks of “a theology of Mary that will promote the flourishing of women and thereby of all relationships and communities of which it is part.”⁸⁹ This suggests that if interpreted positively for women, to depict their autonomous selves, their power over their bodies, their self-determination, their freedom from oppression and to shape their own destiny, Mary could help to uplift southern African women.

As already stated, there is a shared drive for women’s empowerment through the Marian symbol among third world feminists, who have argued that, through new images, Mary can be a catalyst in the liberation of all women.⁹⁰ Added to this is the reverence for Mary that exists in Africa. Johnson points to Mary’s veneration like an ancestral saint in Africa.⁹¹ Africans prominently believe in the spiritual community of the living dead such that where Johnson proposes that Mary be situated within the communion of saints, (meaning the ordinary community of disciples),⁹² some Africans could take that to mean the ancestral community of saints. The International Marian Research Institute argues that in the hierarchy of revered personalities, Mary is the feminine symbol that sits next to the Holy Trinity, and this gives her a special place in the hearts of Africans.⁹³

Fouda also argues that there is a strong cult of Mary in different church families in Africa expressed in liturgical songs, sacred art, prayers and religious objects, and its impact within the churches has unmistakable resemblance.⁹⁴ Mary also has numerous guild fellowships in southern Africa.⁹⁵ For Fouda, in Anglican and other indigenous churches, Mary is quite often given a prominent place in their liturgies and lives.⁹⁶ She argues that Marian groups and movements are spreading, and there is growth of devotion to Mary.⁹⁷ This suggests there is good potential for the Marian symbol to inspire women's empowerment in southern Africa.

There is a limit, however, to the people that the symbol can inspire. The symbol is likely to be most beneficial to Christian women and men, particularly those with some special regard for Mary, as in some Anglican and Catholic circles. While most Christians are likely to have reverence and respect for Mary,⁹⁸ as in the other parts of the world, some Christian women and men may also take the view that the symbol largely works to denigrate women.⁹⁹ Evangelical Christians often argue that the importance of the symbol is exaggerated in Catholic communities, and this may limit their affection for the Marian symbol. Further, not all people in southern Africa are Christians. Even though symbols can affect whole societies and work on a subconscious level, her influence on non-Christians and non-Muslims will likely be limited. Having noted this, it can be argued that diverse views on Mary could turn out to be a healthy thing. Different ways of understanding Mary are needed for various ways of investing in the symbol. Since her symbol is "complex, multi-faceted, and multi-layered," our differences of opinion could reflect diverse, but not necessarily conflicting views.¹⁰⁰

2.3 Defining and Explaining Mary's Inspiration and Empowerment

2.3.1 Mary's Inspiration

Power is not an object or a thing, but a relationship. It is not an attribute of individuals and communities, but an expression of the relationship between two or more entities. In this sense, there is no room for the idea that power can be granted by someone to somebody else as 'something' that comes from outside. For feminist theologians, women's empowerment is essentially a bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated as a top-down strategy. It starts with women's experiences.¹⁰¹ It is a process which embodies 'self' in that it is self-selected and self-driven and cannot be attained through the direct interventions of outside agents. Thus Mary cannot empower women directly. Hers is an inspiring, enabling, facilitating and mentoring role.

When I say Mary inspires, I mean she spiritually, mentally or emotionally stirs, arouses, moves, instigates, enthuses, or prompts towards empowerment. Her inspiration refers to the stimulation of the mind or emotions to a higher level of feeling or activity. It is about motivating, kicking the impetus into motion or welling up that energy for one's advancement from a condition of vulnerability and marginalisation to that of greater centrality, inclusion and voice. Mary's inspiration enables a woman to gain insight into what is undesirable and unfavourable about her current situation, perceive a better situation, the possibilities of attaining it and what she could do to attain it. Her inspiration strengthens women's self-esteem and self-worth, instils a greater sense of awareness of social and political issues, and leads to increased mobility and reduced traditional seclusion.

Among other possibilities, her inspiration can be spiritual, mental or emotional. Spiritual inspiration mainly happens to those who relate to her at the faith level. There can be a special connection between Mary and the 'inner-self' - as a symbol established within the subconscious and as a spiritual being. Possibly some people enjoy a much closer relationship with Mary than with their fellow human beings.¹⁰² In Christian tradition, Mary is a woman bestowed with spiritual authority, who brings spiritual empowerment to believers through intercession.¹⁰³ Mary can also be a model of faith and discipleship whose daily life-experience went through spiritual struggle, and who experienced the darkness and obscurity of faith. Her symbol can spiritually encourage women not to give up in difficult times until they overcome their difficulties. Belief in her spiritual presence can give confidence and assurance.

Mental inspiration can happen by way of persuasion, appealing to ideas that relate to women, or through debates and reflection on Mary and how she analogically relates to women in empowering ways. Marian symbols, in physical shape or as mental ideas, can trigger emotional inspiration, which could be boosted again and again by repetition of an activity such as the recitation of the Magnificat.¹⁰⁴ From analysing the way some people relate to Mary, it seems she is capable of influencing their mental formation of ideas, attitudes, convictions and of being part of their personal conversations. For Anna Karina and others, people often talk to her, listen to her, hear her speak and relate to her very intimately.¹⁰⁵

People who feel passionate about Mary often form Marian groups of strong fellowship, where they pledge to remain loyal to her values, and work hard for social

and political structures that resonate with Marian teachings.¹⁰⁶ Marian prayers, songs, uniforms, badges and flags help in expressing the emotional bond that ties Mary and the group members. Such spiritual, mental and emotional forms of inspiration can lead to creation of new images and perceptions about the relationship between oneself and the society.¹⁰⁷

Among other ways, Mary can inspire symbolically, by example or as a model. In southern Africa, she is symbolically often depicted as the Black Madonna of Soweto – a painting which depicts her as powerful, elegant and on a pedestal. Her assertiveness and warrior-spirit as the fighting Madonna has inspired some southern Africans' quest for freedom.¹⁰⁸ There are also many statues of Mary, some erected on her shrines and grottos. Her symbolic presence in scapulars, on rosaries and tattoos helps her followers to feel her spiritual closeness to them.¹⁰⁹

Other people find inspiration from the example of what Mary did, said or was. For instance, some find inspiration against infection in their understanding of Mary as a physical virgin, and try to live or encourage that life to overcome HIV infection dangers.¹¹⁰ Some mothers want to learn from Mary's motherhood in their own situations. Others are inspired by how she denounced the rich who oppressed the poor and often try themselves to denounce the modern-day oppressive and rich.¹¹¹ She is often seen as one who lived a lowly and hard life like them - one who went through it all, and "who knows what it means to lose a child."¹¹² The way she conducted herself in poverty (Luke 2:24), and under persecution (Matthew 2:13-18) are often seen as exemplary instances of how to conduct oneself under similar conditions. However, it is important to note that Mary's life does not set examples that automatically suit our

modern times. There is always need to imaginatively appropriate our very different situation from hers.

As a model, Mary is more than just an example.¹¹³ As a role model, she is not imitated in the type of life she led, but for the way in which she fully and responsibly shaped her life.¹¹⁴ In southern Africa, for instance, people are often inspired by the notion of her physical virginity to be faithful in their married life.¹¹⁵ Mary is often depicted as a larger-than-life character, whose characteristics surpass ordinary human models, and whose empowered-self people relate to by analogy. Mary is sometimes depicted as a model teacher and encourager, from whom people learn wisdom, perseverance, courage and foresight. People look up to her for right choices, behaviours and attitudes to life.¹¹⁶

Mary also inspires empowerment as an archetype.¹¹⁷ In a book entitled *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, Barbara Jones writes about Mary as an archetype of empowerment for the twenty-first generation from a psychological viewpoint. She argues that the biblical Mary is a strong, psychologically healthy woman who “offers a compelling model and archetype for an empowered woman.”¹¹⁸ For Jones, Mary is a model that can speak to our souls, help us to know how to relate to God and what steps to take in growing as persons in relationship with God. For example, Mary’s ‘yes’ to God is an archetype for men and women desiring God to dwell within them. Mary is a model who facilitates our growth into fullness as unique persons, and not one who forms us into stereotypes of her.¹¹⁹

Mary also inspires as companion, prophet and sister. Elizabeth Johnson lists some of the symbolic modes by which Mary has been sought for inspiration:

. . . a model, a type, an archetype, a prototype, an icon, a representative figure, a theological idea, an ideological cipher, a metaphor, a utopian principle, a feminine principle, a feminine essence, the image of the eternal feminine, an ideal disciple, ideal woman, ideal mother, a myth, a persona, a corporate personality, an every-woman, a cultural artefact, a literary device, a motif, a paradigm, a sign. . .¹²⁰

In southern Africa, the Marian symbol could function as an inspiration for confidence and hope, better organisation and ideals, and focus into goals against HIV/AIDS. Where HIV/AIDS destroys self-esteem, she could help to expand imagination, prompt creativity, originality and inventiveness, motivate ingenuity and help to identify talent by analogically pointing out hidden strengths that have not been fleshed out in empowering ways. While her inspiration can often be mild, she also has potential to strongly stimulate critical and creative thinking and action,¹²¹ to invigorate the weak and animate lifeless projects and activities. Tissa Balasuriya has argued that Mary can influence social consciences,¹²² transform ideas, ways of life, political systems, and instigate revolutions.¹²³ Thinking of Mary in such ways could motivate us to transform our world, particularly the way we conceptualise the feminine gender.

2.3.2 EMPOWERMENT DEFINITION AND ILLUSTRATIONS

2.3.2.1 Definition of Empowerment

Zoë Oxaal and Sally Baden have cited different contexts in which the word 'empowerment' is used by various institutions, movements and traditions. These include educational, social, psychological, political, community development and feminist organisations.¹²⁴ The word has various meanings in the different contexts.

They note that the concept of “power” is at the centre of empowerment.¹²⁵ This power can be depicted as “power over,” “power to,” “power with” and “power within.” By “power over” they mean the dominance of some over others and the subservience of those dominated. It is characterised by aspects of coercion, fear, passive and active struggle. “Power to” involves capacity building. It concerns the right to make decisions, to resolve difficulties or to create solutions. “Power with” involves bringing people together, building alliances and unions and working together for the same goals. “Power within” refers to self-belief, self-confidence, self-consciousness or self-assuredness.¹²⁶ Feminists have also spoken of informal power or invisible power, whose barrier to women they often call the “glass ceiling.”¹²⁷

Oxaal and Baden write:

Empowerment is not only about opening up access to decision making, but also must include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space . . . Empowerment is sometimes described as being about the ability to make choices, but it must also involve being able to shape what choices are on offer.¹²⁸

Ann Ferguson argues that there are two ways of looking at empowerment. First, “liberal empowerment” is a process whereby individuals gain access to resources in order to accomplish outcomes for their self-interest.¹²⁹ For this, economic, legal and personal changes are enough to empower individuals, and there is no need for such individuals to be involved in political organisations. Second, “liberating empowerment” is brought about by radical social movements and increases a person’s material and personal power when groups of people organise themselves to challenge an oppressive system.¹³⁰

In my own context, empowerment is more liberating than liberal. By empowerment I mean the process of women equipping themselves with the knowledge, skills and resources they need to change and improve the quality of their own lives and their communities so as to control and conquer HIV/AIDS and its effects on them. The process involves women having the right to control their own lives, to make their own choices on matters that affect them and to act on those choices. Women's collective assertion of power in the spiritual, physical, mental, political and moral fields, and their power to collectively decide and have their decisions effected is a vital component of this empowerment. At the root of the struggle for such empowerment is the Marian symbol that inspires women to determine their own destiny. Empowered women are those inspired by Mary to: (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context which leave them vulnerable to infection, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) which they exercise, (d) without infringing upon the rights of others, and (e) which coincides with supporting the empowerment of others against HIV infection and AIDS impact in their community.¹³¹

2.3.2.2 Marian Empowerment within Different Types of Power

In this section I explain the theory of empowerment which maps the framework under which Marian empowerment happens. I will explain Marian empowerment under dimensions of "power-within," "power-to," and "power-with," which are dimensions of "enabling power." Unlike "power over," this is power which can be shared, can grow and increase so that all who participate in it are strengthened and affirmed

without diminishing anyone.¹³² The three dimensions correspond to empowerment as experienced on personal, relational and collective levels.¹³³

On a personal level (level one: power within), individuals are empowered when they develop a sense of self and individual capacity, and when they undo the effects of internalised oppression.¹³⁴ At this level, empowerment increases self-confidence, self-control, autonomy, emphasising the ability to do things by oneself and achieving success without the help of others. It includes the acquisition of information and knowledge, skills, economic viability and independence, control over resources, mobility and decision-making power. The process of empowerment must begin in the mind, by changing one's consciousness.¹³⁵

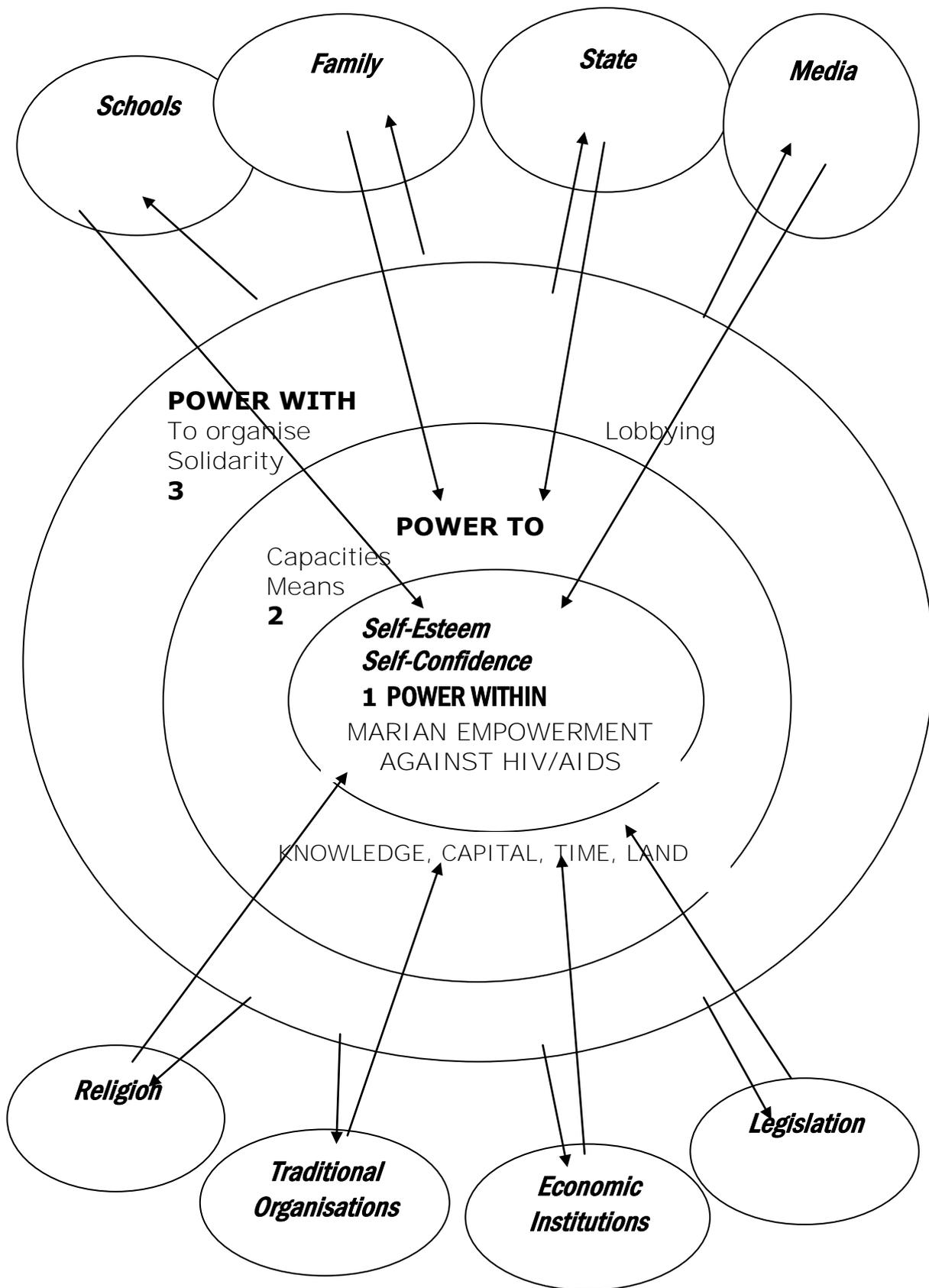
It has been attested in Christian history that Mary's symbol has had a compelling hold on the deep psyches of many people in different societies. Her impact on the life of both men and women has gone beyond their rational assent, and worked on the unconscious level of the society's collective psyche.¹³⁶ Roger Horrocks writes that Marian symbolism is similar to dream symbolism, since it begins spontaneously and without provocation, as self-articulation at the most profound stage of the unconscious.¹³⁷ For depth psychology as well, Mary is a primeval representation that awakens us to the objective of our total human self-fulfilment.¹³⁸ For Anna-Karina and others, Mary has often stood for justice and solidarity with the oppressed and people have approached her to mediate solutions. In so doing, she has often given her followers the power to go through suffering under injustice, encouraged them to carry on the struggle, and awakened them to a sense of agency against their disempowering conditions.¹³⁹ Invoking Mary into one's struggles could trigger an awakening against

powers of oppression, and could lead one to confront one's oppressors. For Anne Carr, Mary has the potential, deep in the unconscious, not only to raise women's consciousness against oppressive power, but to repair, heal and reconstruct a new healthy and positive image for women.¹⁴⁰

According to Samson Phiri, personal empowerment sometimes starts where the oppressed woman has become her own oppressor by making the oppressor's understanding of reality her own.¹⁴¹ The changing of the woman's consciousness does not necessarily happen instinctively from her circumstances of HIV/AIDS and subjugation. Rather, the process of empowerment is usually provoked or inspired by an external agent.¹⁴² Through awareness or consciousness of a symbol of women's empowerment, it can dawn on the oppressed woman that her life could become better. If she were to try to act on such an understanding, drawing from the symbol the energy and courage to demand power and rights and to link up with the resources needed, then the symbol is facilitating her self-empowerment.¹⁴³

Even though the momentum of the empowerment process is the woman's, inspiration from the symbol can be vital because the self-empowerment can be a huge struggle for resources, against one's own attitudes or those of others.¹⁴⁴ For Phiri, the changes in consciousness and self-perception prompted by the symbol can be very powerful, creative, and can enable energy-releasing transformations, from which there is often no reverse.¹⁴⁵ This empowerment at personal level is vital in environments where HIV transmissions happen due to individuals' choices or agency. The risks can be reduced if the individuals acquire a level of knowledge and motivation sufficient to exercise a personal agency to make the necessary changes.

Mary's Inspiration Begins Within the Individual¹⁴⁶



As shown in the figure above, after inspiration at personal level, the symbol's (or Mary's) inspiration then impacts on different aspects of life, on their interaction as well as on different actors: individuals (circle 1 and 2), groups (2 and 3) and different institutions (satellites). Once the different actors have been empowered, they too can reinforce the individual's empowerment.¹⁴⁷

On a relational level, (level two: power to) individuals are empowered when they develop the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.¹⁴⁸ Madine VanderPlaat writes that this form of empowerment does not easily allow progress without conflicts. Relations are affected when women become actors for change, able to examine their own lives, make their own decisions and take their own actions, and when they gain the capacity to act by growing in awareness, skill, knowledge, self-belief and experience. Relations are also affected structurally when women, individually and collectively, challenge the accepted forms of power and how these are perpetuated - conventions, laws, family forms, kinship structures and taken-for-granted behaviours that determine their lives.¹⁴⁹ The changes in women mean they form new relations with other social actors, form alliances and build up mutual support in order to negotiate, be agents of change, alter structures and so realise rights, dignity and secure livelihood. In this process women could be inspired towards a conflicting relationship through the relationship they build with Mary. She could inspire women's agency for a radical or even revolutionary change in society.¹⁵⁰

Gita Sabharwal argues that for it to transform society at large, women's empowerment needs to become a political force (level 3: power with).¹⁵¹ Collective movements and organisations of women could bring about the fulfilment of women's 'practical' and 'strategic' needs, and change both the condition and position of women against HIV/AIDS. Considering that many southern African women are powerless, poor, marginalised, and struggle for their daily needs, their empowerment

could be maximised if it happened collectively. In groups, individuals could work together to achieve a greater impact.¹⁵² Phiri also argues that for many of the disadvantaged women in southern Africa, vulnerability to HIV is more associated with structural and social impediments and infringement of their legal and human rights than access to information on behaviour change and risk. Their enjoyment of human and legal rights has a direct impact on their ability to exercise choice. Empowerment therefore needs to connect with the wider social and political environments, and to happen in solidarity, cooperation and concern for the other.¹⁵³ The women could group for empowerment in households, local communities and even larger entities to fight HIV/AIDS and the causes of its spreading.

Marian groups have for a long time provided the platform for such group empowerment. Among other things, the groups have the potential to provide more separate time and space for women to collectively and more critically examine their lives, develop a new consciousness, organise and act for change. The Marian symbol could be the source of an HIV/AIDS ideology that explains the sources of women's oppression, justifies their revolt against the status quo, instils in them a sense of 'prophetic protest' and imagines a qualitatively different future. She could motivate them to confront inherited cultural definitions, and instil in them an awareness of threats to their newfound sense of self. Marian groups also have the potential to form networks through which a new interpretation could be spread, stimulating a social movement.¹⁵⁴ Such networks could include other feminist groups, women in development and international institutions capable of funding empowerment programs and projects, and women in academic circles for theoretical analysis of their symbol and activities.¹⁵⁵

The table below shows more precisely how Mary could influence the empowerment of Christian women and their groups within the different types or levels of power.¹⁵⁶

The Marian symbol is not used to enhance “power over” others. Rather she frees women from the domineering forms of “power over.”

Type of power	Meaning	Some Possible Inspirational Reflections on Mary	Strategies of Empowerment for Christian Women.
Power over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Involves a relationship of domination and subordination. -Involves conflict and direct confrontation between powerful and powerless groups or individuals - Is often based on socially sanctioned threats of violence and intimidation. - Invites active and passive resistance. - Reflected in patriarchy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mary grew up in a Jewish patriarchal society oppressive to women. -She experiences the wrath of Herod’s violent wield of power (Matthew 2:13-18). -She strongly condemns this power which oppresses the poor and the powerless (Luke1: 46-55). -In some southern African societies, popular Marian images of the black and majestic Madonna depict having power, authority and command. They are not interpreted as dominating or oppressive, but as commanding the respect and assertiveness necessary against oppression. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Actively challenge the oppression and inequality under this mode of power. -Emphasise positive values and exercise of power in governance and leadership by women. -Advocate human rights over customs and tradition. -Transform the judicial and justice systems so that they become sensitive to women and those vulnerable in society. -Advocate for rules, laws, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision-making that uplift women. - Encourage government reform and advocacy strategies that deal with this visible, definable face of power by clearly addressing institutional biases, closed processes, and discriminatory laws.
Power Within	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relates to women recognising how power operates in their lives, and gaining confidence to change this. -About building women’s sense of self: self- confidence, self-worth, self- knowledge, self-awareness, assertiveness and consciousness-raising. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mary’s depiction as powerful on different images and artefacts such as rosaries and cloths has the potential to activate power in the form of consciousness-raising, alertness, responsiveness, and attentiveness to HIV/AIDS, subjugation, and the need for liberation. -Self-identification with some potentially empowering aspects of Mary (for instance, her motherhood) could help to build a positive view of oneself and a longing for empowerment - Reflection on Mary’s positive aspects could be instrumental in the elimination of negative self-belief, a springboard towards empowerment and a lead towards control over HIV/AIDS situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consciousness-raising among women. -Awareness-raising of gender oppression and HIV/AIDS infection and impacts among both sexes. -Promote and facilitate programs on confidence building, self-awareness and self-worth of women. -Build awareness of rights. -Advocate the view of Mary as one with whom to create breakthroughs, turn dreams into reality and create fulfilling relationships.

<p>Power to</p>	<p>-Focuses on individual decision-making, leadership and so on. -The unique potential of every woman or girl to shape her life and world. -Based on the fundamental belief that each individual has the power to make a difference in the world. -Includes abilities to recognise individual differences while respecting others.</p>	<p>-Mary's decision to mother Jesus transformed the world in many ways (Luke 1:28). -Which earned her much respect and dignity (Luke 1:43) -She also made other important decisions (to visit Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56); to stand near the cross (John 19:25); to be part of the post-resurrection community (Acts 1:14); -The uniqueness of some of her judgements and decisions often come out distinctly where they seem to conflict with Jesus' views (at the finding of Jesus in the temple, Luke 2:49; at Cana, John 2; and when she came after Jesus during his ministry (Mark 3:33-35).</p>	<p>-Create and enable decision-making authority, power to solve problems. -Support participation in the decisions and processes affecting women's lives, at all stages. -Support and advocate for women's education. -Strengthen women's economic and political empowerment programs. -Encourage women's participation in income generating activities and training programs, acquisition of skills, economic self-reliance and control over resources. -Advocate the funding of women's organisations working against gender subordination, and promote women's participation in political systems. - Foster dialogue between those in positions of power and women's organisations.</p>
<p>Power with</p>	<p>-Finding common ground among different interests and building collective strength. -Collective dimensions of power. -The power of numbers.</p>	<p>-Mary's motivation at this level of empowerment could come from feminists' depictions of her as fellow sister, apostle, mother or prophet among others. -Her solidarities, guilds or legions in different parts of the world often struggling for justice and helping the vulnerable in society. -Her solidarity with Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56), with other women beneath the cross (John 19:25) and after the resurrection (Acts 1:14) was a strategy for the supporting and uplifting of one another during challenging and difficult times.</p>	<p>-Support the formation and strengthening of women's organisations and movements with a common intention or common understanding to achieve communal goals. -Support the solidarity between women's movements and other rights' movements. -Challenge unequal power relations and support collective agendas of women. - Strengthen women's leadership. -Focus on problems related to HIV/AIDS, such as poverty, inequality, discriminatory and abusive use of resources against women. -Promote women's vision of society and political will for serious action by those in power. - Promote political rallying of women.</p>

The above explanations and illustrations mainly focus on power as something easily identifiable. Mary's inspiration to empowerment could also be conceptualised within the context of informal power. According to Linda Wirth, the informal power

structure mainly consists of the general separation of the male and female worlds. It is in the unconscious, because it is responsible for making men and women take for granted feminine and masculine roles.¹⁵⁷ This power structure impacts on women in ways which often endanger them in relation to the pandemic. To empower women against such a power structure, consciousness-raising is critical. Consciousness-raising could be done through the influence of a symbol in women's groups and at individual level, by promoting the symbol as one which encourages the development of the critical capacity. The symbol should have the capacity to prompt collective action to bring change and to contribute to the process of "deconstruction of interiorised subordination."¹⁵⁸

Informal power is often described as hidden, invisible and glass ceiling.¹⁵⁹ Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) could illustrate how Mary could be invoked for inspiration to empowerment against invisible and hidden power. As hidden power, informal power is about political agendas that do not operate openly, and is therefore difficult to engage.¹⁶⁰ In the Magnificat, Mary declares that God scatters those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. It is as if God reaches out to the secret places of the proud, exposes and disrupts their agendas. He dethrones the proud and oppressive powerful, uplifts the humble, and feeds the hungry and powerless. All this suggests Mary's strong advocacy for the reform of the social order. The Marian statements could encourage Christian women to be on the lookout for vested interests that tend to operate behind the scenes while maintaining influence by control. Her words could motivate the women to ensure they influence what gets on public agenda, and participate in decision-making. The women could be encouraged to fight for the

elimination of all dynamics that exclude and devalues their concerns and representations.

Invisible power is the most insidious dimension of informal power. It often makes women feel they are to blame for their predicament and prevents them from claiming their rights. It influences negatively women's values, beliefs and sense of self. Through repeated experiences of subjugation, women often come to believe they cannot modify their environment or personal situations and their persistence in problem-solving is diminished.¹⁶¹ In contrast to the conditions that such power creates, Mary celebrates her life, her womanhood (my spirit rejoices, v46). She positively talks of herself (the Mighty one has done great things for me, v49) and looks to her future with confidence (From now on all generations will call me blessed, v48). She also looks to the future of the powerless and poor (v.53). She could encourage southern African Christian women to know and claim their rights where HIV/AIDS oppresses them. The women could fight the socialisation, culture and ideology that perpetuate their exclusion and inequality. They could seek to redefine what is 'normal' or 'acceptable,' and could demand provision of conditions in which self-confidence and self-esteem flourish.

“Glass ceiling” refers to an invisible barrier to career advancement that determines the level to which women rise in an organisation.¹⁶² Glass ceilings are held in place by the attitudes of society at large.¹⁶³ In southern Africa, the black Madonna on a pedestal could be used to fight glass ceilings. For instance, the imagery of the Madonna of Soweto is for fighting bullying and for standing up to oppressors. Her motherhood is said to overshadow all other forms of authority.¹⁶⁴ Some feminists also interpret the Assumption of Mary as symbolic of a woman who breaks the glass

ceiling of patriarchal exclusion of women in church hierarchy and towers above all mortal men.¹⁶⁵ She has the potential to inspire upward mobility, in education, in the pursuit of careers, employment or political ascendancy. She could instigate self-belief in women, and help them to articulate totality, fullness and self-autonomy.

2.4 Conclusion

The concepts of ‘symbol,’ ‘inspiration’ and ‘empowerment’ in relation to Mary form the basis of this thesis. In this chapter I attempted to show how the Marian ‘symbol’ could ‘inspire’ women’s ‘empowerment’ at the personal, relational, group and societal levels. I hope to develop the illustrations given in this chapter in some of the chapters that follow. The next chapter looks at the way Mary is currently understood in Africa and how she is impacting on the lives of southern Africans.

ENDNOTES

¹Jason Espada, *The Power of Symbols - a Few General Comments*, accessed on 24-12-2010 www.abuddhistlibrary.com/The%20Power%20of%20Symbols.doc

²Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

³Eric Donald Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, James S. Trefil (Eds.), *The new dictionary of cultural literacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 446.

⁴Babylon's Free Dictionary, accessed on 28-12-2010

<http://dictionary.babylon.com/symbol/>

⁵Babylon's Free Dictionary, accessed on 28-12-2010.

⁶William Potter, *What is a symbol?* (New York: Columbia University, 2005) 43.

⁷Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), 43.

⁸The significance of shaking hands upon signing a peace treaty, for example, extends beyond the physical appearance. Great change takes place because of the greater truth the symbol points to.

⁹English-Word Information, accessed on 24-12-2010

<http://wordinfo.info/units/view/2073/page:5/ip:14/il:S>

¹⁰William Potter, *What is a symbol?* 43.

¹¹William Potter, *What is a symbol?* 45.

¹²William Potter, *What is a symbol?* 45.

¹³Berit Kjos, *Transforming Art and Empowering Symbols*, accessed on 27-10-2010

<http://www.crossroad.to/Books/UnderSpell/8-art.htm>

According to Kjos, The clearest effect of art, as found in paintings, sculpture, music, is to rouse the imagination, influence thought, and touch the hearts. The people affected become like the art that fill their mind and vision.

¹⁴English-Word Information, accessed on 24-12-2010

<http://wordinfo.info/units/view/2073/page:5/ip:14/il:S>

¹⁵English-Word Information, accessed on 24-12-2010

<http://wordinfo.info/units/view/2073/page:5/ip:14/il:S>

¹⁶Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), 43.

¹⁷Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 53.

¹⁸Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

¹⁹Machrine Birungi, *Impact of Symbols in Political and Social Movement Mobilisation: A case Study of Uganda* (Paper presented for European University Center for Peace Studies, Schlaining – Austria, 2009).

²⁰Machrine Birungi, *Impact of Symbols in Political and Social Movement Mobilisation*. Just because the group is strengthened by the help of the symbol, if the symbol is attacked, the group defends itself by defending the symbol with great strength. At the same time, the symbol helps effectively to organise and unite group members, which can result in the hatred and jealousy of other groups.

²¹Machrine Birungi, *Impact of Symbols in Political and Social Movement Mobilisation*.

²²William Potter, *What is a symbol?* 47.

²³UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 35.

The male bias is prevalent even in the few societies that claim to be matriarchal, such as the Chewa in Malawi. Musopole writes the women used to be leaders in religion and society in that culture, but not any longer. Women are expected to perform 'manly' jobs in addition to their house duties. For instance, both the man and the woman till the fields early in the morning, and on returning home tired, the woman carries a bundle of firewood on her head, two hoes in her hand and a baby at her back, while the man walks next to her empty handed. At home the man rests while the woman cooks for him. After the meal, the man sleeps or goes into the village for a drink, while the woman starts to prepare the next meal. Men do not provide money to women for food because women are culturally the primary bread winners. [Anne Nachisale Mudsopole, "Sexuality and Religion in a Matriarchal Society" in Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York, 1992), 196].

²⁴Culture of Angola, accessed on 24-08-2011 <http://www.everyculture.com/A-Bo/Angola.html#ixzz1V6NW5cEu> For example, in Angola, where the political culture is highly militarized, many national symbols stem from the military tradition. Parades, uniforms, a crowing cockerel are some of the prominent political symbols. Included on the national flag is the red color (for blood shed during the national liberation struggle) and a machete (for the country's armed struggle).

²⁵Michel Weber and Will Desmond (eds.), *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought* (Frankfurt / Lancaster: ontos verlag, 2008).

²⁶Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

²⁷DeviantART, The History and Symbolism of the Cross, Gibah reports, December 9, 2006, accessed on 24-09-2010. <http://news.deviantart.com/article/24304/>

²⁸Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Introduction', 7.

²⁹Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Introduction', 7.

³⁰Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 137.

³¹Jasper Taderera, *The Work of CCJP*, 77.

³²Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 139.

³³UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 29.

³⁴UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 29.

³⁵UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 35

³⁶Tatenda Twaibo, 'Joice Mujuru' in *The Herald*, Zimbabwe, 26 April, 2010.

³⁷David M. Cheney, *Statistics by Country by Catholic Population*, accessed on 31-09-2009 <http://www.catholicierarchy.org/country/sc1.html>

³⁸Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 21.

³⁹P. Bruce, "The Mother's Cow": A Study of Old Testament References to Virginity in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa' in A. Phiri, B. Haddad and B. Masenya (eds.), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 203.

⁴⁰Marilyn Thie, 'Feminist Concerns and Whitehead's Theory of Perception' in *Process Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1978), 186-191.

⁴¹Rolf Bouma, 'Feminist Theology (especially Ruether, Rosemary Radford/McFague, Sallie)' in Wesley Wildman (ed.), the *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Modern Western Theology* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1997), 897-914.

According to Bouma, radical feminist theology is a school of thought by women who believe that Christianity cannot be redeemed from patriarchy or male-domination. It views patriarchy as a power oppressive to women whose organisation of society is

based on male supremacy. Radical feminism seeks to overthrow patriarchy by subverting gender roles and by radically reordering society. Many radical feminist theologians have left mainstream Christianity (902).

⁴²Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex, The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), xxiv.

⁴³Mary Thomas, 'Down from her Pedestal: Elizabeth A. Johnson's Truly our Sister' in *East Asian Pastoral Review*, vol. 41, no. 4 (2004), 358.

⁴⁴Marianne Merckx, 'Introduction' in Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 8.

⁴⁵Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 86-90. For Daly, Mary is destroyed by the doctrines about her. Though she seems alive, she is just like a fake Christmas tree. In being saved from original sin (in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception) by her son in advance of both hers and her son's birth, she is cleansed from her own autonomy and self-determination. She has been a false symbol of hope, and in reality she is a symbol of incompetence and many other shortcomings associated with women. For Daly, the impossible ideal of Virgin/Mother ultimately penalises women since it is unattainable. It degrades women to the status of Eve and effectively promotes the collective low-caste status of women.

⁴⁶Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex, The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 338-339. Marina Warner also discards Mary after completely deconstructing traditional Mariology in all its various meanings as expanded projections of the feminine by and for men. For Warner, Mary is an ideal impossible to imitate as virgin and mother. In the end, the Virgin "will recede into legend" and "will be emptied of moral significance" (339).

⁴⁷Kari Borresen, 'Mary in Catholic Theology' in Hans Kung and Jurgen Moltmann (eds.), *Concilium: Mary in the Churches*, no. 168, 1983, 51. Kari Borresen finds linking Christology to Mariology harmful because Mary's autonomy is diminished in her relationship to her son. Mary is important only in the context of her son, and her part in the birth of Jesus is written using an "androcentric gynecology." The subsidiary role of Mary, the new Eve, to Christ, the new Adam, makes an unoriginal, inferior Mary, and, in fact, reorders the androcentric teaching from that of creation (Adam and Eve) into that of redemption (Christ and Mary). Borresen argues that such a Mary cannot be a model for contemporary women. She discards the veneration of Mary as a superfluous worship to the masculine image of God.

⁴⁸Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 31. Althaus-Reid sees the symbol of Mary as the cornerstone of the feminisation of poverty, the colonial spirit of servitude, disrespect for and abuse of poor women in Latin America.

⁴⁹Nomsa Hani, *Virgin Symbol and Body: Christian and African Traditional Beliefs on Sexuality in Relation to the Problems of HIV/AIDS*, accessed on 23-09-2010

[http://www.heart-intl.net/HEART/100507/VirginSymbol .htm](http://www.heart-intl.net/HEART/100507/VirginSymbol.htm)

⁵⁰Marianne Merckx, 'Introduction,' 8.

⁵¹Niki Whiting, *Thoroughly Modern Mary: a Study in Contemporary Mariology* (MA diss, Berkeley, California, March 2005), 42.

⁵²Elina Vuola, 'Seriously Harmful for your Health? Religion, Feminism and Sexuality in Latin America' in Marcella Althaus Reid (ed.), *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 148. Examples of Protestant theologians, especially feminist ones, who have been rediscovering a deep appreciation for Mary and writing

about her include Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of God* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Mary: Mother of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Louisville: Westminster, 2002); Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson, *Mary: A Catholic -Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003); Nicola Slee, *The Book of Mary* (London: SPCK, 2007); Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann, *Was geht uns Maria an?* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1988); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary – The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977); and Basilea Schlink, *The Mother of Jesus* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1986).

⁵³Elina Vuola, ‘Seriously Harmful for your Health?’ 146.

⁵⁴Kathleen Coyle, ‘The Marian Tradition: A Rereading’ in *East Asian Pastoral Review*, vol. 41, no. 3 (1998), 154.

⁵⁵Jorunn Okland, ‘The Historical Mary and Dea Creatrix’ in Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Mariology* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 161.

⁵⁶Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 194.

⁵⁷Jorunn Okland, ‘The Historical Mary and Dea Creatrix’, 161.

⁵⁸Jorunn Okland, ‘The Historical Mary and Dea Creatrix’, 161.

⁵⁹Kathleen Coyle, *The Marian Tradition*, 154.

⁶⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Why Do Men Need the Goddess? Male Creation of Female Religious Symbols*. (Keynote address given at Awakening the Energy for Change: the Black Madonna and the Womb of God, a conference at the Pacific School of Religion, June 18, 2005).

⁶¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Why Do Men Need the Goddess?*

⁶²Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Introduction’, 7.

⁶³Elina Vuola, ‘Seriously Harmful for your Health?’ 154.

⁶⁴Elina Vuola, ‘Seriously Harmful for your Health?’ 154.

⁶⁵Mary Thomas, *Down from her Pedestal*, 358.

⁶⁶Marianne Merckx, ‘Introduction’, 9.

⁶⁷Carol P. Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess” in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds.), *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York, Harper & Row, 1979) p.275. For Carol Christ, the problem for many feminists lies not in the fact that masculine symbols are employed in society, but that they are employed exclusively. For instance, a monopoly of masculine male symbols for God in reality works to stop women from asserting their own authority over their bodies and sexuality, their own determination and constructive relationships with other women both presently and in the past.

⁶⁸Clodovis Boff, ‘Toward a social Mariology’ in in Diego Irarrazabal et al (eds.), *The Many Faces of Mary* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 44-47. Boff states that Mary was an even more rooted in medieval Christendom as a social symbol than she is today. For instance, she was the patron of the imperial capital of Constantinople, and to her was attributed the freedom of the Byzantium from the assaults of a Mongol tribe, the Avars in 627. This resulted in a proliferation of churches dedicated to her. In Russia she was the Virgin of Vladimir, viewed throughout Russian lands as their queen and sovereign. Various liberations were attributed to her, especially that of Russia from the Tartars, after 250 years of subjugation. Many battles and victories were dedicated and attributed to her - of Catholics against Protestants and of Christians against

Muslims, such as that of Vienna against the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of the feudal era, devotion to Mary was used as a major element in the legitimizing of new European dynasties, above all the Carolingian dynasty in the 7th century. Knights were invested in her name. Siena, Strasbourg, Milan Genoa, Venice, Perugia were some of the cities that chose Mary as their patron.

⁶⁹Clodovis Boff, 'Toward a social Mariology', 47.

⁷⁰Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 3.

⁷¹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 3.

⁷²Clodovis Boff, 'Toward a social Mariology', 48.

⁷³Clodovis Boff, 'Toward a social Mariology', 48. For Boff, the social impact and influence of Mary has mostly to do with experience and not theory. In most cases Mary has been used to support the status quo, sometimes to improve it, rarely to transform it. The drive to use Mary as the liberating woman of the Magnificat is very recent.

⁷⁴Clodovis Boff, 'Toward a social Mariology', 47.

⁷⁵Clodovis Boff, 'Toward a social Mariology', 47. The Marian symbol is usually interpreted and used by people in different ways and contexts. The Virgin of Guadalupe, for example, has different meanings for Mexicans. She is a powerful cultural symbol of their identity and nationhood; a symbol of liberation and action; an image of populist appeal cutting across all sectors of Mexican life, displayed in churches, in taxis, buses, on tee-shirts, amulets and tattoos; a profound figure of empowerment; a rallying point for battle cries; and a revolutionary "invoked . . . to sweep away enemies and bestow power on her devotees." [RoseAnna Mueller, *Virgin of Guadalupe* (Presentation to Columbia College, Chicago, 2002)]. Dubisch also asserts that Mary's name was for the revolutionary army of Zapata in 1910 a rallying battle cry, and they carried her into battle because she symbolised their revolution. Since then, she has been a female battle warrior for priests, rebels and others who have sort her power and authority to conquer repressive situations. [Jill Dubisch, 'The Many faces of Mary' in Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Janse, and Catrien Notermans (eds.) *Moved by Mary: The Power of Marian Pilgrimage in the Modern World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 228].

⁷⁶Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/poland/czestochowa-jasna-gora>

⁷⁷Elina Vuola, 'Seriously Harmful for your Health?' 149.

⁷⁸'The Conference Statement of the Asian Women's Theology Consultation' in *Asia Journal of Theology*, vol.2, no.2 (1988), 555.

⁷⁹United Muslim Christian Forum, accessed on 23-09-2010

<http://www.umcforum.org/>

⁸⁰AsiaNews.it, accessed on 23-10-2010 <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/>

⁸¹Flag of Europe, accessed on 23-10-2010

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Europe

⁸² Kathleen Coyle, *The Marian Tradition*, 154.

⁸³ Kathleen Coyle, *The Marian Tradition*, 154.

⁸⁴Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 31.

⁸⁵Clodovis Boff, 'Toward a social Mariology' 52. Boff, however, notes that some passages, such as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56), the woman clothed with sun

(Revelation 12), and the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) are more appropriate for understanding Mary from a social perspective.

⁸⁶Clodovis Boff, 'Toward a social Mariology' 51-52.

⁸⁷Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1983), 61. One of the popular prayers used on sickbeds is as follows, "Oh Mother of Perpetual Help, grant that I may ever invoke your powerful name, the protection of the living and the salvation of the dying. Purest Mary, let your name henceforth be ever on my lips. Delay not, Blessed Lady, to rescue me whenever I call on you. In my temptations, in my needs, I will never cease to call on you, ever repeating your sacred name, Mary, Mary. What a consolation, what sweetness, what confidence fills my soul when I utter your sacred name or even only think of you! I thank the Lord for having given you so sweet, so powerful, so lovely a name. But I will not be content with merely uttering your name. Let my love for you prompt me ever to hail you Mother of Perpetual Help. Mother of Perpetual Help, pray for me and grant me the favour I confidently ask of you. Mother Mary please intercede for me that I will recover from this illness." The book recommends that that the prayer be followed by three 'Hail Mary' prayers.

⁸⁸Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, vi.

⁸⁹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xiv.

⁹⁰Elsa Tamez 'Introduction: the Power of the Naked', 11.

⁹¹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xv. (The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*, University of Dayton, Ohio, May 2007).

⁹²Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 43. (The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*, University of Dayton, Ohio, May 2007).

⁹³The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*, University of Dayton, Ohio, May 2007.

⁹⁴Antoine Essomba Fouda, 'Veneration of Mary in Africa', 88.

⁹⁵Nzanga YaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 24. Nzanga YaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 24.

⁹⁶Antoine Essomba Fouda, 'Veneration of Mary in Africa', 91.

⁹⁷Antoine Essomba Fouda, 'Veneration of Mary in Africa', 88.

⁹⁸Scot McKnight, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus*, 24.

⁹⁹While the thesis specifically targets the empowerment of Christian women, there is not always a clear-cut demarcation between the Christian and the non-Christian woman. Funerals, weddings, and big church feast days are often more of public and social functions than Christian. At these functions, often Christians worship together with the non-baptised. From my experience, most southern Africans, even the non-affiliated and non-practising in Christianity, receive Christian burial and have their funerals accompanied by Christian prayers. Christianity is often part of the society, and this also blurs the line of who may be influenced by Mary and who may not.

¹⁰⁰Roger Horrocks, 'The Divine Woman in Christianity' in Alix Pirani (ed.), *The Absent Mother* (London: Mandala, 1991), 112. According to Horrocks, profound mystical symbols such as Mary's are always full of controversy, since they communicate the innermost conflict and harmony of opposites at the centre of life. Existence "and death, love and hate, good and evil, feminine and masculine, female and male"- such profound, mystical and great, inexplicable and unfathomable

essentials of life face humans all their life. They cannot be fully reasonably examined or understood, and hence great symbols as that of Mary which express them will always be controversial.

¹⁰¹Zoë Oxaal with Sally Baden, *Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy* (Bridge, Development and Gender, Report No 40, University of Sussex, October 1997), 6.

¹⁰²For someone who constantly wears or keeps the rosary most of the time and almost everywhere, the attitude can easily be that of one who wants Mary's influence everywhere, in everything, and every time. Apparently some followers of Mary want her to influence their thinking, words or actions, to guide them always and even protect them from danger or waywardness. Besides such fervent followers, there are others who keep objects attributed to Mary at home, including those who do not use her objects openly. Possibly, many such people would understand Mary as having some role or influence to play even in their supposedly private, personal, intimate, 'mundane' and 'secular' aspects of life.

¹⁰³Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Mary of Nazareth, Friend of God and Prophet' in *America: the National Catholic Weekly*, 17 June, 2000.

¹⁰⁴Anna-Karina Hermkens et. al., 'Introduction: The Power of Marian Pilgrimage', 6.

¹⁰⁵Anna-Karina Hermkens et. al., 'Introduction: The Power of Marian Pilgrimage', 11.

¹⁰⁶*Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (Dublin: Concilium Legionis Mariae, Revised Edition, 2005), 172.

¹⁰⁷Anna-Karina Hermkens et. al., 'Introduction: The Power of Marian Pilgrimage', 13.

¹⁰⁸Laurence Vincent Scully, *The Madonna and Child of Soweto*, accessed on 24-04-2007 http://www.soweto.co.za/html/p_scully.htm

¹⁰⁹*Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary*, 172.

¹¹⁰Nomsa Hani, *Virgin Symbol and Body*, accessed on 24-04-2009.

¹¹¹Daniel B. Clendenin, *Subversive Song of the Mother of God: Mary's Magnificat* (Reflections on The Journey with Jesus: Notes to Myself, The Journey with Jesus Foundation, December 2008).

¹¹²Katharine Moore, *She for God: Aspects of Women and Christianity* (London: Allison and Busby, 1978), 67. According to Moore, "For women, the despised and exploited daughters of Eve, she could also be a greater comfort through her humanity, for was she herself not a woman, had she not born a child and watched Him die; did she not know all the special sufferings that were woman's inescapable sad lot on her earthly pilgrimage? But besides, to both men and women alike, she was the symbol of maternity, the giver of life and of security" (67-68).

¹¹³Women and Girls Tech Up, *Role Models and Mentoring*, accessed on 23-09-2010 http://www.techu.org/mentor/mn_rolemd.html. "Role models are those who possess the qualities that we would like to have and those who have affected us in a way that makes us want to be better people."

¹¹⁴Elina Vuola, 'Seriously Harmful for your Health?' I think that just as a good footballer can inspire both football fans and those who are not, to excel in their own undertakings, Mary can inspire women to empowerment "in areas of life of which she supposedly did not know anything" (154).

¹¹⁵Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1983), 24.

¹¹⁶Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 24.

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- ¹¹⁷Richard I. Evans, *Jung on Elementary Psychology* (London: Pelican, 1979), 52. According to Jung, an archetype is an early and typical example, a prototype, or something that serves as the original model or pattern for other things of the same type. In psychology, archetype refers to profoundly deep as well as overarching models after which individuals pattern themselves. Archetypes are important both in the lives of individuals and their cultures. They are deeply entrenched in our consciousness, and can hold powerful influence over our lives. Jung suggests that one reason for rootless-ness in society is an inability to relate to the stories (myths) and archetypes of the past.
- ¹¹⁸Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium* (Gretna: Pelican, 2000), 24.
- ¹¹⁹Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, 25.
- ¹²⁰Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 100-101.
- ¹²¹Anna-Karina Hermkens et. al., 'Introduction: The Power of Marian Pilgrimage', 7.
- ¹²²Dictionary.com, accessed on 20-05-2010 <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/social+conscience>) According to this dictionary, "social conscience is an attitude of sensitivity toward and sense of responsibility regarding injustice and problems in society."
- ¹²³Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 93.
- ¹²⁴Zoë Oxaal with Sally Baden, *Gender and Empowerment*, 1.
- ¹²⁵Zoë Oxaal with Sally Baden, *Gender and Empowerment*, 1.
- ¹²⁶Zoë Oxaal with Sally Baden, *Gender and Empowerment*, 1.
- ¹²⁷Linda Wirth, *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling, Women in Management* (London: Stationery Office Books, 2nd Edition, 2000).
- ¹²⁸Zoë Oxaal with Sally Baden, *Gender and Empowerment*, 3.
- ¹²⁹Ann Ferguson, *Can Development Create Empowerment and Women's Liberation?* (Paper prepared for Centre for Global Justice, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, 2004), 16.
- ¹³⁰Ann Ferguson, *Can Development Create Empowerment and women's liberation?* 25.
- ¹³¹Adopted from Krista M. Chronister, Ellen Hawley McWhirter, 'Applying Social Cognitive Career Theory', 425.
- ¹³²Zoë Oxaal with Sally Baden, *Gender and Empowerment*, 1.
- ¹³³ATOL – Methodical Support for Development Initiatives, 'Gender and Empowerment,' accessed on 24-10-2010 http://www.atol.be/docs/publ/gender/gender_and_empowerment.pdf
- ¹³⁴Gita Sabharwal, *From the Margin to the Mainstream Micro-Finance Programmes and Women's Empowerment: The Bangladesh Experience* (MSc Econ diss, University of Wales, Swansea, 2000), 19.
- ¹³⁵Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women in the Struggle with HIV/AIDS* (Queque: GMI Research Services, 2005), 45.
- ¹³⁶Carol Christ, 'Why Women Need the Goddess' in Carol Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 117-132.
- ¹³⁷Roger Horrocks, "The Divine Woman in Christianity" in Alix Pirani (editor), *The Absent Mother* (Mandala, London, 1991), 112.
- ¹³⁸Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 194-195.

- ¹³⁹Anna-Karina Hermkens, et. al., 'Introduction: The Power of Marian Pilgrimage', 4.
- ¹⁴⁰Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 102.
- ¹⁴¹Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women*, 48.
- ¹⁴²Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women*, 48.
- ¹⁴³Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women*, 48.
- ¹⁴⁴Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo (ed.), *Women, Education and Empowerment*, 52.
- ¹⁴⁵Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women*, 45.
- ¹⁴⁶Diagram adapted from ATOL – Methodical Support for Development Initiatives, 'Gender and Empowerment,' accessed on 24-10-2010
http://www.atol.be/docs/publ/gender/gender_and_empowerment.pdf
- ¹⁴⁷Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo (ed.), *Women, Education and Empowerment*, 11.
- ¹⁴⁸Madine VanderPlaat, 'Locating the Feminist Scholar: Relational Empowerment and Social Activism' in *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 9, no.6 (1999), 785.
- ¹⁴⁹Madine VanderPlaat, 'Locating the Feminist Scholar', 785.
- ¹⁵⁰Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 93.
- ¹⁵¹Gita Sabharwal, *From the Margin to the Mainstream Micro-Finance Programmes*, 22.
- ¹⁵²Gita Sabharwal, *From the Margin to the Mainstream Micro-Finance Programmes*, 22.
- ¹⁵³Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women*, 47
- ¹⁵⁴According to the *Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary*, for instance, the Legion is in excess of 10 million members worldwide, and that in almost every southern African country, there are thousands of followers (44).
- ¹⁵⁵Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women*, 47
- ¹⁵⁶Adapted from Margaret Schuler, *Empowerment and the Law: Strategies of Third World Women* (OEF International, New Delhi, 1986), 198.
- ¹⁵⁷Linda Wirth, *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling*, 1. For Wirth, the informal power largely contributes to the survival of traditional gender systems. It is discernable in the domestic area and the labour market, where the primacy of male norms is upheld. In workplaces, women tend to be excluded from the informal networks dominated by men, to get less pay for the same job and work much harder to prove themselves.
- ¹⁵⁸Cecilia Sardenberg, *Liberal vs Liberating Empowerment: A Latin American Feminist Perspective on Conceptualising Women's Empowerment* (Paper prepared for presentation to the Conference: Reclaiming Feminism – Gender and Neo-Liberalism, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, UK, 9-10 July 2007), 28
- ¹⁵⁹Powecube Team (Power, Participation and Social Change), *Handout on Power and Empowerment: Summary of some concepts and Approaches*, accessed on 21-09-2010, <http://www.powecube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Handout-on-Power-and-Empowerment.pdf>
- ¹⁶⁰Powecube Team (Power, Participation and Social Change), *Handout on Power and Empowerment*, accessed on 21-09-2010.
- ¹⁶¹Powecube Team (Power, Participation and Social Change), *Handout on Power and Empowerment*, , accessed on 21-09-2010.
- ¹⁶²Mohammad Khaleq Newaz, 'Factors Determining the Presence of Glass Ceiling and Influencing Women Career Advancement in Bangladesh' in *BRAC University Journal*, vol. V, no. 1 (2008), 85.
- For Newaz, 'Ceiling' refers to the limitation blocking upward advancement, and 'glass' refers to the transparency, because the limitation is not immediately apparent

and is normally an unwritten and unofficial policy. The ‘glass ceiling’ is distinguished from formal barriers to advancement, such as education or experience requirements.

¹⁶³Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals and Servant Leaders: Portraits of Spirited Leadership amongst African Women Leaders* (Ed. Diss., Bowling Green State University, 2006), 18-19.

For Faith Wambura Ngunjiri a glass ceiling is one that women can see through but cannot get through unless they break the glass. Gender-based discrimination and the glass ceiling phenomena have included:

1. Lack of opportunity to gain experience and visibility in types of positions that would facilitate advancement.
2. Higher standards of performance for women than for men
3. Exclusion of women from informal networks that aid advancement.
4. Lack of encouragement and opportunity for developmental activities.
5. Lack of opportunity for effective mentoring.
6. Difficulties created by competing family demands.
7. Lack of strong action by top management to ensure equal opportunity.

¹⁶⁴Laurence Vincent Scully, *The Madonna and Child of Soweto*.

¹⁶⁵M. Daly, *Pure Lust* (Women’s Press, London, 1984) p.129. For Daly, the Assumption reinforces women’ subordination. As a symbol in itself, however, the Assumption represents the transformation of the world for which women hope, their empowerment and ascendance into the divine sphere (128-129).

CHAPTER THREE
THE THEOLOGY OF MARY IN AFRICA AND HER IMPACT IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

This chapter reflects on Mary's influence and impact in Africa. First it considers some African theological writings on Mary, mainly by African women theologians. It also reflects on how Mary interacts with some communities in southern Africa. Given the vastness of the region, I concentrate on a few communities, such as the Marian Faith Healing Ministry based in Tanzania and Our Lady of Ngome, South Africa. These do not necessarily function as liberative examples of African Mariology, but are intended to illustrate Mary's influential power and her potential to inspire empowerment.

3.1 Some African Women's Marian Theology

I have not come across developed feminist Mariology in Africa except in the writings of Teresa Okure. My reflections are predominantly on Okure's article 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament: Implications for Women in Mission.'¹ There are Marian writings by other African women theologians across the continent, but they appear to be mostly undeveloped themes and fragments of feminist Mariology. I will include some short reflections on some of the writings.

In her article, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament: Implications for Women in Mission,' Okure discusses Mary's place in God's plan of salvation and her role in the life and mission of Jesus, and explores its implications for the participation of women in church mission today. She argues for a rereading and reinterpretation of women and Mary's roles in

the bible. For her, the contributions of women in the scriptures were not always accurately recorded, but were sometimes omitted and played down. Further, the church traditionally proposed and projected Mary for women as a deeply humble, self-effacing and submissive woman. Consequently, women are largely not heard in church life and liturgy.²

For Okure, a reading of extra-canonical works has shown, for instance, that the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well (John 4:1-42) and Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:10) were Jesus' messengers equal to his male apostles.³ A reading of Jesus' relationship with women in the synoptic gospels also reveals how Jesus employed a women-model as his own style of service. Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-8), for instance, provided the Jesus' model of love and service (John 13:4-17). For Okure, while women in general played such important roles in Jesus' mission, his mother's was foundational.⁴

As is typical with a number of African feminists, Okure does not shy away from celebrating biological motherhood. She argues that the foundational role of Mary began in her biological capacity as a woman, and not because she was "full of grace" (Luke 1: 28). God chose her because she was a woman: "But when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman. . . ." (Galatians 4:4). Mary illustrates that woman's special charism from God is to be covenanted with life.⁵

Emphasis on biological motherhood is also given by other African women theologians. Writing on African Christology, Oduyoye, for instance, states that African Christian women relate closely to Jesus as the son of Mary. For Oduyoye, "Childbearing is central to African women's self-image and the scene of Mary and Elizabeth swapping pregnancy announcements is a precious one for African women."⁶

Okure writes that the role of Mary in Jesus' mission begins in the Genesis narrative, where Mary is comparable to Eve (Genesis 3). As Eve was 'the mother of all the living', Mary is the mother of all who gain new life in Christ. This is made clear in John 19:26-27, "where Jesus entrusts his newborn child, the Church, represented by the beloved disciple, to his mother, and the mother to the disciple."⁷ As Mary is the mother of Jesus, she becomes the mother of the disciple. As noted in the second chapter, some feminist theologians, particularly the radical feminists, think such comparisons between Eve and Mary only help to further women's oppression through the Marian symbol.⁸

Although Malawian Protestant theologian Anne Musopole does not specifically mention the Eve-Mary relationship, she suggests that women were once regarded as sinners, but have now been redeemed from that image through Mary. The Annunciation is an act by which God is reconciled with Malawian women through Jesus.⁹ However, she expresses frustration that this reconciliation is not reflected in the Malawian churches, where women are excluded from important decision-making positions. She compares Christianity to her Malawian matriarchal culture which accommodates women's inclusion, and concludes: "Christianity is very oppressive to women."¹⁰ For Musopole, Mary's mothering of Jesus shows God does not punish women for their sins as men suppose. Men consider women inferior, and the great things that happened in and through woman, particularly at the incarnation, must be a huge scandal to men. In Mary God's forgiveness falls upon woman, and women were elevated and redeemed. Men should stop thinking of women as sinners and preventing women from doing God' work. Musopole suggests a hermeneutic of suspicion based on a mismatch between cultural inclusion and Christian exclusion of women. However, her admittance that women were sinners but are now forgiven may not sit comfortably with the feminist position which tends to defend woman from being considered a sinner once upon a time in the first place.¹¹

Okure uses the argument of Mary's biological motherhood to press on for women's legibility to priesthood. She notes that Mary's mothering of Jesus in the womb and her upbringing of him in early childhood shaped his integral humanity. Mary hugely contributed to Jesus' biological and psychological makeup. He exclusively got his human nature from her - he was truly "the son of Mary" (Mark 6:3).¹² In another article, 'Women in the Bible', Okure states that Mary is "source and giver of life."¹³ The Body and Blood which Jesus later gave as Eucharist fully originated from a woman. What God "actually did in, with and through women" should be the guiding principle of discerning God's will and plan for women's ordination and participation in the church's life and mission.¹⁴ Okure also argues for women's dignity: God's direct dealings with women, not through their husbands, manifest and confirm the deep respect and dignity God conferred on them.¹⁵

Okure sees reflected in Mary's story the need for women to take risks. Mary took great risk in becoming Jesus' mother. She said 'yes' to what was humanly impossible. This was dangerous and foolish, though her foolishness was divine wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). It was foolish to accept she could become pregnant without sexual intercourse and to think people would later believe this. She endangered her life by siding with faith against nature, culture and common sense. Yet by so doing she became the first and the most intimately involved in God's salvation plan. Okure encourages women to break from tradition and to take risk and initiative in order to side with divine wisdom.

Okure also makes the same point in another article.¹⁶ Writing about the woman with the flow of blood (Luke 8:40-56), Okure compares her with Mary. The woman had great determination to be cured and to take her rightful place in society. Like Mary, she hoped that the impossible could and would happen. For Okure, in the Lucan narrative, women achieve

great things because they have the courage to believe and trust in God's power. She argues that what was possible in Luke's day is still possible today since God does not change.¹⁷

Not only Mary is close to God's purpose and mission, but other women too. Okure notes that Mary was the first to proclaim the good news of Jesus conception, and that she did this to another woman, Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45). Elizabeth was also the first to acknowledge and proclaim that Mary was greatly blessed by God for women.¹⁸ Through the channel of Elizabeth's body, the unborn John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit. This is clear evidence that "from the outset, God associated women very intimately and uniquely even exclusively with the plan of salvation in Christ."¹⁹ Mary and Elizabeth are at the centre of divine action as "God's co-workers." God works through their bodies. Joseph, and in some sense Zechariah, only got involved later on.²⁰

Oduyoye finds in Mary and Elizabeth an example of women coming together for mutual support in difficult times and for human good. That Mary visited Elizabeth to share their strange experiences symbolises the solidarity that women need during crises and important life events. Their expected births were due to special divine intervention, just what African women pray for in their fear of the rejection that comes with childlessness. Together, they rejoiced at God's salvation, which comes through women. "As unborn speaks to unborn, God's future as discerned by women is made ready by women to be communicated among and by women to the whole community."²¹

Iphigenia Gachiri writes to encourage the renewal of devotion to Mary while curbing exaggerations.²² Mary's motherhood must not distract from the maternal nature of God. She warns against the wearing of Marian protective medals and inappropriate interpretations of

Marian titles like co-redeemer and mediatrix. Private revelations are also to be mistrusted.

For Gachiri, however, Mary is a revolutionary:

If you know Mary in relation to the times in which she lived you will know that she was the greatest feminist. She was revolutionary, she was innovative, she asked for things that were not practised in that time. And so we cannot look at her and say that Mary went to the well so I go to the well; rather, we look at her and see what she was like in her society, and then ask, What can I be in my society today to be able to be like Mary?²³

Where, for Okure, woman is source, giver of life and co-worker with God, for Rosemary Edet, women are ‘co-creators’.²⁴ Edet sees the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:21-40) as an act helpful in acknowledging women’s power and in fighting against birthing rituals that regard birthing powers as impure. Taking one’s child to the temple acknowledges God as author of life and woman as co-creator. Christians should recognise that women are God-bearers, and can be ministers of the word and sacraments. They are neither inferior to men nor impure after birthing.²⁵

A key event in Okure’s Mariology which underpins the active role of Mary in Jesus’ mission is the wedding at Cana (John 2: 1-11). Mary’s involvement clearly results in Jesus’ decisive action. Left to himself, Jesus would rather not have changed water into wine, but faced with his mother’s courageous faith, he complies.²⁶ As with Mary at Cana, women’s contribution to mission involves recognising the best approaches for dialoguing “with their sons and brothers in church and society.” In so doing, Okure encourages patience and gentleness, fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).²⁷ Thus though she promotes taking risks and initiative, her Mariology is more cautious than radical.

For Okure, Mary unquestionably taught Jesus “by word and example.”²⁸ The event at Cana is one such example, depending on one’s understanding of teaching. Jesus must have derived most of his feminine characteristics from his mother. Today’s women also have the role of instructing all Christians - God’s children - by life and word. All Christians are ‘other Christ’ and “women have a God-given mission to so bring up these children that each one may become a Eucharist, bread for the world and thanksgiving to God.”²⁹

Okure sees the event at Cana as having a greater Marian symbolic significance than apparent. It functions on two levels, the natural and the symbolic. Symbolically, the people with no wine are those invited by Jesus the bridegroom to his wedding (John 3:19), namely, his disciples.³⁰ The wine lacking is knowledge of who Jesus really is. The miracle reveals Jesus’ glory and his disciples believe in him (2:11). This is his first miracle (2:11), not in a series, but in the sense of a primordial or foundational miracle. It sets in motion Jesus’ progressive self-revelation in the rest of the gospel till the climactic moment of his final glorification when his disciples believe fully in him as the Christ and Son of God (20:8; cf 2:22). This knowledge is the overwhelming joy of the new wine imparted to believers. The wedding also takes place on the third day in anticipation of Jesus’ resurrection on the third day. For the Jews, the third day stood for the day of God’s decisive action to save his people.³¹

Thus, for Okure, Mary’s role in John 2:1-11 served to initiate Jesus on his mission. She performed the role of a midwife who helped Jesus give birth to the mission secretly hidden in his heart. This is linked to Mary’s next appearance beneath the cross, where Jesus completes his mission (19:30), and gives birth to God’s children (cf. 1:12-13; 20:17).³² As if in recognition of her role, Jesus entrusts his disciples, represented by the beloved disciple, to Mary as her children, and Mary to the disciples as their mother (19:25). Okure notes that in

Africa when a mother is dying at childbirth, she assigns the child's upbringing to the grandmother. As at Cana, Jesus again calls his mother "woman," "thus paying lasting tribute to her role of bringing forth, sustaining and nurturing life along with him and with God."³³ Thus, for Okure, Mary assumes spiritual motherhood for all Christians. Okure also declares elsewhere: "All human beings are Mary's children insofar as all are Christ's brothers and sisters."³⁴

Though its theology varies, the notion of Mary standing beneath the cross resonates with the suffering of some Africans. Gachiri sees in Mary standing at the foot of the cross an invitation to be in solidarity with those who suffer and endure.³⁵ For Gachiri, women are often called to be silent, quiet and enduring. They must look at the silence and the patience of Mary and see it as one way of attaining wisdom. Women often need to endure rather than escape or seek to avoid suffering: "we cannot run out of our marriages, our communities, our work situations because we have problems."³⁶ Mary is an image of endurance. Gachiri argues that this is not a way of being submissive, but of finding inner strength.

However, for one woman Egyptian Coptic theologian, Mary does not just stand passively and endure suffering. She attempts to escape trouble:

To Coptic orthodox woman in Egypt, Mary is especially present with the sad and the afflicted. She is a source of consolation to mothers who identify with her troubles as a refugee who fled to Egypt to save the life of her baby, and as a mother who saw her son unjustly murdered.³⁷

Okure argues that Jesus' mission, in which Mary participated actively, was fundamentally one of freeing captives, the oppressed and the marginalized in society, and empowering them to live fully³⁸ (Luke 4:18-19; John 10:10). Mary 'mothered' Jesus, not only biologically, but

also in assisting him to begin and complete his mission (John 2:11; 19:25-26). She partook in this mission, first, by opening herself in faith to God's revealed mystery in her life, and then by remaining faithful to her mission from God against nature, culture and human theology. The risks she took make her comparable to the Apostles who rather would have died than fail to testify God's action (Acts 4:19; 5:29-32). "In short, Mary participated in faith in the mission of Jesus by life and deed."³⁹

Okure concludes: "as mother, [Mary] assisted Jesus in his mission substantially from the womb to the cross."⁴⁰ God also calls all women to partake in Jesus' mission. Like Mary, women encounter God and Christ in their various experiences, which are an opportunity for participating in the mission of the church. They should not be denied this opportunity on gender grounds.⁴¹

Along this argument, Oduyoye focuses on Joseph's role in the Gospels. The togetherness of Joseph and Mary, his care and reverence for her, his respect for God at work in and through Mary and his acceptance of God's will against culture enables Mary to fulfil her divine call. An approach such as Joseph's by men will enable women to discern God at work in them and to work with God.⁴²

Edet and Ekeya from Nigeria and Kenya respectively also call for a Marian-based greater participation of women in the church.⁴³ In so doing they call for the reconstruction of Mariology as a means for attaining human wholeness:

Humanity will keep its image and likeness of God if both male and female work as a body. To achieve this we propose that Mariology be revitalised with emphasis on Mary as a human Christian believer whose faith was lived out in her status as woman.⁴⁴

One might also detect here some progressive Mariology seeking to bring Mary down from her pedestal.

The ideas above suggest that, although there seems to be no established systematic feminist Mariology, African women theologians from different Christian backgrounds are already writing about and reinterpreting Mary with a view to their empowerment in their own contexts. I believe a feminist Mariology for women's empowerment against HIV/AIDS, particularly in southern Africa, would complement their Marian theology. However, such an empowering Mariology would have to reinterpret some of the conservative views of Mary, for instance, where she is seen as simply the symbol of the acceptance of suffering rather than of struggle against it.

3.2 Marian Guilds in Zimbabwe

There are many Marian guilds in Zimbabwe. Among those mostly attractive to women are Maria Hosi Yedenga (Mary Queen of Heaven), Pfumo RaMaria Musande (Legion of Mary), Maria Mutamburi (Our Lady of Sorrows), Maria weGomo Kamero (Our Lady of Mount Carmel), Hosi Munyaradzi (Mary Queen and Consoler), the Guild of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and for girls, Chita chaMaria Chevechidiki (Marian Youth Guild). Some are of international origin and others indigenous.

There are also Marian Guilds for priests, brothers and nuns, such as Maryward sisters, Our Lady of Sorrows, Little Children of Our Blessed Lady, Marist Brothers and Fathers, Order of Mount Carmel (Carmelites), and the Marian Hill Fathers. The Marian Movement of Priests is international and includes priests from different churches and guilds in Zimbabwe. There are

also other guilds built around Mary's fame, such as the St Joseph's, St Joachim's and St Anne's.⁴⁵



Some guilds of Malboreign Church, Harare. From left: Mary Queen of Heaven, St Anne and Sacred Heart of Jesus.⁴⁶



Anglican Mothers Union members in Zimbabwe⁴⁷

While most Marian guilds are within the Catholic Church, some are found in other churches. For instance, the Gwiyo Apostles Church in Gutu has a girls' guild, *Chita ChaMaria Mhandara*, (Virgin Mary guild) dedicated to Mary.⁴⁸ In the Anglican Archdiocese of Harare, the Mothers' Union is dedicated and devoted to Mary. According to the Anglican Reverend

Michael Chamunorwa, the sky-blue colour of the Mothers' Union's uniform represents Mary's heavenly state, and the white colour her purity. The Anglican women believe that Mary, as a dignified Jewish woman, used to cover her head in public. To symbolize the 'putting on' of her dignity, the women wear blue veils.⁴⁹ There are also Marian guilds for Anglican nuns, such as the Virgin Mary Camp in Gokwe, Zimbabwe.⁵⁰

On 9 October 2011, I interviewed Mrs Makamure, the chairperson of one of the Marian guilds in the Archdiocese of Harare, Mary Queen of Heaven, at Malbereign Catholic Church. She is known by the title *Amai Vakuru* (Chief Mother).⁵¹ She explained that the guild of Mary Queen of Heaven was fast expanding, had about 20 000 members in the Archdiocese of Harare and over 30 000 countrywide. Though the guild targeted whole families, including men and children, by far the majority were women. In Malbereign parish, it had over 70 Members.

According to Mrs Makamure, the guild was started in the 1940s in Highfields Township, Harare, by Father Alois Nyanhete, with the intention of involving more women in the running of parishes and church councils that were dominated by men. The guild quickly spread to other parishes and took up different parish roles.

Mrs Makamure added that in 2007 different Marian Guilds for lay church members formed a national solidarity of Marian Guilds of Zimbabwe. The solidarity was aimed at working together at national level to coordinate for greater effectiveness in undertaking their works of Marian devotion. This included sharing ideas and works of Charity, such as responding to national disaster situations, for example, droughts, floods, cholera and HIV/AIDS. The

solidarity agreed to celebrate together Marian big days such as the Assumption of Mary, and to have a national congress every two years.

Mrs Makamure pointed out that among its works, her guild supported the social wellbeing of people and their civil rights - though without becoming out-rightly political. During the week, guild members worked in smaller groups of about 15. Every group was required to have weekly meetings and undertake weekly apostolic works. These included caring for street girls, the homeless, patients in mental hospitals and prisoners. She noted that the guild had a rich tradition of providing compassion and care to the poor and bereaved. Their works of charity also included the provision of food, prayer books and electricity generators to priests and nuns, water tanks and text books to schools, and seeds to farmers.



The Marian guild members meet regularly in smaller groups each week.⁵²

Mrs Makamure added that in this HIV/AIDS era, people affected by the virus had become a priority for the guild's group work and service. Some guild members visited slums where they cleaned houses, washed those on palliative care, cooked for them, watered their gardens, fetched firewood, ironed clothes and provided medication and counselling. They also helped care-givers by providing some grocery and money towards transportation to hospital and funeral costs, and met some of the needs of AIDS orphans.

I asked Mrs Makamure if Mary was important only for Catholics. Her response was that the guild did not see it that way. There were Marian followers in other churches. Besides, her guild did all sorts of important work for different people in the name of Mary, regardless of their beliefs, which they would otherwise not do were it not for their devotion to Mary.

I also asked her if Mary empowered women in her guild. She said Mary was personally for her a source of huge strength. Mary gave her the courage to face her daily challenges and those of others. Within their Marian guild women met and taught one another different skills, such as social and family leadership, and the management of different crisis situations. The guild consisted of many experts in various professional capacities who shared their knowledge and skills. They also regularly invited experts from different fields and attended some courses as guild members, including those related to HIV/AIDS.

I pushed her further by asking what she thought about the view that Mary made women humble and docile. She became stern-faced and said that in her own experience, Mary gave women direction, self-confidence and self-esteem in life. She argued that such a view belittled what mattered to them as women, and was not respectful of the educated, innovative

and highly qualified people in her guild. She added that some of her members were lawyers who specialised in fighting for women's rights.

It appeared to me Mrs Makamure was herself highly educated and passionately believed that women in her guild were being empowered through Mary, and that other people in society were also being empowered through the Marian guild in different ways. I went away wishing if I had had the opportunity to attend some of the guild's HIV/AIDS-related courses and duties.

3.3 The Marian Faith Healing Ministry

3.3.1 The Beginning and Growth of the MFHM

Among communities strongly influenced by the symbol of Mary in southern Africa is The Marian Faith Healing Ministry (MHFM) based in Tanzania, which claims to have more than two million members.⁵³ The MHFM was officially founded by its current leader, Father Nkwera in 1987.⁵⁴ Nkwera credits the healing ministry to his visions of the Virgin Mary which began in 1968. Shortly after his ordination to Catholic priesthood, Nkwera heard the words:

Felician my son, I am the Heavenly Mother speaking. I have chosen you to help my children who I will bring to you. You will pray over them and through your prayers God will heal them, and . . . they will receive my assistance.⁵⁵

Nkwera states that from that day on, he has dedicated himself to praying for the sick, healing and receiving direct private relations and apparitions from Mary which guide his work and teaching.⁵⁶ The patronage of the Virgin Mary is central to the identity of the MFHM. His

reputation quickly spread as his former patients began forming prayer groups. Nkwera has also been regularly invited by various priests and bishops to different dioceses in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and other countries, to lead healing services that have often attracted thousands of people.⁵⁷ The MFHM now has branches in all major cities of Tanzania, international branches in various African countries, and overseas branches in London and Houston, Texas.⁵⁸

In 1987, Nkwera installed assistant healers and mediums of Mary who had the same healing, apparition and private revelation charisms as himself.⁵⁹ The MFHM believes Mary is incorporated in the bodies of the mediums, who fall into a trance and are unable to remember the occurrences afterwards. Mary is believed to alternate between different mediums to address the congregation gathered for a service.⁶⁰ While Mary speaks to her seers, the devil speaks through his possessed victims.⁶¹



Fr. Nkwera Praying with Some of his Followers⁶²

In 1991 Nkwera was suspended from his priestly functions, and in 1995 all his followers were summarily excommunicated because of growing differences with the Catholic Church. Despite official Church antagonism, attendance at the MFHM functions has continued to grow steadily.⁶³ Through a series of apparitions and private revelations, Mary emphasises her basic messages to the followers such as the urgent need to repent, more prayer for peace, keeping God's commandments, fasting, observance of prayer vigils, works of charity, regular confession and regular reception of Holy Communion.⁶⁴

People meet at the MFHM Centre in Dar es Salaam everyday for communal prayers.⁶⁵ The MFHM believe they have been given a special holy water which is a mixture of Jesus' blood and water from his side and the tears of the Blessed Virgin Mary, shed out of concern for her suffering "sons and daughters on earth."⁶⁶ Around three p.m. they pray the rosary interspersed with hymns, which lasts about two hours. At five p.m. Nkwera begins "the water service." After uttering a general prayer for the suffering and blessing the holy water to be used later, he speaks the liturgical formulae of exorcism. Then he and Sister Dina (Nkwera's aid) move to the Marian grotto at the back of the prayer area where large bowls of water are prepared for the water service.⁶⁷

All the people present at the prayers line up in front of the grotto and step forward one by one.⁶⁸ Those acutely ill or believed to be possessed by demons kneel in front of either Nkwera or Sister Dina and are completely soaked with the holy water, while the healer says a healing prayer directed to Mary or Jesus, or orders the demons to leave the body of the patient. Possessed patients react to the holy water with twitching, screaming, turning away or convulsive cramps. They are supported by helpers until they wake up, after five to twenty minutes. Sometimes the patients are soaked two or three times before regaining

consciousness, after which they change into dry clothes.⁶⁹ Others who either have minor ailments or seek the water as a blessing from Mary step up next. They are either soaked from large bowls, or sprinkled with water in groups of about thirty.⁷⁰

According to Nkwera, the service ends with words of advice or warning by Sister Dina who often acts as a medium for Mary. The signs of this are minimal changes in her voice and demeanour. In opposition to the Marian messages, demonic testimonies are given by possessed patients at any time during the service. The demons are believed to threaten the people with their evil plans of action.⁷¹ Both the Marian messages from Sister Dina and the demonic testimonies from the possessed patients are tape recorded, transcribed and frequently used as references during sermons and in Nkwera's publications.⁷²

Comoro and Sivalon write that the central ritual of the MFHM, however, is an all night vigil on the first Saturday of every month.⁷³ These vigils average 2000 people.⁷⁴ Some of the faithful come from Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Sudan, and outside Africa.⁷⁵ The vigil includes homilies which often turn into a dialogue between Nkwera and the devil.⁷⁶ The vigil includes a time of testimony, when some claim miraculous healings.⁷⁷

The MFHM is a mixture of the genders, the highly educated, the illiterate, the rich and the poor. However, the majority of the attendees, the possessed and the healed are women.⁷⁸ The greatest benefits the poor receive are by means of prayer.⁷⁹ While the MFHM mainly attracts those with a Roman Catholic background, people from diverse religious backgrounds, including Muslims, also come for healing and worship.⁸⁰ Wilkens notes that the service attendees are people with all kinds of illnesses and family disturbances.⁸¹ These include physical diseases, psychological disorders, and social and economic failures such as

unemployment and marital strife.⁸² In their healing capacity God, Jesus and Mary channel their powers through Nkwera and Sister Dina and the holy water. As mother of Jesus, of the Church and Queen of the world, whatever Mary asks from God is given, including healing powers and powers over evil spirits.⁸³ Prayers, particularly the rosary that emphasises the role of Mary as intercessor before God, are considered to be very helpful.

During the week, some members also meet in small neighbourhood gatherings. The gatherings engage in communal activities such as visiting the sick, attending funerals and wakes, and protecting themselves as an organisation. While Nkwera is the central figure, the group's leadership includes other seers, a national central committee and other experienced lay members.⁸⁴

Some of the followers have a Marian shrine in their homes and wear the rosary around their necks. Within the services, some drink the holy water. Others fill bottles to take home. Some add a small amount of the water to their cooking and sprinkle themselves and their houses with it as protection against the devil and as medicine for the sick.⁸⁵

The MFHM has some strong nationalistic tendencies tied to the belief that Mary is the patroness of Tanzania who chose it for a special role in the apocalyptic fight against Satan. According to Nkwera, Tanzania was specially chosen and is central to salvation history in that it was dedicated to the Queen of Peace and put under her protection by Pope John XXIII.⁸⁶ The MFHM claim the nation was also rededicated to Mary by Pope John Paul II when he later visited Tanzania. A clear sign for them that their country is under Mary's protection is that they never experienced disasters or turmoil like their neighbouring countries of Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.⁸⁷ The MFHM regularly prays for the

nation, for political leaders and sings the national anthem.⁸⁸ However, political transformative action is not a major part of their explicit beliefs.⁸⁹ The MFHM also receives some media publicity, both positive and negative.

3.3.2 The MFHM on HIV/AIDS

For the MFHM, there is a connection between society, politics, the human body and HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a punishment from God for sexually immoral behaviour and for social and political corruption.⁹⁰ HIV/AIDS is a punishment for adultery, fornication and covetousness. God is directly responsible for the disease and for its removal. Mary only functions as a general protector who will take care of the ill in a motherly way and strengthen their faith through her prayer, the rosary.⁹¹ The basis of this attitude is a message from Mary received through a medium in 1987:⁹²

The Lord Jesus, my Son, has afflicted mankind with only a mild punishment which you people and the whole world today cry out that it is very epidemic and fatal.

Has anybody discovered a vaccine for AIDS? (Not yet)

So, my dear children, do not expect to get the cure for AIDS in this world. The cure for AIDS is to pray to God, to repent and abandon sins. Keep well the sixth and ninth commandments of God.

But failure to adhere to this warning the Lord Jesus told me that he will send another small punishment.

According to Nkwera, the MFHM doctrine follows two strategies to fight the HIV/AIDS crisis. Firstly, the general moral degradation of the society and the political elite must be overcome and secondly, those affected by the disease must repent of their personal sins and learn to have faith in God.⁹³ While biomedical treatment can alleviate the symptoms, AIDS belongs to non-biomedical diseases that can only be treated through healing prayers, not in

hospitals. The lasting cure is the return to God by repenting of those sins for which the punishment was delivered.⁹⁴

For the MHFM, healing of HIV/AIDS through prayer depends on one's faith, degree of repentance and God's will.⁹⁵ Complete healing is just one option, and learning to accept an illness as a grace of God is another. In both cases, the strengthening of a person's faith is the main goal. The affected people should live in hope for a long life and a good death.⁹⁶ The rosary, the ritual words as well as the blessed prayer beads themselves protect the believers from all Satanic attacks and temptations that lead to infection.⁹⁷

Nkwera demands that repentance of the general public and the political and religious elite in particular should take the form of a National Day for Repentance. Joint prayers of all religions and denominations should be conducted on a central square of the city for this purpose.⁹⁸ Nkwera also requires the affected to be treated with loving care while they re-evaluate their lives. They should never be stigmatized.⁹⁹ The sacrament of confession and absolution offers a path for reintegrating those afflicted with the disease into the community after all their sins have been forgiven.¹⁰⁰

Nkwera requests the government of Tanzania to directly control the media against the sexually charged music clips on television and the availability of pornography on the internet.¹⁰¹ He also demands sex education in the schools to be abolished. Self-protection skills from HIV and pregnancy will only increase the temptation for premarital sex in children. Nkwera calls the widespread use of condoms, and particularly the free distribution of them, "a great plan of Satan to destroy the whole progeny of mankind" and compares it to "the flood that God brought in the time of Noah."¹⁰²

At the MFHM Centre in Dar es Salaam the HIV/AIDS patients are known to be numerous but not exposed to public knowledge.¹⁰³ They attend the daily prayers, but are in no way segregated from all others seeking relief for a broad range of physical, psychological or social afflictions. Their healing process is the same as that of others - it involves going to consultation, confession, prayers (especially the rosary), water service and Eucharist. There are no special prayers organised specifically for those affected with HIV/AIDS.¹⁰⁴

However, particular attention is paid to education of the afflicted on matters relating to the illness.¹⁰⁵ Seminars that include both religious norms about prevention of the pandemic and medical facts about the disease are held regularly. External specialists are invited on these occasions. The helpers at the MFHM advise the patients which hospitals to seek treatment and how best to take care for themselves physically. Rounds are organised in which helpers go to the homes of the infected (as they do in all other cases of acute illness) and provisions are made for those who need special food in the kitchen of the MFHM Centre.¹⁰⁶ Financial assistance is also often provided for funerals. Besides this, the MFHM has no particular ministry dedicated to those afflicted with HIV/AIDS.

3.3.3 MFHM and Women's Empowerment against HIV/AIDS

The MFHM illustrates a religious movement whose theology is shaped and driven by their understanding of Mary. Apparently there are some works they do beneficial to the poor, including women. However, the Marian symbol appears not very empowering for women. A number of things would need to change within the MFHM for Mary to become an empowering symbol. First, the subordinate role of women would have to end. Currently Father Nkwera and his male Marian ideas seem to dominate the movement. It appears there

is little room for women's views and expressions of what Mary means for them. Women need to assume leadership roles equivalent to that of Father Nkwera in order to meet their needs within the group. A platform would also have to be created for women to express their understanding of Mary for themselves, to form and lead women's Marian groups.

Secondly, the understanding of HIV/AIDS as a punishment for sin would have to change. It denigrates women - the ones mostly infected. Within it is veiled the view that women are sinners – a view rebuffed through Mary's incarnational role. The MFHM theology runs against scholarly evidence which shows women's infection has little to do with unfaithfulness, promiscuity or sinfulness. It diverts attention from a scientific and contextual understanding of the disproportionate effects the pandemic has on women. Rather than ask the infected to repent, the MFHM should focus on real causes of women's infection and promote (rather than condemn) practical ways of ending the pandemic, such as condom use and sex education.

Thirdly, the MFHM's emphasis on AIDS as belonging to non-biomedical diseases naturally discourages the HIV positive to trust in the effectiveness of medication. For those with HIV, one of the most effective ways for a longer life is consistency in taking medication, which requires trust in its effectiveness. Women's empowerment through Mary should encourage the HIV positive to live longer by fetching and using effective medication. As regards women's empowerment against HIV/AIDS, it might be more helpful if emphasis on practical approaches take precedence over purely spiritualised ones.

Fourthly, the MFHM's emphasis on the spiritual world-view is at the expense of bodily empowerment against HIV/AIDS. For instance, there is emphasis on bodily possession by

Mary (and by evil spirits), during which the possessed person is unaware of the body's activities. This suggests bodily enslavement by Mary. Yet Mary should lead to bodily freedom. Her virginity, for instance, should mean women's autonomy – including bodily autonomy.¹⁰⁷ She should help women to have greater power over their bodies and greater say over what happens to them. Unlike the MFHM, there is another Marian movement, Legio Maria, which was formed with a view to empower women.

3.4 Legio Maria

For lack of space I will only give a brief analysis of Legio Maria (Latin, “Legion of Mary”).¹⁰⁸ This is an African Initiated Church which began among the Luo people of western Kenya.¹⁰⁹ It broke away from the Roman Catholic Church between 1962 and 1963.¹¹⁰ It has spread its roots wide, becoming increasingly multi-ethnic with strong fellowship in Uganda, Tanzania and DRC. Some estimates number its membership between two and three million.¹¹¹

Legio Maria was cofounded by Gaudencia Aoko (1943–1988) and Simeo Ondeto.¹¹² Its members allege it emerged out of oppressive conditions.¹¹³ It accused the Catholic Church of many discriminatory practices, such as denying or limiting Africans' rise to clerical positions, condemning and criminalizing African cultural traditions and sensibilities, and generally mirroring colonial regimes.¹¹⁴ It is liberationist and understands salvation as liberation from oppression in its multifaceted forms.¹¹⁵

Aoko and Ondeto claim their religious careers were preceded by a series of dreams and visions in which they encountered Mary and Jesus.¹¹⁶ Aoko was a woman strongly opposed

to gender discrimination within Catholicism, especially the exclusion of women from clerical positions and the hierarchical church organisational structures.¹¹⁷ She claimed to have received in her visions the commission and power to heal the sick, cast out evil spirits, free the faithful from witchcraft and preach.¹¹⁸ After the visions she went on to challenge indigenous African male authority, sexism, and gender hierarchy in the Catholic Church, and later on, in the Legio Maria church she had cofounded.¹¹⁹

Within the Legio Maria, Aoko performed various priestly duties including baptizing, conducting Masses, and serving Holy Communion. She baptized large numbers of women the Catholic Church had previously excommunicated for being in polygamous or leviratic marriages. She also baptized individuals denied baptism by the Catholic Church because of lack of the necessary fees. The Masses she conducted included healing and exorcism activities.¹²⁰

Legio Maria' members usually ask their prayers through Mary. They depict Mary as an elderly African woman more merciful than her son. Mary is considered the only person able to ask her son Jesus to help people during crises, and a powerful heavenly figure, whose role is to empower the powerless.¹²¹ She is part of the spirit world of the ancestors, a heavenly but approachable spiritual being. Legio Maria members usually build her a cortege where her portrait rests, with a white flag representing her. For women members, the African Mary - who they claim was herself a "preacher" - incites them to take the Gospel message seriously and enables them to preach, to become prophets, bishops, and priests among other roles. The role of women is also considered vital in recognition of Aoko, their cofounder.¹²²

Like the MFHM, Legio Maria seems to represent a highly spiritualized and de-politicized Marian theology, within which women's empowerment against real day-to-day oppression may be difficult. However, Legio Maria has a strong vision for women's empowerment, and to some degree, the organisation has taken steps towards fulfilment of that vision. Inspiration from the symbol of Mary seems to have made a huge contribution to women's status. Some commentators view Aoko's work as representing Third World liberation theology with a Marian twist.¹²³



Legio Maria Statue¹²⁴

3.5 Pilgrimages to Ngome Marian Shrine

3.5.1 Introduction

One of the most effective ways by which Mary impacts on people's lives is through pilgrimage to her shrines and places of apparition.¹²⁵ In Africa, the most well-known places of Marian apparition and pilgrimage are Zeitoun (Egypt), Kibeho (Rwanda) and Ngome (South Africa). Since the 1980s, Marian apparitions have been reported in Kenya, Zaire, Mozambique, South Africa, and Cameroon,¹²⁶ and the places of apparition regularly receive pilgrims. Pilgrimage places are numerous in the different southern African countries.



Most Well Known places of Marian Apparitions in Africa¹²⁷

In the province of Natal (South Africa) alone,¹²⁸ pilgrim destinations include Our Lady of Sorrows shrine (south of Kwazulu-Natal); the Immaculate Conception shrine, (in Tsheseng);¹²⁹ Our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace (Ntshongweni);¹³⁰ and Our Lady Consoler of the Afflicted (Kevelaer).¹³¹

3.5.2 The Beginning and Growth of Ngome Marian Shrine

The Ngome Marian Shrine is also in KwaZulu-Natal, where Sister Reinolda May, a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, allegedly experienced ten Marian visions between 22 August 1955 and 2 May 1971.¹³² Her first 'encounter' with Mary reportedly happened soon after Sister Reinolda had received Holy Communion during Mass. Sister Reinolda is said to have seen Mary standing “upon the globe, robed in shining white...on her breast rested a big Host surrounded by radiant light.”¹³³ In the vision, Mary requested to be invoked and venerated as the “Tabernacle of the Most High,” emphasising that more people should become “tabernacles of the Most High.”¹³⁴

In the fourth vision, Mary asked for a shrine to be built on rocky ground at a particular place near spring water, “where seven streams meet.”¹³⁵ Against the local bishop’s wish, the place soon became a popular destination for pilgrims, and a chapel was built on it.¹³⁶ In 1963, an image of Our Lady the Tabernacle of the Most High was painted according to Sister Reinolda’s description of her visions and placed in the chapel. Her statue was also constructed and placed in the shrine.¹³⁷

Popular veneration at the shrine grew as people travelled from far and wide to Ngome to pray, while others fetched water from the springs in the forest below the chapel which they

believed had some curative power. Visitors habitually dipped their feet in the water during prayer.¹³⁸



Mary Tabernacle of the Most High¹³⁹

The death of Sister Reinolda in 1981 brought Ngome further into the spotlight with the help of newspapers and television broadcasts.¹⁴⁰ In 1992, the veneration of Mary at the Ngome site was officially approved by the Catholic Church, and since then, organised pilgrimages to the place have been actively encouraged and promoted.¹⁴¹ A Ngome Shrine Committee was established, which published booklets and printed postcards in English and Zulu.¹⁴² The National Movement of the Pilgrim Virgin in South Africa also promoted Ngome Shrine

popularity in the southern Africa region.¹⁴³ A 37 minute video "The Fire has been lit... it will burn" was produced.¹⁴⁴



Our Lady of Ngome Painting¹⁴⁵

According to Br. Godfrey Numerous healings have been reported at the shrine and comparisons with Lourdes have been drawn. People who have claimed healings include those who had life threatening wounds, cancer tumours, and complicated cases of tuberculosis.¹⁴⁶ Some have claimed their doctors had given up on them. Some healings allegedly happen after touching the area of pain with a picture of the Tabernacle of the Most High statue.¹⁴⁷



Ngome Chapel¹⁴⁸

Although Ngome is far way from developed areas, more and more pilgrims travel to it by private cars and on bus tours from hugely populated areas such as Johannesburg.¹⁴⁹ For Mayer and Engelbregt, the number of pilgrims surge on Marian feast days.¹⁵⁰ Rosaries are given out in their thousands during vigils of prayer and meditation.¹⁵¹

Given Ngome's very Catholic spirituality (centred on the Blessed Sacrament, Mary and the tabernacle), one would expect Christians from other denominations to naturally have their reservations about visiting Ngome. However, Mayer and Engelbregt assert that people from different religious backgrounds come to Ngome for spiritual purposes.¹⁵² Pilgrims include

those with no religious affiliation, those who practise traditional African religion, and those of different Christian denominations.¹⁵³



Pilgrims in Procession with Our Lady of Ngome Statue and The Blessed Sacrament¹⁵⁴

3.5.3 My Visit to Ngome Shrine

On Saturday, 22 October 2011, I travelled to Ngome for an interview with the Ngome Shrine rector, Father Wayne Weldschidt. It was a six-hour journey from Johannesburg. I went through winding village roads, ascending and descending vast Zulu mountains. Ngome was about 80 km from the town of Vryheid and 30km north-west of Nongoma. As the sun was setting I arrived very tired and cranky to what seemed to be an abandoned place. Ngome Shrine was in the middle of a forest, and there was little infrastructural development near it.



Location of Ngome¹⁵⁵



Ngome Shrine in Remote Area¹⁵⁶

I was welcomed by Sister Collette, who took me into the dining hall, where there were about thirty pilgrims who had just arrived from Durban. They too looked tired and exhausted. A large white crucifix was dominating on one side of the wall. My appointment was later that evening, the only time Father Weldschidt was available due a busy schedule, which allowed me time to go round and experience the place.

Outside the dining hall I came across more pilgrims in groups, each one accompanied by a nun. Some were in St Anne's, the Sacred Heart's and St Joseph's guilds' uniforms. There was well organised movement of pilgrims from one point to another, usually in silence. The Ngome shrine was positioned above a thick forest within which streams of water formed a pool. A Marian statue was at the centre of the shrine. I felt the beautiful surroundings brought comfort and were conducive to prayer at the shrine. A large white cross towered over the shrine. A small crucifix, a black cross with a golden body of Jesus, hung to one side.

I also visited the chapel which supposedly was built in 1985. It stood upon solid rock and was a face-brick building, hexagonal in shape. Inside I came face to face with the painting of Mary, purportedly drawn according to specific directions of Sister Reinolda. The painting appeared to be very much alive. I felt it disconcerting to look at it for too long, hard to meet the woman's powerful gaze. I felt the woman depicted could come alive.



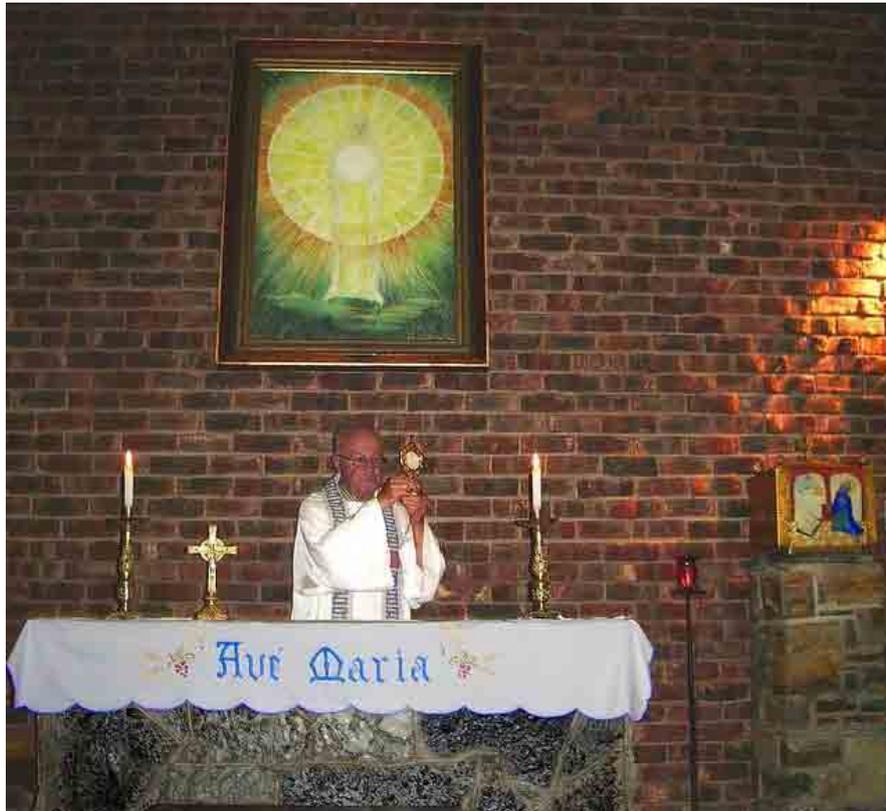
Ngome Stations of the Cross

From the chapel I went downhill the way of the cross, and came to the sacred springs. The springs were a five minutes' walk from the shrine, and reached through a path cut out of the forest. The Stations of the Cross started from the springs and wound their way up the hill, ending at the chapel. Near the springs I met more pilgrims in the company of nuns, including a group of school children who were often reprimanded for making noise as they filled their containers with the water. One of the nuns insisted the water could heal the body and was "good for the soul," and encouraged the pilgrims to collect it. I chose to drink it instead. It was cold and heavy and tasted almost metallic. I had never tasted water like it. There was also a certain quietness to the place. For a while I sat in the shade and listened to the water trickling out from the ground, and it felt good and refreshing.



Ngome Shrine Springs

After the interview it was time for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel. Father Weldschidt explained that adoration took place every night, and all pilgrims partook in it. There were about 130 of them. The altar was glowing with candle lights and reflections from the monstrance, and the consecrated white host took centre stage at the altar. The adoration consisted of moments of Zulu chants and responses, songs and meditative silence. I could feel the pilgrims' deep emotion and devotion from their songs and responses whose echoes travelled deep into the silent dark night. Meditation comprised of total silence, with the pilgrims' attention firmly fixed on the white host. I felt the whole atmosphere was reenergising and refreshing.



Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at Ngome¹⁵⁷



One End Inside of Ngome Chapel¹⁵⁸

After adoration I returned to the shrine. The darkness outside was thick and total, the surrounding areas having no electricity. The silence pervaded everything. Standing in that shrine and staring up at the statue of Mary I felt nothing but peace. The peace prevailed through all else that was around. When I went to sleep, most of the pilgrims stayed behind for organised prayer. Though some of them had looked exhausted on arrival, they were determined to spend all night at the shrine, braving the cold and dark possibly to catch a glimpse of Mary. Deep into the night, I could hear them chanting and praying the rosary. The guest rooms were very small, tidy and comfortable, but nothing out of place within the remote Ngome. Accommodation wise, I thought Ngome was somewhat small, able to host no more than two hundred pilgrims at a time.



The Tabernacle in the chapel¹⁵⁹

My visit at the shrine ended with Sunday Mass, during which the singing was filled with great enthusiasm and joy. At the end of the Mass the pilgrims literally danced out of the Church. What a remarkable change from the crankiness, hurt and desperation that was so obvious at some of the pilgrims' arrival. They appeared renewed. I felt Ngome was for them, and for me as well, a place of deep feeling of peace and renewal.

During the interview, Father Weldschidt explained that Ngome was still growing as a pilgrimage centre. His workmates, fathers Nkululeko and Andrew, were Oblates of Mary Immaculate and priests like him. Benedictine Sisters of Twasana (indigenous to the Diocese of Eshowe) - Rosutta, Alexia, Michael and Agnes oversaw the management of the shrine staff.

Father Weldschidt explained that many of the pilgrims arrived during the weekends, from all over southern Africa and even further abroad. They came for prayer, spiritual renewal, healing and for personal reasons. Some came with heavy hearts, with much to offload and desperate to be healed. They would often cry at the Stations of the Cross, bathe at the springs and weep when praying the rosary. For Father Weldschidt, this opened the way to acceptance, understanding and the reception of God's grace for them. Greater devotion to the Eucharist, according to him, was the main gift from Mary the Tabernacle of the Most High to the pilgrims.

However, Father Weldschidt also added that he had received many testimonies about healings. He would always insisted that people send in their medical records and a reference

from the doctor who treated their illness up until the miraculous recovery. Records of healing claims were being kept.

I asked Father Weldschidt what tangible impact Mary as ‘The Tabernacle of the Most High’ was having on people and society. His answer was elaborate. He noted that, first, the shrine pulled large crowds from various places, and this was having enormous effect and benefits for the social sphere. For instance, Ngome Shrine Centre had mobilised the community to engage the civil authorities to improve the area’s roads and social services with measured success. Some accommodation and small shops selling food and Marian holy objects had been built at the Shrine Centre. Church and civil authorities were meeting regularly to ensure safety and order, to improve, restrain and sometimes manipulate events. There was also a group of associates and volunteers who assisted them during large pilgrimages. He believed Ngome was also having a moral cure on individuals and society.

Father Weldschidt also explained that there were spiritual and material gains, which was a liberating potential for the poor. The Shrine had spawned a vast and effective network of social services, such as healing ministries. Added to this were some economic benefits. Most Ngome Shrine Centre employees were local women. Pilgrims habitually donated clothes, which required vigilant administration. The Centre also hosted a Christmas and winter drive for clothing and food hampers for every family at Ngome.

Thirdly, he emphasised that Ngome had particular potential to empower women in the society. Mary as ‘The Tabernacle of the Most High’ had brought to spotlight matters concerning motherhood in south Africa, such as pregnancy, abortions, destitute mothers, poor mothers who could not afford hospital treatment, and men’s family responsibilities. The

responses by the church, government services, NGOs and others in the country had been favourable to mothers' needs.

Besides, Mary was most attractive to women at Ngome. Pregnant mothers who worried about their unborn babies and mothers concerned about their children often came for Mary's blessing and healing. Women who had lost their loved ones: sons, daughters, also often formed groups for pilgrimages together. Women emotionally wounded and exposed undertook physically tough and exhausting journeys to Ngome and found spiritual and emotional healing. Mary as 'tabernacle' resonated with their motherhood. Some couples also felt confident to ask Mary for a child at the Shrine. According to Father Weldschidt, testimonies were coming in weekly, confirming people were getting what they had come in search of.

Father Weldschidt further explained that sister Reinolda's order of Benedictine nuns also ran one of the largest HIV/AIDS hospitals in the region, near Gungundlovu, some distance from Ngome. Inspired by Sister Reinolda, the nuns started the hospital on donations for the poor. The hospital mostly benefitted poor women, particularly those banished from homes, who could not meet hospital expenses, and those traumatised by infection and affected by violence. The nuns referred to themselves as "Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

Further, Father Weldschidt emphasised that Ngome had grown as an important place for campaigning against violence and promoting peace. The Catholic Church encouraged pilgrims to pray for peace at Ngome, and this was based on a real need to foster a sense of non-violence in the country. As huge crowds travelled to Ngome, that sense of peace was fostered and promoted.¹⁶⁰

Father Weldschidt furthermore noted that the shrine and the apparitions had interacted with society on the level of opinion. Ngome had provoked reaction among various social sectors, intellectuals, magistrates, and politicians; and among various offices in the Church: priests, theologians, and the faithful in general. Various media had also published material on Ngome over the years, particularly The Southern Cross. The South Africa Broadcasting Corporation had produced many Ngome Shrine programs recently during larger pilgrimages. Consequently more people had made enquiries and arrangements for coming on pilgrimage. He showed me a digitally printed poster depicting four images of a “Spectacular” phenomenon which was prominently associated with Ngome Shrine in the media.



“Spectacular” Light Phenomenon Poster¹⁶¹

Father Weldschidt expressed belief that Mary Tabernacle of the Most High will become the overriding image of faith in southern Africa. For him Mary had come among the poor and for

the poor. At this point he appeared very passionate. This was part of the plan of God, because when Mary appeared in Medjugorje, she said the Eucharist would save the world:

The world is searching for salvation, albeit in very barren places, and that search is leading many to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus whom Mary Tabernacle of the Most High has brought to Ngome. It is rapidly evolving before our eyes...it is only a matter of time before it reaches fever pitch. God's grace is overwhelming here and it is this grace that is underpinned by His love for us his children...especially the poor, the abandoned, the helpless, the abused...Here they find a home, here they find a voice, here they find a Mother, here they find God who vindicates them and lifts them up to the dignity of His very own children.

I asked Father Weldschidt if people in Southern Africa thought Mary was that important a figure for them. He said that her popularity was growing due to the witness of those who were coming and going away to share their experiences. He expressed great surprise at how Ngome had grown as a pilgrim centre in the previous year, and added that all 2012 weekends and most weekdays were already fully booked up. He continued:

God is drawing His children from every corner of this continental region. There is a huge interest from the whole of southern Africa. There is a hunger for God which is not being filled in the world today. Only at very holy places like Ngome do people finally feel filled with His grace. Once satisfied, they just cannot contain themselves and begin to share their experience.

I also asked Father Weldschidt if Mary at Ngome faced opposition from some Catholic, Protestant or other quarters. For him, the Shrine enjoyed its own popularity among the faithful "simply because many give witness about their own experiences at the Shrine." He said some Catholic priests were not yet convinced about the authenticity of Ngome Shrine, but they were being evangelised by parishioners who visit the Shrine on pilgrimage. "Our lady has a way to win anyone over to her Son's Eucharistic table. No one who leaves here is the same after spending time in pilgrimage." He added that it was mainly Catholics who

visited the Shrine. However, they were feeling more confident to bring non-Catholic relatives and friends, and “this is having amazing results.”

Father Weldschidt pointed to a small building in which was sold some statues, pictures, candles, medals and some clothing which had on them the Ngome logo and some small messages of Our Lady The Tabernacle of the Most High. He said that the clothing attires were extremely popular and a source of evangelisation by those who wore them. He emphasised that such items were bought by anyone, including non-Catholics and non-Christians. He also said a stature of Mary Tabernacle of the Most High had been taken to Australia to promote the Shrine.

About ten kilometres away from Ngome, on my return journey, I stopped at a village dominated by a Faith Apostolic Church sect, and had a brief interview with its church leader, Pastor Ignatious Ncube. He had visited Ngome once, and I asked him what he thought of the Shrine. His response was quick. He respected Mary as an example of a good Christian life, particularly in terms of sexual purity, virginity and obedience to God’s laws. Her example could help those who wanted to avoid HIV infections, “particularly girls and women.” However, he was opposed to the whole idea of the Ngome Shrine. He feared people were worshipping Mary’s statue. “If you stand before Mary’s statue and close your eyes, you find the image implanted in your mind. The image becomes real in the mind. When people kneel before Mary’s statue, they end up thinking the statue is Mary.” He argued that in the Old Testament, God made it clear that people were not to pray to statues.

More importantly, for him, nowhere in the bible was it written that anyone should pray through Mary. God said worship only him. “I doubt that the human Mary demanded respect

and veneration.” For him, some people who went to Ngome seemed to think Mary was greater than Jesus. They preferred to pray to Mary, and not to Jesus. “Why are there no popular visions or apparitions of Jesus in the Catholic Church? Why are Jesus’ apparitions not publicised?” he challenged.

I asked him how he would explain the alleged miracles and healings at Ngome. He said the healings were not because of the statue or Mary, but because of people’s faith in God which they brought to Ngome with them. He also called for caution, pointing out that the devil had power to do miracles.

Furthermore, for him, Catholics were wrong in believing that Mary did not sin and that she was in heaven. “Jesus said when he comes the dead will be raised and everyone will be judged. So Mary will be judged too. Both those who go to the Shrine and Mary will be judged. No one should confidently say anyone is in heaven.” He concluded: “People should follow what is in the bible. That is the only way to avoid errors.”

I went back to Johannesburg with the impression that Mary was having some considerable effect on some people’s lives at Ngome, and the shrine was growing in different ways. Her influence penetrated different parts of the southern African region, though probably not all people, even in South Africa itself, had heard about the Shrine. Though the events and the spirituality at Ngome were apparently benefiting and possibly empowering some poor people and some women, not everyone thought well of the Shrine.

3.5.4 Conclusion

It appears from the above illustrations that Mary in Africa in general, and southern Africa in particular, is often a very powerful feminine symbol. However, she does not always translate into an empowering symbol. In some cases, the way she is understood would need to change radically for her to empower women against HIV/AIDS. The next chapter suggests how Mary's motherhood could be conceived in an empowering way against HIV/AIDS.

Endnotes

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- ²Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 197.
- ³Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 197.
- ⁴Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 198.
- ⁵Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 198.
- ⁶Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 51.
- ⁷Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 199.
- ⁸Mary Thomas, 'Down from her Pedestal', 358.
- ⁹Anne Nachisale Musopole, 'Sexuality and Religion in a Matriarchal Society' in Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York, 1992), 200.
- ¹⁰Anne Nachisale Musopole, 'Sexuality and Religion in a Matriarchal Society', 201
- ¹¹Marianne Merckx, 'Introduction' in Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 8.
- ¹²Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 200.
- ¹³Teresa Okure, 'Women in the Bible' in Virginia Fabella, Mercy Amba Oduyoye (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 47-48.
- ¹⁴Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 201.
- ¹⁵Teresa Okure, 'Women in the Bible', 51.
- ¹⁶Teresa Okure, 'The Will to Arise: Reflections on Luke 8:40-56' in Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 228.
- ¹⁷Teresa Okure, 'The Will to Arise: Reflections on Luke 8:40-56', 228.
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- ²¹Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 51.
- ²²Iphigenia Gachiri, 'The Present Situation and pastoral Guidelines for Marian devotion Today' in T. Charlton (ed.), *Exploring Our Christian Life In the Light of the African Synod* (Nairobi: Daughters of St Paul, 1994), 130-141.
- ²³Iphigenia Gachiri, 'The Present Situation', 134.
- ²⁴Rosemary N. Edet, 'Christianity and African Women's Rituals' in Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York, 1992), 33.
- ²⁵Rosemary N. Edet, 'Christianity and African Women's Rituals', 33.
- ²⁶Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 204.
- ²⁷Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 207.
- ²⁸Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 208.
- ²⁹Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 208.
- ³⁰Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 204.
- ³¹Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 204.
- ³²Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 204.
- ³³Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 204.

- ³⁴ Teresa Okure, 'Women in the Bible', 51.
- ³⁵ Iphigenia Gachiri, 'The Present Situation', 134.
- ³⁶ Iphigenia Gachiri, 'The Present Situation', 139.
- ³⁷ Author unknown, 'The Magnificat' in Ursula Kung (ed.) *Feminist Theology from the Third World*. This was a Coptic Egyptian theologian's reflection upon the Magnificat from the world Council of Churches' Program on Women and Rural Development.
- ³⁸ Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 206.
- ³⁹ Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 206.
- ⁴⁰ Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 209.
- ⁴¹ Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament', 206.
- ⁴² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 58.
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- ⁴⁴ R. Edet and B. Ekeya, 'Church Women of Africa', 9.
- ⁴⁵ Michael Chamunorwa, *Mapoka Ezvita* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2006, 97. There is a tradition which asserts that Joachim and Anne were the names of Mary's parents.
- ⁴⁶ Photo taken on 9-10-2011.
- ⁴⁷ Photo taken on 9-10-2011.
- ⁴⁸ Michael Chamunorwa, *Mapoka Ezvita* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2006, 97.
- ⁴⁹ Michael Chamunorwa, *Mapoka Ezvita* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2006, 66.
- ⁵⁰ Michael Chamunorwa, *Mapoka Ezvita* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2006, 84.
- ⁵¹ I did not ask for her first name - this would not be proper for a respectable motherly figure in Zimbabwe.
- ⁵² Photo taken on 9-10-2011
- ⁵³ F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo La Adhabu ya Kifungo Kimetungwa na* (Peramiho: Benedictine Publications Ndanda, 2007), 18.
- ⁵⁴ F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 23.
- ⁵⁵ Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry: An African Expression of Popular Catholicism in Tanzania' in Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo (eds.) *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999), 278.
- ⁵⁶ F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 18.
- ⁵⁷ Katharina Wilkens, 'Mary and the Demons: Marian Devotion and Ritual Healing in Tanzania' in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 39 no. 3 (2009), 296.
- ⁵⁸ F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 18.
- ⁵⁹ F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 23.
- ⁶⁰ Katharina Wilkens, 'Mary and the Demons', 297.
- ⁶¹ Katharina Wilkens, 'Mary and the Demons', 297.
- ⁶² Father Nkwera Praying with some of his MFHM followers in a court room after one of their legal battles with the Catholic Church, accessed on 19-09-2011
<http://www.wavuti.com/4/post/2010/6/father-nkwera-and-wanamaombi-allowed-to-challenge-roman-catholic-church-restrictions.html#axzz1ZBC6Cz57>
- ⁶³ Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 280.
- ⁶⁴ Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 280.
- ⁶⁵ F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 23
- ⁶⁶ Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 281.
- ⁶⁷ Katharina Wilkens, 'Mary and the Demons', 299.
- ⁶⁸ Katharina Wilkens, 'Mary and the Demons', 300.

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- ⁶⁹Katharina Wilkens, 'Mary and the Demons', 300.
- ⁷⁰Katharina Wilkens, 'Mary and the Demons', 300.
- ⁷¹F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 18.
- ⁷²F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 18.
- ⁷³Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 280.
- ⁷⁴Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 281.
- ⁷⁵Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 281.
- ⁷⁶F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 26.
- ⁷⁷Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God:" *Explanations from the Catholic Marian Faith Healing Ministry, Tanzania* (Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Bayreuth. Paper Presented at a conference on faith and HIV held in London at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in September 2005)
- ⁷⁸Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 287. One explanation often given by the MFHM is that women are the ones most vulnerable to illness and demons because the devil knows by subduing or overcoming the mother he subdues and overcomes the whole family.
- ⁷⁹Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 287.
- ⁸⁰Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."
- ⁸¹Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."
- ⁸²Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 287.
- ⁸³Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."
- ⁸⁴F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 28.
- ⁸⁵Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 281.
- ⁸⁶F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 34. Though Tanzania's Independence Day was 9 December 1961, annual independence celebrations begin on 8 December, which is the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.
- ⁸⁷F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 34.
- ⁸⁸Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 290. The group has strong ties to the former president Julius Nyerere's family, and regularly condemns corrupt leaders.⁸⁸ It often receives requests for prayers by those running for political positions.
- ⁸⁹Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, 'The Marian Faith Healing Ministry', 290.
- ⁹⁰Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."
- ⁹¹F. V. Nkwera, *Maana na Lengo*, 15.
- ⁹²Felicien Nkwera and Charles Ikpoh, *Messages and Testimonies. Huduma za Maombezi (Marian Faith Healing Ministry) 1969-1994* (Dar es Salaam: Marian Faith Healing Centre, 1995), 118.
- ⁹³Felicien Nkwera and Charles Ikpoh, *Messages and Testimonies*, 118.
- ⁹⁴Felicien Nkwera and Charles Ikpoh, *Messages and Testimonies*, 118.
- ⁹⁵Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Kanisa, Serikali, Msikiti na Uchaguzi Mkuu Tanzania 1995* (Dar es Salaam: Marian Faith Healing Centre, 1996), 48.
- ⁹⁶Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Kanisa, Serikali*, 48.
- ⁹⁷Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Kanisa, Serikali*, 48.
- ⁹⁸Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Kanisa, Msikiti, Serikali. Toba, Rabi! Ukimwi, Ruschwa* (Dar es Salaam: Marian Faith Healing Centre, 2003), 13.
- ⁹⁹Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Kanisa, Msikiti, Serikali*, 28.
- ¹⁰⁰Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Kanisa, Msikiti, Serikali*, 28.
- ¹⁰¹Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Request: A National Day for Repentance* (Dar es Salaam: Marian

Faith Healing Centre, 2003), 9.

¹⁰² Felicien Venant Nkwera, *Request: A National Day for Repentance*, 12.

¹⁰³ Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."

¹⁰⁴ Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."

¹⁰⁵ Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."

¹⁰⁶ Katharina Wilkens, "AIDS is a Punishment from God."

¹⁰⁷ Hauke, Manfred, 'Mother of God or Domesticated Goddess? Mary in Feminist Theology' in Manfred Hauke, *God or Goddess?: Feminist Theology: What is it? Where Does it Lead?* (New York: Ignatius Press, 1995), 184.

¹⁰⁸ David Barrett and John Padwick, *Rise Up and Walk!: Conciliarism and the African Indigenous Churches, 1815 - 1987* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 199.

¹⁰⁹ Teresia Mbari Hinga, *Women, Power And Liberation in An African Church: a Theological Case Study of the Legio Maria Church in Kenya* (PhD Diss, University of Lancaster, 1990), iv.

¹¹⁰ David Barrett and John Padwick, *Rise Up and Walk*, 66.

¹¹¹ Nancy Schwartz, 'Dreaming in Color: Anti-essentialism in Legio Maria Dream Narratives' in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2005), 159.

¹¹² Nancy Schwartz, 'Dreaming in Color', 159.

¹¹³ David Barrett and John Padwick, *Rise Up and Walk*, 66.

¹¹⁴ David Barrett and John Padwick, *Rise Up and Walk*, 66.

¹¹⁵ David Barrett and John Padwick, *Rise Up and Walk*, 66.

¹¹⁶ Peter J. Dirven, 'A Protest and a Challenge: the Maria Legio Breakaway Church in West Kenya' in *AFER*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1970), 131

¹¹⁷ Peter J. Dirven, 'A Protest and a Challenge', 131.

¹¹⁸ Irene E. Gnarra, 'Aoko, Gaudencia' in Phyllis G. Jestice (ed.), *The Holy People of the World: a Cross Cultural Encyclopaedia* (California: ABC CLIO, 2004), 61.

¹¹⁹ Irene E. Gnarra, 'Aoko, Gaudencia', 61. The Legio Maria ultimately adopted an official structure that reproduced the same hierarchical leadership structure that it had sought to escape when it seceded from the Catholic Church. The new structure also forbade women to serve as priests, though it ordained them as church mothers. Aoko opposed this adoption of a hierarchical structure in Legio Maria, and rejected the offer to become a cardinal or bishop. By 1967 she had been eliminated from the leadership of the Legio Maria, and she went on to establish a new church, the Communion Church of Africa, which ordains women for priestly functions.

¹²⁰ Irene E. Gnarra, 'Aoko, Gaudencia', 61.

¹²¹ Nancy Schwartz, 'Dreaming in Color', 167.

¹²² Nancy Schwartz, 'Dreaming in Color', 167.

¹²³ Irene E. Gnarra, 'Aoko, Gaudencia', 61.

¹²⁴ Irene E. Gnarra, 'Aoko, Gaudencia', 61.

¹²⁵ Sarah Jane Boss, 'Jerusalem, Dwelling of the Lord: Marian Pilgrimage and its Destination' in Philip North and John North (eds.), *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven* (New York, Continuum, 2007), 145. According to Sarah Boss, pilgrimages are a microcosm of the soul's journey to Heaven, and in Mary the holiness which prepares the pilgrims for Heaven is fully acquired. For Boss, the single largest group of pilgrimages in the world are to places consecrated to the Mary. Her shrines are visited throughout the year. Besides national and regional shrines, the number of local pilgrimage sites consecrated to Mary is remarkably large throughout the world.

¹²⁶The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010 <http://eshowe.org/ngome.htm>

¹²⁷The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010

¹²⁸Br. Godfrey, 'Spectacular phenomenon at Ngome', 6. Catholics in South Africa refer to "Holy Queen Mary Assumed into Heaven" as the Patroness of the Country.

¹²⁹Here, Mary is also called Our Lady of Bethlehem.

¹³⁰Br. Godfrey, 'Spectacular phenomenon at Ngome', 6. May 31 is the official day of pilgrimage in honour of Our Lady of Ntshongweni. Pilgrims come from all over Southern Africa to pray at the shrine.

¹³¹Br. Godfrey, 'Spectacular Phenomenon at Ngome', 8.

¹³²Godfrey Sieber, 'The Shrine of Our Lady at Ngome' in *The Benedictines of Inkamana* (Durban: EOS Verlag, (1995), 600.

¹³³The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010

¹³⁴The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010

¹³⁵Godfrey Sieber, 'The Shrine of Our Lady at Ngome', 604.

¹³⁶Godfrey Sieber, 'The Shrine of Our Lady at Ngome', 604.

¹³⁷The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010

¹³⁸Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet* (Durban: Marian Hill Brothers, 2007), 11.

¹³⁹The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010

¹⁴⁰Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 11.

¹⁴¹Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 11.

¹⁴²Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 11.

¹⁴³Br. Godfrey, 'Spectacular Phenomenon at Ngome', 8.

¹⁴⁴Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 19.

¹⁴⁵The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010

¹⁴⁶Br. Godfrey, 'Spectacular Phenomenon at Ngome', 8.

¹⁴⁷Ngome Healing Testimonies accessed on 27-09-2011.

¹⁴⁸The History of the Parishes in the Diocese of Eshowe: The Shrine of Our Lady of Ngome, (1985), accessed on 27-09-2010

¹⁴⁹Sarah Jane Boss, 'Jerusalem', 145. According to Boss, some pilgrim routes make tough demands on their travellers in order for the pilgrims to acquire spiritual merit, such as atonement for sin, either for oneself or for others. It is when pilgrims are aware of their need for the most basic needs that they are most open God's presence. When in such need, God gives them a sense of the sacred and increases their desire for him. In desiring him, they then transcend the difficult conditions of hardship in which they were first led into that desire.

¹⁵⁰Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 19.

¹⁵¹Ngome Healing Testimonies accessed on 27-09-2011.

¹⁵²Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 19

¹⁵³Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 19

¹⁵⁴Ngome Healing Testimonies accessed on 27-09-2011.

¹⁵⁵Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 11.

¹⁵⁶Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 11.

¹⁵⁷Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 11.

¹⁵⁸Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 11.

¹⁵⁹Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 23.

¹⁶⁰NationMaster South Africa Crime Statistics, accessed on 22-11-2010

<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/sf-south-africa/crime>. South Africa currently ranks second for assault and murder and first for rape on world scale.

¹⁶¹Fr. Michael Mayer and John Engelbreght, *Ngome Booklet*, 19.

One of the Ngome events well publicised by televisions and newspapers, contributing to Ngome's popularity, was called the 'light phenomenon'. The phenomenon occurred on 13 December 1997, the feast of the Immaculate Conception and the day earmarked for the official opening of Ngome as a place for regular adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. According to Mayer and Engelbreght, about twelve minutes after sunset a dramatic phenomenon appeared in the sky above Ngome. The phenomenon consisted of several rays of blue light radiating from the direction at which the sun had set. The rays gradually increased in number and in thickness. Shortly before they disappeared, they illuminated clouds in the sky so that they resembled flames. The whole phenomenon lasted for about fifteen minutes and it was captured on video.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARY'S MOTHERHOOD

4.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that conceptualising Mary as an empowered mother could help us to recognise southern African women as people of dignity and respect, and could inspire the women to claim power in society as mothers in their fight against HIV/AIDS. The basic position of many forms of African feminism is that African women are fond of being mothers and consider their motherhood an essential part of their definition.¹ Motherism, for instance, argues that African women were very powerful and content with their societal role as mothers before the coming of colonialism. After regaining independence, they now struggle to reclaim their motherly powers in order to withstand patriarchal subjugation.² I will first briefly state some feminist views of motherhood from different parts of the world before explaining the African concept of motherhood. I will then go on to show how Mary could be conceived as an inspiration for the empowerment of African Christian women as mothers.

4.2 DIFFERENT FEMINIST CONCEPTS OF MOTHERHOOD

4.2.1 Western Feminism

Among different Western feminist strands is one strongly rooted in Second Wave feminism (1960s to late 1970s), which argued that maternal experience was defined by patriarchal culture.³ Religion, art, medicine and psychoanalysis were considered strongholds of male power which objectified motherhood, disregarded female experience and silenced the mother's voice. The Second Wave activists insisted on women's right to work and participate

in public life and argued that mothering was not essential to women's fulfilment or necessary to every woman's life.⁴

The modern western feminist strand, also largely influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, sees the link between childbearing and childrearing as socially manipulative and undergirding social practices which limit women's possibilities to the domestic sphere, and which serve to exclude and restrict women from entry into the public domain.⁵ It seeks to liberate motherhood from the conventional family which, it argues, leaves no space for women to choose alternative identities,⁶ and to debunk social pressures of a mothering role as intended to control women's bodies and energy. It critiques motherhood by challenging what is seen as an overemphasis on fertility.⁷ The symbol of Mary as mother is often discarded in preference to her depictions as fellow sister or disciple.⁸

4.2.2 Some Third World Feminist Conceptions of Motherhood

Third world feminism is generally more accepting of the traditional notion of motherhood. Black feminists in America, for instance, have argued that whereas the middle-class, mid-twentieth-century American mothers stayed at home and longed to be part of the public sphere, the brutalising effects of slavery made black mothers work most of their time and long for more time with their children.⁹ Signe Arnfred argues that for black women, the home has not always been a private domain because black women have adapted to "co-mothering" where their children are cared for by grandparents or other female kin.¹⁰

In Latin American nations, Mary is very popular as mother, and motherhood and its significance within their cultural traditions is highly cherished. However, there are Latin

American feminist scholars who have critiqued the implications of local mythologies and motherhood discourses, in which Mary is cherished as a model of motherhood. For instance, a feminist close examination of the La Malinche/Virgin of Guadalupe contradiction concludes that the Virgin image serves to suppress the threatening or deviant femininity embodied in La Malinche - regarded as the Mexican Eve. The Virgin (symbolising passivity, tenderness, and self-sacrifice) “is central to the construction of femininity in Latin American cultures because she embodies virtues convenient for the patriarchal order.”¹¹ La Malinche - the sexualised, wilful, stubborn and self-determinant woman is seen as risky to patriarchy and so is portrayed as evil. Some Latin American feminists, such as Marcella Althaus-Reid¹² have gone on to reject the Virgin Mother symbol altogether, while others have sought to portray her in new and empowering ways.¹³

There are feminists in Asia who also seek to liberate themselves from destructive formulations of patriarchal interpretations of motherhood. Among them, one group has sought to do so using the Marian figure by applying their own interpretations of Mary as opposed to patriarchal interpretations which are oppressive to them. In 1987, feminist theologians from thirty four Asian/Pacific countries at a conference in Singapore resolved “to rediscover the liberated and liberating woman, Mary”¹⁴ in their own cultural contexts.

It appears the more conservative a culture is, the more attractive the traditional concept of motherhood. In the more progressive western cultures, biological motherhood is becoming less and less important for women’s identity. In Latin America and Asia, motherhood is acclaimed as important, but with a lot of emphasis on its reinterpretation. In the very conservative African cultures, motherhood is in the main passionately celebrated as central to women’s identity.

4.3 SOME AFRICAN CONCEPTS OF MOTHERHOOD

4.3.1 Mothers' Powers Undermined by Colonialism

A number of African feminists argue that it was colonialism and its accompanying religions, especially Christianity, which downgraded women to positions of powerlessness and subjugation within their own societies. They contend that the colonial administration marginalised women from salaried jobs in the formal sector and in education.¹⁵ Mireille Rabenoro, for instance, stresses that this created economic inequality, and gave more power to men in the household than they had ever had, while women slipped from the powerful position of motherhood down to the category of dependent family members.¹⁶ Mojubaolu Okome narrates some impacts of colonialism and Christianity on African motherhood:

Where in the past, women were able to play some important roles in society, with colonization, these are defined out of existence. Where the religion of the colonized had key roles for women to play both as deities and priestesses, the imposition of Christianity ruled these out. Whereas motherhood formerly implied power, it now came to be seen as an encumbrance. Whereas motherhood and participation in the economy were not mutually exclusive, it soon came to be as Africa moved inexorably toward Westernization. Although being a woman was not coterminous with being the weaker sex, this became the norm. Indeed, one of the most important institutional [privileges] upon which a woman's claim of power could be made – motherhood - became irrelevant because of the separation between the public and private spheres that was an integral part of the colonial enterprise. As an actor that was restricted to the private realm, women were domesticated and subject to the discipline of those recognized as the heads of households - men.¹⁷

Okome is one of the African feminists who argue that historically, matriarchy was the dominant ethos of socio-political organisation and moral life in Africa. For her, this historical social setting should become the basis for the empowerment of modern African women.¹⁸ Motherhood is still an important social position in women's self-definition, and plays an important part in African women's reclaiming of power. Okome holds that elements of this matriarchal consciousness and ideology remain, despite the forced entry and the

spreading of exploitative patriarchal structures and values since colonialism.¹⁹ She believes modern African women can reverse the gender setbacks suffered during colonialism by drawing insights from past structures and through models of women's empowerment.²⁰ Okome argues that in the past mothers exercised power “as wives, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, political officials, owners of capital, noble/aristocratic officials of deities and religious leaders.”²¹ Some of the traditional powers women enjoyed were the love, reverence, loyalty and obedience given to mothers.

4.3.2 Motherism

One prominent representation of African feminism, motherism, has recently been developed in several former British colonies, such as Nigeria, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, as Africa’s alternative to Western feminism.²² Motherism sees women essentially as mothers. Motherists contend that an African feminist theory must be founded on motherhood central to African philosophy and the source for the survival and harmony of the African family throughout the past. They argue that motherhood has been the heart of African art, literature (especially women's writing), culture, psychology, oral traditions, and experiential philosophy, even in the post-colonial era.²³ According to Oyeronke Oyewumi, the whole African community is naturally invested in motherhood, and “there is no greater public institution than motherhood.”²⁴ She portrays maternal love as the deepest and most fundamental of all Africans’ actions. For Niara Sudarkasa, there is no male parallel to motherhood - not even fatherhood, for “motherhood transcends gender.”²⁵

Ifi Amadiume contends that African women's identity is centred on their labelling as “mothers,” and “the mother-focused matri-centric unit” is at centre stage of African

feminism.²⁶ African female power is "derived from the sacred and almost divine importance accorded to motherhood," with the veneration of motherhood constituting "the main difference between the historical experiences of African women and those of European women."²⁷ For Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Mother is the preferred and cherished self-identity of many African women."²⁸ It is in itself a position of authority. Oyewumi claims that "the model of motherhood is absolutely natural . . . because it binds women together in collective experience," of "childbearing and the mothering of children, and consequently the nurturing of community."²⁹ For Fidela Fouche, African mothers prefer a feminism which seeks social justice to one which seeks personal rights and equality with patriarchy.³⁰ Signe Arnfred also argues that African feminists refuse to see themselves as "others" or "the second sex," and that their own societies do not give rise to such ideas.³¹ The female body's capacity for pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation is seen as a positive potential, as a source of love, dignity, respect, pride, commitment, equality, social unity toward the common good and empowerment. It is an important avenue for their flourishing and fulfilment, and more of an opportunity than a limit.³²

Catherine Acholonu, in her book *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* also uses the term 'motherism' as a "multidimensional Afrocentric theory" to define "the essence of African womanhood" and proposes the concept of 'motherism' as a framework for investigating African women's unique experiences.³³ 'Motherism' for her provides a contrasting response to feminism of Euro-American cultural experience.³⁴ For Acholonu, the traditional role of the African woman was essentially that of "a matriarch and a social nurturer, and her status ranged from that of royalty and leadership to that of a goddess, a priestess, a soldier and a quintessential partner to the African man."³⁵

4.3.3 Biological and non-Biological Motherhood

Akosua Ampofo argues that one of the African families' important values is fertility or biological parenting. Children bring higher status to the family-line, and in the past were considered a significant economic asset. The birth of children strongly ties the married couple together, ensuring the continuity of the family-line. A woman's fertility is so essential that most ethnic groups have special ceremonies to celebrate a girl's entry into potential motherhood.³⁶ There is a strong cultural understanding that men and women should continue to bear children throughout their reproductive years, a desire partly rooted in women's positive experience of motherhood.³⁷

Yet mothering is also a non-biological social position. Motherhood is a set of behaviours, expectations and responsibilities that constitute culturally defined kinship roles. The care for children can be as significant as women's birthing. Niara Sudarkasa notes that those who have not given birth become mothers by having children who are "adopted", "assumed" or "assigned." They assume responsibility for the care and upbringing of one or more children of their relatives, or they might have children "given" or "assigned" to them.³⁸ Such motherhood takes up the responsibility for rearing, educating, and launching the careers of many children. For Sudarkasa, the respect due to such a mother is not diminished due to the fact that she is not the birth-giver.³⁹

Motherhood also includes communal mothering. African motherhood is firmly located in extended family structures. This involves collective responsibilities held by a network of women in a given community. The 'mothers' share information helpful in the upbringing of their children. The members of the extended family can also baby-sit and help in the rearing

of children. For Obioma Nnaemeka, the saying “It takes a village to raise a child” deeply pervades African cultures.⁴⁰ Akosua Ampofo also argues that “the experience of being mothered as a child by a whole community and taking responsibility of younger siblings and fictive kin at an early age creates an ethic of caring and advocacy for a collective good.”⁴¹

Because of this notion of communal responsibility, in some matrilineal societies, there is no term which uniquely designates the birth-mother. The making of any distinction between the two is often discouraged. The biological motherhood and communal motherhood do not contradict but overlap. Among the Kaonde in Zambia, the person identifiable as biological mother is not distinguished with a kinship term of her own. She is called ‘inanji’, the same term used for all of the speaker’s “female matrikin in the first ascending generation.”⁴² For the Bantu peoples of Central and Southern Africa in general, the terms ‘mother’ and ‘father’ are extended to ‘step-mothers’ and ‘step-fathers’ and to a wide range of other kinsmen and kinswomen such as uncles and aunts.⁴³ All brothers of the father are called ‘father’, all sisters of the mother are called ‘mother’, all their children ‘brother’ and ‘sister’.⁴⁴ Reciprocally, the term for ‘child’ or ‘offspring’ also refers not only to one’s ‘own’ children but to the offspring of many kinsmen and kinswomen.⁴⁵

Motherhood further extends to public engagements. Sudarkasa argues that in African societies, greater importance is given to the community than the individual, and women’s biological tasks do not prevent them from taking up political or economic responsibilities. Women do not only care for their children, but broadly for the community also. Sudarkasa draws out the complex roles of the mother in African conjugal and extended families:

5) . . . a woman is mother to her children to whom she has given birth. 6) She is also “mother” to all the children for whom she has assumed responsibility as well as to any children “assigned” or “given” to her. 7) . . . a woman may also be seen as a “co-mother”

to her husband's children by her co-wives. 8) As the Mother of So and So . . . within the community, she has part of the collective responsibility for all children in her husband's compound, as well as for children in all other families and compounds to which she is related (e.g.. her own father's compound, or that of her mother's father). 9) As mothers reach the age and status of Iya Agbas (Elder Mothers), their motherly roles seem to eclipse all others, except those associated with chieftaincies, and they are among the most honored persons in their compounds and communities.⁴⁶

Mieke Maerten argues that nowhere in the world have women been more involved in political roles than in Africa, and this is because the organisation of traditional African societies is not separated from family ties.⁴⁷ Women's clear roles as members of a community were for them an advantage, even though men had greater privileges within the clan. As members of certain families, women got certain responsibilities and privileges.⁴⁸ Hence African men and women have often had complementary and matching responsibilities. Economic and political affairs and roles were collective and not individual. This meant African women could play important roles, for instance, in issues of trade.⁴⁹

Doria Daniels contends that African mothers managed to navigate the integration of these roles very efficiently, so that the divided image of the mother as either activist or sweet mother is challenged.⁵⁰ Oyewumi also states that a mother has roles independent of her sexual ties to a father.⁵¹ Motherhood is defined as a relationship to progeny, not as a sexual relationship to a man. Hence mothers by definition cannot be single. Marital coupling does not necessarily constitute the base of societal division of labour. Procreation and lactation are not necessarily part of the sexual division of labour.⁵²

In Africa, society expects women to be mothers. According to Mieke Maerten, reproductive tasks come first before any other for African women. Motherhood is unquestionably an inherent aspect of womanhood: being a woman implies being a mother.⁵³ Culturally, the senior-most women are addressed as 'grandmother', regardless of whether or not they are

biological mothers, and a young woman is called by one of her children's names, as 'mother of So and So'.⁵⁴ It is generally acceptable to address any woman one does not know well as 'Mama'. A married or mature woman is greeted by asking: 'how are your children?' The answer is usually 'they are well, thank you', even if the woman has not yet had a child.⁵⁵ This illustrates how women are expected to be mothers and treated as such.

4.4 Some Criticism of the African Concept

Lisa Jeannes and Tamara Shefer argue that the African concept of motherhood promotes the myth of a woman who takes up all responsibilities, is all-loving and all-giving under any circumstance.⁵⁶ There is a notion of the 'Perfect Mother,' which raises too high the levels of expectation of what a mother can do. In the end suffering becomes an intrinsic part of motherhood and suffering mothers are often neglected by their husbands, children and society. During the height of natural disasters, wars, famines, and widespread disease, mothers are expected to exercise self-sacrifice and self-giving. They face many forms of abuse, such as the expectation to work for others even when sick themselves.

The conception of motherhood also fails to promote women as individual beings in their own right, a recognition that could go a long way in addressing the HIV/AIDS problem. Their rights are pushed into the background, and some mothers suffer badly due to husbands' infidelity and objectification of their bodies.⁵⁷ In light of this, motherist feminism in particular, appears too complicit and complacent to criticise decadent cultural, political and religious practices that affect mothers.⁵⁸

The notion of motherhood can also lead to biological determinism. Women are enormously pressured to find their fulfilment in motherhood, often under very high infection risks, poverty, and violence. The pressure can make it difficult for methods of prevention of infection to work - condoms are seen as a barrier to conception.⁵⁹ The pressure can also limit women's alternative choices in life and careers. Teenage girls often abandon their bright career-prospects in favour of starting families. With no regular income or property of their own, they end up fully dependant on their husbands.

Biological determinism could also suggest that it is a woman's duty to care for children, and men must leave all child upbringing and care-duties to mothers.⁶⁰ Further, there are instances where childless women are despised by society and their rights limited. Infertility is often sanctioned as a reason for a man to divorce his wife, or to acquire another one.

In social constructionism, social constructs are constantly maintained and re-affirmed, a process which introduces the possibility of change. Though critical of Simone de Beauvoir and other western feminist scholars, African women could learn from them the extent to which gender roles are not inevitable but rather the product of social forces. In *The Second Sex*, social constructionist thought exposes the contingency of some social practices of wifehood and motherhood that southern Africans often wrongly seem to regard as natural and inevitable.

4.5 MARY'S MOTHERHOOD

4.5.1 Introduction

In church history, Mary's importance rose from that of a simple Israelite girl to that of God's mother and the most ideal member of Christ's body or the church.⁶¹ She has been a friend of sinners with "maternal authority over God," whereby God owes her obedience as a child obeys its mother,⁶² and a kind-hearted feudal noblewoman who pleads with her Son for those who seek her intercession.⁶³ While she has often represented a softer side of God, and therefore a weakness, she arguably has been up there, highest in hierarchy and most competent in terms of influencing human beings to have godly values. Such a status of hers has appealed most strongly to her fellow women, particularly mothers.⁶⁴

In southern Africa today, Mary's relevance to women is also strongly linked to her womanhood, particularly her motherhood.⁶⁵ Africans' relationship to their mothers is so strong that their identification with Mary as mother is often very deep. She is most popularly known as 'Mama Maria' ('Mother Mary').⁶⁶ It is in her role as mother that she is often seen as the closest person to the Trinity and is given unprecedented power of intercession and intervention.⁶⁷ Artists often present Mary as an African mother in their various and particular cultures.⁶⁸

4.5.2 Some Criticism of Mary's Motherhood

One should be quick to point out, however, that Mary remains one of the reasons why some southern African Protestants staunchly separate themselves from Catholic forms of Christianity. Some Protestants in southern Africa believe titles, powers and privileges of

worship only proper to God, particularly to the Holy Spirit, have been wrongly assigned to Mary's motherhood.⁶⁹

On a wider scale, there are also some contemporary women who think the concept of Mary's motherhood is bad for women's empowerment. For Althaus-Reid, Mary's motherhood has been a tool of women's subservience in Latin America.⁷⁰ Monica Furlong also argues that "because Mary is so pure, so chaste, so tied to the image of the mother," she cannot be a model but an indirect disgrace for women sexually attractive and approachable to men.⁷¹ For Anne Carr, Mary became the mark of perfect womanhood, and that in tradition meant motherhood was the epitome of women's entire purpose in life.⁷² Simone de Beauvoir protests: "For the first time in human history the mother kneels before her son: she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin."⁷³ Mary Daly asserts that the impossible ideal of Virgin/Mother ultimately penalises women since it is unattainable.⁷⁴

4.6 MARY'S MOTHERHOOD AS INSPIRATIONAL TO EMPOWERMENT

4.6.1 Blessed Among Women

In Christian and Jewish societies, there is a view that mothering of a messiah is the epitome of motherhood. Evelyn Acworth writes that in the Old Testament, motherhood was the highest title to which a woman could aspire; it was more honourable than wifedom or virginity, and mothering the Messiah was the dream of many women.⁷⁵ As Jews looked forward to the consummation of the divine purpose in the coming of the Messiah, "a secret longing was cherished by every girl that it might be she who should mother the Messiah."⁷⁶

No wonder some of Mary's contemporaries envied her motherhood: "Blessed are you among

women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” (Luke 1:42); “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts on which you suckled” (Luke 11:27). This association of Mary’s motherhood with blessedness has continued in Christendom, and people have sought Mary’s motherhood for inspiration and uplifting, despite the negative impacts it has also had on women.⁷⁷ Her motherhood made her an all-time model and celebrity, particularly for other mothers. In African tradition, the credit for a child’s excelling talents is reflected back in the parents and the mother’s honour increases with the increase in the social status of the son.⁷⁸ The chief’s mother is considered the chief-mother and “If the son is God as is Jesus, his mother deserves the highest veneration among mothers - Mary is the very epitome of the sacredness of motherhood.”⁷⁹ In the southern African cultures, leaders are often respected, honoured and followed devoutly, often to the point of blind obedience. When African women seek an example and model of motherhood from Mary, some of them pay detailed attention to all they can learn from her.

4.6.2 Some Background Comparisons

Mary’s motherhood could also inspire the uplifting of southern African mothers because the circumstances of her motherhood, culturally oppressive to women, were in some ways not unlike theirs. During Mary’s earthly days, parents played a huge role in deciding who their daughters would marry.⁸⁰ This too is the usually the case with some southern African peasant women today. Like Jewish girls at that time,⁸¹ some southern African girls with little education attempt marriage in their teenage years. As she was married to the local carpenter and stone-carver, Mary must have worked hard and unrewardingly, just like some southern African mothers today.⁸² If Jesus’ brothers - James, Joses, Judas and Simon - and sisters (Mark 3:31-4; 6:3) lived with him in Jesus’ days of youth, then Mary’s family was just as big

as some African families today. Were these Jesus' cousins, then this would resonate with African extended family life-systems that struggle to cope with orphans from families disrupted by HIV/AIDS.⁸³

The journey to Bethlehem for a census accords with some man-made misfortunes mothers often face, such as forced displacements and demolition of their houses by their governments.⁸⁴ The vulnerable circumstances of the manger could remind one of some mothers who die at birth-giving either at home for lack of clinics, transport, or money, or at clinics for lack of medicine, equipment and expertise.⁸⁵ Becoming a mother is very often concurrently associated with the dangers of death. For instance, birthing times are 'moments of truth' when HIV tests tell whether mothers and their children will live long or not. The dangers the child faced from Herod could remind one of the little power mothers have of shaping the future of their children within the whole patriarchal framework. The flight into Egypt parallels the displacement of some southern African refugees, who often have to travel long distances to strange lands with their infants in hazardous circumstances. The unjust killing of Mary's son compares with sons and daughters who unjustly, under bad governance, poverty, poor nutrition, lack of money, knowledge, medicine, and unjust trade, succumb to 'trappings' of infection and AIDS deaths. For the African mothers, however, Mary was not overcome by her challenges, she overcame them. They could find in her, not only the strength to trust in God and live in hope, but the inspiration to overcome their difficult situations. She could be their example and reminder that if they strive for uplifting from their current difficulties they could come out of them.

Such circumstances of Mary, deemed similar, could highlight the plight of African mothers. For instance, reflection on her birth-giving circumstances could be done to underline the need

to support women living with HIV to access adequate information about potential pregnancy outcomes; to be empowered to prevent unintended pregnancies; to lessen the HIV-transmission risk to children at birth-giving; to lessen barriers against delivering at health facilities, and to provide HIV-positive pregnant women and lactating mothers with additional nutritional support and counselling.⁸⁶

Women in Marian groups could engage themselves in such reflection on Mary's circumstances and theirs. Mary offers them the platform for group reflection on their own situation, and for a concerted effort to end their common problems. Her circumstances could also inspire the need to encourage one another to act on other HIV-related issues such as undergoing tests for both partners before attempting pregnancy.⁸⁷

4.6.3 Africans' Veneration of the Dead

Mary's exalted motherly status also accords with the southern African traditional ancestral beliefs, where African ancestors are believed to be intermediaries constantly in touch with the Africans' daily lives and in control of the beings of the visible world. Mary as the mother of Jesus is often seen as the mother of all, who befits the saintly/ancestral intermediary role for many Africans and African Christians.⁸⁸ Mary is often considered closest to God Himself, and one who naturally symbolises the worth of a person in his/her ultimate, immediate relation to God.⁸⁹ In Africa, where "one needs one's mother at every turn in life,"⁹⁰ Mary is often considered "the natural, the most reliable, the most powerful, and the most influential human ancestor of all the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ."⁹¹

In this capacity, Mary's already celebrated function as a motherly protector could be emphasised for women's uplifting. For most of the women in Marian groups, solidarities, legions, and for other Christian and African women in general, coming together in Mary's name, praying for her help, singing and dancing to her songs already motivates mothers to face the world's difficulties. Her veneration, even as Queen of Heaven, comes naturally for those rooted in the African tradition. Asking favours, protection and intercession from one's 'living-dead' mother is quite a normal and acceptable way of seeking inspiration to empowerment in the tradition.⁹² For such women further promotion of an awareness of Mary as protector of mothers, their children and families could result in a greater sense of security and confidence in mothers and women. Mary could be depicted as active, politically aware and involved, and as one who supports her children through tough challenges. She could become a more reassuring spiritual companion, who gives courage and reassurance to mothers, and struggles day-in day-out with them and beside them; who listens to their earthly problems and helps them to reach their goals. She could help women to withstand being bullied by the difficulties of HIV/AIDS.

Mary's natural motherly protective powers, magnified in the spiritual realm, could also be instrumental in strengthening the natural protective powers of southern African mothers. Many women face the challenge of protecting their children within a society ravaged by HIV/AIDS. As with Mary, it could be within mothers' powers to influence, protect and shape their children's lives at all stages of life. They could learn from Mary how to more empathically assert their mothering powers over their children's lives – powers they allegedly enjoyed traditionally as political and economic participants in the ethic of communal care. As a human being Mary exercised such protective powers on Jesus when she escaped to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-28), sought him in the temple (Luke 2:41-52) and in the early stages of

his ministry (Mark 3:31-34). They could gain from her motherly spiritual stature the assurance that they do have within them what it takes to ensure their children are born without infection, to help them grow up empowered against HIV/AIDS and even to help protect their grown-up children from HIV/AIDS.

4.6.4 The Spiritual and Metaphorical Realms of African Motherhood

The African world consists of the unborn, the living, and the dead, and motherhood is present in all these realms. This makes African mothers more than mere women and African motherhood more than a mere earthly institution. For Sudarkasa, motherhood is “pregestational, presocial, prenatal, postnatal, and lifelong.”⁹³ A pregnant woman, for instance, is understood to exist vicariously in two realms: the world of the unborn and of the living. In the womb “our life begins in dimensions which transcend the anatomical limits of our body towards an infinite destination from an infinite origin.”⁹⁴

For Sudarkasa, birth-mothers also have mystical powers, especially over their offspring. They routinely draw attention by invoking birth processes and the mystical and social values associated with them. With their mystical powers, mothers can “confer privileges that hark back to the very foundations of society and women's presumed roles in it.”⁹⁵ They hold ‘force’ that could be activated for both destructive and productive purposes, for blessing and for curse. They are capable of setting-up and even letting-loose powerful forces of goodness and darkness, of creating new life and destabilising the very essence of society. They can critique social behaviour and have the wisdom to control transgressors.⁹⁶

Oyewumi also states that the curse from one's mother has no antidote.⁹⁷ Concurrently, one's mother is an invaluable blessing from conception and she continues to add to her blessings as long as she lives. When growing up, therefore, one learns to fear mothers and to respect the power of the mother's words. Her words are sacred and their preservation empowering. Knowledge imparted by the mother is power.⁹⁸

Hence for Catherine Acholonu, motherhood is traditionally a sacred and powerful spiritual path.⁹⁹ Birthing and physically nurturing new life leads to a conflation of "maternal" and "feminine spirituality."¹⁰⁰ The African saying: "There is no deity like the mother" means it is the mother that is worthy being "worshipped."¹⁰¹ The mother is mighty, being the only unquestionable source of an individual's life. Hence in African traditional religions, a woman holds important positions. She is often a priestess who possesses ritual powers, and mediates between the spirit world and the people of the community.¹⁰² African women are "the spiritual base of every family, community and nation."¹⁰³

With the erosion of traditional values, however, motherhood now reflects a mere shadow of these powers. One could argue that in a society where women die for lack of power, such 'god-like' powers must be acknowledged again and given back to mothers.¹⁰⁴ These motherly powers protected women from indiscriminate oppression by society. God's grace was already at work in the pre-Christian African culture which afforded respect and dignity to mothers. Their words should once again be feared and respected, and their knowledge be considered empowering. As with Mary on a pedestal, who enjoys some spiritual reverence and dignity, mothers should reclaim their traditional spiritual powers.

This reclamation of motherly spiritual powers could find support in Mary's motherhood. There is also a theology which asserts that, along with her 'yes' at the Annunciation (Luke 1:26f), Mary was made the spiritual mother of Christians near the cross (John 19:26-27).¹⁰⁵ She is the mother of Jesus Christ, and allegorically, of Christ's spiritual brothers and sisters. Christ is the head, and Christians are members of his body (Ephesians 1:20-23). Christ's mother is also his members' mother. As with the Africans' concept, Mary's motherhood is physical, spiritual, mystical and metaphorical.¹⁰⁶

Southern Africans should acknowledge how Mary reaffirms the uplifting of femininity in God and learn from her to see in every woman a potential 'Christ-bearer.' Because they are women, southern African mothers could, like Mary, exercise vast influence on our destiny and social transformation. Their motherhood transcends the biological and impacts on our other realms of life. For Okure, women have the task, like Mary, of mothering all people who are brothers and sisters of Jesus.¹⁰⁷ The influence of their natural and mystical powers on our social lives, including its economic and political aspects, needs to be affirmed and supported. They have the power to fight oppression, promote girls' education, women's employment and other works of women's liberation.

4.6.5 Mothers as Nurturers of Life

As expressed above, African motherhood's powers are firmly rooted in the womb where life begins. According to Anne Baring and Andrew Harvey, in the womb the embryo experiences "union or fusion and containment within the watery, nurturing matrix."¹⁰⁸ In the terminology of Yoruba cosmology, humans fully experience the life-force in the darkness of the womb, where mothers weave the network of life and spin the thread of fortune.¹⁰⁹ The mother

provides the vital female force that vibrates to start off the creative process in the womb. The “darkness of the womb” represents feminine power. The mother nurtures the child and provides light for it as it takes on form and prepares to enter the passageway into the future.

For Omifunke Torres, humanity needs to reawaken and to heal in its lack of consciousness of the fact that “the dark, wet, moist, and mysterious” modern African woman is the source of this power.¹¹⁰ Torres argues that lack of understanding and appreciation of such feminine power has resulted in a great deal of emotional pain for women and lack of connectedness to their feminine nature and to themselves as containers of the life-force. Women have been forced to reject their passions, which has limited their vision and capacity to actively participate in the creative processes.¹¹¹ Taiwo Makinde also compares a woman’s power to water: A woman is powerful just like water which can quench raging fires and also cause floods.¹¹² In one sense, one can say HIV/AIDS is like a flood – a result of the abuse of women’s power by our societies, and in another like a raging fire - in need of women power to quench it. Mistreatment, violence, cruelty and exploitation of women and mothers have become harmful to us, and women’s restoration to a position of power in society will help to end the pandemic.

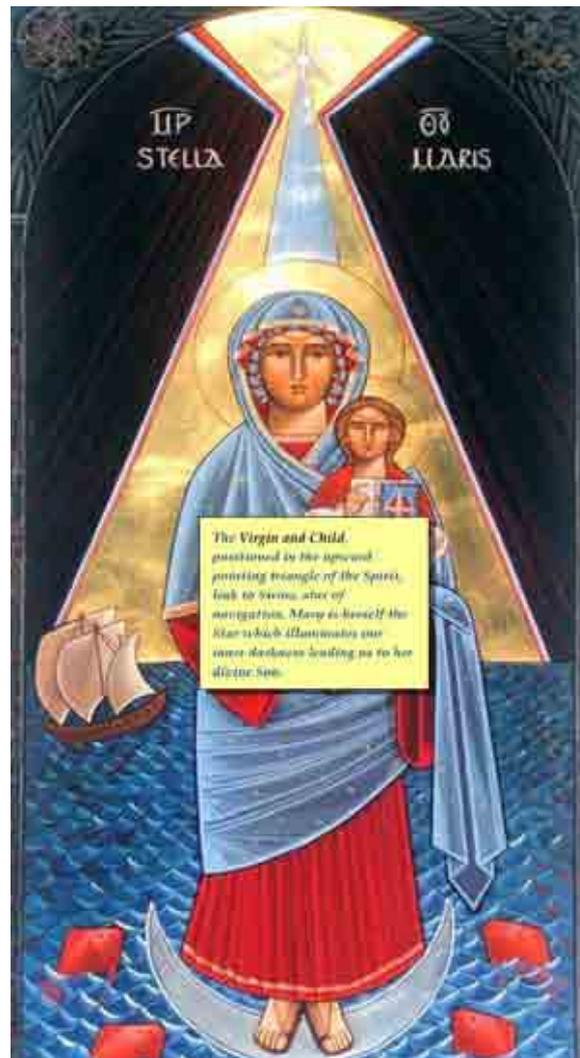
The limitation of women’s powers goes beyond birth-giving circumstances and affects their whole life and that of society. Their emotions, consciousness and need for healing are an essential part of the African societal life, and so their suppression or denial could lead to the disintegration of society. It debases and devalues, not only southern African women, but family, social life, and the way society understands gender roles and HIV/AIDS impacts. The HIV/AIDS infections are marked by a lack of appreciation of woman's worth and her marginalised role which denies her the full expression of her feminine wealth of intelligence

and wisdom. Hence for Evelyn Acworth, the mother should be allowed to gain power through the sentiments of dependence felt towards her by the family, so that she can rule, not by domination, but by love.¹¹³

Like African mothers, Mary is often called a nurturer of life. In this role, she is often compared to the sea itself,¹¹⁴ or the star of the sea. The name Mary (Latin: *Maria*) is often translated to mean 'seas'.¹¹⁵ For a long time, Mary has also been referred to as the Star of the Sea (Latin: *Stella Maris*). As 'Stella Maris' she is a female protector, a patroness or guiding spirit of those who sail the seas. The title, however, was later more popularly used to emphasise Mary's role of assisting those who sail the 'stormy seas of life'. Metaphorically, the world is the sea and life is a fragile vessel in a wide 'sea' full of dangers and possibilities. Where mothers are associated with the creative waters in the darkness of the womb, Mary is the Lady of the seas or Star of the sea and the guardian of the waters.¹¹⁶ Just as seafarers have traditionally depended on the stars for navigation, so her followers trust in her protection and guidance. She is a sign of hope and a guiding star for them. The sea is feared and also loved because of its enormous power to sustain or destroy life. People are powerless and insignificant in the midst of its rage, yet it is also a source of untold beauty and nourishment. As Star of the Sea, she shines radiantly from a pedestal, lights the way in dark places, outshines other stars, helps to give vision, courage, will, and leads to safety. She is the guide who helps to steer the vessel of life towards the everlasting shore of peace. She is also a symbol of serenity above the raging waters. Her followers, often tossed by the raging storms of life, far from land and in danger of getting lost and capsizing, are urged to lift up their eyes and to keep them fixed on her so as to reach the calm shores.¹¹⁷ The figure below reflects a number of aspects of her powerfulness.

This magnified symbolism emanates from her nurturing of Jesus, the source of life for the whole human race. She was the person who gave birth to his mortal form and reared him as a child. As his mother it is conceivable that she daily took care of his health, religious upbringing, made educational decisions for him and taught him how to perform basic physical tasks such as feeding, talking, and dressing, and some Jewish customs and ways of life.

Mary as Star of the Sea¹¹⁸



Like Mary, mothers are usually protectors of life.¹¹⁹ They usually have wisdom to enlighten, vision to avoid calamities, and the ability to guide us to a safe and more selfless society. When seen in the light of Stella Maris, their potential to improve our lives is immense, their wisdom profound, their love wide and deep-reaching like the sea, and they could be a source of selfless unity. They could be stars in many ways - shining examples of how to live together as equals, in tenderness, without taking advantage of one another, or causing harm to the vulnerable and weak. They too could be symbols of peace - listening to them could be an important way to end sexual, physical, political and social violence which are fertile grounds for infections. In such and many other ways, we could learn from Mary to listen, respect and restore mothers' powers. In the light of 'Mama Maria,' men could acquire a new and more balanced view of women and their role in family and society. Her merits as nurturer, healer, consoler and guardian¹²⁰ are also of intrinsic worth to southern African women.

4.6.6 Mothers as Nurturers of Society

This role of Mary of protecting and nurturing life, not only at its beginning, but throughout its whole span, suggests the nurturing role of mothers is not limited to the womb. Mothers usually contribute a lot to the characters of their children. After birth, children tend to be closer to their mother and spend more time with her. This prolongs the vital earlier feeling of close relationship, trust and safety between mother and child. Though not exclusively, it is usually the mother who awakens in the child the feelings of trust and containment experienced in the womb. Her presence comforts, reassures, sustains and encourages.¹²¹ The child grows in confidence and strength and delights in itself and in life. The consistent loving-care of the mother enables the child to have trust in self, and to survive negative life-experiences and traumas. The mother provides the model from which the child learns how to

nurture and support itself and care for its children in turn. She penetrates her child's innocent world and plants the seeds of good values and worthy characteristics. Such a child could later contribute to the wellbeing of the society. As such the mother often has much input in the behavioural, emotional and intellectual development during childhood and the difficult years of adolescence.

Nkiru nzegwu argues that the mother's influence on the growing child is generally far greater than that of the father. Some great personalities are brought-up by their mothers single-handedly, and various great leaders in society reflect the leadership qualities of their mothers.¹²² Mothers are usually at the heart of the family, and the family is the cornerstone of society. According to Filomina Steady, there is a supreme role accorded to motherhood in many African societies, where the woman as mother is seen as an embodiment of the generative aspect of society, and is "equated with the life force itself."¹²³

There is good reason to believe Mary was such an important mother in Jesus' formation. In all of Jesus upbringing, Mary seems to be at the forefront of his care. The Magi find the child with Mary (Matthew 2: 11). Joseph is told to escape to and return from Egypt with Jesus and Mary (Matthew 2:13, 20). At the presentation, Simeon blesses Jesus' parents but has a special message only for Mary (Luke 2: 34-35). At finding Jesus in the Temple, Luke also gives prominence to Mary (Luke 2:48). This was against the culture. Mary is finally portrayed as the one who preserves in her heart the mysteries of Jesus' life (Luke 2: 18, 51). For Okure, this is rich evidence which proves Mary's role in the life of her Son was neither silent nor passive.¹²⁴ God's own son was brought under her rule (Luke 2: 51). As already noted, for Okure, Jesus must have derived most of his feminine characteristics from his mother.¹²⁵

Apparently, Mary's influence on Jesus' life outlives Jesus' teenage years. She often took important initiatives in his mission. For Okure, Mary's role at Cana (John 2:1-11) served to initiate Jesus on his mission. She helped to transform the wedding atmosphere into a truly positive and celebratory one. Mary's attempt to withdraw Jesus from the crowds (Mark 3:31-4) suggests how courageous, decisive and protective she was of him in his adulthood. Though, like some mothers with their grownup sons, she failed to bring Jesus under her control, her motherly instinct is proved right when she later loses him on the cross. Her presence near the cross could mean that she did not give up after her failure.¹²⁶ The impression given is that Mary brought Jesus up at least until the beginning of his ministry. For Okure, Mary helped Jesus substantially in his mission "from the womb to the cross."¹²⁷

This impression could help to reinforce the direct involvement of African motherhood in running the society. Mary could be interpreted as challenging women to boldly seek the transformation of their own societies through their mothering. Daniel Migliore argues that Mary's motherhood manifests the tender feminine qualities indispensable to the growth and development of men and states.¹²⁸ Southern African women could find in Mary inspiration in the moulding of their own children's characters - a moulding that could contribute to the ending of the root causes of the pandemic. African mothers could also be encouraged to reclaim their traditional responsibilities and powers at communal and societal levels – powers of collectively nurturing communities and societies, and taking responsibilities complimentary and matching those of men. HIV/AIDS destroys communities and the African vision of the community as greater than the individual should lead to the active promotion of motherhood in public engagements of the economy and politics. For the good of the society, society should once again let mothers enjoy love, reverence, loyalty and

obedience, and women should be allowed to assume their traditional roles as political officials, owners of capital, noble/aristocratic officials of deities and religious leaders.

4.6.7 Mothers as Social Leaders

For mothers to fulfil these roles properly, and for their values to penetrate society through and through, they need to be among society's key decision-makers. An Akan proverb puts it this way: 'even the king was born of a woman.'¹²⁹ Motherhood antedates the king and therefore cannot be subordinated to any social institution. Motherhood should be accorded its place as the original source - the fountainhead of the social, and mothers should be given leadership places in society for society's own good.

In a doctoral thesis entitled *Tempered Radicals and Servant Leaders: Portraits of Spirited Leadership amongst African Women Leaders*, Faith Ngunjiri explores, particularly in Kenya, how African mothers exercise leadership in public and social institutions.¹³⁰ The women publicly retain their femininity, "their maternal roles as nurturers, caregivers, and servants of the people at grassroots, national, Pan-African, and global settings."¹³¹ According to Ngunjiri, there are at least three ways that motherhood and leadership are connected: motherhood gives the women a social status and credibility for leadership in their communities; the responsibility inherent in motherhood generates leadership; and through their own mothers and grandmothers, the women leaders learn a brand of leadership based on service.¹³² The women employ motherhood as servant leadership for social justice in the public domain and find fulfilment in serving others.¹³³ Unlike patriarchal exploitative leadership, they seek to serve first, and it is this conscious choice that makes them aspire to lead.

The women leaders have a “deep spirituality” marked by a hunger for fulfilment in serving humanity as “their greatest strength in leadership.”¹³⁴ Their leadership is also intent on healing and reconciliation, empowering others to act and being stewards of their communities and nations.¹³⁵ They transform organisations and strengthen relationships through collaboration, negotiation, community building, and ethical care. They lead creatively, using resources innovatively to do good for the disenfranchised and marginalised, particularly women and children. They give back to their communities by building institutions and providing services for the public good. Many of the women also engage in activism for social justice with minimal resources, and have succeeded to various degrees in small localities and on global platforms.¹³⁶

Ngunjiri notes that most of the women leaders are full of resiliency and resistance in the face of challenges. They criticise corruption, injustice, and other structural evils, “yet theirs is a creative encounter in which they also ponder what they can do about it and engage in action and advocacy.”¹³⁷ In their societies, they often pay a high price for their activism. They are tempered radicals willing to suffer the consequences of their radical actions and stance, to suffer the indignities of being regarded as cultural traitors, and sometimes even sacrifice the comforts of a marital status in order to live out what they believe to be just and right. Often they make a difference by turning personal threats into opportunities, leveraging small wins, and organising collective action.¹³⁸

Ngunjiri states that there are few women in leadership positions in Africa. During Ngunjiri’s research, some of the women leaders argued that if more women take on leadership, there will be reconstruction and rebuilding in places of corruption and exploitation. They were of the opinion that men in power must give way to women in leadership, otherwise Africa will

perish because of men's brand of leadership with an iron fist. From their view, new leadership must be about what each person can contribute to humanity, about building, nurturing and constructive skills.¹³⁹ Rather than be led by the privileged elite, the women advocated that the deprived and alienated among them should rise to serve for social justice. In such ways, the servant leaders reflected the idea of redefining motherhood as a domestic role, by elevating it to a public role of providing service to the communities and nations.

Historically, Mary's motherhood has been intermingled by many features of servant leadership. She has been the leading mother, yet a servant: "I am the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:48). Her servanthood has been one of the major reasons why some feminists have discarded her as unsuitable to inspire women's empowerment. Though Mary has been elevated as leader, they have argued, she has been made a tool for women's servanthood and humility.¹⁴⁰

However, some feminists have gone on to redefine what it means to be a humble servant. For instance, according to Pauline Chakkalal, "far from denying her self-worth on the pretext of humility, Mary asserts her greatness by acknowledging the mighty deeds of God in her life (Luke 1:48-49)."¹⁴¹ Mary therefore offers a new understanding and function of the virtue of humility. It is not about denying or hiding one's gifts and talents, but about consciously and gratefully accepting and using them. For Chakkalal, this positive understanding of humility is portrayed in Mary's life "from the Annunciation to the Pentecost."¹⁴² She notes that this is clear when Mary visited Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56) and when she intervened at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11). In both cases, Mary shows genuine concern, feminine sensitivity and a spirit of service. She expresses humility and assertiveness concurrently¹⁴³ - aspects which are an essential part of the African women's servant leadership.

African women leaders are meant to be role-model mothers and to learn from other women role models. By mothering Jesus, Mary exercised the leadership of taking the human race into a new relationship with God. Marianne Katoppo adds that Jesus' leadership qualities did not develop in a vacuum: Mary must have imparted some of them to Him.¹⁴⁴ Her motherhood makes her a natural Christian model leader, and she could be a model to African women's leadership. She could encourage more African women to take up leadership, and those in leadership positions to stand their ground against patriarchal challenges. Mary could also help open the eyes of society to see how effective women could be as leaders. In Mary God manifests a deep respect for women and indicates they could take leading roles for social good.

4.6.8 Single Motherhood

Mary could further be inspirational to single mothers, and mothers who find themselves running families in the absence of a father figure. In the biblical story, we do not hear about Joseph from the time Jesus was twelve. By the time of Jesus' crucifixion it appears Mary was a widow. This situation resonates with that of some African mothers who are single heads of families. Some have their husbands living in towns, and others have always been single mothers. Due to HIV/AIDS, more women are shouldering the responsibilities of single motherhood, single grand-motherhood and single foster-motherhood. Single mothers often get minimal support from others, and often face stigma, marginalisation and discrimination from society due to the lack of male-headship in their homes.¹⁴⁵ To empower themselves for such tasks, the single women can look to Mary for inspiration.

In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17), Mary's motherhood is portrayed to show respect and God's blessing on the motherhood of women whose social status was disreputable. Though it was not customary for Jews to include women in their genealogy, Matthew included five women: Tamar (v3), Rahab (v5), Ruth (v5), Bathsheba (v6) and Mary herself (v16). This was to show that their motherhood was important for the Messianic mission. Jane Schaber makes four observations about the first four women:¹⁴⁶

1) All do not fit into patriarchal family structures: Tamar and Ruth have no children and are young widows, Rahab is a prostitute, and Bathsheba commits adultery and becomes a pregnant widow. 2) All four are hurt or let-down by the male world. Though the author may not have been fully feminist conscious, he must have been aware that the society was patriarchal, that women often suffered unjustly, and that some women and men often corrected their circumstances in unusual ways to lessen their suffering.

3) In their sexual acts (even in Ruth's case there is strong suspicion of a sexual act) - all four are in danger of damaging the social order and being condemned. Allegations of inappropriate sexual behaviour are made against Tamar, implied against Rahab, concealed in Ruth's case, and in Bathsheba's case made against her partner. 4) The situations of all four are rectified when men accept either their guilt or their accountability for them, thus protecting them and giving them an identity and a lifeline in the patriarchal setup, legitimising them and their offspring. In the end, they are honoured because it is believed that through them the covenant promises to Abraham and David are fulfilled.

For Jane Schaber, in this theological account, Matthew portrays Mary as one of the social 'misfit mothers', whose life is endangered by the conception of Jesus, but whose story has an

outcome that gets the social fabric mended, and ensures the birth of a child who is either legitimate or legitimated.¹⁴⁷ This view of Mary could speak to southern Africa today in its attitude to single mothers and mothers considered social misfits. Just as Mary is ‘single,’ in the sense that there is no human partnering her in the conception, but is granted much respect in the gospel, single mothers should also be respected and given full human dignity. They should not be seen as misfits or disreputable, but full members of society who can make great contributions to it. Society should refrain from being judgemental, for God can even make right what in the eyes of society is wrong. The important contributions single and marginalised mothers make to society should be fully acknowledged and appreciated. Their children too should not be stigmatised but fully accepted as people who can contribute to social transformation. Men and society should also accept responsibility and be accountable for making single mothers what they are, and their duty to make right the suffering caused to the women.

4.7 Conclusion

Southern Africans could appropriately look to Mary for the empowerment of women within their cultural context where Mary shares some of her background and motherly aspects with them. If she is depicted as a powerful mother who analogically relates to all mothers, Mary has the potential to help reconnect African mothers to their original powers. Society could learn to respect mothers and to give them the dignity they deserve by looking at Mary. This chapter, however, has not particularly dealt with mothers who live in sorrow due to the pandemic. The following chapter looks at how Mary as Mother of Sorrows could inspire the empowerment of mothers living in deep sadness.

ENDNOTES

¹Gyimah, Miriam C., 'Aspects of Feminism and Gender in the Novels of Three West African Women Writers (Aidoo, Emecheta, Darko) by Edith Kohrs-Amissah' in *West Africa Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, (2003), 90.

²Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, *African Women: Reflections on Their Social, Economic and Political Power* (A paper presented at Lehman College, The City University of New York, 12 May, 1999).

³Signe Arnfred, 'Images of 'Motherhood' – African and Nordic Perspectives' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 4 (2003), 2.

⁴Signe Arnfred, 'Images of 'Motherhood,' 2.

⁵Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990). In this book, for instance, Mary Daly argues along Simone de Beauvoir that men throughout history have sought to oppress women and she focuses on the actual practices that, in her view, perpetuate patriarchy.

⁶Signe Arnfred, 'Images of 'Motherhood,' 2.

⁷Motherhood and Maternity - History, Religion, and Myth, accessed on 16-07-2009 <http://science.jrank.org/pages/10304/Motherhood-Maternity-History-Religion-Myth.html> Motherhood and Maternity - History, Religion, And Myth

⁸Johnson, Elizabeth A., *Truly Our Sister*, 131-134.

⁹Motherhood and Maternity - History, Religion, and Myth, accessed on 16-07-2009.

¹⁰Signe Arnfred, 'Images of 'Motherhood,' 3.

¹¹Lisa Davies, 'Monstrous Mothers and the Cult of the Virgin in Rosario Castellanos' *Oficio de Tinieblas* in *Cardiff University New Readings*, vol. 6, (December 2000), 1.

¹²Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 80.

¹³Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, *Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (New York: Burns & Oates, 1987), 126.

¹⁴'The Conference Statement of the Asian Women's Theology Consultation' in *Asia Journal of Theology*, vol.2, no.2, (1988), 555

¹⁵Mieke Maerten, *Feminism in Africa*, accessed on 21-06-2010 <http://www.rosadoc.be/site/rosa/english/pdf/factsheetsenglish/34.pdf> According to Mieke Maerten, three colonial spheres of church/mission, governance and trade were mainly disruptive to traditional power and gender roles. Women were systematically ignored by legally making men the owners of farms and property. Colonial rulers were very insensitive to the economic responsibilities entrusted to women in the traditional cultures. They did not recognise women's central position in the making of such products as cotton, tea, coffee and cacao. The colonial employment of African men immensely increased the work load for African women, especially where men migrated to mining areas or towns. Women were viewed as gatherers of food and child nurturers. The traditional economic complementarity of men and women came to an end. The western legal emphasis on individual property rights ownership and western marital law clashed with the traditional emphasis on communal life and resulted in women losing several rights.

¹⁶Mireille Rabenoro, 'Motherhood in Malagasy Society: A Major Component in the Tradition vs. Modernity Conflict' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 4, (2003), 6.

¹⁷Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, *African Women*, 7.

¹⁸Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, *African Women*, 7.

¹⁹Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, *African Women*, 7.

²⁰Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, *African Women*, 7.

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- ²¹ Motherhood and Maternity - History, Religion, and Myth, accessed on 16-07-09.
- ²² Elvira Godono, *Postcolonial Motherism*, 6.
- ²³ Elvira Godono, *Postcolonial Motherism*, 6.
- ²⁴ Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood' in *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 4, (2003), 3.
- ²⁵ Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood', 3.
- ²⁶ Ifi Amadiume, *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: the Igbo Case* (New Jersey: Red Sea Press, 2000), 10.
- ²⁷ Ifi Amadiume, *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundation*, 15.
- ²⁸ Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Family Bonds/Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies' in *Signs*, vol. 25, no. 4, (2000), 1094.
- ²⁹ Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Ties that (Un)bind: Feminism, Sisterhood and Other Foreign Relations' in *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, (2001), 2.
- ³⁰ Fidela Fouche, 'Overcoming the Sisterhood Myth' in *Journal of Transformation*, vol. 23, (1994), 94.
- ³¹ Signe Arnfred, 'Simone De Beauvoir in Africa: 'Woman = Second Sex?', *Issues of African Feminist Thought* in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, vol. 2, no.1, (2002).
- ³² Signe Arnfred, 'Simone De Beauvoir in Africa', 10.
- ³³ Catherine Acholonu, *The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (Abuja: Afa Publications, 1985), 110.
- ³⁴ Catherine Acholonu, *The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, 110.
- ³⁵ Catherine Acholonu, *The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, i.
- ³⁶ Akosua Adomako Ampofo, 'Mothering among Black and White non-Ghanaian Women in Ghana' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies: Issue 5*, (2004), 10.
- ³⁷ Akosua Adomako Ampofo, 'Mothering among Black and White non-Ghanaian Women', 10.
- ³⁸ Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood in Nuclear and Extended Families, with Special Reference to Comparative Studies Involving African Societies' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 5, (2004), 2.
- ³⁹ Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood', 20.
- ⁴⁰ Obioma Nnaemeka, 'The Clinton Controversies and the African (Igbo) World' in *West Africa Review*, vol. 2, no.1, (2000), 1.
- ⁴¹ Akosua Adomako Ampofo, 'Mothering Among Black and White Non-Ghanaian Women', 10.
- ⁴² Signe Arnfred, 'Simone De Beauvoir in Africa', 11.
- ⁴³ Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood', 13.
- ⁴⁴ Mwizenge S. Tembo, *Traditional Family Patterns in Africa*, accessed on 16-07-2008. <http://www.bridgewater.edu/~mtembo/africantraditionalfamily.htm>
- ⁴⁵ Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood', 20.
- ⁴⁶ Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood', 12.
- ⁴⁷ Mieke Maerten, *Feminism in Africa*, accessed on 21-06-2010. Mieke Maerten argues that Africa has a long and unique tradition of female leaders: queens, chiefs, and religious leaders – from Hatchepsut in Egypt to queen Njinga in Angola. Female leadership however, does not necessarily bring about an egalitarian or feminist society, and certainly not a matriarchate. Women, like men, gained these positions because of their status as members of a certain dynasty.

- ⁴⁸Mieke Maerten, *Feminism in Africa*, accessed on 21-06-2010.
- ⁴⁹Mieke Maerten, *Feminism in Africa*, accessed on 21-06-2010.
- ⁵⁰Doria Daniels, 'They Need to Know Where They Came From to Appreciate Where They Are Going to – Visual Commentary of Informal Settlement Women on Motherhood' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 5, (2004), 13.
- ⁵¹Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women's Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, (2002), 3.
- ⁵²Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Conceptualizing Gender', 4.
- ⁵³Mieke Maerten, *Feminism in Africa*, accessed on 21-06-2010.
- ⁵⁴Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood', 24.
- ⁵⁵Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood', 24.
- ⁵⁶Lisa Jeannes and Tamara Shefer, 'Discourses of Motherhood among Group of White South African Mothers' in *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 5, (2004), 1.
- ⁵⁷Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender & Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), 89.
- ⁵⁸Anju Malhotra, Sidney Ruth Schuler and Carol Boender, *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development* (Background Paper prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender, New Perspectives, Final Version, June 28, 2002).
- ⁵⁹Mireille Rabenoro, 'Motherhood in Malagasy Society', 8.
- ⁶⁰Lisa Jeannes and Tamara Shefer, 'Discourses of Motherhood', 3.
- ⁶¹Isabell Naumann, *Aspects of Mary and the Church through the Centuries*, (Campus Ministry at the University of Dayton, Marian Resources, September 2010).
- ⁶²Wioleta Polinska, *In Woman's Image: An Iconography for God*, accessed on 24-04-2009 <http://fth.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/13/1/40>
- ⁶³Isabell Naumann, *Aspects of Mary and the Church through the Centuries*.
- ⁶⁴Katharine Moore, *She for God*, 68.
- ⁶⁵The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.
- ⁶⁶The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.
- ⁶⁷The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.
- ⁶⁸The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.
- ⁶⁹Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 24. According to this book, the controversy over Mary is mainly centred on how much prominence and power she should be given, and not on whether she is an important figure in Christianity. Most Protestants have great respect for Mary in southern Africa.
- ⁷⁰Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 80.
- ⁷¹Monica Furlong, *A Dangerous delight: Women and Power in the Church* (London: SPSK, 1991), 44.
- ⁷²Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 189.
- ⁷³Simone de Beauvoir, (ed. and trans. by H. M. Parshle), *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 160.
- ⁷⁴Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 83.
- ⁷⁵Evelyn Acworth, *The New Matriarchy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1965), 35.
- ⁷⁶Evelyn Acworth, *The New Matriarchy*, 35.
- ⁷⁷The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.
- ⁷⁸The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.

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- ⁷⁹The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.
- ⁸⁰Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Mary of Nazareth'.
- ⁸¹Kilian McDonnell, 'Feminist Mariologies: Heteronomy/Subordination and the Scandal of Christology' in *Theological Studies*, vol. 66, no.3, (2005), 565.
- ⁸²Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Mary of Nazareth'.
- ⁸³Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Mary of Nazareth'.
- ⁸⁴United Nations, 'Zimbabwe: Evicted and Forsaken - Internally Displaced Persons in the Aftermath of Operation Murambatsvina' in *Human Rights Watch*, vol. 17, no. 16, (2005), 89.
- ⁸⁵Sue Holden, *Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in Development and Humanitarian Programmes* (London: Oxfam GB, 2004), 11.
- ⁸⁶Care needs to be taken, however, to avoid impossible demands on modern women and the judgement of modern life using the wrong criteria. There are huge differences between Mary's situation and that of HIV/AIDS for modern-day southern Africans. Following Mary's example is not about literally copying her life, but pursuing where reflection on the details of her life might lead. It happens indirectly and some degree of imagination is required in contemplating anew how her life, circumstances and words might still relate to our own present-day concerns. The life of Mary is less a set of specific examples for close copying and more of an analogous case that requires re-identification under very different circumstances.
- ⁸⁷Mothers 2 Mothers (M2M), accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.m2m.org/> There is a 'Mothers to Mothers' (M2M) program in South Africa that recruits HIV-positive mothers who have recently given birth with a view to their educating, counselling and supporting HIV-positive pregnant women who attend antenatal clinics for Prevention of Mother to Child Treatment. At every such visit, counsellors help pregnant women by engaging them in conversation, sharing personal experiences, educating them on their needs and encouraging them to adhere to medication. Such activities that improve community health, empower pregnant mothers, their families and communities, and contribute to the de-stigmatisation of the infected could be adopted and expanded by Marian groups with the aim of empowering women and mothers.
- ⁸⁸The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.
- ⁸⁹The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*..
- ⁹⁰Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood', 2.
- ⁹¹The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*..
- ⁹²The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*..
- ⁹³Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood', 3.
- ⁹⁴Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel, (Trans. John Bowden), *I Am My Body* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 14.
- ⁹⁵Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, *African Women*, 9.
- ⁹⁶Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome, *African Women*, 9.
- ⁹⁷Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood', 3.
- ⁹⁸Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood', 3.
- ⁹⁹Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood', 3.
- ¹⁰⁰Motherhood and Maternity - History, Religion, and Myth, accessed on 16-07-09.
- ¹⁰¹Elvira Godono, *Postcolonial Motherism*, 6.
- ¹⁰²Elvira Godono, *Postcolonial Motherism*, 6.
- ¹⁰³Catherine Acholonu, *The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, 112.
- ¹⁰⁴Niara Sudarkasa, 'Conceptions of Motherhood', 14.
- ¹⁰⁵The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.

¹⁰⁶The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*.

¹⁰⁷Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the new Testament', 207.

¹⁰⁸Anne Baring and Andrew Harvey, *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God Throughout the World* (New Alresford, Hants: Godsfield Press, 1988), 11.

¹⁰⁹Omifunke Torres, *Keys to Feminine Empowerment from the Yoruba West African Tradition*, accessed on 21-06-2010 <http://www.mamiwata.com/keys.html>

¹¹⁰Omifunke Torres, *Keys to Feminine Empowerment*, accessed on 21-06-2010.

¹¹¹Omifunke Torres, *Keys to Feminine Empowerment*, accessed on 21-06-2010.

¹¹²Taiwo Makinde, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment of Women in Yoruba Culture' in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, (2004), 169.

¹¹³Evelyn Acworth, *The New Matriarchy*, 18.

¹¹⁴AOS, *Serving the People of the Sea*, accessed on 01-06-2010
<http://www.stellamaris.net/page.php?s=1&p=553>

Below is a *Hymn to Mary, Star of the Sea*, which depicts Mary as a powerful and empowered figure that is loved, respected and feared.

Contemplating the sea
I glimpse your splendor. . .

Like the sea you are immense.
The distant horizon,
where our gaze is lost,
always escapes us
when we think we have reached it.

Like the sea. . .dazzling
as it sparkles in the sun.
My eyes then close,
fearing the burning light
that comes from its beauty.

Like the sea, you are profound.
Who can measure it
and sound its depths?
For fear that I might lose myself in it
it offers me its waves.

Like the sea, an ocean.
So wide and so mighty,
that the seafarer respects
and seeks at the same time.
He loves it, he needs it.

Like the sea, you are a mother.
Bearing the ships,
both great and small,

with their crews
from all nations.

Like the sea, you are a link.
Linking all peoples,
enfolding the earth
so that it may be one,
and live in solidarity

On the sea coast,
somewhere in the world,
a seafarer's child
remembers his father.
And down in his heart
he whispers an Ave Maria

¹¹⁵The Name of Mary, accessed on 24-05-2010

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464a.htm> Other translations suggest that more literally it means 'bitter sea' (mara = bitter; yam = sea).

The English name Mary is also the transliteration of the Greek name Maria or Mariam, which in turn is the transliteration of the Hebrew name Miriam. Some scholars derive the name Miriam from the Hebrew word *meri* which means rebellion, obstinacy, or stubbornness. About the sister of Moses, who is first called Miriam in the bible, Chana Weisberg writes, "Despite being born into the most difficult period of oppression, Miriam rebelled from her earliest age against the slave mentality engulfing her people. Though she felt their pain acutely, she would not succumb to fear or despair. Though she was exposed to abject cruelty, she would not yield to moral corruption or apathy. Bravely and resolutely, she kept vigilant watch over the faith in the promise of redemption." Chana Weisberg, *Miriam, Mother of Rebellion*, accessed on 02-11-2011

http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/1555460/jewish/Miriam-Mother-of-Rebellion-Part-3.htm. Such rebelliousness or stubbornness, in the face of oppression, particularly against Pharaoh (Exodus 2:1-10), could also be attributed to Mary who, for instance, struggled against Herod (Matthew 2:13-18). As with Miriam in the Exodus story, Mary did not give up to her difficulties. She not only escaped to Egypt, but ensured the child Jesus returned from Egypt to his place of future mission.

¹¹⁶Our Lady Stella Maris, accessed on 24-05-2010

<http://www.stellamaris.net/ourlady.php?s=1>

¹¹⁷Our Lady Stella Maris, accessed on 24-05-2010.

¹¹⁸Our Lady Stella Maris, accessed on 24-05-2010. This icon of our Lady Star of the Sea was painted by Stephane Rene. It is set in the context of the night and reflects the 'night' of difficulties in real life. The star is Sirius, known as the largest and brightest night star in the sky. The mother and child are positioned in the upward pointing triangle of the Spirit - linking to Sirius the leading star of navigation. Mary is herself the Star whose light penetrates her followers' inner darkness and leads them to redemption. Mary is likened to the star Sirius, (though the star also adorns her) often called the God Star and was an object of great worship in ancient times. The smaller stars Sirius A and Sirius B that also adorn Mary were also part of this worship culture and form the basis of the Star of David symbol. She stands at the centre of the four fish, a reference to the four Gospels (ultimately Christ Himself

who was known to the early Christians as the Great Fish). The boat in the background symbolises an individual believer on a life journey. The boat of life can be steered securely by turning to Christ as safeguarded by Mary, star of the Sea, or of our life. Mary stands on the moon, another object of worship in ancient times. The image also recalls the depiction in Revelation 12 of Mary's victory over her difficulties and those of many people.

¹¹⁹Stella Maris, The Apostleship of the Sea, accessed on 01-06-2010

<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/stellamaris.html>

¹²⁰Campus Ministry at the University of Dayton, *Native African Religions*, Marian Resources, May 2007.

¹²¹Elvira Godono, *Postcolonial Motherism*, 6.

¹²²Nkiru Nzegwu, 'Cultural Epistemologies of Motherhood: Refining the Concept 'Mothers'' in *Jenda, a Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 5, (2004), 2.

¹²³Filomina Chioma Steady, 'Introduction' in Filomina Chioma Steady (ed) *The Black Woman Cross-culturally* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1987), 7.

¹²⁴Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the new Testament', 201.

¹²⁵Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the new Testament', 208.

¹²⁶Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 8.

¹²⁷Teresa Okure, 'The Mother of Jesus in the new Testament', 209.

¹²⁸Daniel L. Migliore, 'Mary, a Reformed Theological Perspective' in *Theology Today*, vol. 56, no. 3, (1999), 346.

¹²⁹Oyeronke Oyewumi, 'Abiyamo: Theorizing African Motherhood', 5.

¹³⁰Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 13. Ngunjiri writes that African women find themselves surrounded by cultural, social, economic, and political barriers to ascending to positions of leadership. However, in spite of multiple challenges, a few African women can be found in several leadership roles.

¹³¹Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 18.

¹³²Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 25.

¹³³Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 20. Ngunjiri defines leadership as "an influential relationship in a community of practice involving persuading constituents to achieve organisational goals."

¹³⁴Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 27. For some African women, this servant-leadership is not counter-cultural in the traditional African context. They argue that modernity is what has altered the servant-leadership attitudes of the leaders due to the emergence of capitalism and its antecedents of individualism and competition. These women leaders argue that the notions of leadership as gendered male, and the practices that emanate from modern conceptualisations of leadership are alien to their sensibilities as Africans and as women. For them, the concept of serving others is natural, inherent and a sort of cultural genetic makeup – African women serve others, whether these are their immediate family, their communities, or the nation.

¹³⁵Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 25.

¹³⁶Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 25.

¹³⁷Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 25.

¹³⁸Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 25.

¹³⁹Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 25.

¹⁴⁰Manfred Hauke, 'Mother of God or Domesticated Goddess? Mary in Feminist Theology' in Manfred Hauke, *God or Goddess?: Feminist Theology : What is it? : Where Does it Lead?* (New York: Ignatius Press, 1995), 182. According to Hauke, Daly also bemoans that the mother "kneels before the son."

¹⁴¹Pauline Chakkalakal, *Women's Discipleship and Leadership in Jesus' Movement: An Indian/Asian Feminist Biblical-Theological Reconstruction*, (Paper presented at a joint Study Workshop on the theme, A Reconstruction of the Early Christian Origins - An Asian Feminist Perspective, organised by AWRC, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in January 2006)

¹⁴²Pauline Chakkalakal, *Women's Discipleship*.

¹⁴³Pauline Chakkalakal, *Women's Discipleship*.

¹⁴⁴Katoppo, Marianne, *Compassionate and Free*, 23

¹⁴⁵Gladys B. Mutangadura, 'Gender, HIV-AIDS and Rural Livelihoods, 367.

¹⁴⁶Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 160-166.

¹⁴⁷Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 163.

CHAPTER FIVE
MARY MOTHER OF SORROWS AS A FIGURE OF
EMPOWERMENT

5.1 Introduction

"O all ye that pass by the way attend, and see if there be any sorrow like mine."
(Lamentations. 1:12)¹

O ye who pass along the way
All joyous, where with grief I pine,
In pity pause awhile, and say,
Was ever sorrow like to mine?

See, hanging here before my eyes,
This body, bloodless, bruis'd, and torn,
Alas! it is my Son Who dies,
Of love deserving, not of scorn.

He is my God! and since that night
When first I saw His infant grace,
My soul has feasted on the light,
The beauty of that heavenly face.

For He had chosen me to be
The lov'd companion of His heart;
And ah I how that dear company
With love transpierc'd me like a dart!

And now behold this loving Son
Is dying in a woe so great,
The very stones are moved to moan
In sorrow at His piteous state.

Where'er His failing eyes are bent,
A friend to help He seeks in vain
All, all on vengeance are intent,
And eager to increase His pain.

My Son! my Son! could I at least
Console Thee in this hour of death,
Could I but lay Thee on my breast.
And there receive Thy parting breath!

Alas! no comfort I impart;
Nay, rather this my vain regret
But rends still more Thy loving heart
And makes Thy death more bitter yet.

Ah, loving souls! love, love that God
Who all inflamed with love expires;
On thee this life He has bestowed;
Thy love is all that He desires.

For the average southern African woman, life is a difficult struggle through and through. Before the HIV/AIDS era, the women lived a tough life due to poverty, lack of education and cultural expectations that overburdened them. When HIV/AIDS struck, life became much harder. In places like Zimbabwe, their life-expectancy was cut almost by half. Statistically, young women in southern Africa are three to six times more likely to be infected than young men.² AIDS makes some of them live in sickness and die young. They die after long periods of terrible pain and suffering for lack of medication. Due to poverty, they often suffer without dignity. Wherever HIV/AIDS decimates lives, women are usually at the centre of the suffering involved. Almost always, there are more women than men at death-beds, funerals and burials. Women are usually the ones who first alert the neighbours of a death by wailing when the one they have been caring for dies. They keep vigil with the bereaved, singing and dancing to console them and to provide their immediate needs. Cleansing rituals for widows are also very tough, while men virtually have none. The challenges of bringing up their own children, nursing the dying and coming to terms with impending deaths of family members are often too much for them. The women suffer and live in sorrow because they are disproportionately, unfairly and unjustly infected and affected. Some become permanently mentally affected, and signs of long-term sorrow are often noticeable all over their bodily features.

This “culture of suffering,”³ deep-seated within African women’s lives, is also a theme firmly rooted in the symbol of Mary. Beginning in the 4th/5th century, the

veneration of Mary's sorrows and compassion has grown within the Christian tradition. Seven of her sorrows have made the strongest appeal:⁴

1. Luke 2.7: no room for them in the inn,
2. the prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:34-5),
3. the massacre of the innocents and the flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-18),
4. the three days' loss of Jesus (Luke 2:41-50),
5. the meeting with Jesus carrying His Cross,
6. His Death on Calvary (John 19:25-27)
7. and His burial in the tomb (Matthew 27:57-61)

This chapter attests that in her sufferings, Mary is a fighting woman, full of faith, hope, courage, strength and spirit; and more importantly, her sorrows were not an end in themselves. They were part of the road in her life-journey to post-resurrection victory. It explores more deeply some of the HIV/AIDS situations that women face, and focuses on many of the above mentioned Marian sorrows as sources from which southern Africans could learn lessons on how to overcome the pandemic. In so doing, lessons of empowerment are often drawn from scriptural minute details of Mary's story. From analogy and comparisons of situations, the chapter suggests some developmental needs and technical skills for women. According to Barbara Jones,

The scriptural record affirms a psychological whole Mary who stands as an effective, powerful archetype of full personhood, capable of guiding and inspiring contemporary individuals. As we see ways in which God empowered Mary and in which she exercises that authority in her life, we can begin to see anew the ways in which God has empowered us. As we identify with Mary we are empowered alongside with her. She helps us recognise the authority we have been given, models developmental skills and their use, and shows us how these skills are put to use over a lifetime of consistent choice.⁵

5.2 Mary's Appeal to Women as Mother of Sorrows

In Christian history, tragic plagues such as the Black Death, famines, droughts and wars have regularly ignited devotion to the mother of sorrows.⁶ Recently in Africa, it is claimed a very sorrowful Mary appeared as Our Lady of Kibeho, Rwanda, just before the Rwandan genocide.⁷ There are some feminists who hail such a traditional role of Mary as mother of human sorrows. Elina Vuola says that suffering is one important aspect in attempting to comprehend Mary's significance for women.⁸ Mary is "the premium female sufferer," who can function essentially as an exemplar, as one through whom feelings and hopes are directed.⁹ For Vuola, Mary is the mediatrix of both grace and suffering, bargaining the borders "of immanence and transcendence," the ordinary and the holy.¹⁰ She is one with and one of women who lament. Although Marina Warner ultimately rejects Mary, for her Mary's statues often shed tears in tragic times, not always as a reprimand, but a blessing and a symbol of the purifying sacrifice of the Cross, which washes sinners of all stain and gives them new life.¹¹

For Megan McKenna, there is an analogical connection between every woman who suffers and Mary. She sees Mary in every suffering woman:

Mary is the woman butchered in Rwanda, the Muslim woman raped and brutalized and left pregnant by soldiers, the single mother on welfare, working at subsistence wages, raising her children without help from the church or community or her ex-husband. She is all the women, one third of the world's population always on the move, fleeing from starvation, war, and disasters of flood, earthquake, and drought. She is the woman who mourns the slaughter of the children, the executions of the state, the torture and disappearances of men and women. She is the shadow of the old ones battered or shunted aside, institutionalized or left on the streets to wander and scavenge for a living. . . . She is the one who belongs to those who have no one else. She is the one who mourns injustice, violence, insensitivity, and selfishness. She is both victim and advocate. She is singer and crier for an end to evils and unnecessary hurt.¹²

It is such analogical connection between women and Mary that makes it possible for southern Africans to explore and obtain from an empowered Marian symbol the potential to uplift women. In southern Africa, Mary could be the woman told she is HIV positive - living with a prediction of her future turmoil and pain (Luke 2:35). She could be the one who escapes from harmful and destructive HIV situations (Matthew 2:13-18); who panics and is dismayed over the loss of a valued part of her life (Luke 2:41-52); stays on vigil at the 'bedside' of a dying loved one (John 19:25-26); 'embraces' a part of her life that dies; and stands at the 'cemetery' in tears (John 19:38-40). Southern African women who believe Mary understands their sufferings¹³ could identify with her in their HIV/AIDS experiences. Like Mary in the hymn above, they too are tormented mothers who experience the sufferings of birth-giving, nurturing the child, and seeing him die.

In Marian guilds and in rosary prayer-groups, Mary is more than just a symbol. She is a living spiritual mother, someone who cares, who feels pain when her children suffer, who protects and intercedes for them to avoid or stop their suffering. Men and women entrust their sufferings to her for intercession, healing, and for the power to overcome HIV/AIDS challenges. As Maseno reports, Mary is almost everything to them because she is in touch with the sorrow and suffering so familiar to African women.¹⁴ She is their mother of sorrows whose long-suffering makes her a confidant and source of comfort.¹⁵

5.3 Some Criticism of the Mother of Sorrows

Ivone Gebara argues that emphasis on the self-sacrifice and suffering of Jesus and Mary has led to the glorification of women's suffering, and has reinforced the value of dependence, sorrow, suffering and martyrdom for them.¹⁶ Rather than help women, the role of women as pain-bearers has found support in Mary's female figure. The ideology of suffering exalts Mary and Jesus' sorrows and encourages renunciation of women's basic human rights. It defines the "good mother" as one who experiences grief and loss, which victimises women.¹⁷

For Gebara, feminism is not about dwelling on Mary or Jesus as suffering figures, but about enjoyment and fulfilment. Central to Jesus was not sacrifice or suffering, but a battle against evil in all its manifestations. Feminism tries to end suffering, to transform it into a sign of salvation for those crushed by life and its burdens. It "opens a path to a human vocation to pleasure, beauty and largesse."¹⁸ In place of the cross, feminism promotes justice, respect, and gentleness among people. Feminism is about encouraging women to reinterpret their suffering with a view to becoming independent, strong, lively, and holy, or attaining full human dignity.¹⁹

Rosa Gil and Carmen Vazquez also contest that because of Marianismo (the teaching that women, like Mary, ought to be morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men),²⁰ many women, like Mary, endure and accept suffering as if it were part of God's design for them. Many women give up their pleasure, thoughts, dreams, and desires in order to put themselves at the service of others because Jesus and Mary suffered a lot more.²¹

However, throughout all their lives, suffering is an enduring reality for the average woman in southern Africa. While all the above critical views are worthy noting, Mary has the potential to help women suffer with dignity and hope, and to continue to strive for the defeat of HIV/AIDS and all that supports it.

5.4 PORTRAYING MARY'S SORROWING AS INSPIRATIONAL FOR EMPOWERMENT

5.4.1 Mary's Sorrows Beginning from the Incarnation (Luke 1:26-38)

The period of Mary's pregnancy is conceivably marked by moments of intense emotional and physical pain. Marianne Katoppo states that the punishment for an affianced virgin getting pregnant by somebody else was death.²² In re-imagining and re-constructing her story, it is conceivable that Mary should have known this, and should have suffered serious anxiety. She most likely feared people would gossip about her pregnancy outside marriage.²³ Joseph's desire to divorce her (Matthew 1:19), albeit quietly, must have caused her at least the emotional pain that normal women undergo when they face divorce. Thus her motherhood to Jesus would have involved serious challenges and anxieties from the beginning.

Her long journey to Bethlehem when her birthing time was almost due must have added to her discomfort. The birth took place in conditions of extreme poverty – a stable, and she placed her baby in a manger (cf. Luke 2:7). According to Elizabeth Johnson, giving birth is not easy. It involves

sweating, counting contractions, breathing deeply, crying out, dilating, pushing hard while driven to the very centre of one's being with unimaginable bursts of pain. . . followed by much bleeding, and then deep fatigue, breasts swollen with milk, and unpredictable hormonal swings.²⁴

There is some common ground and some common experiences in Mary's sufferings during pregnancy and that of an average modern-day southern African mother. For instance, in both cases, there is concern about what the woman's partner brings to the pregnancy. Where for Mary pregnancy could lead to divorce and execution, for southern African women, it could bring death through infection. Some women in southern Africa get pregnant at very young ages, and have to contend with political instability. As in Mary's time, pregnant women are often displaced through political violence and face starvation. Hence, to some extent in her birthing story, Mary travels deep into some experiences common to poor southern African women. In both cases there is a high degree of self-sacrifice, risk, uncertainty, and struggle.

Rather than be destroyed by them, Mary overcame the dangers and anxieties that she faced. To overcome their own sufferings, African women often need to break cultural barriers. For instance, women need to be accustomed to talking openly about sex and to know their own bodies. They should be able to speak out defensively when their lives are in danger of infection. Teachers, religious ministers, cultural and political leaders, for instance, should encourage women to demand HIV testing, the availability and use of condoms as part of any marriage arrangements.

It is also conceivable that Mary was greatly relieved when the angel announced to Joseph that he should accept and protect her (Matthew 1:18-24) together with the child (Matthew 2: 13-18). Joseph accepted his foster-fathering responsibilities. There

are often inadequate and piecemeal efforts to relieve mothers overwhelmed by care for orphans in southern Africa. The male-headed households should accommodate more children whose parents die of AIDS, and there should be the political will corresponding to such needs. The cultural understanding that it is women's duty to care for young ones needs to be challenged and replaced. A coordinated response by all sectors where men dominate - governments, the World Bank, NGOs and all others involved - is needed to alleviate women from such disproportionate weight of responsibility. Policies and programs that enable orphaned children, particularly girls, to maintain access to education need to be developed. At the same time, there is need for capacity building for the older women who usually care for orphans. For instance, they should be consulted and be directly involved in the design, implementation of programs meant to lighten their care-work.

While it may seem overambitious to think of Mary as capable of pushing for such huge changes, these are some of the ways of thinking of Mary differently - as capable of influencing wider social, political and cultural changes. As a powerful feminine symbol, she not only should reflect and express the gender principles and moral standards we set as society, but should reinforce and shape them.²⁵ Her symbol should motivate pushing for changes on a large scale. Our symbols should be allowed to work towards our goals. She should be conceptualised as one who can inspire the breaking of bonds of infectious and oppressive habits and who can help enforce the protection of the vulnerable and weak. The heartaches and sorrows of her life should contain a message of strength and encouragement for those who hurt.

5.4.2 “A Sword will Pierce Through your Soul. . . (Luke 2:35)

Elizabeth Johnson points out that when Simeon says to Mary "..... a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35), this cannot refer to Mary's later experience near the cross (John 19:25-27). Mary's absence at Jesus' death in Luke and in the other synoptic gospels indicates that in Luke the sword does not symbolise this particular suffering. The sword, therefore, could be Mary's agonising spiritual discernment.²⁶ For Johnson, Mary was not given automatic understanding and she wrestled with God as a biblical interpreter, hearing, believing, and pondering the word in order to gain knowledge and insight into her son's mission.²⁷

There are, however, some theologians, who go on to argue that even if Luke did not refer to Mary's experience near the cross, the experiences of 'the sword piercing her soul' culminated in Jesus' crucifixion. For instance, John McHugh argues that, regardless of whether Mary was actually near the cross at Jesus' crucifixion or not, nowhere was her pain more acute than when she knew of Jesus' crucifixion.²⁸

Whereas Mary got the news foretelling her suffering in connection with her child's life from Simeon, southern African women often receive the news of their infection as part of their birth-giving process. As Mary must have left the temple worrying about what Simeon's prophecy meant, so too are mothers told of their infection at hospitals. Pregnant mothers worry about the future of their unborn children, and feel guilty about potentially passing the infection on to the baby. Those mothers told of their child's infection after birthing go away knowing they too are infected, carrying the sentence with them. They know their child is a poor victim, and that they too will

suffer. An HIV diagnosis could contribute to feelings of hopelessness, fear of death and depression. They face considerable psychological stress, a sense of shame, loss and grief. They worry about being stigmatised by partners, families, friends and communities, and about losing their jobs and livelihoods.

These mothers should be empowered to protect themselves from the 'sword' of infection. Like Mary, they need to be strong and must not give up hope for life. Marian and other women's groups have the important work of supporting them and pressuring governments, local authorities and donor organisations to provide them with their needs, such as highly effective counselling services. Access to information on the possibilities of a woman transmitting HIV to an unborn or breastfeeding child, should be made easily available.

Though often criticised by feminists for his conservative views,²⁹ John Paul II makes an argument that could help underline some important roles women play during critical HIV/AIDS moments. He argues that at the presentation of Jesus, Simeon's words are not directed to Joseph but to Mary because she is the one who has an important contribution to make in the redemptive act of her Son on the cross.³⁰ For John Paul II, God's intention here is to call for the specific involvement of woman in the work of redemption. By giving back her Son to consecrate him for his saving mission (cf. Luke 2:23), Mary also gives herself to this mission. It is an act of interior sharing that expresses the consent of woman to Christ's redemptive work.³¹ Mary is not just a single person, but represents the "daughter of Zion," the new woman whose place is close to that of the redeemer.³²

In the struggle against HIV/AIDS, the special closeness of women to those in immediate and critical need of 'redemption' from the pandemic is noticeable. For instance, as hospitals and clinics become overwhelmed, home-based AIDS care is becoming widespread, and female family members are finding themselves taking over care-work for their sick family members. These are 'redemptive' tasks which are emotionally healing, and necessary to save the sick from impending total health deterioration. Unfortunately the 'redemptive' tasks weigh too heavily on women, to the extent that care is often unwillingly given, and often extracted from women by psychological and social pressure. Women often pull out of regular formal and informal employment and income-generating activities; extract girls from school; cannot seek medical treatment; face escalating household tension and violence when they cannot adequately perform other domestic roles; and fall into deep household poverty levels.³³ For poor caregivers, the time, effort and resources used in providing care violates their right to health, undermines their quality of life, and limits their opportunities, capabilities and choices. Palliative care by girls undermines the potentially positive effects of girls' education, including improvements in income-earning potential later in life, enhanced bargaining and decision-making power, control over their sexuality and participation in public life. The work within the care economy has become a 'sword' piercing women's souls in their 'redemptive' tasks against HIV/AIDS.

One way of empowering women care-givers, for instance, is by training volunteer care-givers from Marian and church groups in conjunction with health-care providers, counsellors and community outreach workers. Governments could be pressured to allocate financial and human resources for community support of volunteers who

provide the home-based care. The volunteers, in collaboration with local health institutions, could be trained in counselling and in providing psychosocial support to home-based caregivers. They could also help in will preparation, spiritual or religious support, funeral arrangements, children's custody and school fees.³⁴ Partnerships should be built at the community level involving religious groups, NGOs, and community organisations to deal with the gender dimensions and socio-cultural issues of care-giving. To some extent, such partnerships that involve members of Marian groups at community level already exist, including Marian religious centres and church mission centres that run hospitals with the help of government employees.

Another way of empowering women against the 'sword' of the pandemic is by economically valuing care-giving work. Government policy makers, donors, the UN agencies could be encouraged to develop, fund and implement programs and policies aimed at valuing care work. Economically valuing care work would help to reveal how home and community-based care affects women's lives, health, productivity and economic security. It would reveal how much longer than men women work and would prove that care work does not come without financial costs.³⁵ It would show that care-giving is 'redemptive', not only in sustaining the life of the sick and healing emotionally, but also in sustaining the supply of labour to the economy, and in making human societies possible by keeping the social fabric in good repair. It would also encourage decision-makers to ensure that public investment serves the needs of care-givers and that models for care and support include income generation and food security that mitigate the impact of the women's unequal burden. It may even become a stepping stone towards the provision of unconditional cash benefits, tax allowances,

pension schemes, employment opportunities and free access to health care for caregivers.³⁶

Similarly, the ‘sword’ that pierced Mary’s heart could mean many other things that oppress women: the sword of political dictatorship, sexual violence, rape of young girls, every scorn of the infected and other patriarchal subjugations. If women ‘pierced’ by the sword of sorrow and anguish unite their torn hearts with Mary’s in their determination to end the pandemic, the potential for empowerment is huge.

5.4.3 Escape to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-18)

The distance from Bethlehem to Egypt is over 200 miles.³⁷ By applying the hermeneutics of suspicion, intuition, and vision, one could say because of Herod, Mary left Judea in emotional agony, distress, sorrow, and fear. She suffered on the journey, struggling for food, water and shelter in the desert. This journey by Mary echoes that of southern Africa’s women in hiding, in exile and women refugees.³⁸ Some leave their homeland to protect their children and daughters from violence and rape by mercenaries and soldiers.³⁹ For their survival, they work in conditions that still place them at great risk. In exile, some refugees are kidnapped and murdered, while others are raped still and infected.⁴⁰ Such women and children refugees and asylum seekers could be better protected under an internationally coordinated refugees’ protection system and an international campaign for refugees’ rights in southern Africa. Currently there is hardly any coordination in these matters.⁴¹

The exile narrative has multiple references to “the child and his mother” (verses 13, 14, 20, and 21). Both are threatened. Mary’s life is at risk from the brutal power of the state. The vulnerable child is surrounded by her care, and this exposes her to the same peril. This powerful connection between mother and child is also reflected in HIV/AIDS situations. The child cannot be fully protected without empowering the mother. In their long-term plans for protecting children, it is crucial for southern Africans to focus on enabling women to prevent their own infection.

"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (v18). Rachel’s voice is a symbol of those suffering Jewish mothers whose children were murdered on a mass scale. It stands for the lifting up of their lament to God. In her voice, women bond together as she expresses their grief and outrage. According to Elizabeth Johnson, Rachel’s voice pierces the male world of power, of slaughter.⁴² Her tears pour out in disagreement to such cruelty; her screaming is defiance to this brutal way of running the world.⁴³ Mary, too, must have heavily grieved for these children who died in place of hers. Not too long after, the same violence killed her son.⁴⁴

Rachel still weeps in southern Africa. She is that voice of women weeping for their children, for their loved ones and for their own lives. She is defiant and refuses to be silenced by evil patriarchal regimes. As long as the pandemic rages on, this rage of women must continue. Women must shout out until their voices are heard against barbaric behaviour that leads to infections. For instance, women could decide not to vote for any political structures that tolerate violence, rape and any other form of inhuman treatment for women. The Marian guilds and other women’s groups could

work together for such tough measures against perpetrators and systems that perpetuate these evils. Mary could also give hope to those grieving their children and could strengthen them to continue their journey of life without conceding defeat. She defiantly survived and overcame Herod's outrage for innocent children.⁴⁵

5.4.4 Jesus Lost in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52)

In this passage, Mary suffers great maternal anguish. The verb Luke uses for 'sorrowing' (*odynasthai* in Greek) connotes severe mental pain, sadness or overwhelming anxiety.⁴⁶ Mary's words carry an unmistakable tone of rebuke and reproach: "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have sought for you sorrowing." She corrects him, scolds him, and complains about his behaviour.

According to Beverly Gaventa and Cynthia Rigby, from the time of conception, "a woman physically experiences a life that is both herself and not herself."⁴⁷ She wants to be in charge of her child's life, yet also wants her child to be free. When Mary ponders, she comes face to face with such anguish or anxiety. It is this anxiety which generates confusion, uneasiness, and entices Mary to try to control Jesus' mission.⁴⁸

Such anguish is imaginable within the HIV/AIDS context, where mothers must constantly worry about their children's health. As the children grow, their mothering involves loss, a constant painful giving up and letting go. Mary, however, is strong and perseveres through. While Mary loses her child in the temple, some women lose theirs to sexual abuse, poverty, prostitution, infection and illness. The scene of Mary and Jesus in the temple could be an encouragement for mothers who struggle to cope.

There is hope for them that they could get their children back. Mary did not give up until she found her child again. Even the announcement that a child is HIV-positive need not lead to despair.

Mary and Joseph had taken for granted Jesus' return to Nazareth (v44). This scene could also help southern Africans to think about what they often take for granted in the patriarchal world which promotes infections, and the societal values they have lost, thereby allowing HIV to spread. For instance, the continual spreading of HIV indicates we have lost our 'ubuntu' values. Ubuntu is a worldview of the 'bantú' people (mostly in eastern and southern Africa) that defines an individual in relation to the community. It means what makes a person fully human is essentially how that person enhances others' wellbeing. A person with 'ubuntu' values affirms others, and knows that it is when others are humiliated, diminished, tortured or oppressed that he/she too is diminished. When one does well, it is for the benefit of all. At the heart of this 'ubuntu' concept is the saying "I am because we are, and because we are, I am."⁴⁹ Mary's central role in searching for Jesus and her anxiety for the wellbeing of her family could signify to us how mothers are central to the regaining of such community values of mutual concern and respect.

5.4.5 Standing Near the Cross (John 19:25-27)

Elizabeth Johnson and Sabina Lopez are two among other feminists who contest the thinking that Mary was present at the crucifixion of Jesus to cooperate with her son in his sacrifice. Sabina Lopez argues that Mary's natural inclination would be to want to take Jesus off the cross, to rid him of his suffering and shame and to comfort him.⁵⁰

Such refutations, however, have not stopped some women, including Johnson, from recognising the empowering possibilities of Mary near the cross. Johnson writes,

Mater Dolorosa is not a theological concept or a symbolic image or an archetypal experience, but a real person who got hit one day with the terrible fact that her firstborn son was dead by violent, public and shameful state execution, preceded by excruciating torment. . . The scene at the cross conjures up all the anguish and desolation a woman could experience who had given birth to a child, loved that child, raised and taught that child, even tried to protect that child, only to have him executed in the worst imaginable way by the power of the state. Calling on her memory, grieving mothers, wives, and daughters find strength in the bitter struggle against state repressions and personal despair. There is the shared Calvary women suffer with Mary in the sufferings that feed on their own children's lives.⁵¹

The symbol of Mary near the cross could depict southern African mothers who are powerless to relieve suffering from their loved ones, and whose hearts are torn because of their helplessness. Mary's place below the cross could also represent the long periods that mothers tend and watch as their sons and daughters brutally undergo the torture of the scourge and deteriorate in health until they die.⁵² The mothers 'drink from the same cup' of suffering as Mary. She could represent their cry as they experience failure, defeat, or despair, and as they long for dignity, justice and peace. Yet Mary's suffering experience near the cross was not destructive, but one presented in a context of faith, hope, and love. Even in the midst of deepest sorrow, southern Africans should not let sorrowing mothers' dignity and beauty be crushed.

It may be assumed that Mary knew her presence beneath the cross was a comfort to her son. By her motherly instincts and love, she knew the inner healing effects on Jesus of her presence. By the mother's presence, those on palliative care are acknowledged, understood, accepted, and loved. Jones writes, "The power of Mary's loving presence in the midst of suffering helps us to learn the simple power of being

fully present ourselves when a loved one suffers.”⁵³ This healing presence must be recognised, appreciated and valued by society.

Beneath the cross Mary is a sorrowful yet powerful figure. She stands there fearlessly in the presence of Jesus’ murderers. The verb ‘to stand’, which literally means ‘to be on one’s feet’, ‘to stand erect,’⁵⁴ shows the dignity and strength of Mary. It recalls her unfailing constancy and extraordinary courage in facing suffering. She has an inner resiliency to endure suffering, sustained by faith, which was strengthened during the events of her life. Mary illustrates how southern African women must stand up and fight. Empowerment will not come to them easily, and for the foreseeable future, the pandemic will continue to strike hard. When the mystery of the cross falls on them, Mary is their brave companion who knows how to stand in faith and hope.

Their grief could become an important impetus for standing up against oppressive patriarchal ‘executioners’ and ‘torturers’ – the custodians of the systems that promote women’s infection and suffering. Not only such women, but all southern Africans with a conscience should watch with Mary at the disgraceful Golgothas of our own time. These are places of ‘crucifixion’ of the powerless - places such as homes where women offer palliative care, and where women are often infected silently lest they be thrown out; in townships where girls sell their bodies for ‘bread’; or in judicial systems where victims of rape are humiliated and rapists walk away free. But Mary’s journey continued into the new life of the post-resurrection community (Acts 1:14-15; 2:1-21).

Southern Africans too need to go on and give witness to women's victory in the resurrection power. Where the cross represents darkness, to watch with Mary beneath the cross could represent the opening of our eyes and turning from darkness to light: from the darkness of being powerlessly infected, to the light of control of one's body; from the darkness of violence in the privacy of homes and bedrooms, to the light of its exposure in the open, of speaking out against it and punishing it in justice systems; from the darkness of educational impoverishment to the light of knowledge about one's health, one's body and one's rights. In such depictions, the cross could be a place of 'redemption' where women could powerfully come out of HIV/AIDS misery and strive for deliverance from the pandemic.

The cross could also be a place of responsibility. Mary stood there with other women who had become part of Jesus' spiritual family. Apparently most of the men had escaped.⁵⁵ Jesus, Mary and these women are an example of a Christian family that stand together in times of trouble. They are united, and they see to each other's wellbeing at such times. The women's presence contrasts with the position of men who escape from their families when sickness strikes. Women's loyalty endures the test of suffering. It is high time men learn loyalty and engage themselves more fully in care-giving tasks. Just as the beloved disciple stood there with Mary, was given Mary to look after and welcomed her into his home (v27), men should take up the responsibilities of helping women, and should be welcoming to women's good advice and wisdom. The mothers, widows and women who struggle alone to make a living or who have been wronged or exploited should all get much more support and help from men within their families and communities.

Apparently the beloved disciple stood at the cross a repentant, forgiven and restored man. While the synoptic gospels give the impression that all the male disciples had escaped (cf. Mark 14:50), John's gospel suggests that the beloved disciple later on came to the cross and restored his relationship with Jesus. The cross becomes a place of rebuke of bad deeds, cowardice, and of restoration to a life of dignity. In the southern African context, those who have directly or indirectly contributed to spreading the pandemic, both individuals and corporations, could still repent and be restored to goodness. They could work as HIV/AIDS activists who campaign to stop risky behaviour. The male-dominated governments, non-governmental organisations and churches should spearhead community education on the importance of male involvement in care-giving roles and discussions that challenge gender norms which prescribe care work as 'women's work'.⁵⁶ They should encourage men to take over household tasks such as water and fuel collection, food-crop production, managing home gardens and basic nursing activities. Public debates, media campaigns, educational workshops and schools should be used to campaign for a change in cultural attitudes towards care-work. Concurrently, policies and programs should be designed in ways which expand women's opportunities and choices – particularly in relation to waged work – as opposed to gender roles only tied to domesticated motherhood. In such ways, contemplating Mary's grief at the foot of the cross could lead to more sorrow for one's wrong-doing, and to a greater desire to make amends.

"Jesus said to Mary: 'Woman, behold your son!' Then to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And he took her to his own home" (John 19:25-27). By these words, it has often been held that the disciple represents all the followers of Jesus, and Jesus has entrusted all Christians to Mary as their mother.⁵⁷ Not all feminists, however, agree

with this interpretation. Gaventa and Cynthia Rigby argue that to interpret Jesus words at the cross as his devotion to his mother over-interprets the passage.⁵⁸

Other feminists, in contrast, find here an expression of a son's particular concern and respect for his mother. Jesus is doing an act of filial piety, though he also subordinates the natural kinship to a higher form of relationship. For Sarah Boss, the mother-son relationship acquires a new redemptive dimension. Mary becomes the mother of Christians after suffering 'birth pangs' during her son's passion.⁵⁹ Mary must have shared her knowledge and wisdom of Jesus with the beloved disciple. This view invites the Christians, like the beloved disciple, to welcome Mary into their homes and into their inner lives.

Thus the separation of death between Jesus and Mary need not be barren but fruitful, like a mother giving birth. By her presence at the death of her Son, Mary merited the power to console the dying. Just as Jesus gives the beloved disciple to Mary, he could also give to mothers who lost their children to the pandemic the world to look after. The motherhood of bereaved women could transcend the motherhood of flesh and blood to embrace all people groaning under the pandemic. This idea of sorrow that could turn into blessings was expressed by the archbishop of Syracuse in Sicily in 1953, regarding a Marian weeping statue:

Mary has wept!..... Weeping is fecund. There has never been a sterile tear. As the rain that falls from on high irrigates the countryside and prepares it to receive, in all fertility, the crops and seed and fruit that will in time come to ripeness, so it happens in the realm of the spirit. A woman who weeps always becomes, in the very act, a mother. And if Mary weeps beside the Cross of Jesus – I can tell you that her weeping was fertile and made her a mother.⁶⁰

Rather than feel dejected and powerless, the mothers could brace themselves for becoming God's enduring, assuring, and supporting compassion. Times of sorrow could become times of God's profound presence. As with Mary, there could be meaning, depth and even redemptive power in their suffering.

5.4.6 A Suggestion of Mother Centres

According to Elizabeth Johnson, the women present with Mary near the cross form a community that shouts 'no' to the powers that kill. Mary inspires women to say 'stop killing': "No more killing of other people's children."⁶¹ No more war, brutal greed and tyranny! For Johnson, this gesture is rich and symbolic because it leads to life. Women stand around the cross as Jesus' friends, caring for his lifeless body so that life will not be further violated. Mary's figure galvanises non-violence as an expression of faith.⁶²

Just as a new community mainly comprising of women supporting one another in the face of violence is formed near the cross, in southern Africa, I suggest the formation of Marian mother centres in the face of the HIV/AIDS' 'cross'. Mother centres are a fast growing movement which originated in Germany in the 1990s and have spread to more than 20 countries.⁶³ They provide public spaces where mothers and their children can go daily. They support the work and world of mothers; promote social cohesion, community building and parenting at the base of social and economic development; and reintegrate the culture of care into public life. They build women's confidence and ability to help themselves and each other.⁶⁴ Their approach to problems is mother and women orientated at a community level - they follow

women's ways of learning and doing things. They pave ways for caring for neighbourhoods, improving the quality of life for mothers, families and communities and enhancing mothers' public influence.

The neighbourhood networks generated by mother centres open up nuclear family structures to local support networks and bring a shift towards more collective responsibility and organisation of reproductive tasks. Opportunities arise for providing support to care-givers to spread tasks, such as care-giving for children and the elderly within the larger group. The reinvention of family and kinship by mother centres is an answer to the weakening of family, kin, neighbourhood and social ties and networks.⁶⁵ For them to be relevant, they adapt to the diverse needs of the local situation of mothers and communities.⁶⁶ They are also a switchboard of information and exchange, a place where issues and talents can become visible. Everything that happens or need immediate attention or response in the community can be discussed daily and collectively. There is openness, fluidity and transparency of decision making.

There are no target groups for social services at mother centres. Their approach is resource, not problem oriented. Women are not asked to define their problems; instead they define what skills and resources they have to contribute to community building and solutions. They run on the basis that everyone is good at least at one thing which they can contribute to the mother centre and thereby to the community.⁶⁷

At individual level, benefits of partaking in mother centers include more self-confidence and liveliness, an increase in the domestic participation and contribution

of fathers, help in bringing together work and family life, and in securing employment or creating income generating activities. Individuals gain expertise and capacities in “organising and negotiation skills, communication and relationship skills, improved stress resistance, capacity to work in teams, increased willingness to take responsibility as well as to develop tolerance and flexibility.”⁶⁸ On the social level mother centers bring marginalised groups into social involvement, invigorate neighbourhoods and local culture, create innovations in professional and institutional programs, create a rich environment for informal education and develop leadership potential.⁶⁹

Mother centres often act as pressure groups and a new form of advocacy for policies that support mothers and community life at local government and national levels, such as the legitimisation of the informal learning that occurs in the mother centre setting, and challenging the media to publish positive views of women.⁷⁰ Women’s expertise in care-giving and in dealing with the concrete aspects of everyday life is often made part of local government programs such as municipal childcare, the design of playgrounds and safety in urban environments, municipal family and youth programs, activities to decrease violence, reforms in health care and in the conditions in hospitals, the combat of poverty in families, and reforms in educational systems. They are a platform for turning a ‘mothering perspective’ into a political voice at local and national policy-making levels.

While the spreading of mother centres has so far not taken place under Mary’s influence, the symbol of Mary as mother has the potency to inspire and enrich a firm foundation for such centres in southern Africa, and could help to maintain the focus

on fighting HIV/AIDS. Mary could make this contribution in her role as a link between peoples, a unifier or common denominator. Not only Christians find Mary's motherhood a common denominator at communal and societal levels, but Muslims, Hindus⁷¹ and others as well. She not only bonds people together to avoid conflicts,⁷² to cope with wars,⁷³ pandemics and oppressions, but also to work together for positive goals. She links God and humanity in Jesus Christ. Tina Beattie says that Mary's motherhood draws the believer into a space of mystery, where Word meets flesh, time meets eternity.⁷⁴ She has also been portrayed as the link between humanity and redemption, the Old Testament and the New, humanity and divine wisdom, Israel and the church, the old Israel and the new and the old Eve and the new.⁷⁵ Most of these symbolic connotations derive their meaning from the understanding that her motherhood symbolises unity. She could be a link at family, community, and society levels. Latin American women theologians call it "shared Calvary" when they suffer with Mary in wars and political oppressions that harm their children.⁷⁶ In Africa she is in many ways a huge source of bonding for different peoples. At funerals, at churches - to pray or to do works of charity - at conferences and congresses people often come together in Mary's name. As already noted, schools, missions, convents, roads, bridges, parks, townships and so forth have often been built in her name and named after her, and people commit themselves to different tasks under that name.

Marian mother centres could be reinforcements of extended families, based on neighbourhood networks and choice. They could be a mean for African women reconnecting with their traditional status as mothers collectively responsible for communities and society. They could also provide a basis to prevent many of the HIV-related problems from escalating or getting out of hand. They could contribute

to the transformation of the southern African social institutions and legislation and could champion a shift from a life of dependence by mothers and women to one of empowered self-help participants in local planning and decision making. They could help in the re-channelling of resources, so that social work funds and programs go directly into the hands of grassroots women's groups. This could include innovations in legislation and funding regulations to remunerate and acknowledge the qualification of women's work outside of professional channels, especially in fighting HIV/AIDS, and in responding to the cultural norms which worsen the plight of women. They could increase participation of women in political affairs and governance at grassroots level and enhance greater political responsiveness to women's health issues. Women could be supported against violence, abuse and be helped to develop negotiation and safety skills. Mary's motherhood could be the rallying point for all women whose motherhood binds them together in collective experience.⁷⁷

The Marian mother centres could provide the opportunity for women to create a group identity separate from that of the family that often enforces strict adherence to oppressive gender norms, and promote women's leadership, participation and decision-making against HIV/AIDS. Jesus redefined the family as brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers who do the will of God (Matthew 12:47-50). At no other time than during the HIV/AIDS era has the family been more a source of pain, dysfunction, unreliability, and brokenness for women unfairly infected by their husbands. They often discover that their blood family members even hurt them more. As it was beneath the cross, women could bond in Marian mother centres to console and support one another. Through prayers, encouragement, love, and sharing resources,

women could make it through the difficult times. The women could discover mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters in extended families all over again.⁷⁸ Such centres would give witness to personal commitment of a disciple which transcends natural family bonds.

5.4.7 Co-operator

Stabat Mater⁷⁹

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,
all His bitter anguish bearing,
now at length the sword has passed.

O how sad and sore distressed
was that Mother, highly blest,
of the sole-begotten One.

Christ above in torment hangs,
she beneath beholds the pangs
of her dying glorious Son.

Is there one who would not weep,
whelmed in miseries so deep,
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

By the Cross with thee to stay,
there with thee to weep and pray,
is all I ask of thee to give.

For the sins of His own nation,
She saw Jesus wracked with torment,
All with scourges rent:

She beheld her tender Child,
Saw Him hang in desolation,
Till His spirit forth He sent.

Can the human heart refrain
from partaking in her pain,
in that Mother's pain untold? . . .

This Stabat Mater hymn portrays a mother-son bond that unites Mary with Jesus during his experience of suffering and death.⁸⁰ The bond indicates that Mary co-operated in her Son's suffering. The Stabat Mater also demonstrates Mary's maternal compassion to all generations of Christians implied by her presence and participation with Jesus in the sacrifice of the cross. Although the pain she suffered was hers, it is a shared suffering - 'com-passion'.

This idea of Mary's co-operation in Christian redemption is, however, hugely controversial. There are different views on it, varying from one extreme to the other.⁸¹ Gaventa and Rigby argue that Mary exists near the cross to reveal the end of Jesus' relationship with her, and nothing about herself.⁸² On the other hand, some feminists value Mary's co-operation in the redemption process, and in Jesus' suffering beneath the cross. Sarah Boss argues that the fruitfulness and redemptive value of Mary's maternal suffering highlights the fruitfulness and redemptive value of Jesus' suffering.⁸³ At the 'last supper', Jesus says

You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow. . . , but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish . . . (John 19: 25-29).

For Boss, this maternal imagery is subsequently reinforced by the presence of Mary near the cross. There is a mystical union of Mary with her son - a union expressed as an act of childbearing which is accomplished by Christ on the cross, and shared by his mother.⁸⁴ For Tina Beattie, if Mary is not a person who co-operates in her own redemption, she is an object to be used and discarded by God.⁸⁵

That Mary is co-operator, however, would not necessarily mean she is co-redemptive, an extreme position shrugged off even by the Second Vatican Council.⁸⁶ As with Beattie, Jacques Bur links her co-operation with the incarnation event. Her co-operation in the sacrifice of the cross had the same nature and intent as the co-operation at the time of the incarnation. It was a role of free loyalty, a 'yes' of spiritual union with the sacrifice of the cross, the redeeming value of which remains Christ's alone. The grace merited by Christ produced in Mary, as at the incarnation, is the fiat, the 'yes' of compassion.⁸⁷

Understanding Mary's co-operation in this way means human beings can collaborate and be instrumental to their salvation. Through human co-operation, redemption can come to southern Africa. In a special way God has honoured mothers to be co-workers with him in salvation and in the creation of new life. In southern Africa, mothers could become instrumental to a new uninfected life. Their closeness to the 'cross' of the pandemic and the contributions they make to counter its impacts are part of our salvation story. If more room is created for their genius, their innovations and suggestions, this could speed up our salvation from the pandemic.

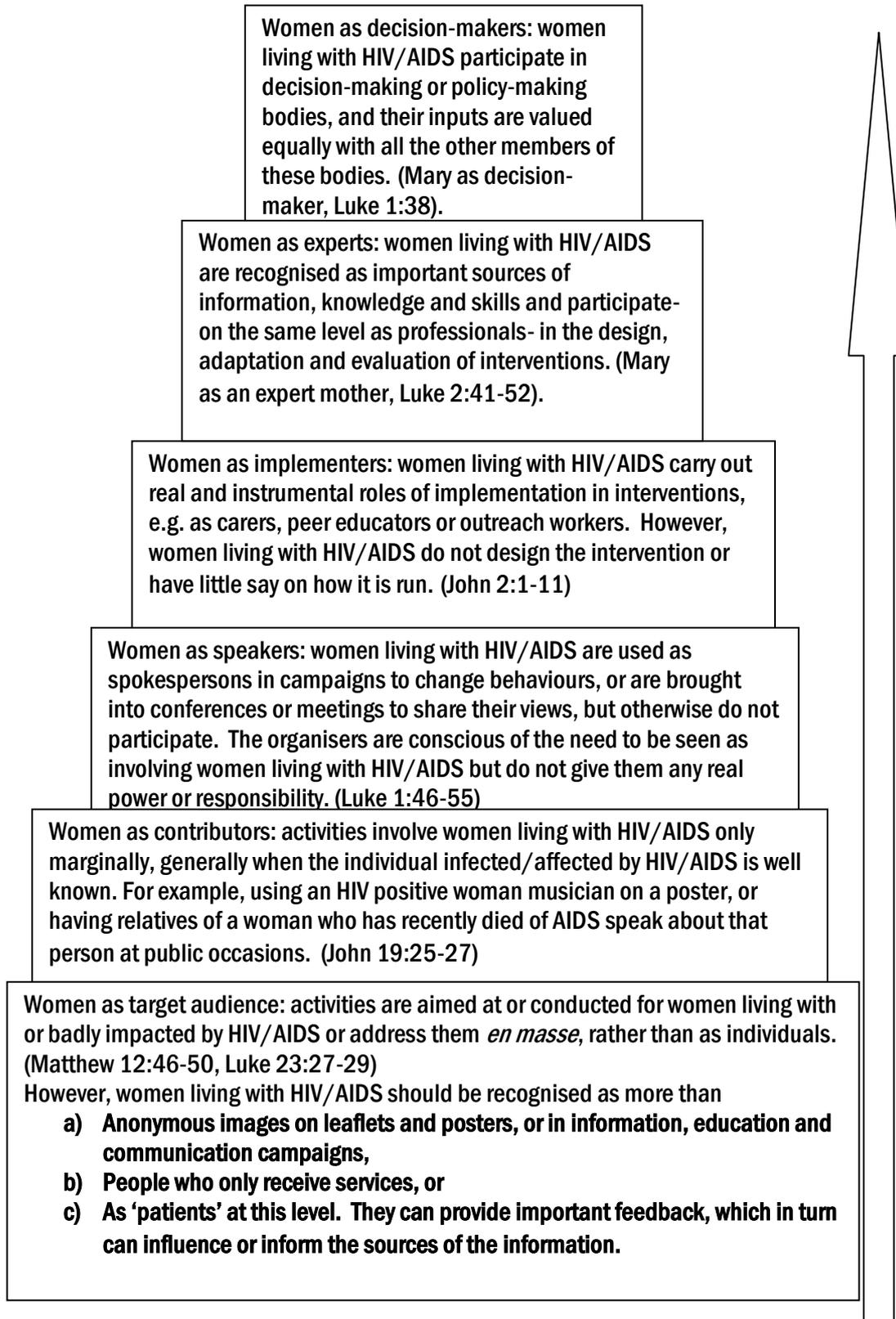
Mothers experience and endure the sufferings of their children. This idea, expressed in some church fathers' depictions of Mary beneath the cross, finds some anchoring in some ideas of modern feminists. According to Alphonsus Liguori, for instance, Mary is called Queen of Martyrs because her heart was transfixed by a sword of grief. As the passion was the sacrifice which Christ made upon the Cross, so the compassion was the sacrifice of Mary beneath the Cross. The lance that pierced the heart of Jesus (John 19:34) was not felt by him, but by Mary. This was Mary's martyrdom. "He

suffered in the flesh, and she in her heart, so much so that the heart of Mary became, as it were, a mirror of the passion of the Son.”⁸⁸ This finds support in Gebara’s argument, that the martyrdom of women, whose woundedness is not physically visible or at public disposal, needs to be recognised and their suffering prevented.⁸⁹ Gaventa and Rigby also argue that the mother totally feels the pain of her child, and Mary totally felt the excruciating pain of Jesus, and society tends to become blind and immune to such inner suffering of mothers. Many mothers experience “disenfranchised grief” - grief over loss that is denied social and religious legitimacy.⁹⁰

Due to their profound involvement in HIV/AIDS matters, the women are prone to some non-physical sufferings that come with the stressful demands of the disease. They need to be at the centre of involvement in issues of fighting HIV/AIDS. HIV-positive women could be part of the design, implementation and monitoring of HIV programs at community and national levels. At policy formulation level, they could provide insights into how living with HIV affects women differently than men. Through organisations such as Marian mother centres, caregivers should also be recognised as valued stakeholders who occupy formal places in decision-making bodies on HIV/AIDS policies, programs and budgets. Their participation would give them opportunities to assert themselves and to own the process and its results.

The figure below is a pyramid that portrays various possible stages of involvement by women in HIV/AIDS matters that affect them. The highest level represents complete application of involvement.⁹¹ Also included at each level is a biblical reference that reflects Mary’s participation and involvement in what affected her life.

A Pyramid of Women's Involvement



5.5 Conclusion

As Elizabeth Johnson writes, overall, Mary's suffering was a truly human journey.⁹² Life did not treat her smoothly. As with some modern southern African women, she faced existential paradoxes of life. She experienced tears and tediousness, suffering and bitterness, anguish and death, but also delight, daylight, bravery, and uplifting. She lived and suffered in the dark night of faith.

Conceptualising Mary in this way could inspire southern African women, who still experience many stages of her journey, to be strong in the face of tribulations. In the life-stories of southern African women, Simeon still prophesies, and a lifelong sadness runs alongside their perseverance in grace. Still Mary escapes with Jesus into Egypt, and stays there. Still for three days Mary searches desperately for her child with a gloomy spirit, hoping to find him in the temple. As more and more get infected, she still meets him, again and again, with the heavy cross upon his shoulders. She is still at the foot of the cross, in sorrow but in hope, and at the burial place, shattered yet clutching to faith. If these women walk along Mary, she could inspire in them a spirit of resilience and victory against adversity. This is what Joyce Rupp testifies:

I have personally found much hope and inspiration when I have discovered my own struggles reflected in the sorrows of Mary. I have felt comfort and kinship in knowing that Mary has been there before me. In this Mother of sorrows I have found a woman of compassion and courage whose life experiences give me strength to weather my own tribulations.⁹³

My next chapter looks at how southern Africans could conceive Mary's bodily contribution to redemption so as to inspire southern African women's empowerment against HIV/AIDS.

ENDNOTES

¹Taken from *Hymnal Words of Mary in Sorrow on Mount Calvary*, Author unknown, accessed on 09-07-2010

http://www.hrcac.org.uk/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=51

²UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, iv.

³Elina Vuola, 'Seriously Harmful for your Health?', 150.

⁴The Seven Sorrows of Mother Mary, accessed on 05-12-2008
<http://www.angelfire.com/md3/fel/test.html>

Her other widely venerated moments of suffering are: Luke 4.28-30: Jesus' life threatened by the townspeople of Nazareth; Luke 11.53-54: Jesus' life threatened by the Jewish authorities; John 18: 18-40: Jesus arrested and judged; And John 19:32-37: His being taken down from the Cross.

⁵Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium* (Gretna: Pelican, 2000), 30.

⁶Marina Warner, *Alone Of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 216.

⁷Ignace Mboneyabo, 'Judgement on the Apparitions of Kibeho' in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 11 July 2001, 8. Our Lady of Kibeho, Rwanda, refers to an apparition of Mary, which began in 1989 to forewarn against the Rwandan genocide. The visionaries claim that Mary showed them terrifying glimpses into the genocide: a tree in flames, a river of blood, and many abandoned, decapitated corpses.

⁸Elina Vuola, 'Seriously Harmful for your Health?', 150.

⁹Elina Vuola, 'Seriously Harmful for your Health?', 151.

¹⁰Elina Vuola, 'Seriously Harmful for your Health?', 152.

¹¹Marina Warner, *Alone Of All Her Sex*, 223.

¹²Megan McKenna, *Mary: Shadow of Grace* (New York: New City Press, 2007), 12.

¹³Loreen Maseno, *Feminist Theology in West and East Africa*, accessed on 24-04-2009.

¹⁴Loreen Maseno, *Feminist Theology in West and East Africa*, accessed on 24-04-2009.

¹⁵For example, Benedict XVI, *Prayers: Our Lady of Africa*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 4 October, 2009. Benedict describes Mary as the Queen of Africa, who suffered much with her son, and because she did not surrender, was "crowned Queen of heaven and mother of the Church" and intercedes for those in difficulties. He also calls her a model of all Africans in whom God made a new beginning based on victory over evil.

¹⁶Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 88.

¹⁷Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 86, 106.

¹⁸Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 90.

¹⁹Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 90.

²⁰Jose Angel Gutierrez and Rebecca E. Deen, *Chicanas in Texas Politics* (University of Texas-Arlington, Occasional Paper No. 66, October 2000).

²¹Jose Angel Gutierrez and Rebecca E. Deen, *Chicanas in Texas Politics*.

²²Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 17-18.

²³Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1993), 17

²⁴Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 277.

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- ²⁵Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Introduction', 7.
- ²⁶Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 280-281.
- ²⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 281.
- ²⁸John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), 112
- ²⁹The International Catholic Online Authority on Women's Ministry, *Women Priests for the Catholic Church*, accessed on 05-12-2008 <http://www.womenpriests.org/>.
- ³⁰John Paul II, 'Christ Calls Women to Share his Mission' in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 15 January 1997, 11.
- ³¹John Paul II, 'Christ Calls Women', 11.
- ³²John Paul II, 'Christ Calls Women', 11.
- ³³UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, iv.
- ³⁴Olagoke Akintola, *A Gendered Analysis of the Burden of Care on Family and Volunteer Caregivers in Uganda and South Africa*, (written for Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, August, 2004), 20.
- ³⁵Olagoke Akintola, *A Gendered Analysis*, 23. According to Akintola, one research in sub-Saharan Africa observed that women use 40 billion hours a year collecting water - the same time spent annually by all the workers in France.
- ³⁶Stephanie Urdang, 'The Care Economy: Gender and the Silent AIDS Crisis in Southern Africa,' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 32, no 1, (2006), 171. According to Urdang, youth stipends, old age pensions and family grants already exist in some southern African countries. The Government of Swaziland and the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria are already working on them. The Government of Swaziland provides stipends of \$30 per month to 10,000 women caregivers who look after orphans.
- ³⁷Time and Date AS 1995–2010, *Cities Located Close to Bethlehem*, accessed on 14-02-2008 <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/distances.html?n=1048>.
- ³⁸ActionAid International, *The Johannesburg Position on HIV/AIDS and Women's and Girls' Rights in Africa*, (A statement issued by a number of women's groups in Africa at the African Women's Regional Consultation on Women's Rights and HIV/AIDS in Africa held in Johannesburg, South Africa, April 6-7, 2006).
- ³⁹ActionAid International, *The Johannesburg Position*.
- ⁴⁰Jeff Otieno, *Rape And Plunder of DRC - How EAC States Betrayed a Wounded Neighbour*, accessed on 30-09-2010 <http://allafrica.com/stories/201009130880.html> Countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Democratic Republic of Congo are notorious for their records of rapes, often for political reasons.
- ⁴¹Mary's exile could also be a reminder of children and adults living with AIDS rejected from schools, work places and marginalised by society and thereby denied a sense of belonging. Not only women's groups, but churches, political parties and NGOs need to stand up against such injustices.
- ⁴²Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 246
- ⁴³Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 246
- ⁴⁴Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 247
- ⁴⁵There are also other empowerment possibilities that could be drawn from Mary's exile. For instance, we often conquer by flight and not by fight. If a marriage exposes one to dangers of infection, departing from one's home of marriage until one is assured of safety could be good. Mary's refuge in Egypt with Jesus also runs parallel to the story of Joseph who was sold by his brothers (Genesis 45:1-16) but later saved

them and their families' lives. Her rebellion, obstinacy, or stubbornness against the king's murderous order rule saved her son's life. By withdrawing from a married but risky life, women could end up looking after their children who often end up double orphans. Further, the difficulties Mary must have faced in exile could resonate with the experiences of women who face unjust property distribution systems and other hardships after the 'exile' of divorce. The civil courts and traditional justice systems must improve to stop such 'cruelty of Herod' on southern African women.

⁴⁶Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (eds.), *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 108.

⁴⁷Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (eds.), *Blessed One*, 108.

⁴⁸Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (eds.), *Blessed One*, 108.

⁴⁹Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Tempered Radicals*, 13

⁵⁰Quoted in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 8.

⁵¹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 296.

⁵²Angela West, *Deadly Innocence*, 215.

⁵³Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, 32.

⁵⁴Encarta World English Dictionary 1998-2004, Microsoft Corporation, accessed on 05-08-2008.

⁵⁵In the passion narrative, Luke mentions women along with others who "stood at a distance to watch" (23:49). According to Mark and Matthew, only women followers witnessed the crucifixion (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:55). John names four women along with the male "beloved disciple" (John 19:25-26).

⁵⁶Clarence Hall et al, *Man Enough to Care: Involving Men in Homebased Services for People Living with HIV/AIDS in Rural Zimbabwe*, (Congress on Public Health in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on August 25, 2006). This Africare's male empowerment project, "Man enough to care?" in rural Zimbabwe addresses imbalances between male and female care-giving for people living with HIV, by expanding men's roles in home-based care. The project has trained many men to be home-care volunteers and to provide basic nursing care, infection control and psychosocial support.

⁵⁷Mother Adela, SCTJM, *The Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary*, accessed on 05-12-2008 http://www.piercedhearts.org/mother_adela/pierced_hearts.htm

For the Catholic woman theologian Adela Galindo, for instance, Mary actively cooperated in giving birth at the cross through her maternal heart. Jesus' words: "Woman, behold your son" opened the Heart of Mary for her spiritual motherhood. Soon after, a soldier pierces the heart of Jesus. The opened heart of Mary receives those that the pierced heart of Jesus would reach with its redemptive power. The disciple is not named so that Mary can be mother to every 'disciple' of Jesus.

⁵⁸Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (eds.), *Blessed One*, 54.

⁵⁹Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 200.

⁶⁰Marina Warner, *Alone Of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1976), 223.

⁶¹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 297.

⁶²Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 297.

⁶³Mother Centres International Network for Empowerment, accessed on 10-07-2010. http://monikajaeckel.com/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2009/08/mc01mother_centers_around_the_world.pdf

Mother Centres are UN Accredited Best Practice for promoting healthy families and for the strengthening

of the capacity of civil society to revitalise local neighbourhoods and revive community life.

⁶⁴Mother Centres International Network, accessed on 10-07-2010.

⁶⁵Mother Centres International Network, accessed on 10-07-2010.

⁶⁶Mother Centres International Network, accessed on 10-07-2010.

⁶⁷Mother Centres International Network, accessed on 10-07-2010.

⁶⁸Mother Centres International Network, accessed on 10-07-2010.

⁶⁹Mother Centres International Network, accessed on 10-07-2010.

⁷⁰Mother Centres International Network, accessed on 10-07-2010.

⁷¹ Francis X. Clooney, *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary* (New York: Oxford University: 2005).

⁷² AsiaNews.it, accessed on 23-10-2010 <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/>

⁷³ RoseAnna Mueller, *Virgin of Guadalupe*.

⁷⁴ Tina Beattie, 'Marian Spirituality' in Philip Sheldrake (ed.), *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 425.

⁷⁵ Daniel Migliore, *Mary: A Reformed Theological Perspective*, 346.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, 296-297.

⁷⁷ Daniel Migliore, *Mary: A Reformed Theological Perspective*, 347.

⁷⁸ Daniel Migliore, *Mary: A Reformed Theological Perspective*, 346.

⁷⁹ Liturgia Horarum, *Stabat Mater dolorosa: At the Cross Her Station Keeping* [Translated by Fr. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)], accessed on 23-10-2010 <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/BVM/SMDolorosa.html>

⁸⁰ Liturgia Horarum, *Stabat Mater dolorosa: At the Cross Her Station Keeping* [Translated by Fr. Edward Caswall (1814-1878)], accessed on 23-10-2010. This bond of suffering becomes even more clear when the rest of the hymn is read:

O thou Mother! fount of love!
Touch my spirit from above,
make my heart with thine accord:

Make me feel as thou hast felt;
make my soul to glow and melt
with the love of Christ my Lord.

Holy Mother! pierce me through,
in my heart each wound renew
of my Savior crucified:

Let me share with thee His pain,
who for all my sins was slain,
who for me in torments died.

Let me mingle tears with thee,
mourning Him who mourned for me,
all the days that I may live:

Let me, to my latest breath,
in my body bear the death
of that dying Son of thine.

Virgin of all virgins blest!,

Listen to my fond request:
let me share thy grief divine;

Wounded with His every wound,
steep my soul till it hath swooned,
in His very Blood away;

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
lest in flames I burn and die,
in His awful Judgment Day.

Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence,
by Thy Mother my defense,
by Thy Cross my victory;

When my body dies,
let my soul be granted
the glory of Paradise. Amen

⁸¹William Most, *Ordinary Magisterium: On Mary's Immediate Cooperation in the Objective Redemption* (Manassas: Catholic Resources, 1994), 312-319. Ludwig Ott takes the extremely minimalist position and argues that Mary's co-operation is only in furnishing the humanity in which Jesus could die, a remote cooperation. Hers was "an indirect, remote cooperation" (316). Some German theologians, chiefly Koester, Semmelroth, and Mueller have argued that her role was only "active receptivity", just as putting out a hand (active) to receive what one had no part in producing (316). For Ivone Gebara, Jesus' suffering is no more important than that of anyone else who goes through the same torments. To claim otherwise only affirms male martyrdom as the only way to salvation. This confirms injustice toward women and humanity. Gebara believes her viewpoint makes the 'non-physical' crosses of Mary equal in value to those of Jesus. (Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 116-117).

⁸²Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (eds.), *Blessed One*, 50.

⁸³Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid*, 199.

⁸⁴Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid*, 200.

⁸⁵Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate: A Gynocentric Refiguration of Marian Symbolism in Engagement with Luce Irigaray* (Bristol: CCSRG, 1999), 99. In reference to the Annunciation scene, Beattie argues that either Mary can hypothetically say no, in which case her assent has salvific significance, or she is deprived of her freedom before God and in that case she is a lesser figure than Eve, who was created with the freedom to disobey.

⁸⁶Jacques Bur, *How to Understand the Virgin Mary* (London: CSM Press, 1982), 62.

⁸⁷Jacques Bur, *How to Understand the Virgin Mary*, 62.

⁸⁸St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary, Discourse IX: of the Dolours of Mary*, (provided by Catholic Information Network, Libreria Editrice, Vatican, 2009).

⁸⁹Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 118.

⁹⁰Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (eds.), *Blessed One*, 109.

⁹¹Adapted from Samson Phiri, *The Participation of Women in the Struggle with HIV/AIDS* (Queque: GMI Research Services, 2005), 45.

⁹²Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 110.

⁹³Joyce Rupp, *Your Sorrow Is My Sorrow: Hope and Strength in Times of Suffering*, accessed on 05-08-2008 <http://www.joycerupp.com/sorrow.html>

CHAPTER SIX

THE INCARNATIONAL ROLE OF MARY'S BODY AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I suggest women could be empowered against HIV/AIDS in their bodies through a theology based on the conception of Mary as empowered in her body, particularly through the role she played at the incarnation. I will draw from her figure some aspects which could inspire the empowerment of southern African women, and demonstrate their applicability. It is only fitting that feminist theology, which starts with bodily experience, should investigate and analyse the inhabitation of the virus in the physical body, its attack on women's bodies and the implications of this, and how society might change from shunning women's bodies as causes of infection to embracing them as means for overcoming infection. Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart state that from the instant when Mary agrees to give birth to Jesus, women's bodies become locations of revelation and redemptive action which began with the incarnation. They become a special means for the transformation of the world.¹ Tina Beattie also says:

Marian spirituality has the potential to express the joy of a renewed and redeemed creation. And as the one chosen to speak on behalf of all humankind in freely saying 'yes' to the incarnation, Mary affirms the authority, dignity and holiness of woman before God in the Christian story.²

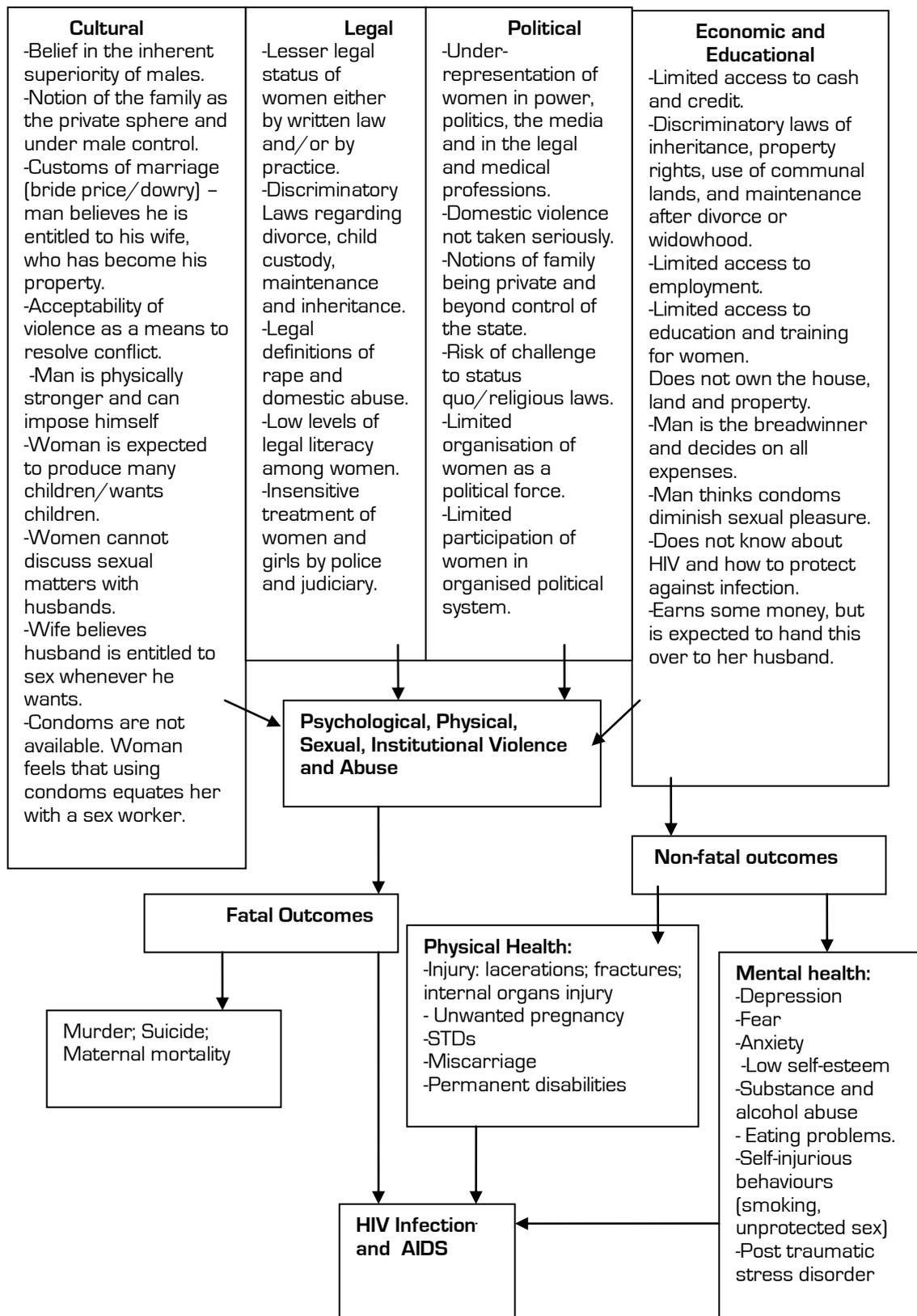
According to Isherwood, there are at least four different bodies: the physical or the individual – the lived experience of the body as self; the social - the representational use of the body as a symbol of nature; the political - which involves the regulation and control of the body; and the divine - which is the feminist subversive body.³ In this chapter I will

concentrate on the physical body of the individual woman, which however, is also related to the social, political and divine bodies. After briefly showing how HIV/AIDS impacts on women's bodies, I will go on to explain how African feminists view their bodies. My main arguments for women's empowerment are based on three subsections: Eve and Mary the New Eve, the dignity of women's birthing powers and the priestly ordination of women.

6.2 African Women's Bodies and HIV/AIDS

In every four young people living with HIV in Southern Africa, three are women.⁴ Until recently when infection rates have been recorded to be falling in some countries, more than one in five pregnant women were living with HIV. There are many reasons for this. Women's genitals 'hold' men's larger quantities of sexual fluids after intercourse for longer periods, and the semen naturally contains higher concentrations of the virus than the vaginal fluids.⁵ A woman's infection is also more likely to go untreated, because women's infections are not as visible as men's, and because of the stronger social stigma directed towards women who contract sexually transmitted infections. Other sexual diseases enable easier HIV infection. Women are also less likely to afford the nutritional requirements for good health;⁶ and girls are usually less educated and less knowledgeable about sex, their bodies and HIV/AIDS.⁷ Furthermore, the paying of the bride-price at marriage is often understood to be the purchase of a woman's reproductive and productive capacity which leaves her with little power over her own body and over property ownership.⁸

Some Factors that Perpetuate Abuse and Infection of Women's Bodies:⁹



Some women are also subjected to physical violence. It is not uncommon for men to beat-up partners who refuse intercourse or request the use of condoms, and some men get away with raping their wives.¹⁰ There is also a cultural tendency to give priority to male sexual pleasure. Some women use vaginal drying agents, which could damage the vaginal walls, increasing women's vulnerability to HIV transmission.¹¹ Such reasons and impacts are ongoing. The diagram above attempts to summarise them.

The diagram suggests that many forms of abuse of women leave them vulnerable to infection, and women's subjugation and powerlessness is manifested in the infected body. This inspires the idea of turning a woman's body into a battlefield for her liberation from infection, and into a source for empowerment.

6.3 African Feminists' Body Theology

I have not come across African feminists' body theology as such, but their understanding of their bodies largely falls somewhere between conservative Christian body theology and radical post-modern feminist body theology.¹² (My main sources for my arguments come from the position between conservative and liberal feminist body theology). On the one hand is the Christian traditionalist body theology, such as that of Pope John Paul II, which views a woman's body as essentially rooted in her motherly nature.¹³ For John Paul, this maternal nature, which makes a woman essentially different from a man, can be in the sense of physical motherhood or in the spiritual sense of self-giving. The pope interprets the purpose of the woman's sex organs as being uniquely designed for and fulfilled by the function of motherhood: "The whole exterior constitution of woman's body. . . [is] in close union with motherhood."¹⁴ The pope refers to modern society as "a culture of

death” in which integrity has been lost between man and woman as a result of objectification of one another in sexual relationships. He believes that women hold the key to social transformation and that “a greater presence of women in society . . . will force systems to be redesigned for the good of humanity.”¹⁵ For him, a committed relationship is where sexual union happens in the context of Christian traditional marriage and family setup. For the pope, in her motherhood, Mary represents the ‘woman’ as she was intended to be in creation.¹⁶

Though motherhood is profoundly an essential part of many African women, some have voiced concerns against some aspects implied in the pope’s feminist theology. Oduyoye, for instance, stresses that the idea that a sexually-active woman’s destiny is in married family life plays well into some African traditional structures that, at marriage, hand over ownership of a woman from her father to her husband. Because men usually have power which overrides that of women in the African traditional family setup, the theology of John Paul II could easily imply that a woman’s destiny is in men’s hands.¹⁷ African feminists have not made an outright onslaught on traditional marriage as such, but they do not want marriage to be a *cul-de-sac* (dead end) where they cannot escape infection. Joy Kwesiga argues that rather than bring up girls with a view to passing them on from one man’s rule to another in marriage, girls should be educated to freedom.¹⁸ Also, African women have cried foul that, instead of protecting them, the traditional marriage setup has exposed them to infection.¹⁹ Faithfulness to one partner has not worked for women because it is culturally acceptable for men to practise polygamy.²⁰ Further, the theology also indirectly demonises single mothers who are deemed to have had sexual relations outside marriage. Oduyoye and Gladys Mutangadura have argued for the empowerment of single mothers.²¹ For Gladys Mutangadura, women often become single mothers for

reasons beyond their control, and such mothers should not be stigmatised or marginalised by society.²²

On the other extreme end of feminist body theology is the view that the body is for pleasure and for subversiveness against the patriarchal status quo. The Queer and Indecent theology of Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid champions this view.²³ These theologians argue that gender relations need to be changed by defying the boundaries put in place by patriarchal institutions. They are also against biological essentialism. For them the significance of the body is in offering bodily performances which resist the social dictates of sexual and gendered behaviour. It is in sexual experimentation and play that gender roles are subverted and women gain a greater degree of freedom from gender's narrow and oppressive prescriptions.²⁴

In their incarnational theology, Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart state the importance of women's bodies for revelation and for the transformation of the world.²⁵ Of late, however, Isherwood has been merciless in her queer scrutiny of what she understands as the patriarchal traditional notion of Mary's body. She argues that Mary is an idealised and abstracted woman, who has no life of her own and who can therefore offer no real life to women.²⁶ She subversively describes Mary as a woman with breasts, but has been raped so continually and constantly by patriarchy that in place of a vagina she is now depicted with a phallus. To empower women, Mary should first be given back her human flesh and vagina.²⁷ For Althaus-Reid, Mary is not a real woman but 'a thing', 'a gas-like substance,' or a fairy tale of a woman.²⁸ Mary's famous response "let what you have said be done to me" has ultimately meant "to my body" for women. Mary's images must

be indecently “undressed” and her sexual organs openly exposed to illustrate the illusiveness of the idea that she can help to empower women.²⁹

The indecent theology propounded by Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, which seeks to indecently ‘undress’ Mary and to expose her sexual organs, is unlikely to appeal to southern African women, where Mary is popular as mother, and where motherhood is traditionally revered with awe as almost sacred. Culturally, Africans are generally conservative, and consider abhorrent any indecent sexual exposure of the body, let alone the indecent exposure of a mother’s body to her children.

Further, for African feminists, empowerment is not necessarily to be gained by subversion. Though the subject of pushing boundaries has been attractive to some, African feminism is not bent on the radical elimination of the patriarchal system. African feminism tends to distinguish between patriarchy and patriarchal sins and argues for a reestablishment of their traditional feminine roles in the largely patriarchal systems. According to Ifi Amadiume, “The recognition of the motherhood paradigm means that we do not take patriarchy as given, or as a paradigm.”³⁰ Rather than fight for the power to enjoy sex as pleasure, Nyambura Njoroge argues that African feminists fight for the power not to have sex when they judge it improper and unwise. They basically want men and women’s social roles and powers to be complementary, to be “different but equal.”³¹

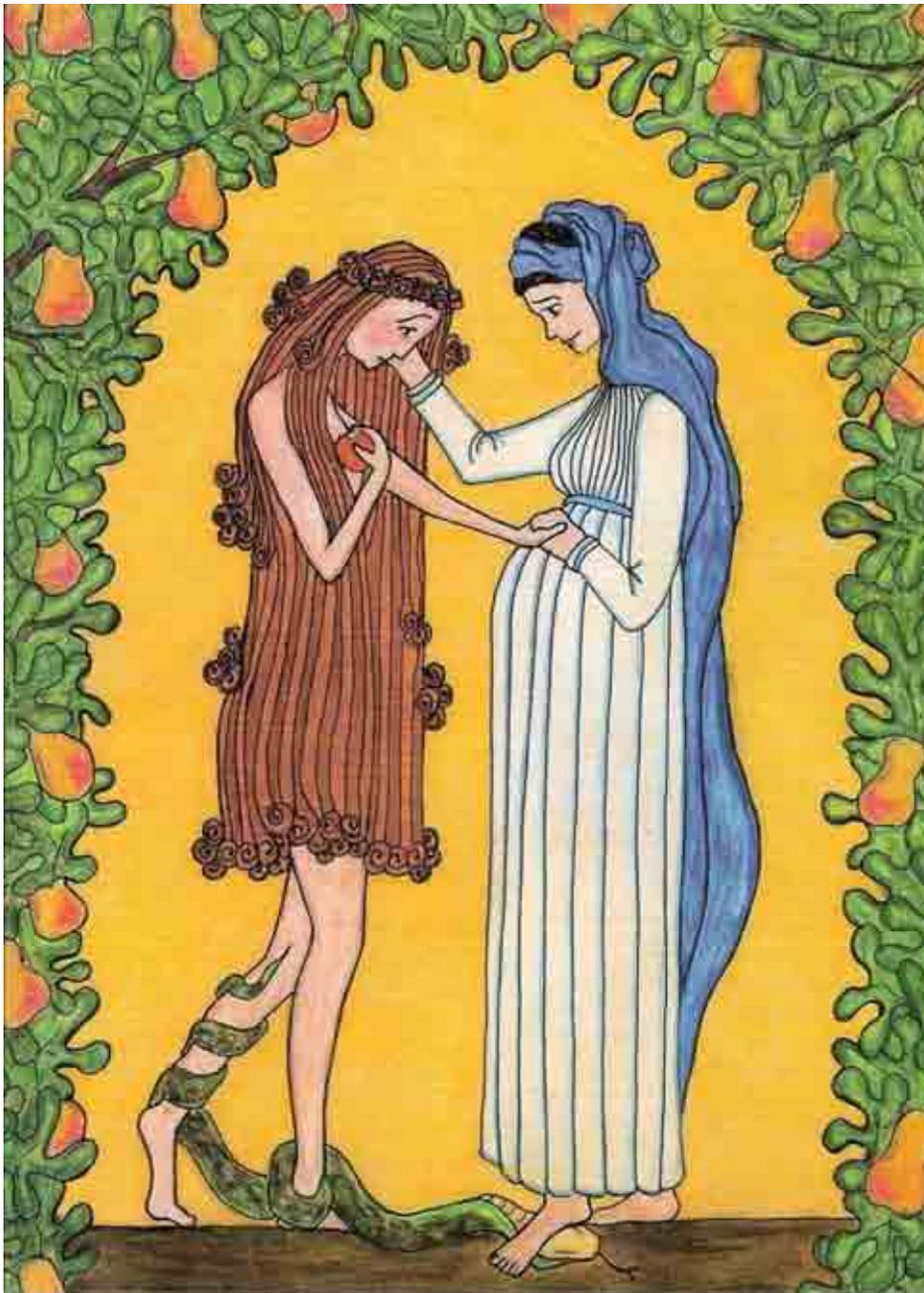
6.4 EVE, MARY AND WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV

6.4.1 Tina Beattie on Eve and Mary

This section draws out some empowering possibilities for southern African Christian women from the Eve-Mary theological relationship, particularly as interpreted by Tina Beattie.³² According to Beattie, to be born a woman is to confront a double evil: the natural evil such as natural sickness and death, and the evil of structural sin and androcentric privilege which results in women's exploitation and oppression. Using the symbols of Eve and Mary, Beattie seeks women's empowerment against structural sin and oppression.³³ She argues that women need Eve and Mary as symbols of pain and joy which are the complete reality of being a woman and sometimes a mother.³⁴ For her, however, Eve and Mary are not symbols of the opposition between good and evil, but of opposites brought together without loss of distinctiveness. In the incarnation, binary opposites are replaced with unity in difference – God and humankind, grace and nature, Eve and Mary. “Eve and Mary encounter one another in the middle ground where difference implies not conflict and opposition but relationality and mutuality. . . . a space of paradox. . . . where good and evil meet but are not necessarily reconciled.”³⁵ Woman discovers herself in the imaginative space between Eve's struggle and Mary's joy.

Beattie believes that Eve stands in solidarity with every victim of misogyny. She is the symbol of battered wives, victims of rape, women whose fertility is a misery and a trap. She is the “soulmate” of every woman who suffers through the deadly combination of sex and violence which fallen man experiences as the disordering of his masculine sexuality.³⁶ However, in the incarnation, God makes a new covenant with woman which restores her to her state of original goodness and communion with God. Eve is set free

from her association with death and evil through her identification with Mary, in which woman's suffering is not rejected; it is a grace-filled journey through a historical process of struggle, pain and joy, to the final recognition of the beauty of her own being in God.³⁷



Mary Consoles Eve³⁸

For Beattie, Mary symbolises the redemption of all women. Mary is a sign of women's liberation from Eve's suffering. The incarnation liberates woman from the role of the sinner.³⁹ It rejects a world in which woman stands condemned through the maternal association with death. The maternal flesh which, in a world of sin, is associated with corruption and death becomes a sign of purity and life in a world redeemed. Women are embodied in Mary, and the affirmation of woman's relationship to God is the first step in the liberation of all the oppressed. It is only when the personhood of woman is restored to the image and intimacy of God that the whole human race also becomes freed from its captivity to sin.⁴⁰

Beattie's theology could remind one of the association of women with the evils of AIDS. In southern Africa, there is a widespread association of women and death, where, first, AIDS is often referred to as a "woman's disease" because women are seen as HIV-snares, AIDS vectors, or AIDS-killers whose role is to lure men to their death through sexual attraction.⁴¹ Second, "AIDS has a woman's face."⁴² Most people who live with HIV are women. Also, HIV infection in family usually first comes to light when a mother tests positive during pregnancy. Following this, the child she carries, the father and some children may also test positive. The mother who first heralds the bad news is often blamed as the root-cause of the family's infections.⁴³ Where men are the known source of infection, their forgiveness comes much more easily than women's.⁴⁴ Further, the shortage of medicine and poor nutrition results in shorter life expectancies for poor women than for men.⁴⁵ The death of a mother could also mean short lives for her infected children; or greater poverty, poor education and insufficient parenting for them, and further vulnerability to infection. It could metaphorically mean the 'death of the family', which reinforces the association of woman with death.

First, Beattie's theology could help us to see, acknowledge and support women as life-giving. It helps us to refute the association of women with death. Southern African women predominantly associate sexual intercourse with life. According to UNAIDS, many married women get infected by their only lifetime partners in their openness to procreation.⁴⁶ They are infected at the moment of potential conception, when they give a gift of self - their own bodies - so that others, their children, can receive the gift of life. As opposed to causing death or killing, their gift is that of receiving and nurturing new life. Like Eve, the mother of the living, and like Mary, the disposition of these women is to bring forth life, not death. Their attitude to life is positive, not negative. Death comes due to other causes.

The stigma that associates women with death as HIV-killers is therefore misplaced. Just as Mary is the face of Eve's hope, she is also the face of every stigmatised woman's hope. If Eve is the face of the stigmatised and suffering woman, Mary's body is God's protest against this suffering.⁴⁷ Mary demonstrates that suffering is not God's will for the women, that their oppression is not the way things are meant to be. She cries out with every woman who struggles under HIV/AIDS and stigma. Rather than habitually blame women, men should accept blame where they are responsible for women's infection. An attitude of honesty could divert society's attention to the true root causes of women's infection and suffering, such as domination, violence and sexual exploitation.

Second, Beattie's theology could help us to realise that living with HIV need not lead to death. Just as Eve, who was associated with death, is now associated with life in Mary, so the struggles of southern African women should end with an abundance of life. With Mary women should strive to crush and vanquish the head of the HIV/AIDS 'serpent'.

To mother the living as Eve does is to defy the forces of death. With such a theology HIV could become conquerable and controllable, just as with other challenging diseases. Positive messages, such as that people with HIV can live long good lives, should be promoted. Through incarnation theology, a life-affirming theology and life-affirming attitudes should bring a turnaround in the lives of those readily giving up under HIV/AIDS burdens. Infected or affected women should be motivated to fight and regain their lives, and society should work for the provision of enough medication, hospital staff, clinics, food, and the elimination of stigma. Africans should spearhead the finding of an AIDS cure. In this way, Mary could become a sign of the restoration of women to Eve's condition of original goodness before the fall.⁴⁸

Third, Beattie's theology could help us to realise that protecting and empowering women is fundamental to conquering HIV/AIDS. According to Beattie, first the personhood of woman is restored to goodness, and then the whole human race becomes freed from evil.⁴⁹ Such a message could reflect how the destiny of southern Africans is written on women's bodies. Restoring a woman to her original goodness could also mean giving her decision-making powers and powers to change her situation. Should this happen, much good is likely to fall back into place. For instance, if through good medication infected mothers' lives are prolonged, infected family members are likely to have the care they need, and live longer and productive lives for their own good and that of their families. Children, particularly girls, are likely to enjoy good parenting and to continue with education, and family decline in poverty could be arrested. The family could be spared from its own 'death', and a reversal of fortunes could result. Thus the suffering of women's bodies must come to an end for the good of the whole society.

Fourth, the theology that reconciles Eve and Mary could also help women to reflect on their own shortcomings which could indirectly support systems that promote infection. Like Eve women often flirt with power, are vulnerable to temptation, and sometimes willing conspirators in the structures of women's subjugation and infection. They are not always innocent victims, which would leave them without a sense of accountability for their deeds. In Eve women might find a representation of autonomy and accountability which would encourage them to recognise and acknowledge their failures and sins within the HIV-infection enhancing structures. Eve could point to southern African women's anguish and predicaments of their own making, and penalties of their own faults and failures. Eve could also point to false consciousness, as when women desire that men dominate them, due to an atmosphere where a woman has known nothing else but being dominated. In Mary, however, such causes of women's oppression are toppled. In her body at the incarnation, Mary is the culmination of Eve's becoming, in a way that affirms rather than negates such experiences of Eve's long journey from the gates of Eden to the gates of paradise.⁵⁰

6.4.2 Women's Bodies as Sources of Power to Overcome HIV/AIDS

Women need not only be restored to goodness, they should take the lead in fighting HIV/AIDS. Through her body, a woman has become a channel of revelation and redemption. Mary, the new Eve, was granted power to overcome the evil one: "She will crush your head" (Gen 3:15). Through solidarity with Mary women receive superior strength to combat the enemy, becoming God's first allies on the way of salvation. Women's bodies analogically 'embody' the redemptive Christ in different ways, and every woman in her body could be God's first ally against evil.

This ability, in Mary and in women in general, to overcome evil through their bodies, is explained by Barbara Jones.⁵¹ For her, Mary is not only a birth-giver. By birthing Jesus, Mary shows she is strong, empowered, and makes political and individual decisions with her body that are radical for the reformation and transformation of society. Mary “is intelligent and able to think in clear and complex ways.”⁵² When Gabriel visits Mary (Luke 1:26-38), Mary “listens, discusses the practical question of her virginity, and then not only accepts God’s plan . . . but also actively joins in the plan.”⁵³ She trusts her own discernment, and does not question the truth of the angel’s appearance. She searches the right choices for her, not elsewhere, but within herself with God’s assistance. She is able to make decisions based on her own life values and purposes. Her free choice is founded on whom God is and on who she truly is.⁵⁴ She decides not to go with the ‘crowd’ - the customs or even cultural expectations. She is her own person who executes her assertiveness skilfully. From this, Mary demonstrates she is gifted with an ingenious, creative, and imaginative side.⁵⁵

Taking Mary as a model, the incarnation could mean women’s creativity, their feminine genius in coming up with solutions to problems, and the implied freedom to exercise their ability to think and be original. Beginning in their bodies, women should become free to actualise or incarnate God’s ‘saving word’ against the pandemic. Mary, who defined her own future by deciding to give birth to Jesus, shows that women are endowed with the power, based on their own experiences, to define their own lives against oppression. Women should be encouraged to be original in fighting HIV/AIDS: in their writings, leadership styles and decision-making roles. The dignity that women earned through Mary’s incarnational role also affirms their authority over matters of sexuality which affect their bodies.

In southern Africa, there is need for greater acknowledgement of women's bodily experiences, for more affirmation of women's true capability in the HIV/AIDS struggle, and for a bigger feminine platform on HIV/AIDS issues. Women, whose bodies are central in the unfolding experience of the pandemic, should be given greater space and power to speak. Because of their bodily experiences, women could be better equipped to understand certain aspects of HIV/AIDS. Their standpoint is essential for examining their systemic oppressions in a society that often devalues their knowledge. Their location as a subordinated group allows them to see and understand the world in ways different from men's and to challenge any existing male-biased conventional wisdom. The disproportionate impacts of HIV/AIDS on their bodies make women's experiences, instead of men's, the more appropriate point of departure for fighting the pandemic.

Besides, women often naturally hold a different type of knowledge and insight. Their emotions, ways of doing things and reasoning are often different. Their feminine tendencies and inclinations are characteristically different. Like men, women's purpose, strengths and weaknesses are often reflected in the physical make-up of their bodies. These distinct differences mean men and women often understand, express and feel the impacts of HIV/AIDS in their bodies differently. For instance, because life begins within a woman, women often have a better sense of modesty and sanctity to guard against exploitation or objectification of the other person. Women's openness to life sometimes extends to their capacity to unify society towards a life-giving goal. Men often cannot match them when it comes to protection of life and the care of the vulnerable – the unborn children, the weak, those needing palliative care, the poor and the outcast. Many men could learn from women in areas of emotive capacity, unselfish love, commitment, communication, intuition, interpersonal relations and empathy.

Without ruling out exceptions, as men in southern Africa, we generally need to learn from women that life is a gift and not a mere thing a person can claim as his exclusive property; that a person is recognised, valued and loved for what she is, and not an object for pleasure or power; and that women are persons with an inviolable dignity. The HIV/AIDS pandemic in southern Africa is a manifestation of the failure of many patriarchal societal features. In the present scene of violence, discord and destruction the patriarchal social structure is found wanting, and its standards and values are unacceptable. Patriarchy has not succeeded in controlling the primitive passions, or in enabling humanity to become humane. Rather than stress dominance and logic, there is need for greater introspection, recognition and embracing of feminine faculties; for a new pattern of life by feminine and maternal impulses. The understanding and acknowledgment of women's bodies and capabilities could contribute to this change.

6.5 THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN'S BODIES

The conception of Mary as one who experienced all the birth pangs that birthing women normally go through could inspire respect, reverence, appreciation and even a sense of indebtedness to women's biological make-up and mothering powers by society.⁵⁶ In this section I argue that a Marian theology rooted in the dignity of women's biological make-up could be helpful in redeeming the female body and southern Africans from HIV/AIDS. This theology calls for a celebration of Mary's motherhood in her female carnality.⁵⁷ The theology could help society to connect the beauty of motherhood to the dignity of their maternal bodies.

The view that women's infection has to do with lack of reverence for their bodies finds a supporting tone in Sarah Boss's theology. Boss argues that lack of respect for women, particularly mothers, has led to the degeneration of society in the western world. Boss draws a sharp contrast between pornography and the Virgin in Majesty. For Boss, the growth of pornography corresponds to the decline of respect for Mary as Virgin in Majesty. Pornography proclaims the body to be simply "flesh without spirit, body without soul, and merely an object," while the image of Virgin in Majesty is meant to disclose the mystery of the unification of "the spirit and flesh" in "a sacred vessel."⁵⁸ Boss argues that Mary and Christ can be used to end domination and oppression of women.⁵⁹ The coming of Christ into this world through the Motherhood of Mary shows that, through Jesus and Mary, the world can be led to restoration of God's original plan.

Pornography is simply a symptom of a bigger problem - that of seeing women's bodies as instruments for male gratification, a problem at the heart of women's infection in southern Africa. Apparently, when some men demand unprotected sex, the attitude is like that of a pornographer. The woman is seen as simply a body to satisfy one's cravings, and not a human being with an equally valuable life and soul. The body is separated from spirit and is objectified for the pursuit of pleasure alone.

Southern Africa needs a revision of the whole concept of woman, a revolutionary change in attitude, and a new understanding of women's bodies. HIV/AIDS thrives on what it means for us to be 'woman' in relation to 'man' and vice versa. All the stages of growth a woman goes through from birth to old age need revision: how she learns to care for herself; what responsibilities she gets at home; who she respects and how; who she is protected from; how she relates to her brothers, uncles and other males and how they

relate to her. The form of education a girl gets at school, what subjects are suggested for her and what she aspires to be - these all need to be reconsidered. All cultural constructs, mental and emotional images of 'woman' need to be put under scrutiny and questioned. In all this, any suggestion that the feminine subordinates to the masculine needs to be fished out and discarded. A sustained campaign for the respect of women's bodies needs to be undertaken by society at large. Below are illustrations of such a campaign based on feminine powers.

First, women's blood could symbolise peace as opposed to sexual violence. Rene Girard, an anthropological philosopher, suggests there is an association between men's fear of menstrual blood and their sexual violence. He argues that the male imagination feeds on the association between blood, sex and violence: "Sexuality is impure because it has to do with violence."⁶⁰ This is not just in clearly violent sex acts, but in childbirth and in violence motivated by sexual unfaithfulness, for example, there is an intrinsically violent facet to sexuality. He suggests that women are seen as some threat because of their fertile bodies which bleed in a way which reminds men of their own love for violence, which then masks itself as sex and is projected onto women's bodies.

There is much violence surrounding sexual activity in southern Africa. Seemingly, some men infect women out of sheer cruelty, while for others it could be the need to dominate.⁶¹ Some men get away with such behaviour. The virginal conception of Christ, however, could work as a response to such attitudes and against the coalition of sex, violence and power. Christ was conceived peacefully, for instance, if compared to the births of some Greek gods that happen out of violent sexual acts.⁶² His conception in the absence of a male sexual act could symbolise the ushering of an era of peace. The virgin

birth shatters the sexual pattern of history and sets free the fertile female body to play a constructive role for humankind. However, the virginal incarnation does not mean the end of sex, but of an alliance between sex and violence by which men wield their supremacy over women. Mary's virginity could symbolise the restoration of peaceful coexistence between men and women, and the breaking of the stranglehold of violence and infections.

If Southern Africans expose the capacity of sex to act as a mask for violence, if they publicly name and shame the connection between violence, sex and women's infection, this could help to liberate the goodness of sex. Promoting an understanding of the virgin birth as symbolising peace could be an important step in the liberation of women from men's attitude towards the female body.

Secondly, besides peace, women's blood could symbolise redemption. A South African theologian, Lyn Holness, suggests a wider understanding of redemption wherein women's activities and agency are included.⁶³ She declares Mary's or a woman's act of birthing redemptive in itself. In an attempt to repair damages caused by apartheid on women, Holness argues that if Mary's birthing is made part of Christology, all instances relating to the shedding of women's blood would be viewed in the light of redemption, which would enhance reverence for the natural cycles of women on which life depends. She argues that the shedding of blood by Christ (a man) on the cross parallels the shedding of blood by Mary (a woman) when she gives birth to Christ. In Philippians 2, it is described how Christ "emptied himself, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross." For this, God exalted him. Holness sees this experience as paralleling the birthing process. Mary's shedding of blood in birthing is part of the redemptive paradigm. Where women have lost their lives while birthing, where

menstruation has been associated with discomfort, and where women and girls have been violated through sexual abuse, incorporating Mary's birthing into the Christological paradigm would mean that all this shedding of women's blood becomes part of redemption, thus "redeeming" women in the process.⁶⁴ She argues that this theology can reverse instances of history's destructive moments, including customs that have for long rendered women unclean for shedding blood.⁶⁵

Holness' views challenge the lack of meaning often attached to women's experiences of fertility and life. They reverse the association of women's blood with negativity to life. The easy infection of women who may want to give birth may be one result of such negativity. Instead of experiencing birth-giving as life-enhancing, some women experience a cultural oppression, a devaluation of their birth-giving event, and a lack of respect for motherhood by society within the HIV/AIDS era. Holness' theology could help restore honour to women, and inspire a sense of sanctity of birthing and feminine powers.

Thirdly, redemption from HIV/AIDS could be viewed as beginning in the womb. Luise Schottroff argues that Mary's pregnancy with the king of the world shows how God links with the people, namely, where they are most helpless and fragile.⁶⁶ Mary is among the poor of her people, the country population of Galilee (Luke 4:26) who suffer daily due to economic hardships. She is also a Jewish woman, and one of the colonised people living in distress (Luke 4:18). Because Mary is a woman, she has little respect both socially and culturally. The pregnant Mary represents all the powerless and despised women, whose bodies God does not overlook (Luke 1:46-54). It is God's plan that the redemption of the world starts "in the womb of a poverty ridden woman and not in executive

boardrooms.”⁶⁷ For Schottroff, this shows that women are seismographs for changes in culture, and their bodies are the places where conflicts become unmistakably evident.

To conquer HIV/AIDS, we must allow God’s revolution to happen through bonding with people where they are most vulnerable and weak - in the wombs and in women’s birthing energies on which all depend for survival. God bestows high value on our endangered world through the pregnant woman. God’s salvific powers begin their manifestation where men are happy to plant their seeds of dominion. Yet our lives are womb-centred and to tamper with wombs is to tamper with life. Our future could be written off or affirmed in the woman’s womb. We must evolve to a HIV-free society by looking for God’s law and closeness in the vulnerable bodies of women. The day no pregnant woman shall be infected is the day a new AIDS-free generation shall begin. The womb should be honoured and held sacred. If men become humble, and respect women in their self-giving, we will realise God is not far from us. The royal reign of God, which began with the pregnancy of a poor woman, will also show its powers over HIV/AIDS.

Fourthly, women’s bodily changes are important for the needed changes in southern Africa. According to Una Kroll, a woman’s body is very flexible and adaptable to changes compared to a man’s. The developments of the breasts, menstruation, pregnancy, the menopause, are stages in a woman’s life with which the body must cope.⁶⁸ The inability to control menstrual regularity has often been understood as symbolising the powerlessness of women to control their lives. Yet, for Kroll, women have realised that vulnerability, limitation and defencelessness are both sources of power and the root for a higher form of living. When women adapt to their natural rhythms instead of working against them, they become flexible, adoptable and practical. Physical birth also has huge

spiritual benefits, enabling most women to go along with life and a greater consciousness of God's creativeness in their lives. When women lose blood from the womb, it is usually a "sign of life, of hope, of fulfilment, of completion."⁶⁹ (For infected women, it is a means of lessening the viral load in blood). On the other hand, whenever men bleed, it is a warning that they could die. Because men are not subject to regular reminders, they often arrogantly dice with death and assume that they have the right to dominate women whom they deem "weaker."⁷⁰

Kroll's explanation might give insight into why, while women seem to strive hard to avoid infection, some men seem not to fear it or care. For instance, not to use a condom during sex is often considered a sign of bravery and manliness. Such arrogance is dicing with death. Men, however, could learn from womanly wisdom so that together they may contribute to the welfare of each other. Men need to re-evaluate the use of the male body, based on the female body, including its birth-giving and menstrual phenomena. This means first appreciating women's bodies, their blood and all the changes that happen to their bodies.

Melissa Raphael also argues that menstrual energy incapacitates patriarchal phallic powers, and re-sacralises what patriarchy has defiled.⁷¹ Though premenstrual tension can cause irritability for women, that irritability can be "a spiritual-political irritation" agitating social change. It makes women highly spiritually aware, introspective and creative, and generates in women the need for psychological and political change.⁷² Menstruation is a basis of knowledge, the source of a "religio-political shift" in which women and nature have become speaking subjects, unlike in patriarchal religions where only the male God and men do the talking. It is even the primary medium of divine

regenerative energy.⁷³ Patriarchal taboos against women's blood have barred women from prophetic inspiration and from freedom of procreative choice. However, maternal reproductive power includes and transcends female biology and becomes part of periodic "rhythms of cosmic creation, destruction and re-creation."⁷⁴ For this reason, rather than disqualify women, menstrual energy qualifies them for higher religious status.⁷⁵ Thus in allowing the needed changes in southern Africa, women should be allowed the platform of expression of their knowledge from their menstrual energies.

Furthermore, women's pregnancy contrasts with the objectification of one another. The HIV/AIDS virus thrives on faulty relationships which see the other as an object, a thing or an item for selfish use. However, from women we learn that life is shared. From motherhood life begins with a twosome. John Hughes stresses that we do not start life as monads but as organisms in relationship, who seek not the destruction of the other but recognition and selfhood with and through one another. Our life begins in proportions which transcend the anatomical confines of our body towards an infinite destination from an infinite beginning.⁷⁶ For Berner-Hurbins, "We grow in our mother's bodies and at the same time flow into our mothers' field of energy."⁷⁷ We may even assume that we are the same thing as our mother's body around us, and fail to notice any difference as her field of energy flows into ours and fuse with it.⁷⁸ For Elaine Storkey:

Pregnancy is . . . the giving of one's body to the life of another. It is sharing of all that we have, our cell structure, our blood stream, our food, our oxygen. It is saying 'welcome' with every breath, and every heartbeat. And for many mothers that welcome is given irrespective of the demands made on one's comfort, health or ease of life. For the demands of this hospitality are greater than almost any of our own, and the growing foetus is made to know that here is love, here are warm lodgings, and here is a place of safety.⁷⁹

In our times of rampant infection, women's hospitality, outstanding at pregnancy, could also be extended to one another. Mary exercises such hospitality by visiting Elizabeth. She is hospitable to Jesus, but also to Elizabeth and John to whom she brings Jesus (Luke 1:44). Similarly, empowering mothers or women so that they make important decisions and act upon them could be an important means of forming the society for mature relationships that have genuine concern for the other, and could lead to happier and far more harmonious patterns of life. Women apparently have the power to transform society so that people may no longer treat one another as objects. According to Evelyn Acworth, where a mother's powers are exercised, greater awareness is likely to be given to human values,⁸⁰ and to social stability where social values protect its members.

6.6 WOMEN'S ORDINATION

6.6.1 Mary and Women as Priests

Priestly ordination is another area where women could be empowered in their bodies against HIV/AIDS. There are very few ordained women ministers in southern Africa, and more ordinations of women to priesthood would enhance greater representation in social leadership against women's infection. It would empower them as people's representatives before God and as powerful mediators between God and people. For southern African women, this would be a restoration to their traditional priestly duties. According to Musimbi Kanyoro,

. . . the powers of healing, preaching and spiritual direction, typically understood by the Christian Church to be priestly duties, are powers traditionally exercised by women and men in African societies. If there is to be any general picture of African women in ordained ministries, an inclusive study of the religious roles played by women in different types of societies in Africa is imperative.⁸¹

The International Catholic Online Authority on Women's Ministries⁸² asserts that throughout the centuries the faithful have devoted themselves to Mary as a priest. The faithful intuitively understood that Mary, though a woman, shared in Jesus' priesthood more than anybody else. The feminists justify their claim for Mary's priesthood using four major arguments.

First, they contest that, as her relationship to Elizabeth shows, Mary descended from the royal tribe of Judah and from the priestly tribe of Levi. Jesus derived his priesthood from her.⁸³ Second, Mary exercised priestly functions, especially the offering of Jesus as a sacrifice both at the presentation in the temple (Luke 2:22-40) and on Calvary (John 19:25).⁸⁴ Third, from Mary and Jesus came the Eucharist. Only Mary and Jesus could say, 'This is my body; this is my blood' to Jesus' body and blood.⁸⁵ Fourth, Mary obtains pardon of sins. Intercession and obtaining forgiveness of transgressions were understood to be specifically priestly roles (Heb 5:1). As mother of Jesus she also mediated between God and man in her body.⁸⁶

These arguments could strongly inspire women's ordination. Sidney Callahan adds that from the history of Marian devotion, one can conclude that gender is less significant than charity and doing God's will. In Marian devotion, Mary's gender does not limit her in how she serves God. Rather, Marian devotion shows that "Love of God and neighbour, like wisdom and truth, knows no gender."⁸⁷ It validates Mary's female human nature and the female body in general. For her, Mary's life and actions are a model of women's full equality and emancipation within the church.⁸⁸ Gender identity is transcended because Mary is the first disciple. She is a type and model for every faithful Christian believer, whether male or female.

The strong connection between Mary's motherhood and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross which points to her priesthood merits further mentioning. Boss asserts that Mary's fiat at the annunciation is so priestly that it illuminates Christ's surrender of himself on the cross.⁸⁹ In a powerful Marian analogy, Ambrose says of Christ, "he is a virgin who bore us in his womb; he is a virgin who brought us forth; he is a virgin who nursed us with his own milk."⁹⁰ Often the cross is called the first Eucharist proper, so that Mary and other women, who were with her near the cross, when apparently most disciples had fled, are often referred to as the first priests.⁹¹

Maria Clara Bingemer links this connection of sacrifice and mothering with women in general and declares that all women are priestly because of their motherly or 'self-emptying' powers. She argues:

It is the women who possess in their bodiliness the physical possibility of performing the divine Eucharistic action. In the whole process of gestation, childbirth, protection, and nourishing of a new life, we have the sacrament of the eucharist, the divine act, happening anew . . . Breaking the bread and distributing it, having communion in the body and blood of the Lord until he comes again, means for women today reproducing and symbolizing in the midst of the community the divine act of surrender and love . . .⁹²

Bingemer then extends the creative actions of women's bodies beyond giving birth to other actions that provide liberation for others:

Woman's body, eucharistically given to the struggle for liberation, is really and physically distributed, eaten and drunk by those who will - as men and women of tomorrow - continue the same struggle. We almost hear the words 'take eat this is my body' as we picture women standing against the many faces of oppression that afflict them.⁹³

Bingemer is writing in the context of women struggling for liberation, and her ideas are applicable to those struggling for liberation from HIV/AIDS. They too have, in their

bodiliness, the physical possibility of performing the priestly eucharistic action. Their sacrifice and self-emptying is notable when they do most of the care-giving tasks, carry most of the blame and are last considered for treatment or nutritional diet. The words ‘take, eat, this is my body’ should be heard where infection is only a conclusion to a complicated life of violence and poverty. Most of the suffering happens to them, and often they volunteer where sacrifice is needed. What is missing from the women, particularly the infected women, is sacramental ordination.

6.6.2 Priestly Ordination of Infected Women

From the viewpoint of liberation theology of disability, the body of Jesus, revealed to his followers at his resurrection as tortured and perforated yet perfect, could have a huge positive impact on infected women, though they are not necessarily disabled. In his resurrected state, Christ has ‘impaired’ hands and feet, and a pierced side. For Nancy Eiesland, he rises from the dead with a body reshaped by injustice and sin. He fulfils the promise of the incarnation that God is with us, embodying the full contingency of human life.⁹⁴ Further, the disabled God, in revealing true humanity, demonstrates that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of impairment or corruption. Jesus the corrupted God is a ‘survivor’ who embraces the ambiguity of life and embodiment without retreating into despair.⁹⁵

About the Eucharist, Eiesland writes:

‘Do this in remembrance of me’. Who is the one we remember in the Eucharist? It is the disabled God who is present at the Eucharist table - the God who was physically tortured, arose from the dead, and is present in heaven and on earth, disabled and whole . . . For in Jesus’ resurrection, the full and accessible presence of

the disabled God is among us in our continuing human history, as people with disabilities, as the temporarily able-bodied, as church, and as communion of struggle.⁹⁶

This disabled God is also among those living with HIV/AIDS. These are people whose bodies have also been tortured and marked with signs of torture in the form of the virus permanently living in them. This idea of the disabled God in the Eucharist seems to exert an irresistible pull to the altar on women living with HIV. In the sense that both Christ's body and theirs are scarred by evil in the world, women living with HIV relate more closely to Christ's body than those whose bodies are considered whole. In this sense, a deliberate option to ordain those living with HIV could enrich the church. The church is impoverished without the infected at the altar. The perforated body of Christ speaks volumes about how the church should be in communion with those scarred by oppression and subjugation. Christ, who spent a good part of his ministry healing bodies, chose to rise from the dead with a body that identifies with the scarred. The church in its present state is not a perfect church, and this should also be reflected by the status of those who stand at the altar. The church should become a communion of struggle with infected women by giving them priestly roles.

Ordaining infected women could change the Eucharist liturgies to honour women's bodies and their roles in a more visible and practical way. This is needed in southern Africa, where dehumanisation of women through their bodies has taken centre stage. Women should use the Eucharistic liturgy and rituals to reclaim their bodies, senses, emotions and their bodily dignity. Those who feel they have been abused by the presence of the virus inside their bodies could rediscover a new sense of embodiment and connectedness by making use of the senses of touch, taste and smell in the Eucharistic rituals that reconnect them with people and with God. In a culture where women's bodies

are violated, ridiculed, controlled and commercialised, this could affirm women's bodily integrity and holiness and assert the respect they deserve.

It could send out the message that women's bodies are not for misuse and disposal. They are life-giving and sources of life. The association of HIV positive women with death or with what is abhorrent could be countered, and a true unprejudiced understanding could be cultivated. Their ordination could also support the view that having HIV is not the same as suffering from AIDS, and that people living with HIV can live normal lives.

The ordinations would more directly counter the stigma of women living with HIV. The ordained women would be symbols of openness, of the clear exposure of all that is taboo in talking about infection. Their ordination could enhance discussion, and the shaming of all the wrong that men do which society condones, and could encourage action to end it all. It could be a protest that not all people are happy with the way culture and society has defined women's bodies, and an appeal to all people of good will to see the evil side of women's infection and to act against it.

Such ordinations could encourage openness for treatment and garner support for the provision of women's treatment needs. If women living with HIV become ordained leaders, they will most likely get most of the support they need for medication, just as it often is the case with some male priests living with HIV.⁹⁷ The care women leaders are likely to get may even set the norm for equal treatment for all HIV-positive women in society. In leadership positions, the women priests will be in the driving seat in campaigning for such treatment.

Their ordination would also speak out against the historical oppression of women in general. Where women have been subjugated, this would speak out loudly and clearly that subjugation is wrong. A call for justice comes from the disabled God's experience of torture, and acts of injustice are also inscribed on the bodies of many infected people. A long history of lack of power and poverty has contributed to women's infection. On the altar, the sight of a woman openly living with HIV lifting up Christ's body could be a huge symbolic outcry for their justice.

Giving infected women that priestly platform of reverence will be morally supportive to those unfairly infected who are victims of social presumption. The thinking that the HIV-positive have done wrong is often deeply ingrained in society. The underlying message will be that judging a person living with HIV is wrong. The ordinations could also help to bring to repentance those who proudly consider themselves uninfected due to their own intelligence and better self-care. Such ordinations would also signify solidarity and reconciliation: God among humankind, those with HIV and those without.

The uninfected will also be challenged to come to terms with the vulnerabilities and weaknesses in their own bodies. According to Eiesland, for the able-bodied, "developing empathy for people with disabilities means identifying with their own real bodies, bodies of contingency and limits. Positive body awareness comes not from pursuing an ideal but from accepting the reality that bodies evolve, become ill and disabled, and die."⁹⁸ Such ordinations will make the bold statement that we are all mortal and limited. They could express our acceptance that our ordinary lives incorporate contingency and difficulty. Such humility could lead to more respect for others and healthier societal attitudes.

The worship of a bodily impaired God has always been a scandal to some, and the presidency of infected people at Eucharistic celebrations is unlikely to appeal to all. However, their ordination and leadership of worship could be a strong reminder to all that the evil which Jesus came to overcome is still rampant. It could be a practical reminder that Christians' duty to fight evil has not been achieved yet, and that society has not yet fully engaged itself in fighting all that promotes infection in women.

Ordaining women living with HIV, however, should be a lot more than just a repudiation of injustice. More importantly, it should be an affirmation of the potency of their bodies. The Eucharist symbolises that our non-conventional bodies cannot be reduced to artefacts of injustice and sin. What should be discernable on women's bodies is not only the ravages of injustice and pain, but also the reality of surviving with dignity. In women priests would be recognised the image of God. In Christ would be the affirmation of their non-conventional bodies. In the Eucharist, we encounter the disabled God, who displayed the signs of abuse and physical injury, not as a demonstration of failure and defect, but in affirmation of connection and strength.⁹⁹ Such ordinations could find inspiration from Mary the first woman priest and the mother of sorrows, who, though she did not suffer HIV-infection, also suffered many injustices and pains in her body.¹⁰⁰

6.7 Conclusion

Southern African women's bodies have become the place where social injustice, inequality and oppression are imprinted in capital letters that spell HIV/AIDS. Yet God has demonstrated from the incarnation that from a woman's body is the power to overcome evil and to restore creation to original goodness. That restoration begins in the

woman's body itself. In southern Africa, such revolutionary capabilities of women need to be urgently brought into action. The truth of Mary, who through her womanhood split open the world and brought forth its redeemer, must be rediscovered on the bodies of the present-day women in the HIV/AIDS context. Her heroism casts a light in which we could see more clearly the truth of women's lives and capabilities. It is up to southern Africans to accept her in her powerful depiction and to allow her courage to start a chain reaction that draws them out of the pandemic. My next chapter argues that conceptualising Mary as a powerful and autonomous virgin could inspire our society and Christian women to freedom and autonomy.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 11.
- ²Tina Beattie, 'Marian Spirituality', 426. As stated in the previous chapter, for Tina Beattie, Mary had the freedom to say 'no' to God at the incarnation, otherwise she would be a lesser figure than Eve, who was created with the freedom to disobey (cf. Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 99).
- ³Lisa Isherwood, 'Sex and Body Politics: Issues for Feminist Theology' in Lisa Isherwood (ed.), *The Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 22.
- ⁴UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, iv.
- ⁵Médecins Sans Frontières, *Post Test Clubs in Nairobi, Kenya: Towards a Model for PLHIV Grassroots Support* (MSF Artsen Zonder Grenzen, Belgium, April 2008).
- ⁶Sue Holden, *Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS*, 11.
- ⁷UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 5.
- ⁸UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 53.
- ⁹Adapted from Suzanne Maman, *Lifetime Partner Violence* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 123.
- ¹⁰UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15.
- ¹¹K. Kun, 'Vaginal drying agents and HIV transmission', 94.
- ¹²P. Bruce, "The Mother's Cow," 203.
- ¹³Pope John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis* (Boston: St Paul's Books and Media, 1981), 144-5.
- ¹⁴Pope John Paul, *Original unity of Man and Woman*, 147.
- ¹⁵Pope John Paul, *Original unity of Man and Woman*, 147.
- ¹⁶Pope John Paul, *Original unity of Man and Woman*, 147.
- ¹⁷P. Bruce, "The Mother's Cow," 203.
- ¹⁸Joy Kwesiga, *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002).
- ¹⁹UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15.
- ²⁰UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15.
- ²¹ Bruce, "The Mother's Cow," 203.
- ²²Gladys B. Mutangadura, 'Gender, HIV/AIDS and Rural Livelihoods', 368.
- ²³Lisa Isherwood, 'Our Lady of Perpetual Succour: Mother of Phallic Fetishes? Queering the Queen of Heaven' in Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips (eds.), *Post Christian Feminism: a Critical Approach* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 121.
- ²⁴Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, 'Thinking Theology and Queer Theory' in *Feminist Theology*, vol. 15, no. 3, (2007), 302-314.
- ²⁵Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, 11
- ²⁶Lisa Isherwood, 'Our Lady of Perpetual Succour', 121.
- ²⁷Lisa Isherwood, 'Our Lady of Perpetual Succour', 121. It appears Isherwood implies that one can no longer imagine Mary without picturing her being raped. To restore her feminine image, the organs used in the rape have to be removed - that is, patriarchy has to stop using Mary for their own purposes.
- ²⁸Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 39.
- ²⁹Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 73. Note that Isherwood and Althaus-Reid's views contrast with that of John Hughes, who argues that Mary shows she has emotion and a human understanding of herself as embodied because she can be frightened, joyful,

concerned and can be hurt. She gives birth and keeps important messages in her heart and ponders about them. Where need be, she uses her body to flee with her son, to find him and restores him under her wisdom and guidance. [John Hughes, *Marian Prayers* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1999), 47].

³⁰Signe Arnfred, 'Simone De Beauvoir in Africa', 15. Rather than wholly get rid of patriarchy, Amadiume prefers to talk of matriarchy or "a shift of focus from man at the centre and in control, to the primacy of the role of the mother/sister in the economic, social political and religious institutions." This matriarchy, however, should be viewed "not as a totalitarian system – that is the total rule governing a society - but as a structural system in juxtaposition with another system in a social structure" (16).

³¹Nyambura J. Njoroge, 'The Missing Voice: African Women Doing Theology' in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, vol. 4, no.8, (1997), 77-83.

³²There are a number of feminist critics of the Eve-Mary theological relationship. For Elizabeth Johnson, it is centred on the Madonna-whore syndrome which exalts the symbol of the spiritual feminine but denigrates the sexual, maternal, carnal reality of actual women in the concrete. It allows men to love and revere their ideal of woman in Mary, while ignoring and dominating concrete women. (Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 25) [Note that for Beattie, however, Mary and Eve are not symbols of opposition, but of opposites reconciled]. Beattie's Marian feminist theology also comes out as quite rooted in patriarchal Mariology when compared to, for instance, the theology that prefers Mary Magdalene as a better representation of modern women (cf. Jane Schaberg and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, 'There's Something About Mary Magdalene' in *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 2006). As Althaus-Reid has argued, ideas on Mary cannot always be made concrete enough to help women. To overcome this shortfall, I will try to apply concrete examples to the Marian theology in the HIV/AIDS context where I make use of ideas from Beattie.

³³Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 4. Beattie argues that Marian theology has within itself the power to destroy the oppressive symbols of maternal femininity invested in Mary deeply embedded in Catholic consciousness. Such symbols will not lose their power by being ignored or rejected. They are also irreplaceable in their importance, though they must be reconstructed.

³⁴Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 83.

³⁵Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 130.

³⁶Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 130.

³⁷Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 129.

³⁸Paul J. Pastor, *Mary Consoles Eve*, accessed 20-09-2011. e

<http://sparksandashes.com/author/pauljpastor/> According to Beattie, woman finds herself in the middle ground of Mary's joys and Eve's sorrows. As expressed earlier, the Eve-Mary theology has been embraced by some African women theologians such as Okure.

³⁹Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 130. According to the author of Ecclesiastes, sin and death came into the world through woman: "From a woman was the beginning of sin, and because of her we all died" (Eccl 25: 24). This is despite that in Genesis, Eve means the Mother of the living. This passage identifies Eve with both death and sin, and because women are thought to lure men into having sex and infecting them, they are also seen in the eyes of Eve, the traditional tempter and sinner in Christianity.

⁴⁰Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 130. In Beattie's theology, in becoming the mother of the Saviour of humanity, Mary is herself first saved or restored to original goodness, and then helps to bring about everyone else's salvation.

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- ⁴¹Nikitta Foston, *Why AIDS is Becoming a Black Woman's Disease and What We Can Do About It* (Centre for International Development at Harvard university, November, 2002).
- ⁴²Kofi Annan, 'In Africa AIDS has a Woman's Face' in New York Times, International Herald Tribune, Saturday 29 December 2002.
- ⁴³Sue Holden, *Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS*, 11.
- ⁴⁴Sue Holden, *Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS*, 12.
- ⁴⁵Sue Holden, *Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS*, 12.
- ⁴⁶UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15.
- ⁴⁷Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 129.
- ⁴⁸Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 128.
- ⁴⁹Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 128. The point of restoration to original goodness through Mary would not appeal to feminists who think Mary did not exercise free will at the incarnation. For instance, it would not work for Mary Daly, who reads the Infancy Narrative in Luke 1:26-38 as a disguised rape story. For Daly, Mary is a rape victim, raped goddess, and the theme of the raped goddess runs almost universally in patriarchal myths. (Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 84, 85, 135).
- ⁵⁰Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 129.
- ⁵¹Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, 39.
- ⁵²Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, 31.
- ⁵³Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, 39.
- ⁵⁴Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, 39.
- ⁵⁵Barbara Horton Jones, *Empowered with Mary: Affirming Full Personhood in the New Millennium*, 39.
- ⁵⁶Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 277. Elizabeth Johnson, for instance, argues that Mary experienced all the birth pangs that birthing women normally go through.
- ⁵⁷I am aware of the danger of defining all women according to their bodily functions. I understand that not all women (or men) behave in the same way, and that their behaviour is not always shaped by their bodies in a predictable way. Not all women, for instance, are peacemakers, biological mothers, or victims of HIV/AIDS. Without essentialising them, or limiting their humanity, my intention is to show that women's bodies are good and that they can be seen in a positive light, against a background where some women have suffered for being women.
- ⁵⁸Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid*, 8.
- ⁵⁹Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid*, 18.
- ⁶⁰René Girard, Patrick Gregory, *Violence and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 34.
- ⁶¹Winnifred Woodhull, 'Sexuality, Power, and the Question of Rape' in Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (eds.) *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 167-76.
- ⁶²Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 104.
- ⁶³Quoted in Karin Sporre, 'Images of Motherhood: Conflicts and Creative New Thinking Within and Outside the Christian Tradition' in *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 4, (2003).
- ⁶⁴Karin Sporre, 'Images of Motherhood', 10.

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- ⁶⁵Karin Sporre, 'Images of Motherhood', 12.
- ⁶⁶Luise Schottroff, (Translated by Annemarie S. Kidder) *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 163.
- ⁶⁷Luise Schottroff, *Let the Oppressed Go Free*, 165.
- ⁶⁸Una Kroll, 'A Womb Centred Life' in Linda Hurcombe (ed.), *Sex and God: Some Varieties of Women's Religious Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 98.
- ⁶⁹Una Kroll, 'A Womb Centred Life', 98.
- ⁷⁰Una Kroll, 'A Womb Centred Life', 98.
- ⁷¹Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment: the Post-Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 198.
- ⁷²Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, 197.
- ⁷³Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, 218-219. While menstrual energy is a channel for organic change in other substances, that change symbolises divine action through women's energy in bringing about social change. The menstruating woman represents a spiritual political form: a woman embodying the sacral energy to resist nature's violation and to protect it (and herself) from harm.
- ⁷⁴Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, 219.
- ⁷⁵Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment*, 218.
- ⁷⁶John Hughes, *Marian Prayers* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1999), 49.
- ⁷⁷Quoted in Christopher K. Richardson, 'God in our Flesh: Body Theology and Religious Education' in *Religious Education*, vol. 98, Issue 1, 2003, 83.
- ⁷⁸Christopher Richardson, 'God in our Flesh', 83.
- ⁷⁹Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 34.
- ⁸⁰Evelyn Acworth, *The New Matriarchy*, 27.
- ⁸¹Quoted in Aruna Gnanadason, 'Women's Ordination Worldwide 1st International Conference, Dublin 2001' in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 62, Issue 2, (2003), 147.
- ⁸²International Catholic Online Authority on Women's Ministries, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.womenpriests.org/mrpriest/mgen.asp> This is a feminist organisation which campaigns for, among other things, the ordination of women to priesthood in the Catholic Church.
- ⁸³International Catholic Online Authority on Women's Ministries, accessed on 23-09-2010.
- ⁸⁴St Antonio María Claret (1807 - 1870), *Copiosa y Vera Collección de Panegíricos*, Rome, 1860, vol. 3, 390-391.
- ⁸⁵Kingdom Musings, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://peacepastorkindommusings.blogspot.com/>.
- ⁸⁶International Catholic Online Authority on Women's Ministries, accessed on 23-09-2010. This feminist organisation gives various explanations for the ordination of Mary based on some teachings of church fathers: that the Holy Spirit himself ordained Mary by means of an interior anointing; that Christ extended his own priesthood to her - He assigned her spiritually and extended his own priestly dignity to her; that the character of the priesthood was part of Mary's being - in her was the essence of priesthood in its fullness; and that Mary's priesthood was part of her motherhood. For the Online Authority feminists, though not literally 'ordained', Mary was equivalently and eminently a priest.
- ⁸⁷Sidney Callahan, *Mary and the Feminist Movement in America: The National Catholic Weekly*, New York, December 18, 1993.

⁸⁸Pauline Chakkalakal, *Women's Discipleship*. For Pauline Chakkalakal, because women have excelled in discipleship, they are suitable for leadership in Christianity. No theological, psychological, or pastoral reason should stop women from taking up any leadership task. The condition for leadership is not the male or female biological feature, or the social structure of gender roles. The deciding factor is the capability of the person to serve.

⁸⁹Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid*, 199.

⁹⁰Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 79.

⁹¹Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 72.

⁹²Maria Clara Bingemer, 'Women in the Future of the Theology of Liberation' in Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (eds.), *The Future of Liberation Theology – Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989), 486.

⁹³Maria Clara Bingemer, 'Women in the Future', 486.

⁹⁴Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 107.

⁹⁵Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 107.

⁹⁶Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 107.

⁹⁷ICMDA HIV Initiative, *Canon Gideon Byamugisha*, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.icmdahivinitiative.org/pages/canon-gideon-byamugisha.php>

⁹⁸Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 110.

⁹⁹Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 110.

¹⁰⁰St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MARY'S VIRGINITY

7.1 Introduction

For a long time within Christian tradition, Mary has been popularly known as a biological virgin who birthed Jesus without having sex with a man, and whose hymen remained intact after birthing. The image of the Virgin Mary as intact, wholesome, pure and chaste traditionally became the mark of perfect womanhood. Of late, however, some feminist theologians have sought to reinterpret this meaning of her virginity, provoked by the realisation that it has vilified and degraded sexually active women, causing them feelings of guilt, humiliation and inadequacy.¹ Mary Thomas complains that the virgin symbol has been more often shown as submissive than authoritative; and for Anne Carr, humility, patience, obedience and purity were identified with this symbol, while fortitude, justice and autonomy were hardly part of it.² According to Manfred Hauke, it was Mary Daly who popularised the reinterpretation of Mary's virginity as a paraphrase for female autonomy, and by so doing gave it a meaning radically contrary to the traditional one. Daly emphasised that Mary's virginity means woman is independent of man, and is not defined solely through her relationship to man. This reinterpretation has gained worldwide acceptance in feminist circles.³

In southern African tradition, biological virginity and abstinence from sex, particularly before marriage, has been upheld as valuable and important for cultural, practical, moral and religious reasons. At the onset of HIV/AIDS, emphasis on biological virginity before marriage has been reinforced in some quarters. This chapter considers how conceptualising Mary as an empowered virgin could inspire the empowerment of southern African women,

particularly Christian women, against HIV/AIDS and its impact. It argues that the biological and metaphorical meanings of virginity overlap, and have both a part to play in empowering women against HIV/AIDS. Mary's biological virginity is hugely admired in Africa, as demonstrated by the many Marian groups that take vows of virginity and chastity and seek to be sexually active only in the context of Christian marriage. This understanding of virginity, however, can lead to unrealistic expectations and the suffering of women. It should be tethered by the figurative understanding of virginity as autonomy or freedom, which brings with it empowering possibilities for both the sexually active and inactive against the pandemic. The figurative notion of virginity also has many practical implications on how men must live and conduct themselves. Men must let go some of their traditional powers that limit women's freedom, and take up some new responsibilities to ease women's burdens.

7.2 The Traditional Concept of Virginity

Virginity, particularly for girls, is very highly valued in southern African cultures.⁴ According to Maureen Kambarami, a girl's virginity is considered her family's treasure which at marriage guarantees honour for her and her family.⁵ A young woman who has premarital sex is seen as intemperate and immoral, and the loss of virginity before marriage is a matter of deep shame. Girls should only have sex when permitted to do so by their families at marriage.⁶ Traditionally, physical virginity was also emphasised for practical purposes - to avoid unwanted pregnancies, venereal diseases, and to ensure that children were the true offspring of the paternal parent. It was a moral responsibility for ethically sound and minimally harmful sexual conduct in society.⁷ A girl was constantly informed of the dangers of 'playing' with boys as she grew up. For religious reasons, a few women also lived as virgins to devote more energy to their relationship with the Divine, while others periodically

abstained from sexual relationships to prepare themselves for some sacred duties.⁸

Maureen Kambarami notes that there were a number of methods used to restrict girls to biological virginity until marriage.⁹ For instance, after the wedding night, the son-in-law usually paid a special bride-prize to the bride's parents as confirmation that their daughter was a virgin, and as a token of appreciation. In the Zimbabwean Shona culture, this was usually in the form of a cow called 'mombe yechimanda'.¹⁰ Often, the bed-sheets from a couple's wedding night were also assessed for blood. If there was no bleeding, the bride's mother was given a white sheet with a big hole in the centre, signifying that her daughter was already deflowered.¹¹ According to Kambarami, such customs are still strongly adhered to in some southern African societies.¹²

Though boys were also trained to grow into sexually responsible men, emphasis was not necessarily on preserving their virginity. During puberty, they underwent an initiation ceremony into adulthood, which involved training them how to sexually 'handle' a woman, after which they could put their lessons into practice.¹³ However, whoever deflowered a girl, or impregnated her outside traditional marriage was usually pressured to marry her, or heavily fined as punishment and deterrence against such social behaviour.¹⁴

7.3 Virginity Testing to Fight HIV/AIDS

7.3.1 Virginity Tests

With the coming of HIV/AIDS, some traditionalists and high-ranking government officials in some regions have resumed virginity tests for girls on a larger scale (and for boys in some places). Though virginity testing is done in different ways, it usually involved examining the

vagina to see whether the girl's hymen is intact or not. During the test, a girl lies on a mat with her legs apart and her knees raised. An older woman, often wearing latex gloves, parts her labia.¹⁵ Some avoid touching the hymen. If the tester sees a small hole, she confirms the girl is a virgin, and the women around usually celebrate, for instance, by clapping and ululating. If the tester sees a big hole, an accusing silence follows the girl, who is then counselled against sexual promiscuity by an older woman in seclusion. Those newly-branded virgins are colourfully dotted on their faces and foreheads to show their 'purity', and a certificate is given to each. The certificate is usually displayed on the wall in the house for visitors to see.¹⁶ For generations, older women have also routinely tested girls individually at home.

In South Africa and Swaziland, virgins are annually invited to gather for a huge national ceremony called the Reed Dance festival, where tens of thousands of virgins carry reed-sticks in procession. The event often takes more than a week, during which female elders discuss general sexuality matters with the girls, and teach them how to avoid and withstand casual sex advances.¹⁷ In Swaziland, such celebrations often attract up to fifty thousand virgins at a time at the King's palace. While for the Swazi these events have been largely part of a graduation process to womanhood and marriage, of late they are also done to curb the pandemic. In 2001, to reduce teenage infections, the Swazi king imposed "Umcwasho," a traditional five-year ban on sex with unmarried girls. To symbolise their chastity, the girls wore woollen tassels, blue and yellow for the under-eighteens, red and yellow for the over-eighteens.¹⁸ Men who broke the law were fined. Other such annual events are also done in South Africa and Lesotho on a smaller scale, often in conjunction with local schools.¹⁹ Before the South African parliament passed a Children's Bill in 2005 which prohibited virginity testing for girls under 16, tests were done even on infants as young as four months old in search of signs of sexual abuse.²⁰

Workshops and tests are also held for boys, and certificates provided for those who pass them. First, a hard penis foreskin is considered a sign of virginity. Boys are also required to urinate in the sand, and if the urine comes out straight and makes a straight hole, the boy is considered a virgin. If the urine comes out in the form of a shower, the boy fails the test. Often, boys' knees are tested. If fingers go in above the knee, then the boy is considered no longer a virgin.²¹

Such virginity tests are carried out in many places in Africa, including in Zimbabwe and Malawi. In Uganda and Nigeria,²² scholarships to colleges and universities have been provided for some virgin girls who pass the tests and pledge abstinence until marriage. In Uganda, parties of up to seventy thousand virgins at once have been held, which have included street marching and parading.²³ Abstinence before marriage is even stricter in Muslim communities and families.

7.3.2 Some Arguments for Virginity Tests

According to Mariam Isa, many Africans believe these tests are an effective traditional solution against infection. For them, virginity testing is part of their identity almost lost under colonialism and westernisation, and the infections are a result of people adopting a western life style, liberal towards sex. They argue that girls must keep their virginity because they are the ones infected by the men, and the ones impregnated, who leave school to care for the babies.²⁴ If a girl becomes pregnant, her whole family is also affected, as they end up caring for the child. Virginity tests, they argue, offer an opportunity for older women to teach girls about sex and to encourage them to wait until they are ready. It helps them to feel proud that

they abstain from sex. Ultimately, they argue, preserving virginity helps society as a whole, men included. Sexual diseases do not spread and children are born in stable families.²⁵

According to Isa, some parents claim that virginity testing has made positive changes on the behaviour of their daughters. They attest that once the children begin to attend the tests, they adopt self-respect. They believe the tests have encouraged some young girls to delay sexual activity, and argue that the parading of virgins is good for their self-esteem as they are admired, cheered at and “valued.”²⁶ The girls also enjoy meeting like-minded virgins for encouragement at test venues.²⁷

Suzanne Leclerc-Madlal argues that for some African mothers who work during the day and cannot employ babysitters, the tests have sometimes uncovered cases of rape or child abuse.²⁸ The tests, argues Leclerc-Madlal, help to restrain paedophiles from preying on children.²⁹

7.3.3 Christian Virginity Pledges to Combat HIV/AIDS

Different churches are also re-emphasising the need to abstain from sex before marriage. Some southern African boys and girls are making virginity pledges to abstain from sex before marriage, as part of living out their faith. There are some evangelical and born-again Christians in southern Africa. Some of them, such as the Baptists, have links with American churches. Being a virgin is quite fashionable among the born-again Christians who, along with Catholics, oppose condom use.³⁰

Among the Catholics and some Anglicans, some of those who make abstinence vows are youths in Marian guilds.³¹ The Youth Guild of Mary mainly consists of girls who take vows

to imitate Mary's physical virginity and chastity before their marriage. They are supported by other Marian groups, such as the guild of Mary Queen of Heaven and groups of consecrated Catholic and Anglican nuns, such as Little Children of Our Blessed Lady.³² The example and inspiration of Mary's virginity is seen as an antidote for 'impure' sexual urges or a motivation to overcome sexual temptations that could result in infection. Mary's virginity is also valued for inspiring purity of thought and faithfulness to one partner among the married. Mary's rosaries and statues are used by her followers in their search for her intercessional help. Arguably there are many other Christians in general who also find inspiration in Mary's virginity in their day-to-day sexuality and faith.³³

Besides the mainstream churches of western origin and evangelicals, there are some African Indigenous Christian churches that emphasise physical virginity before marriage. The Nazareth Baptist Church of South Africa, for instance, prides itself on the prominent role of virgins in their worship, which they link to fertility.³⁴ The well-being of the community as a whole is believed to be dependent upon the retention of virgin girls. Their events, such as the annual pilgrimages to Mount Nhlankazi, the July festivals, the Sabbath services, and weekly group meetings prominently include celebrations of virgins' purity. In church, men are separated from women, and virgin women sit on their own and cover their faces with white cloths. This division is an important measure of moral discipline for them. They also venerate the Virgin Mary, and virginity testing is well established as a practice within their moral cosmology.³⁵

7.3.4 Some Criticism of Emphasis on Biological Virginity and Virginity Tests

Modern feminism usually criticises virginity tests for perpetuating men's ownership and

control of women's lives. Oduyoye argues that it effectively hands over to fathers and husbands the control of women's bodies. It is an attempt to manage the epidemic by exerting greater control over women and their sexuality. Oduyoye illustrates how this is reflected in the performance of the marriage ritual in Africa. The woman's body and her virginity is a thing of value owned by her father until it is transferred to her husband and paid for by dowry.³⁶ Women live as subordinates, helpers and merely unreal or shadow reflections of men's self-fulfilment. Women become important only in relation to men as daughter, mother, or wife.³⁷

Everjoice Win argues that virginity is tied to the bride's price ('lobola'). Virginity is important because it increases the woman's 'value,' especially at marriage, when she would fetch a huge 'lobola'. Such 'lobola' does not benefit the woman, but the men in her family. The 'lobola' is paid for a woman's reproductive capacity or loosely translated, it buys her uterus.³⁸

For Kathambi Kinoti, virginity tests draw away attention from the poor role that men play in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Debate about men's contribution has been conspicuously absent in the popular discourse on AIDS at all levels.³⁹ She also argues that virginity tests for boys have been few and far between, and only a few boys are seriously encouraged to abstain from sex. The tests put the onus on girls, while boys are often left to believe that manliness means having a lot of sex, sexual partners and children.⁴⁰

Virginity tests also tend to victimise rape victims. Kinoti argues that many girls and women, out of shame, do not report that they have been raped. They would undergo several levels of trauma if they had to undergo virginity tests. The tests are also insensitive to poverty and

powerlessness. Due to poverty and dependence on men, some girls are forced to trade in their bodies and their virginity.⁴¹ Kinoti also argues that a myth has arisen that an HIV-positive man is cured by having sex with a virgin. Contrary to the view of some medical professionals,⁴² Kinoti believes the ‘virgin cure’ myth is behind the rape atrocities in countries like South Africa.⁴³

For Kinoti, tests can discourage disclosure of an HIV positive status.⁴⁴ HIV positive people are seen as impure. Accessing treatment services for sexually transmitted diseases can be highly stigmatising. The tests restrict women’s ability to ask for information about sex for fear of being deemed sexually active. They promote a culture of silence around sex that dictates ignorance and passivity for good women in sexual interactions.⁴⁵ Karin Brulliard adds that those who refuse undergoing virginity tests are often taunted as implicitly admitting failure, and those who fail are often shunned and stigmatised, which can cause immense psychological and emotional trauma. Such public shunning could result in failure to find a marriage partner.⁴⁶

One United Nations Women’s report argues that the problem is not mainly about girls’ failure to abstain from sex, but about men’s promiscuous sex habits. A girl who has avoided contracting the virus very often contracts it at marriage.⁴⁷ Women’s vulnerability largely depends on their partners’ sexual behaviour. Thus virginity does not protect women from HIV/AIDS. Single and sexually active women often have much more ability to negotiate safer sex than married women.⁴⁸

Some critics are also aware that virginity tests can be inaccurate. Very rarely, a girl may be born without a hymen, or the hymen could be ruptured during normal physical activities and

sport. G. Ramatsekisa notes that some girls naturally have a large opening. The hymen could also be stretched open by the use of tampons or even at a gynaecological examination.⁴⁹ Moreover, there are women whose hymen tissue is so flexible it moves aside during penetration and repositions itself after. Thus the hymen is not a reliable indicator of one's biological virginity.⁵⁰ There is no scientifically accurate way of ascertaining whether a girl is a biological virgin, let alone a boy.

Further, research has often shown that where virginity is highly valued, some young people practise alternative sexual behaviours, such as anal or oral intercourse, thereby risking HIV infection.⁵¹ Human rights activists also argue that virginity testing is a degrading practice that is against the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which southern African countries signed.⁵² It does not define the personality of some modern African women, particularly in urban areas, where not being a virgin is not the same as being promiscuous.⁵³

For Erika George, the trouble is not with girls not preserving their virginity, but with gender inequality or a lack of equal opportunity for boys and girls.⁵⁴ Choice, autonomy and bodily integrity are key principles in women's rights, and AIDS prevention is about changing values and choices of both women and men. In place of the tests and traditional practices, girls should be given more choices and support systems to enable them to stick with those empowering choices. For instance, sex lessons should include teaching children about safe sex.⁵⁵

Thus as it stands, the popular southern African concept of virginity has many shortcomings. It is too narrowly conceived and uncomfortably tied to men's power over women's bodies. In its present form, it hardly empowers women to withstand infection.

7.4 The Southern African General Concept of Mary's Virginity

Tied to this not-so-empowering traditional notion of virginity is that of Mary's virginity. Africans have apparently done little to reinterpret the traditional meaning of Mary's virginity for themselves. About Mary's virginity in Africa, the University of Dayton writes:

. . . if the motherhood of Mary is widely appreciated in the African context, this is not the case of her virginity. Africans do value virginity but usually only as a transitory or temporary stage, not permanently or forever. Women are expected to stay virgins until they get married. Before all, however, they are expected to be fertile. Fecundity is much more praised than virginity. Bringing life is of a much higher value.⁵⁶

This statement seems to sweep under the carpet or to ignore the huge issue of girls' virginity. True, motherhood comes first, but girls' virginity is a big issue. Not appreciating this could actually be detrimental to women's health in particular. Ignoring what Mary's virginity means for African women could be tantamount to accepting her traditional subjugating interpretations. In 2009, at Silveira Mission in Zimbabwe, the following words were displayed on a big portrait of Mary:

An African woman like Mary is prayerful
An African woman like Mary is obedient
An African woman like Mary is faithful
An African woman like Mary is content with little
An African woman like Mary is hospitable
An African woman like Mary is transparent
An African woman like Mary is hard working
An African woman like Mary is unifying factor
An African woman like Mary is merciful
An African woman like Mary is pure
An African woman like Mary is ahead looking⁵⁷

Such a portrayal of Mary is reminiscent of the traditional subjugating notion of her virginity, which may help to subdue rather than empower women against HIV/AIDS. Taking girls' virginity for granted could be tantamount to accepting such a patriarchal status quo. Instead,

southern Africans could gain much from the worldwide feminists' reinterpretations of Mary's virginity that seek to empower. Her virginity would basically mean women's independence from infection by men and from the patriarchal institutions that indirectly promote such infection. Below is a discussion of what both the biological and metaphorical notions of Mary's virginity could mean for southern Africans, particularly women, in the HIV/AIDS era.

7.5 The Need for Biological Abstinence and Virginity

While many modern feminist theologians prefer a metaphorical understanding of Mary's virginity, for southern Africans, sexual abstinence is critically important within the HIV/AIDS era. It is an inescapable fact that those who abstain from sexual activity are in little danger of infection. In the HIV/AIDS context, sexual abstinence does not necessarily mean subjugation, docility or lack of power. Rather, it could mean the power to choose not to be sexually active. The young women infected upon becoming sexually active do survive the scourge while still virgins. What needs to be looked at is how their infection could be prevented upon their becoming sexually active.

In southern Africa, Mary's biological virginity could signify a new uninfected race and a life untouched by viral defilement. Because we look forward to a new and different uninfected race, the virginity of a young woman should warrant esteem and respect. It could symbolise a new beginning, freshness, purity, blessing, and youthful integrity. Gertrud von le Fort says that "the virgin . . . does not have her place within generation, but marks an end to generation."⁵⁸ When the Swazi kingdom declared a period of no sex with biological virgins, it was aware of the power of virgins to break the old order and start a new one, though such a declaration might have been naïve and impractical. Hopes for a future AIDS-free generation

are pinned on biological virgins to start with. Mary's virginity, which ushered in a new era, invites all southern Africans to esteem and respect physical virgins in anticipation of such an era.

In Christian history, some men and women were empowered by taking up a life of virginity and abstinence. In the early Church, women virgins who entered the wider community of faith avoided patriarchal limitations and the duty to procreate.⁵⁹ Virginity was a sign of a break with patriarchal culture, a gesture of freedom, an evasion from male abuse, from being taken advantage of and an acquisition of some sense of self-transcendence.⁶⁰ By law, virgins were their fathers' property, and they had first to fight against society's anticipation for them to marry.⁶¹ The virgin became a symbol of a person committed to her true self, a symbol of inner wholeness. The idea of virginity as freedom, power and dedication was strengthened by the way in which it ultimately came to symbolise incarnation. The image of the burning bush, for instance, was used to show that Mary's virginity (on which God manifested himself) was a dignity which not even the fire of the divine presence could quench or annihilate.⁶² Virginity meant freedom of the body and physical self-determination.

Within their religious communities, virgins became leaders and were free to study and write. Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Sienna became reformers and visionaries and models of an alternative life for women.⁶³ Others also helped to educate girls and thus contributed to the improvement of the general status of women.⁶⁴ According to Ruether, some became mystics and were thought to convey God's voice, and medieval Christians travelled long distances for their advice. Some were uplifted to sainthood. Julian of Norwich contributed to Church teachings.⁶⁵ Medieval women mystics, such as Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hadewijch, Marguerite Porete, and contemporary women, such as Jane Leade

rebuilt feminine symbols, redesigned the gender imagery of spiritualities and became powerful self-determinants of their own lives, as well as visionaries, prophets and pastoral teachers for their societies.⁶⁶ They gained self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness through physical virginity. Some of the women were inspired by the Marian virgin symbol.⁶⁷ In southern Africa, by preserving virginity, a woman could also strongly advocate against infection in her personal commitment and in her vocational status as an autonomous woman.

Besides some catholic and Anglican nuns, priests and brothers, some of whom belong to Marian Orders, there are also some ordinary people who exercise abstinence. Some of these have been married before – including some widows; others have always been single mothers and fathers, while others simply live a sexually inactive life. It is sometimes the abstinent elderly women who do most of the palliative-care work and look after the orphans. They sustain our economies and societies when some of the sexually active succumb to the pandemic.⁶⁸ They are the true source of hope for the proper upbringing of boys and girls who one day should live in an AIDS-free society. Their life of biological abstinence empowers them against infection.

This position does not sit comfortably in the face of the popular feminist understanding of virginity. Roger Horrocks, for instance, states that Mary's virginity should be interpreted not physically but metaphorically, and her virginity should be taken as part of the inner energetic power in human qualities.⁶⁹ Chung Hyun Kyung also argues that Mary's virginity should be interpreted as a relational reality;⁷⁰ and for Catharina Halkes, virginity is an attitude, not abstinence.⁷¹ Presently in southern Africa, however, some find inspiration for their sexually inactive lives from Mary's physical virginity. This experience is echoed by Christiane Frohlich and Erika Fuchthauer: "for women who all too often experience sexuality as violence

and rape, Mary's virginity symbolises the dream of physical autonomy."⁷²

Roger Horrocks says that the virgin is like a virgin forest - unspoiled by human beings, and so productive, fruitful, faultless. The virgin forest is a vital source of life, and "human penetration" has often spoiled and harmed it.⁷³ In a literal and practical sense for southern Africans, the penetration of a virgin has actually spoiled and harmed her. She should not be seen as someone awaiting 'conquering' or 'penetration', but should be respected in her bodily integrity. Hence Oduyoye argues that the African concept of virginity, largely limited to the period before marriage, does not make women autonomous. Women's identity is completely constructed in relation to others. For Oduyoye, "The unspoken assumption is that a woman must be married."⁷⁴ Such an assumption could be ended by recognising those who exercise virginity and abstinence in adult life as important members in our society. Unlike the married and the sexually active, they are outside patriarchal control and its dangers of infection.

This however, does not mean the refutation of metaphorical virginity. Instead, I propose the collapsing of the two notions of virginity into one. Mary's "unruptured" hymen,⁷⁵ even after birthing, comes into play here.

Before birthing, Mary is a physical virgin with her hymen intact (Luke 1:34).⁷⁶ After birthing, she is still a virgin, even though her birthing process is thought to have happened the normal way.⁷⁷ Yet for a woman to have her hymen intact after birthing in a normal way is a logical impossibility. What seems sensible is that the two concepts of physical virginity (before birthing) and metaphorical virginity (after birthing) have been collapsed into one. At the same time the meaning of metaphorical virginity overruns that of physical virginity. Her hymen remains 'unruptured' metaphorically, not physically - and thus her virginity (as Virgin-

Mother, for instance) transcends the physical status of her body. In southern Africa, such a collapsing of the two concepts will allow avoidance of obsession with physical virginity, while at the same time recognising all women as autonomous and assertive virgins.

In the end, to call women virgins should be a way of affirming their liberation from the constraining powers of the phallus, their integrity and freedom from infection. Whether sexually active or not, they are virgins when they are free to remain outside the powers of infection and contribute to the defeat of HIV and of patriarchal structures that enhance its spreading.⁷⁸

Such a collapsing or merging of concepts is not new in southern Africa. For instance, motherhood transcends physical birthing, such that all women are mothers.⁷⁹ Looking at virginity in this way deems irrelevant virginity tests and obsession with the literally intact hymen. It could relieve brides from wedding-night anxieties, and help to end stigmatisation of women who seek information and health services against HIV/AIDS. Women could freely choose physical virginity and abstinence as a way of fighting HIV/AIDS, and still live as virgins if they later become sexually active.

7.6 THE WIDER MEANING OF METAPHORICAL VIRGINITY

7.6.1 Feminists' Understanding

According to Chung Kyung, virginity means the ability to define self. Virginity is about a self-defined and self-derived life. It is about a woman coming up with her own meaning, description, characterisation and designation of self: “when a woman defines herself according to her own self-understanding, of who she really is and what she is meant for in this

universe she is a virgin.”⁸⁰ For Kyung a virgin is a woman whose identity is not given to her by a male. The Virgin Mary is a model of self-knowledge and self-definition. Mary’s virginity means she is liberated, free to serve God. It is essentially an inner attitude which “lies in her true connectedness to her own self and to God.”⁸¹ Mary could inspire knowing oneself well, a balanced and honest view of what one’s life means and should mean for oneself.⁸² For Katoppo, “Virgin, then, would. . . mean a woman who . . . does not lead a derived life (as ‘daughter/wife/mother’); a woman who matures to wholeness within herself as a complete person, and who is open to others.”⁸³

In line with Kyung, some feminists argue that virginity means wholeness and perfection. For Molly Falcon, Mary’s true and perfect virginity encompasses her whole person, body and soul, throughout her entire life.⁸⁴ She is a sign of wholeness and completeness and is a model of full womanhood and liberated humanity. She signifies the fullness of the perfection of what is characteristic of woman, of what is feminine, “the culminating point, the archetype of the personal dignity of women.”⁸⁵ For Roger Horrocks, at the psychic level, Mary’s virginity stands for totality, fullness, and the union of human and sacred.⁸⁶ These concepts of virginity suggest notions of African women’s fulfilment, completion and self-realisation through different accomplishments. This is as opposed to their lives partly owned, broken, damaged, impaired, wounded or incapacitated by their fathers, husbands or HIV/AIDS impacts. Virginity is about them embracing all that enables them to reach their highest attainable goals, about them reaching their full potential. The section below illustrates some vital components of such a virginal state for southern African women within the HIV/AIDS context.

7.6.2 Virginitly Implies the Ability to Combat Infection in a Sexually Active Life

Most girls remain free of HIV as long as they are biological virgins or abstain from sex. However, the moment they become sexually active, some become infected. Consequently, sexual activeness and motherhood tend to be viewed as principally opposed to virginitly, with one prone to infection and the other not. What society needs to realise and accept is that a sexually active person could live a good uninfected life. Mary's recognition as virgin-mother could help to highlight this.

Often this experience of being either virgin or virtually infected happens when a woman is exchanged from her father's authority to that of her husband. In first century Palestine women were also passed on from their fathers' ownership to that of their husbands. In her empowerment, Mary broke the custom by becoming pregnant outside the system.

According to Bingemer and Gebara, Mary is a girl in a position of transition at the incarnation.⁸⁷ She is affianced – and so has started the movement away from her father's rule. But she is not yet in marriage, and also a (biological) virgin – thus not yet under Joseph's rule. It is at this point of flexibility and vagueness in her social scene that Mary is requested to mother Jesus. For Bingemer and Gebara, her freedom allows her to answer for herself in an exceptional way. Not identified as 'daughter' or 'wife', Mary is free to respond as it suits her. Her "Let it be to me according to your will" (Luke 1:38) is a declaration of her right to choose for herself, and a confidence in God's invitation.⁸⁸ This understanding of Mary's virginal motherhood brings in a new understanding of women's freedom based on choice and self-determination and not on dominion, and this freedom could put not only Mary but all virgins outside the law of marital domination, where they are often unable to escape infection. Beattie

argues that just as Mary bodies God in human form, so every woman has the image of God in her, and is not reducible to a product of exchange. In this way, women's lives should no longer be considered owned by others. Lobola should at most simply be an inexpensive symbol of one's commitment that does not lead to ownership or control of the bride's life. In the marriage process, women should be left free to make decisions about their own lives and bodies.

For some feminists such as Mary Daly, the Virgin/Mother is an impossible ideal which penalises women and promotes their collective low-caste status.⁸⁹ However, for Beattie, the language of virginal motherhood affirms sexuality and procreation and liberates from oppressive dualisms. In Christ opposites are reconciled without loss of distinctiveness,⁹⁰ so that Mary's virginity symbolises life, not sexual inactivity. Her virginity and motherhood overlap. Mary's description as both virgin and mother confronts any Christian woman, irrespective of her marriage status and whether she has offspring. For Marion Woodman, the pregnant virgin is the whole world saturated with meaning. Because she begins womanhood without giving up "her virginity, the pregnant virgin gives birth to herself, to the man and to all creation."⁹¹ For Joseph Lackner, motherhood and virginity are united in the Virgin Mother such that one does not exclude the other - they wonderfully complement each other.⁹² These views suggest southern African women could still fully enjoy virginity in their motherhood. A sexually active life and autonomy could still be enjoyed without being exposed to HIV/AIDS.

7.6.3 Virginitly Implies the Education of Women

Educational attainment is one fundamental prerequisite for women to be able to define themselves, a basic requirement for their wholeness and perfection. It is a prerequisite for empowering women in all social spheres. A good quality education, of comparable quality and content to that of boys and men, and designed on the basis of women and girls' immediate and strategic needs, will build on their capacities and prepare them to grab opportunities in the public and private domains. This also implies education in areas traditionally dominated by men. The education should increase their ability to bargain for resources within the household, for decision-making powers, control over their own fertility, participation in public leadership and policy making, and for government representation.⁹³ An empowering education also includes consciousness-raising, so that women recognise the causes of their suffering and take steps to improve their conditions.

Vocational skills' training is also an effective, practical way to help women become autonomous. Various non-formal educational training programs targeting women should be brought into place, and existing technical and vocational education institutions should cater for the needs of girls and women with limited basic educational qualifications. Practical skills in computers, internet and other business areas could create real income-generating opportunities for women.⁹⁴

To make his covenant with humanity in the Old Testament, God addressed himself only to men: Noah, Abraham, and Moses.⁹⁵ However, at the beginning of the new eternal and irrevocable covenant is the Virgin Mary. The patriarchal period in the order of the history of salvation is replaced by that which starts with a virgin. For Katoppo, the incarnation is the

beginning of a new order starting with a socially insignificant woman saying ‘yes’ to God. In Mary the lowly are exalted, and an era of autonomous women begun.⁹⁶ For Leonardo Boff, the virginal conception is also a sign of a brand-new and absolute beginning for humanity.⁹⁷ Education is a prerequisite for access to such a new order of personal autonomy in southern Africa. Education would enhance self-esteem and self-confidence; help to build a positive image of women as active contributors to society, and to develop the ability to think critically.

For Sarah Boss, the Annunciation is a summary of creation. At the creation of the world the earth was “without form and void” (Gen 1:2). Mary, too, is a virgin and nothing has been created in her. In the same way the spirit of God floats over the waters (Gen 1:2), Mary is told “the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). As God first created the world by his word, Mary conceives Christ by God’s words through the angel.⁹⁸ Boss argues that because of this power to recreate, Mary and Christ could be used to end domination and oppression of women.⁹⁹

In the HIV/AIDS context, a clean clear-cut beginning will also need to involve women’s bodies. Women will need to be well vested in the ways their bodies work and interact with society, and to make informed choices about their bodies and health. Girls’ education could enable them to protect themselves from HIV and to practise safer sex. Various studies have concluded that when young people have information about sex, they either tend to delay sexual intercourse or to use condoms.¹⁰⁰

As already stated, for a long time, Mary has inspired schools and educational institutions, some of which bear the name ‘St Mary’. From such educational institutions have often come

great women contributors to society and strong social leadership. Such Marian educational contributions help to enhance women's virginity.

Mary is also considered an educator - one who shaped the person of her son. Katoppo points out that "Jesus did not grow up in a vacuum."¹⁰¹ There is a saying: "The mother is a school: if you prepare her properly, you will prepare an entire people of good character. The mother is the first teacher, foremost among them, and the best of teachers."¹⁰² Mary is considered such a mother. She is also a model from whom southern Africans are often willing to learn. Through educational inspiration, Mary could be about creating breakthroughs for African women, moving beyond fears and limiting beliefs, accomplishing goals and realising true desires, turning dreams into reality and living fulfilling lives.

Thus among other things, a virgin is a well informed and educated woman, because such a woman has the capacity to know what she needs, the freedom to access resources, and to free herself from the pandemic. Education enables her to find good employment and to sustain herself. She does not depend on a man for her living.

7.6.4 Women's Virginity Enhanced by Men's Circumcision

For women to be truly and fully virgins, men also need to take responsibility for their actions that contribute to women's infection. Because the virus is usually passed to a woman by her male long-term partner, men have a role to play in ending women's infection. For instance, according to WHO and UNAIDS, there is compelling evidence that male circumcision reduces the passing of the virus from woman to man by about 60%.¹⁰³ If through circumcision, fewer men receive the virus from women, the cycle of infection will be

curtailed, and fewer women will in turn get infected by their partners. Men will become less of a danger to their partners.

Male circumcision could be an important part of our AIDS theology. When Mary and Joseph took the infant child for circumcision (Luke 2:21), he was named Jesus, which means 'salvation' or 'saviour' in Hebrew. His circumcision has traditionally been seen as the first time his blood was shed, symbolising the beginning of the redemption process. In church liturgy, the Feast of Jesus' Circumcision celebrates God's intention to save human flesh through death's destruction by Jesus' bodily resurrection.¹⁰⁴ In undergoing circumcision, Jesus circumcises our sins and gives us salvation, and the removal of the outer-skin symbolically represents spiritual circumcision or God's requirement for people to repent from sin. Its interpretation has had some resemblance to baptism - a symbol of the new covenant and of hope and trust in God's promise to save his people.¹⁰⁵

In the HIV/AIDS context, circumcision could also stand for our longing for salvation. It could symbolise the dawn of a new era of deliverance from HIV, could represent the inner repentance of the heart in our societies, and a new covenant between men and God to end the pandemic. In Jesus' circumcision and death, God has pledged to save us from death and all its causes, including AIDS. Southern Africans need to take responsibility for fulfilling their own commitment to that covenant. They need to repent from all that assists the spreading of infection and to live a moral life free from infection risks. Circumcision could symbolise the end of the destruction of our bodies through the virus, our change of habits, customs and behaviour. Virginity testing of girls should be replaced by men's circumcision. It is only fitting that the mark of repentance should be on men's bodies, because statistically it is mostly men who get involved with more sex partners and infect their long term partners, particularly

in marriage. Mary, as the Virgin, as one who, with Joseph, orchestrates Jesus' circumcision, and as traditionally the Ark of the Covenant,¹⁰⁶ could be a supportive symbol in all this.

7.6.5 Virginitv Implies Ending Polygamy

Women's virginitv as metaphorically understood contradicts what polygamy implies and stands for. Governments should place a ban on polygamy because it fuels the HIV/AIDS scourge. Times have changed and polygamy no longer has much positive value.¹⁰⁷

Though in recent times polygamous marriages have become fewer partly due to Christianity and education, pervasive polygamy is often practised in some societies. South Africa has recently promulgated legislation which recognises the validity of polygamous marriages.¹⁰⁸ In September 2008, King Mswati of Swaziland had 13 wives.¹⁰⁹ Apparently his habit and expectation to choose a new wife each passing year was interrupted when one of his wives was caught cheating with his close government official.¹¹⁰ The preceding king, his father, had 70 wives when he died.¹¹¹ The current South Africa president is also polygamous.¹¹² Polygamy often involves parents giving away their young daughters in marriage to older married men for monetary gains or in exchange for the customary cattle dowry, without the girl's full consent.¹¹³

In Malawi, polygamy is often practised to curb infidelity. With more than one wife, a man is thought to have fewer reasons for extra-marital relations.¹¹⁴ Yet polygamy could also fuel cheating. Though infidelity is not polygamy, in practice, some men do not draw the line between the two. Some recruit new girlfriends on the pretext of exploring the possibility for a new wife.¹¹⁵

Polygamy is often shunned today for being unethical. It is seen as mostly benefiting men and lacking respect for women's autonomy. For Eusebius McKaiser, it perpetuates the attitude that women are intrinsically inferior to men.¹¹⁶ There is no equal love relationship, and women become a means to an end, and never really become autonomous. McKaiser argues that if it is not acceptable in society for a woman to have two husbands, it should not be acceptable for a man to have two wives.¹¹⁷

Polygamy also increases vulnerability to HIV-Aids. If one sexual partner becomes HIV-positive and sex is unprotected, it becomes an important driver of the pandemic. Some studies have indicated that polygamy accelerates the spread of HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. The UNDP's report found that multiple sexual partners and high levels of inter-generational sex contribute to high levels of infection in Swaziland.¹¹⁸

In contrast to what seems typical of a polygamous relationship, the Holy Family demonstrates a liberating model of equal gender relationships. According to Sidney Callahan, Mary is equal to, and is not in any way dominated by her husband. She is totally free as a moral agent: "Even in a misogynous age, all of Mary's powers and privileges, her strengths and virtues, were seen as independent of her status as a wife."¹¹⁹ Callahan concludes: "If any spouse is the designated 'helpmate' in this marriage, it is Joseph."¹²⁰ For him, the fact that Mary's name "always" comes first (before Joseph's) in the bible adds to this observation.¹²¹ Polygamy does not measure up to the standards of marriage based on love between woman and man. As southern Africa becomes more and more Christian, polygamy should give in to the gospel's liberating, healing and purifying power to help women enjoy a virginal state of life.

7.6.6 Women's Post-Test Clubs could Enhance their Virginit

Mary Daly ultimately rejected the symbol of Mary for women's empowerment, but not before earlier noting that the perpetual virginity of Mary could become a symbol of autonomy, integrity, independence and self-determination of woman.¹²² Daly defines virgins as "the proud Prudes who prance through the Realms of Pure Lust fiercely [focussing] our Fury, firing! inspiring our Selves and each other with renewed commitment to the cause of women and all Elementary be-ing."¹²³ Virgins are never captured and "unsubdued," and inspire one another with renewed resolve to live with great strength and courage. Daly's definition suggests a strong element of women's collective will and refusal to accept an identity or an experience imposed from outside. She suggests the social mobilisation of women, and the building of alliances and coalitions. As a means to autonomous virginity, women organise themselves with a common purpose and understanding to achieve collective goals.

One form of expression of such solidarity could be Post-Test Clubs. First established in 1990 in Uganda, there are very few Post-Test Clubs (PTCs) in southern Africa. PTCs are a community-based association of volunteers affected by HIV who encourage people to be tested, and inform people how to avoid infection, and if infected, how to live a healthy life and avoid spreading the disease.¹²⁴ They perform group therapy for sustained sexual behaviour change and reduction of HIV transmission chains. The general goal of PTCs is to create a nurturing and supportive environment for people affected by HIV to help one another cope with the challenges they face as they strive to care for their physical, psychological and spiritual health.¹²⁵ They provide medical information about HIV/AIDS so that members can proactively take control of their own health. Club membership usually includes HIV-positive and negative men and women, and the HIV status of the Club members can remain

anonymous. However, they have so far been more effective when led by people openly living with HIV.¹²⁶ The PTCs have become a ‘family’ for many who were otherwise neglected, outcast and rejected because of their status. They also link up with health clinics for referrals, public health talks, and tracing medication defaulters. They have become an effective training ground for good HIV/AIDS peer educators in communities, schools, families and work places.¹²⁷

Several PTCs have started income generating activities. Some make handicrafts, tend community gardens for commercial purposes and offer vocational training, while others have embarked on micro-finance projects, such as village savings and loan programs owned and managed by club members.¹²⁸ They often provide material assistance to the most needy widows and orphans among them, working together on projects, and pooling resources to pay for members’ funerals.¹²⁹

If some PTCs are formed exclusively for women, they could be a channel for women’s access to the best possible care. Women need their own PTCs because they are generally disproportionately infected and affected compared to men. The discrimination, stigma and challenges they face are often unique to women. Women’s PTCs could help them to share ideas, resources and information, such as latest treatments available, local support services and strategies for survival. They could help women to overcome loneliness or isolation, and to build self-esteem among group-members to better address and overcome stigma and discrimination, and thus make one another more confident and powerful. They could link-up women from different backgrounds and campaign to increase understanding and tolerance among themselves and in society. Women’s PTCs could help to provide legal information for

women living with HIV to protect their rights and that of their families. They could start income generation projects for specifically uplifting women.

They could increase HIV-positive women's visibility and lead to change by providing a public or political voice. They could empower their mostly disadvantaged members to become passionate activists in their communities and on higher governing levels. Government recognition of such PTCs could lead to the involvement of HIV-positive women at the highest levels in the development and coordination of the HIV/AIDS response. Such recognition could help PTCs to influence policies at national level and greater networking and collaboration with other organisations. Their work could be beneficial for under-resourced national health systems.

The inclusion of Marian spirituality in such PTCs could also enhance a more positive attitude towards life. Feminist rituals and ceremonies could be part of women's PTC programs in churches, at homes or in the community which could help bring about much healing. Such exercises as Marian retreats could help in reconciling women and their condition emotionally, which could be very therapeutic. Marian spirituality, centred on being 'uplifted' or empowered, could encourage members to be forward looking. A Marian spirit of service could help members to offer services to one another and to the community as a healthy expression of their virginity, instead of holding on to self-blame, shame, guilt, anger or resentment, which could be detrimental to their bodily and mental health. Mary's sense of justice and solidarity could inspire women's PTCs in their endeavour to live their lives to the full. Luke 1:46-55 gives the idea of an autonomous Mary who was well aware of social injustices and who celebrated the acts of God to reverse the social order in favour of the poor and oppressed. Her solidarity with Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56), with other women near the

cross (John 19:25) and at the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14) must have strengthened and uplifted them to heroically go through trying times. Mary's special attraction to women, evident in Marian guilds and legions, could extend to women's PTCs.

According to Gregory of Nyssa, Mary's virginity signifies the conquest of death.¹³⁰ For him, death, which starts with every new-born child, finds a barrier in virginity. Death had been there since the time of Adam, but when Mary came, death could not overcome the fruit of her virginity. Rather death was overcome. Therefore, in every soul which passes through this life in the flesh under the protection of virginity, the strength of death is in a manner broken and annulled.¹³¹ Tina Beattie emphasises that such an interpretation of Mary's virginity symbolises life and not sexual denial.¹³² It does not necessarily denigrate women's sexuality. For infected women, Mary's virginity becomes a sign of hope, not only in the life to come, but in this life also. Mary becomes a "symbol of a state when life must no longer assert itself before the ever-present reality of death."¹³³ Mary represents the final and absolute triumph of life over death.¹³⁴ In Mary's virginity, therefore, is inclusive the promise that one day southern Africans' lives will no longer be cut in half.

By working to prolong women's lives, PTCs could affirm the Marian message that death can be defied. The women could seek to make AIDS a controllable illness and to live their lives normally. They could live out the message that death can be overcome in Christ. According to Beattie, a perfect goodness of the world is created anew in Mary's womb, where life and wholeness extend beyond the furthest horizons of human imagination. Mary is virginally pure because she belongs to this new order of redemption.¹³⁵ Even though living with HIV, women in PTCs symbolically and metaphorically also belong to that order by virtue of sharing in Mary's femininity. In them is the power to start things afresh and to purify what has been

defiled so as to experience life in its fullness. Such a spiritual outlook could give HIV-positive women in PTCs strong willpower to continue with their lives and life-ambitions.

7.7 Conclusion

Simply condemning the cultural notion of African virginity altogether may not be the best way to help empower women in Africa. There is need to identify and respect their cultural needs in negotiating an acceptable path between HIV prevention and the Africans' notion of virginity. If the African concept of virginity is allowed to expand and be enriched by the wider feminists understanding of Mary's virginity, this could lead to empowerment against HIV/AIDS in various key areas of their lives. Living out Mary's virginity will mean a new race of virgins, who live in a bodily and spiritual freedom that is guided by principles of both the biological and the metaphorical meanings of virginity. The next chapter conceptualises Mary as a revolutionary and attempts to show how she could inspire revolutionary changes for women's uplifting.

ENDNOTES

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- ²Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, 189.
- ³Manfred Hauke, Mother of God or Domesticated Goddess? 184.
- ⁴Women and Global Human Rights, *Virginity Testing*, accessed on 24-04-2008
<http://www.webster.edu/~woolflm/virginitytest.html>
- ⁵Maureen Kambarami, 'Patriarchy and Female Subordination in Zimbabwe' in *Culture, Femininity and Sexuality*, (University of Fort Hare, Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series, September 2006), 5.
- ⁶Maureen Kambarami, 'Patriarchy and Female Subordination', 5.
- ⁷Maureen Kambarami, 'Patriarchy and Female Subordination', 6.
- ⁸Thabisile Buthelezi, "'The One Who Has Eaten It, Has Only Eaten a Part': Exploring Traditional Zulu Premarital Sexual Practices' in *Sexuality in Africa Magazine*, vol. 31, Issue 2, (2008), 4.
- ⁹Maureen Kambarami, 'Patriarchy and Female Subordination', 5.
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- ¹¹Heather Corinna, *Magical Cups & Bloody Brides: Virginity in Context*, accessed on 03-12-2010 http://www.scarleteen.com/article/politics/magical_cups_bloody_brides_virginity_in_context
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- ¹⁴Spiwe Murandu, *Virginity Tests and the HIV/AIDS Epidemic* (Bulawayo: Jonde Press, 2004), 56.
- ¹⁵Spiwe Murandu, *Virginity Tests and the HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, 57.
- ¹⁶Spiwe Murandu, *Virginity Tests and the HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, 57.
- ¹⁷Spiwe Murandu, *Virginity Tests and the HIV/AIDS Epidemic*, 57.
- ¹⁸Erika R. George, 'Virginity Testing and South Africa's HIV/AIDS Crisis: Beyond Rights Universalism and Cultural Relativism Toward Health Capabilities' in *California Law Review*, vol. 96, Issue 6, (2008), 1448.
- ¹⁹Erika R. George, 'Virginity Testing', 1448.
- ²⁰Erika R. George, 'Virginity Testing', 1448.
- ²¹Fiona Scorgie, 'Virginity Testing and the Politics of Sexual Responsibility: Implications for AIDS Intervention' in *African Studies*, vol. 61, Issue 1, (2002), 55–75. According to this traditional understanding of virginity, the kneecaps of a virgin boy are firm. It is in the process of losing one's virginity during sexual intercourse that the kneecaps loosen up. The excitement causes vigorous knee jerks leading to the loosening of tendons around the kneecaps, a loosening which can be felt by the fingers.
- ²²Taiwo Abiodun, 'Behold Nigerian Virgin!' in *The Nation Sunday Magazine*, 31-01-2010
- ²³BBC News Channel, *Uganda Virgins Offered University*, accessed on 4-10-2008
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4700171.stm>
- ²⁴Mariam Isa, *Virginity Test for Boys on Cards*, accessed on 4-10-2008
<http://www.news24.com/xArchive/Archive/Virginity-test-for-boys-on-cards-20020130>
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- ³²Jasper Taderera, *The Work of CCJP*, 77.
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- ³⁴Preben Kaarsholm, 'Culture As Cure: Civil Society and Moral Debates in KwaZulu-Natal after Apartheid' in *Popular Cultural Materials and Public Spheres, Current Writing*, vol. 18, no. 2, (2006), 83.
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- ³⁶Preben Kaarsholm, 'Culture As Cure', 83.
- ³⁷P. Bruce, "The Mother's Cow," 203.
- ³⁸Everjoice J. Win, 'The Way I See It: Virginity Testing as HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy: Clutching at Straws' in *Sexuality in Africa Magazine*, vol. 1, Issue 1, (2004), 13.
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- ⁴⁰Kathambi Kinoti, *Virginity Testing and the War against AIDS*, 1.
- ⁴¹Kathambi Kinoti, *Virginity Testing and the War against AIDS*, 2.
- ⁴²For instance, Dr Rachel Jewkes, 2008 Director of the MRC's Gender and Health Research Group, and two of her collaborators, Dr Lorna Martin (Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, University of Cape Town) and Ms Loveday Penn-Kekana (Centre for Health Policy, University of the Witwatersrand) have argued that other factors are to blame for rape. Dr Jewkes contests that there is not enough evidence to conclude that infant rapes have increased in South Africa. Further, most infant rape perpetrators do not know they are HIV-positive at the time of committing the crime ('The 'Virgin Myth' and Child Rape in South Africa' in *Science in Africa - Africa's First On-Line Science Magazine*, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.scienceinAfrica.co.za/2002/april/rape.htm>
- ⁴³Kathambi Kinoti, *Virginity Testing and the War against AIDS*, 2.
- ⁴⁴Kathambi Kinoti, *Virginity Testing and the War against AIDS*, 2.
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- ⁴⁷UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 11.
- ⁴⁸UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, 15.
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- ⁶¹Mary Thomas, *Down from her Pedestal*, 359.
- ⁶²David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 246.
- ⁶³Mary Thomas, *Down from her Pedestal*, 359.
- ⁶⁴Mary Thomas, *Down from her Pedestal*, 359.
- ⁶⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Why Do Men Need the Goddess?*
- ⁶⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Why Do Men Need the Goddess?*
- ⁶⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Why Do Men Need the Goddess?*
- ⁶⁸Robert Mugemana, *HIV and AIDS: The Global Inter-Connection, Our Future at Stake*, HIV and Development Programme, UNDP (Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press/UNDP, 1995). According to Mugemana, it is the most sexually active – between ages eighteen and forty nine – who are most prone to infection.
- ⁶⁹Roger Horrocks, 'The Divine Woman in Christianity', 110.
- ⁷⁰Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 77.
- ⁷¹Catharina Halkes, 'Mary in My Life' in Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 70.
- ⁷²Christiane Frohlich and Erika Fuchthauer, 'Women and Religion' in CAIPORA Women's Group (ed.) *Women in Brazil* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1993), 68.
- ⁷³Roger Horrocks, 'The Divine Woman in Christianity', 110.
- ⁷⁴P. Bruce, "The Mother's Cow," 203.
- ⁷⁵William E. Phipps, *Supernaturalism in Christianity: Its Growth and Cure* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2008), 42.
- ⁷⁶Barbara G. Walker, 'The Goddess - II, The Virgin' in Barbara G. Walker (ed.) *The Woman's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 1048-1051. Barbara G. Walker is one of those who contest Mary's physical virginity and argue that in Luke 1:34 the Hebrew word 'almah' which was translated 'virgin' should have been translated 'young' so that instead of 'I am a virgin' it should have read 'I am young.' For her, the gospel of Matthew used the Greek word 'parthenos', (Matthew 1:23) meaning 'virgin', instead of 'almah' which translates 'young woman' when referring to the virgin birth of Jesus.
- ⁷⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 276-277.
- ⁷⁸In this sense, sexually active women are virgins as well. However, in southern Africa, being sexually active is not necessarily one of the leading ways to achieve autonomy. Due to HIV/AIDS, there is an obvious limit to how women can responsibly use their bodies for pleasure and for subversiveness.
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- ⁹¹Marion Woodman, *The Pregnant Virgin* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1985), 85.
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- ⁹⁶Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 17.
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- ¹⁰¹Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 23.
- ¹⁰²Islamic Mothering: The Muslim Woman and Her Children, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://oumabdulaziz.jeeran.com/mothering.htm>
- ¹⁰³UNAIDS/WHO, *New Data on Male Circumcision and HIV Prevention: Policy and Programme Implications, Conclusions and Recommendations*, (Conference Paper for Technical Consultation on Male Circumcision and HIV Prevention: Research Implications for Policy and Programming, Montreux, 6–8 March 2007), 4.
- ¹⁰⁴Tierney, John, 'Feast of the Circumcision' in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 190.
- ¹⁰⁵John Tierney, 'Feast of the Circumcision', 190.
- ¹⁰⁶Steve Ray, *Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant*, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/2005/0510fea5.asp>
- According to Steve Ray, Mary is the living tabernacle of the Word of God, the Ark of the New and Eternal Covenant. The account of the Annunciation incorporates the metaphors of the tent of meeting with God in Sinai and of the temple of Zion. Just as the cloud overshadowed the Israelites moving in the desert (cf. Num. 10:34; Deut. 33:12; Ps. 91:4) and just as the same cloud, as a mark of God's presence among the Israelites, drifted over the Ark of the Covenant (cf. Exod. 40:35), so now God's shadow covers and enters the tabernacle of the New Covenant, namely, Mary's womb (cf. Luke 1:35).
- ¹⁰⁷US History Encyclopedia, *Polygamy*, accessed on 32-09-2010. <http://www.answers.com/topic/plural-marriage> Polygamy is the practice of being married to more than one spouse. Usually it is men who marry more than one wife.
- ¹⁰⁸Marissa Herbst and Willemien du Plessis, 'Customary Law v Common Law Marriages: A Hybrid Approach in South Africa' in *Electronic Journal of Comparative Law*, vol. 12, no. 1, (2008). The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act recognises polygamous marriages entered into before and after 15 November 2000, when the Act came into operation.
- ¹⁰⁹Olaitan Ladipo, 'King Mswati And Unlucky Number 13' in *Nigerian Village Square*, August 14, 2010.
- ¹¹⁰Olaitan Ladipo, 'King Mswati And Unlucky Number 13'.
- ¹¹¹Olaitan Ladipo, 'King Mswati And Unlucky Number 13'.

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- ¹¹²Olaitan Ladipo, 'King Mswati And Unlucky Number 13'.
- ¹¹³Olaitan Ladipo, 'King Mswati And Unlucky Number 13'.
- ¹¹⁴Emmanuel B.Z. Kondowe, David Mulera, *A Cultural Approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care*, (UNESCO/UNAIDS Research Project, Malawi's Experience, Country Report, Special Series on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care: A Cultural Approach, Issue no. 5, Cultural Policies for development Unit, UNESCO, 1999), 2.
- ¹¹⁵Author unknown, 'Religious, Cultural Issues Affecting Efforts to Fight HIV/AIDS, U.N. Report Says' in *The Medical News Today: HIV/AIDS News*, 18 June 2008.
- ¹¹⁶Eusebius McKaiser, 'Polygamy Debate Reveals Nation's Schizophrenia' in *Businessday*, 17 March, 2008.
- ¹¹⁷Eusebius McKaiser, 'Polygamy Debate Reveals Nation's Schizophrenia'.
- Proponents of polygamy, however, counter-argue that AIDS continues to spread not because men marry more than one wife, but because they cheat. For them it is not marriage (mono or poly) that spreads AIDS, but unprotected cheating. Some polygamous societies do not have high HIV prevalence. For instance, in northern Ghana, where 44% of marriages are polygamous, HIV prevalence is low. (Emmanuel B.Z. Kondowe, David Mulera, *A Cultural Approach*, 22.)
- ¹¹⁸The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland, *The Second National Multisectoral HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2006-2008*, 18 September 2007, 9.
- ¹¹⁹Sidney Callahan, 'Mary and the Feminist Movement'.
- ¹²⁰Sidney Callahan, 'Mary and the Feminist Movement'.
- ¹²¹Sidney Callahan, 'Mary and the Feminist Movement'.
- ¹²²Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 38.
- ¹²³Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elementary Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), x.
- ¹²⁴Médecins Sans Frontières, *Post Test Clubs*.
- ¹²⁵Médecins Sans Frontières, *Post Test Clubs*.
- ¹²⁶Médecins Sans Frontières, *Post Test Clubs*.
- ¹²⁷Médecins Sans Frontières, *Post Test Clubs*.
- ¹²⁸Médecins Sans Frontières, *Post Test Clubs*.
- ¹²⁹Médecins Sans Frontières, *Post Test Clubs*.
- ¹³⁰Valerie Karras, 'A Re-evaluation of Marriage, Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa's On Virginity' in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, (2005), 111-121.
- ¹³¹Valerie Karras, 'A Re-evaluation of Marriage', 115.
- ¹³²Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 134.
- ¹³³Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 103.
- ¹³⁴Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 103.
- ¹³⁵Tina Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 102.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MARY AS A REVOLUTIONARY

8.1 Introduction

A Psalm of Bringing to Birth:¹

Leader Women, what will we bring to birth
in the world of the new creation?

All Wisdom and justice,
peace and compassion,
concern for all God's little ones,
for the homeless and the destitute,
the hungry, and all who bear the brunt
of indifference and oppression.

Leader Women, what will we bring to birth in
the church of the new creation?

All A total disdain for power
that diminishes or destroys,
divestment of wealth and status,
a sharing of human resources
based on mutuality
and the sudden surprise of grace.

Leader Women, what will we bring to birth
in the hearts of the new creation?

All An unbreakable bond in the Spirit
that binds as one all brothers and sisters,
transcending class, color, culture,
religion, race, and gender,
that treats no personal preference,
no physical or spiritual difference
as aberration or handicap.

Leader One has been born among us
Who heralds such liberation.
Human liberation,
women's liberation
have taken flesh among us
and in Spirit dwell with us.

All Holy the woman who helped this happen.
Blessed are we when we give birth
to the Word made flesh
in us.

This psalm by Miriam Therese Winter makes an analogy between women's biological power to birth and their power to change oppressive systems in the world, replacing them with justice, liberation, sharing of resources, equality and other feminist values. It calls for "total disdain of power that diminishes and destroys" and for a radical turnaround or a reversal of values so as to bring about a "new creation." The psalm proposes a fundamental change in power and organisational structures or a revolution (from the Latin *revolutio*, 'a turnaround').² In the end, the psalm implicitly points out that Mary has already begun such a fundamental change by birthing Jesus the human liberator, and that when women bring about the desired changes, they like Mary, metaphorically give birth to Jesus. This psalm is only one among other feminist theological writings in different parts of the world that refer to Mary as a model of women's liberation and that link her with a revolutionary spirit for political, economic, cultural or social transformations. In this chapter, I focus on the concept of Mary as a revolutionary model of liberation for women oppressed by HIV/AIDS and all the structural inequalities that make women vulnerable to it. I argue that her Magnificat could be instrumental to the women's political and economic revolution and to their revolutionary solidarities, and I also attempt to show how this could be done practically.

8.2 Mary as a Revolutionary Figure

According to Elaine Storkey, Mary is a revolutionary because she took up the task of mothering Jesus which changed the future of the world. Though Mary was a young, ordinary and insignificant Jewish woman, the weight of responsibility which lay on her shoulders was one unparalleled in terms of how much depended on it.³ The risk was massive: "Resting on Mary's reply was the weight of history, the weight of eternity, the

weight of God's planned redemption for the whole of creation groaning in its lost-ness."⁴ Her response was revolutionary because it "set into action the most cosmic event since the creation of the universe itself."⁵

There are many instances where Mary's heroic symbol has been considered a great inspiration for social revolutionary transformation. Elsa Tamez of Mexico claims that Mexican women recognise themselves in Mary's experience and see Mary as one who identifies with their revolutionary struggles and as an active participant with them.⁶ Another Mexican, Maria Pilar Aquino, claims that women in Latin America, together with Mary, have to some extent overcome inequality, subordination and oppression, and brought about evolution in their social and political life.⁷ For Ana Castillo, Our Lady of Guadalupe the Protectress was the "revolutionary figure" that helped the Mexicans in their revolution for independence from the Spanish.⁸ Maria Pilar Aquino also asserts that in Brazil, with Mary's help, women were largely part of the ideological mobilisation which led to a peaceful end to the military regime in 1985, and to the election of the first working-class president.⁹ She claims these women now participate in all sectors as leaders of organisations who support important undertakings and spearhead key strategic tasks. For Aquino, Mary has become a liberator whose actions, like Jesus' actions "make the presence of salvation in human history manifest."¹⁰ For Alma DeRojas, Cubans have for centuries looked to the Virgin of Charity for assistance in dealing with the struggles of slavery, independence, revolution, and exile.¹¹

Nicaraguans Gebara and Bingemer also assert that Mary is a strong and empowered woman who made revolutionary political and personal decisions.¹² Bayembe states that the women of Nicaragua massively participated in the 1979 overthrow of the Somoza

dictatorship while singing the Magnificat.¹³ Rosemary Radford Ruether ties the Magnificat to the revolutionary spirit of liberation theology prevalent in Base Communities in South America.¹⁴ Asian Women Doing Theology credit Mary with the removal of the repressive Marcos regime in the Philippines in 1987.¹⁵

8.3 Feminist Theologians of the Opposing View

There are, however, some radical feminists who think Mary cannot be a revolutionary figure for women's empowerment because she herself cannot be liberated from past oppressive interpretations of her.¹⁶ For Mary Daly, Mary is destroyed by the doctrines about her. She is a symbol of incompetence and many other shortcomings associated with women.¹⁷ Marina Warner also discards Mary after completely deconstructing traditional Mariology in all its various meanings as expanded projections of the feminine by and for men.¹⁸

Within mainstream Christian theology, the view of Mary as a revolutionary has its fervent opponents and doubters also. Mary is often seen as portrayed in ways that provide religious legitimation of stereotypically subordinate roles for women. Monica Furlong argues that she is too pure and chaste to be a liberating model for women.¹⁹ Although Ruether envisions a liberation Mariology based on Luke's gospel, her view is that societies and churches with "high Mariologies" have an outstanding record of negativity toward women.²⁰

For Althaus-Reid, the Magnificat is simply an old poem of liberation which Mary supposedly remembered, and that does not make Mary a liberator.²¹ Althaus-Reid

believes that because of male involvement, the outcome of Mariology in Latin America has been a very harmless feminist liberation theology, devoid of any radical, revolutionary possibilities.²²

8.4 Revolution-ripe Environments

Mary lived at a time of imperial rule in which the poor were exploited by the Romans. According to Elizabeth Johnson, under Roman occupation, Jews most likely paid a triple tax: to the emperor; to the local Jewish client-king; and the traditional Jewish tithe (10%).²³ This taxation system was at the heart of the poverty of many Jews. Some Jews ended up in serious debts, while others lost their land.²⁴

Mary's time was also a time of intense social upheaval and political conflict. According to Johnson, poverty and hunger were the main causes of first-century revolts against the repressive Roman occupation. The atmosphere was ripe for political revolts and revolution. For example, historical writings of the time show that when Mary was about sixteen, about 2000 Jews were crucified outside the Jerusalem city walls after a revolt.²⁵ The violent way Jesus and most of Jesus' apostles died was part of the political-economic restlessness, including the violence and destruction of the temple in 70A.D.²⁶ In her teenage years, Mary could easily have known neighbours or friends who were killed or lost their land; her young acquaintances may have become socially uprooted and violent. Her family might have gone hungry after paying their taxes.²⁷

This life of Mary, in a society marked by political violence and restlessness, great disparities in wealth, power and privilege, is reminiscent of many lives of southern

African women who experience civic powerlessness, poverty and the HIV/AIDS impact. Her politically oppressive circumstances were not unlike theirs. Southern African women, who disproportionately suffered deprivation and violence during colonialism and liberation wars, are among the poorest, the most powerless and the worst hit by the impact of HIV/AIDS today.

Her image could depict some ways in which women could participate in personal and societal liberation in a revolutionary way. For instance, she was a tough ordinary woman who travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of about seventy miles,²⁸ just before birthing (Luke 2:4-7). This portrays a physically strong woman with great powers of endurance and determination. She could also inspire southern African women's own creative and revolutionary responses within their own challenging context. Her status, similar to theirs in some ways, could help to reassure women that as in her case, God has not forgotten them. She could help to bring new hope, life and dignity.

8.5 Identified with Biblical Fellow Women Revolutionaries

According to Richard Bauckham, in the Hebrew Bible and apocrypha, a string of women are depicted as human instruments in God's liberation of his people from their enemies, and placed alongside such male revolutionaries like Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and David. They are Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 2:15-21); Deborah (Judg 4-5); Jael (Judg 4:17-22; 5:24-27); Hannah (1 Sam 1-2); Esther; Judith and the mother of the Maccabean martyrs.²⁹ Like the male revolutionaries, they fulfil God's intention of delivering his people in heroic and revolutionary ways. Among these women, Deborah and Judith remarkably and outstandingly exercise authority in the public and political spheres - roles which were

deemed 'male'. By acts of gruesome violence, Jael and Judith successfully attack Israel's prime enemies to serve God's purpose of delivering his people. Though the other women mentioned do not formally step outside the traditionally 'feminine' roles, they also exercise their roles in ways that drastically and decisively affect the course of public life.³⁰ These cases demonstrate the actual power and potential of women in society to decisively reverse and end oppressive situations.

Bauckham notes that Mary's portrayal by Luke is paralleled to these revolutionary figures. For instance, Elizabeth refers to Mary as "blessed among women," (Luke 1:42) reiterating the praise given to Jael (Judg 5:24) and to Judith (13:17) after their gallant actions. There are also similarities between Mary's Magnificat and the songs of Miriam (Exod 15:21); Deborah (Judges 5); Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10), and Judith (Jdt 16:1-17). The theme of reversal which runs through the stories of these women is firmly rooted in Mary's Magnificat (1 Sam 2:5b; cf. the parallel in Ps 113:7-9).³¹ Mary is herself one of the humiliated (Luke 1:48) and her exaltation happens at the expense of the exalted. In both cases, the singer's own experience of God's favour is representative of what will follow for others in consequence, and what happens in the domestic and familial sphere of the woman transcends that sphere, achieving national and even worldwide significance and effect in God's purpose. The context of each of the songs combines the individual and the general, the personal and the political, the domestic and the public.³²

For Bauckham, these similarities serve to highlight that Mary's motherhood is celebrated not as a purely domestic and familial matter, but as an active role in a revolutionary act of God for the salvation of his people. She is gifted with angelic revelation (Luke 1:31-37) and Spirit inspired insight (Luke 1:41-45) into her God-given role that changes the world

radically.³³ Her motherhood “is of national and even world-changing significance,” and will lead to the reversal of the status of the lowly and the exalted.³⁴

Another classification of Mary as a revolutionary is in the genealogy of Mathew 1:1-17 as discussed earlier, where she is placed alongside other Old Testament revolutionary women - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Johnson argues that these foremothers foreshadow Mary who, by accepting to be the mother of a liberator, becomes subversive. The inclusion of these disrespected women heralds the reversal of things through the coming of the Messiah.³⁵ As in their case, unexpectedly “God works through, with, and in [Mary] in a providential way to bring forth the Messiah” who makes a revolutionary reversal of an oppressive situation.³⁶ Through them, the people were redeemed, freed, and brought out of situations of suffering.³⁷ Mary is one of the insignificant, illegitimate, defenceless, tabooed people who become agents of divine revolutionary action in history.³⁸ Through her, the patriarchal pattern is crushed.

The portrayal of Mary among other revolutionary figures gives a broader picture of the impacts of women revolutionaries in salvation history. Mary is not just one inimitable figure, but in line with other great women achievers, and women’s accomplishments stretch over a much longer period than Mary’s life span. Like Mary, other women have been revolutionaries, and modern women too could be revolutionaries. Further, the broader picture of women’s revolutionary impacts suggests greater results when seen as one episode of revolutionary acts by women. If today’s women combine their efforts against oppressive situations of infection, their impact too could be much greater and wider.

8.6 The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56)

8.6.1 Introduction

The Magnificat is a song that invokes revolutionary liberation in many areas of life – personal, social, moral, political, economic and gender.³⁹ It is a song of salvation with concrete social, economic and political dimensions. It is revolutionary because Mary's canticle praises God for the kind of salvation that involves overturning structures, social patterns and values. It speaks of changing the structures of power forever. For Tissa Balasuriya, it is a radical message similar to that of some revolutionary prophets of different ages.⁴⁰ It inspires and prepares people mentally and in consciousness to initiate a revolution.

As noted earlier, the meaning of the name 'Mary' partly suggests revolutionary mindedness. Its origins are from its Hebrew form "Miriam" which has two Hebrew meanings: "bitterness" (from the root *mar*); and "rebellion" (from the root *meri*).⁴¹ Both meanings could be viewed as signifying the qualities of Mary's character. She experienced the bitterness of oppression as one under colonisation, as one of the poor and as a woman. At the same time, the Magnificat could be seen as song of rebellion against her oppression and that of poor people. Though she feels bitterness, she does not succumb to fear or despair, but is full of resilience and defies her powerful oppressors. Her rebellion, infused in her faith, could be understood as an expression of hope for a brighter future and an optimism that the oppressed will rise above their challenges. It could be an expression of her inner strength to overcome her challenges and to encourage others to go through their difficulties. She stubbornly focuses on survival and renewal.

Quoting Martin Luther, Johnson writes that Mary “sang it not for herself alone but for all of us, to sing it after her.”⁴² The chant does not end with Mary - it is still read, recited or sung in churches and denominations worldwide. In prayers and in hymns, often sung by people with no special devotion to Mary, the words still invite the poor and oppressed to seek justice and to hope for empowerment in God. Thus Mary has given her song to make the reality of God present in their lives. Mary stands as a prophet of the coming age, calling oppressed people, particularly women, to take a similar stance to hers, so that the anticipated salvation may be fully realised.

8.6.2 The Magnificat and Women’s Political Revolution

The Magnificat indicates that corrupt powers must be overthrown: “He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly.” (51-52). For Gebara and Bingemer, “Mary’s song is a war chant, God’s battle song enmeshed in human history, in the struggle to establish a world of egalitarian relationships of deep respect for each individual . . .”⁴³ Richard Horsley thinks that the core subject of the Magnificat is God’s revolutionary overthrow of governing powers that oppress the people.⁴⁴ It reflects the intense political conflict and struggle of the Israelites against their oppressors. In its background, people are hungry because of the triple tax. Mary is also to suffer at the hands of Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish leaders. In the Magnificat, however, her words imply that such powerful people are actually weak.⁴⁵ For Elaine Storkey, the Magnificat implies that Herod’s power is so fragile that its survival rests on butchering innocent babies. Pilate’s power is so superficial that to keep it he has to deny justice to the innocent.⁴⁶

Even today, the message of the Magnificat could still inspire the overthrow of tyrants in southern Africa.⁴⁷ Their kingdoms could be divided. Self-opinionated officeholders or people with no vision, who crush the women by oppressive rules, regulations and customs, could be removed from office. They too could find their ‘empires’ withdrawn. Johnson notes that the six central verbs in the Magnificat that describe God’s help to Israel also denote forceful action: “show strength, scatter, pull down, lift up, fill up, send away.”⁴⁸ Thus the Magnificat could encourage powerful, vigorous and revolutionary action against political oppression of the weak.

More than just a show of dignity, strength, determination and resilience - as explained earlier, standing near the cross could mean waging a revolutionary struggle. Near the cross (John 19:25-27), Mary gives the impression of one who knows how to fight the kind of revolutionary struggle she declares in the Magnificat. As Jesus dies for the political crime of high treason according to Pilate (“the King of the Jews:” John 19:19), Mary stands bravely before Jesus in this dangerous place in the presence of his imperial killers. Unlike most male disciples who had escaped, she is active, politically-aware and involved, and supporting her son through much pain and suffering. She is strong enough to follow through and survive the sufferings of Jesus. She is determined to face all the public shame, derision and abuse of the crowd; the hostility of the religious and political leaders and the local and foreign powers.⁴⁹ Her struggles culminate in victory through the resurrection of her son and in the post-resurrection community marked by celebration, faith and power (Acts 1:2). She could encourage southern African women to take up strong positions against all forms of political exploitation. Her courage and strength of character under such circumstances could be an inspiration for those struggling for political freedom and empowerment.

Political revolutions are not new in southern Africa. The second half of last century was marked by revolutionary struggles for independence from colonial powers, and by national independence celebrations. The struggles were usually full-scale guerrilla warfare between the repressed indigenous peoples and their colonialist oppressors.

Though men were the major players on the warfront, women played very important roles in these struggles. They coordinated and worked in groups to provide food, clothing, shelter, and emotional and informational support to the guerrillas.⁵⁰ Working together ensured they functioned more efficiently. They often spied for the guerrilla fighters in very dangerous circumstances. Those caught in the process were often killed by the colonial soldiers.⁵¹ The men could not have done without the basic needs and support that women provided. In spite of playing such important roles, the guerrilla fighters at the same time pressured some women into sexual relationships. Some women were raped and killed. Under such difficulties, some women were nonetheless not content to play second fiddle to men. These swapped their traditional roles and went for full-scale guerrilla war-training, and joined men on battlefronts.⁵² They fought just as hard as the men in the battlefields.⁵³

It soon became clear, however, that victory through guerrilla warfare was not translating into economic, educational and political well-being, especially for women. Some former guerrilla leaders became dictators while others mismanaged the national economies of their countries.⁵⁴ Hence the struggle for independence for many women has continued.

In the 'post-independence' era, the majority of the political leaders remain men and women's voices remain underrepresented. Already heavily disadvantaged before

‘independence,’ women remain the most oppressed, and their oppressive conditions have made their infection easy. There is still need for a radical turnaround, a non-violent political revolution, without which women will continue to be vulnerable to HIV-infection, violence, poverty and other large-scale disasters.

Such a reversal would mean women’s political empowerment in terms of equitable representation in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and in the formulation of policies affecting them. Women are poorly represented in the lower levels of government, and are even rarer in its upper levels of decision-making and implementation. Entry into politics is difficult for them, often because of traditional and cultural barriers. Furthermore, those in office often lack the needed resources and male support to make a difference for fellow women’s lives.⁵⁵ Hence women’s HIV/AIDS and health related issues and resources remain insufficiently addressed at the local, national and regional levels. For a radical change, strong measures must be taken to guarantee women equal access to, and full participation in the “legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, and also the advisory commissions, committees, boards, and trusts.”⁵⁶ Women-friendly personnel policies also need to be drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in development processes.

On one hand, women’s political revolutionary achievements should be judged on quantifiable aspects of their empowerment, such as their numbers in positions of power and decision-making, and reservation of their seats or quotas. On the other hand, development of non-quantifiable aspects of women's empowerment, such as their analytical, advocacy, leadership and networking skills is important for women’s increased abilities/capacities to enter into political leadership or to create radical/revolutionary

reversals.⁵⁷ Such skills provide the foundation for sustainable improvements in women's positions. Increasingly, women should break the traditional boundaries and stereotypes, for instance, by taking up ministerial positions in previously male-dominated sectors such as defence, finance and foreign affairs. The reverse, of appointing men to positions previously viewed as women's domain such as women's affairs, children and community services, should also happen.⁵⁸

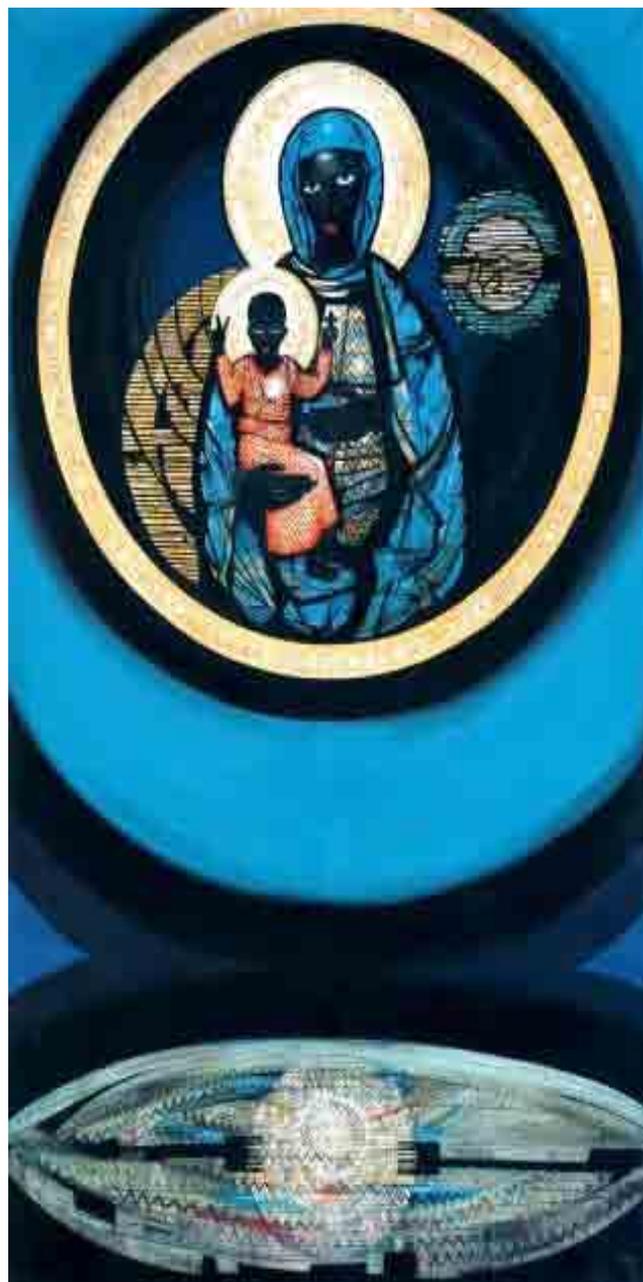
There are today some revolutionary feminist views of the black Madonna as a radical political 'game-changer'. She is often seen as an autonomous, independent, and active heroine for social justice. She is considered one who stands up for the poor and oppressed, a "woman of strength who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile."⁵⁹ For the sake of justice, black Madonnas are understood to be about crossing lines between religions, between the personal and the political, and about invoking intense passion in many people.⁶⁰ For instance, Our Lady of Guadalupe, a black Madonna, is a symbol of rebellion against the rich, upper and middle classes, and against the subjugation of the poor.⁶¹

In southern Africa, the Madonna and Child of Soweto depicted below could also inspire women's political empowerment.⁶² She was painted in support of revolutionaries struggling against apartheid. Beneath her is painted an eye, with different images in it explaining the Madonna picture. The pupil of the eye stands for the township. Two black forks that run across the eye toward the pupil signify the pain imposed on black people.

In the midpoint of the eye - a representation of the local church that stood up against apartheid - is a cross with a light that illuminates the pupil.⁶³ She is an adult woman, a

powerful character, not to be sidelined, an untamed revolutionary in her dignity and is sitting on a platform or throne. She is beautiful, a patron, more of a respectable figure than a friend or playmate; and she is associated with a strong sense of justice, inclusion, dissidence and compassion.

The Madonna and Child of Soweto



She holds a strong child and has the crown of a ruling queen with a sphere as a sign of power in her hand. Her child has a smaller crown and is signalling victory through suffering (the cross).⁶⁴ She is a bridge that integrates some women's experiences, particularly as mothers, mediates for petitioners, and is believed to be miraculous. Her images are printed on t-shirts that are sold across South Africa.⁶⁵

Whenever the South Africans remember the terrible apartheid period, this Black Madonna is a symbol of their hope. Such a symbol of a political and fighting Mary, in touch with the lives of people in southern Africa, has the possibility of inspiring the political empowerment of southern African women. Like apartheid, HIV/AIDS is a form of oppression where women are the worst hit. Marian guilds and women's movements could attain from her image and power the attitude to fight for their political uplifting.

8.6.3 The Magnificat and Women's Legal Empowerment

Elaine Storkey observes that the revolutionary tone in the Magnificat includes gender liberation.⁶⁶ Storkey notes that in her culture, Mary experienced many of the legal limitations of women in all patriarchal societies. Like other Jewish women of the time, her evidence was not accepted on its own in a court of law. She had strongly prescribed gender roles. She was not allowed beyond the gentiles' porch in Herod's Temple. Jewish men used to thank God loudly that they were not created women, even in women's presence.⁶⁷ Yet, in Jesus all those distinctions and restrictions between men and women were to be abolished. There was to be gender justice, and no more division of status between Jew and Greek, slave and free, men and women (Galatians 3:28). For Storkey, women were to be uplifted (Luke 1:52) from such gender and legal limitations.⁶⁸

Legal empowerment is closely related to women's political empowerment.⁶⁹ For a woman experiencing HIV-related oppressions, stigma and discrimination, legal empowerment would affirm and restore her power and freedom, and support her psychological well-being and overall welfare and health. Upholding justice and the rule of law could also create hope and bolster confidence for women in public institutions. The law and judicial process could revolutionise justice in 'private' relationships between women and men. Matters deemed private, such as domestic violence, lack of inheritance rights, marital rape and sexual harassment could be made public. The courts and the judiciary could ensure that "justice starts at home" by fully, justly and evenly applying the legal framework to benefit women.⁷⁰

There are at least three broad ways of revolutionising the justice system in southern Africa. First is by seeking changes in normative justice.⁷¹ In southern Africa, there is need for women to continue lobbying for a conducive legal framework, where women's rights are attached to the countries' constitutions. Normative, substantive law reform in both formal and informal justice (traditional, indigenous, customary) systems is needed to establish rights for women without discrimination, and to rescind contradictory customary laws and practices.⁷²

Second, there is the need for revolutionary change in procedural justice. Legal changes need to be implemented through institutions such as the judiciary and the police that enforce those laws, and in their operating procedures.⁷³ Concepts of fairness, impartiality, transparency, women's dignity and respect need to be taken a lot more seriously. The justice systems regularly fail women in that they are less likely to gain access to courts than men. Procedural changes need to ensure that the courts are accessible to women

socially, physically and financially. Legal literacy training, community lawyers, childcare services, mobile courts and legal aid for women could minimise the economic, social and physical distance between women and the legal system.⁷⁴

Law enforcement bodies (such as the police, jails, and national human rights offices, equality organisations and other grievance bodies) need to be reformed to eliminate gender bias.⁷⁵ Law enforcement officials need training in how to support women survivors of crime and to eliminate gender biases in the investigation and prosecution of crimes. The police, prosecutors and judges, need to be trained to better recognise incidents of sexual exploitation and domestic violence and trafficking.⁷⁶ There is need for more women in the judiciary, including national courts and traditional justice benches.

Thirdly, there is the need to revolutionise cultural justice. This includes changes in the customs, in cultural and social values.⁷⁷ The Magnificat advocates a revolution of a cultural nature: “He has shown strength in his arm and scattered the proud-hearted” (v.51). The arrogant of heart and mind are overthrown. Such a statement debases significant aspects of our cultural values which have made some people proud, greedy or vain at the expense of women. The Magnificat challenges us to develop the means of an alternative culture that places a value on the human person and human dignity. This requires us to combat all forms of cultural domination and discrimination, and to work against sexism and classism. Humility and respect, equality and dignity of all should become the principle on which our policies are decided.

In southern Africa, customary law rarely guarantees women's rights to equality. Most southern African states have so far found it difficult to apply constitutionally recognised

human rights standards to their informal customary systems.⁷⁸ The power of culture, combined with the lack of access to the justice system due to high costs and prohibitive procedures, make it impossible for the vast majority of women to meet justice.⁷⁹ To avoid this, the seriousness with which laws on sexual assault, marital rape, domestic violence, marriage and dissolution of marriage are interpreted should be informed by corresponding international law. There is also need for radical changes in laws relating to property inheritance, land ownership, and women's employment rights. Where the domestic justice systems fail to remedy their grievances, women should be able to bring them to regional or international human rights bodies.

8.6.4 The Magnificat and the Media

It is very difficult in today's world to speak of a social revolution without the use of the media. The media is one of the major tools used by oppressive regimes for propaganda. Yet if properly used, the media has huge potential to contribute towards women's wellbeing. The media is also vital for the transmission of the Magnificat, for making possible the concretisation of its message and for bring about a cultural revolution. Where Mary stands against discrimination and the insulting of her dignity, women today have the potential to do the same on a larger scale through modern media.

In southern Africa, the media is in some ways entrenched in cultural and customary ways of life that limit women's empowerment possibilities. HIV/AIDS is often reported on in ways that place blame on women, and words often carry value judgements with negative terminology reinforcing existing stereotypes.⁸⁰ Yet the media has the potential to make a huge difference by holding governments accountable, educating the public on how to

cope with HIV/AIDS and discrediting gender stereotypes and stigmas associated with the virus. More effective utilisation of radios and television broadcasts for better dissemination of information will help clear up misconceptions regarding HIV/AIDS. Posters, pamphlets and theatre could contribute towards revolutionising societal views by raising public awareness around HIV/AIDS and the underlying socio-economic factors.

If women monitor the media's performance on gender, this will raise awareness amongst media practitioners of gender discrimination issues. Women's organisations could analyse the change of value judgments, perceptions and attitudes in media, and seek to replace negative language with positive and empowering terminology. Huge changes could result from women's consistent lobbying for increased visibility, for improved reporting of issues that affect them, and from demanding that reporting raise the underlying HIV/AIDS issues that disproportionately impact on women. They could challenge sensational reporting and stop the insensitive reporting of myths. Mass media campaigns could raise awareness on sexual health issues, elimination of violence, sexual abuse and harmful sexual practices.⁸¹

Demanding an increase in women's professional participation at all levels of media programming will enhance equal space and time for women's and men's voices. It will help in ensuring that the media portrays positive images of male involvement in family responsibilities, while discouraging dominant male behaviours in the private and public spheres. Women could also embark on teaching others, especially their families, to be discriminating media market consumers who condemn programs and publications which insult their dignity or debase their role in society.⁸²

8.6.5 The Magnificat and Women's Solidarity

Writing about the possibility of women's empowerment through the Marian symbol, Elizabeth Johnson argues that women's "solidarity is unequalled in its ability to support women's revolutionary struggles for equal justice and care for themselves and for others."⁸³ Johnson points out that in Luke 1:39-56, Mary and Elizabeth struggle with the challenges they face; they acknowledge, support and encourage one another by listening, affirming and celebrating both their present and future.⁸⁴ For Johnson, they exemplify how women can struggle against their problems in revolutionary solidarity.

There are some revolutionary and political groups of women in southern Africa, but they have not had huge impacts at regional level. There is, for instance, Women of Zimbabwe Arise,⁸⁵ who have often invoked inspiration from their local legendary heroine Nehanda Nyakasikana, a 19th century Shona diviner and revolutionary leader in the fight against Rhodesian colonisation. Nyakasikana (about 1840-1898) was a spirit medium of the Zezuru Shona people in Zimbabwe.⁸⁶ She was, for the Shona, God's spokesperson, the equivalent of a prophet. She performed traditional ceremonies that were thought to ensure rain and good crops, and made oracular pronouncements.⁸⁷

After the coming of colonialism to Zimbabwe, and following the colonialists' imposition of a 'hut tax', forced relocations, and forced labor in 1894, the Shona people revolted in 1896.⁸⁸ The rebellion was spearheaded by Nyakasikana, their traditional religious leader.⁸⁹ Because she was a powerful woman spirit medium committed to upholding traditional Shona culture, her messages struck directly at the core of Shona beliefs and

captured the minds of the people. However, due to the colonialists' superior weapons, she was subsequently captured and executed in 1897.⁹⁰

According to tradition, Nehanda's dying words were, "My bones will rise again."⁹¹ In the post-independence Zimbabwe, she is still a huge national spiritual and inspirational figure. Both men and women, particularly those who uphold the African traditional religion, regularly pray to her for their wellbeing and that of the country. Some hospitals and colleges of national significance have been named after her.⁹²

The Federation of South African Women⁹³ has also found motivation from Nontetha Nkwenkwe, their national female figure. Born in about 1870 in the Ciskei area, South Africa, Nontetha Nkwenkwe became a widow respected in her society as a seer, herbalist and household head.⁹⁴ After surviving the 1918 influenza epidemic which decimated ten percent of people in the Ciskei area, she began having visions in which God told her the epidemic was punishment for people's sins and her mission was to reform society.⁹⁵ Nkwenkwe's prophetic role was part of revivalist movements that blossomed as people struggled to make sense of the influenza calamity, and to overcome anxieties and insecurity felt by women facing increased family, work and labour migration stresses. Her revivalist movement helped keep alive a spirit of resistance at a time when political bodies were weak.⁹⁶ Although Nkwenkwe was politically non-confrontational, the apartheid system soon mistrusted her independent mind and her large-scale black gatherings. She was categorized as subversive, was arrested, and rather than being charged, was committed to a mental hospital in 1922 until her death in 1935.⁹⁷

The Church started by the Prophetess Nkwenkwe, however, has grown to some 30 000 members today with congregations throughout the old Ciskei area of the Eastern Cape, with some branches in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Jeffreys Bay and Knysna.⁹⁸ Women today find inspiration from her as a woman preacher, prophets and founder of an independent church.⁹⁹ She was able to attract some local women (especially diviners) to her cause and they soon became prominent in her church. Women express gender and class frustrations in her church and secure a measure of independence, whilst their prophetic role offers the prospect of enhanced status.¹⁰⁰

Inspiration from such heroic and religious figures, however, has hardly gone beyond tribal or, at most, country boundaries. This could be partly why women's revolutionary movements have not always been co-ordinated at regional level. Their effectiveness has been limited and their recognition isolated.¹⁰¹ Such groups of women could work together with Marian networks and take advantage of Mary's more widely recognised symbol. The Marian figure, with its regional and worldwide recognition and appeal, has more potential to bring together women for a single purpose and help them speak with one voice. More than just a popular figure, Mary has already been a symbol of unity to some extent in southern Africa: some Marian guilds from different churches already meet under her name, and Marian institutions save people of different backgrounds in society.¹⁰²

In southern Africa, Marian shrines, chapels, grottos, gardens and her other places of worship could become special platforms for conscientising women's groups with the Magnificat's revolutionary message. They could become places for communicating a radical message for empowerment against infection and other social forces behind their

suffering. Even on a wider scale of women's solidarity, Marian devotion and Marian places of worship throughout the world could also be used to fight against HIV/AIDS and related problems. For instance, they could be used as platforms for understanding, campaigning, and taking steps to stop the growing gap between the rich and the poor which strikes hard on southern African women. Most southern African countries suffer exhaustion from paying debts, and the resultant poverty often leads to internal conflicts, more infections and deaths.¹⁰³ Programs by the IMF and the World Bank have often left poor and marginalised women in deeper poverty, unemployment, insecurity and lack of education.¹⁰⁴ The revolutionary message in the Magnificat could inspire the use of women's international networks to fight such injustice.

8.6.6 The Magnificat and Economic Revolution

Indeed, the Magnificat envisions an economic revolution by which the hungry and the starving receive good things, instead of their being monopolised by the rich (Luke 1:53). God's kingdom represents an economic turnaround, in which the rich are sent away empty handed. It encourages an economic revolution where God takes sides, brandishing a powerful arm against those who oppress the poor.

In southern Africa, a quiet but potentially powerful revolution has started in some residential areas such as Cape Town in South Africa. The urban townships, former breeding grounds of anti-government protests during apartheid, are no strangers to revolution. During apartheid, their bumpy streets experienced countless angry protests and their homes sheltered many rebellious meetings. Now that the main killer is no longer government bullets, but HIV/AIDS, in conjunction with lack of power, poverty,

unemployment and crime, the seeds of revolution are being sown differently. They are vegetable seeds, grown openly in community food gardens, created on previously unused pieces of land, often former places of garbage and litter. It is now a revolution led by women, often nicknamed “a grandmothers’ revolution, based on spinach.”¹⁰⁵ Formerly AK-47 weapon-chests are now increasingly filling up with vegetables: cabbages, carrots, beetroot, kale, spinach and heads of broccoli.¹⁰⁶

Normally, women co-own and run a community garden, about three quarters the size of a soccer field, filled with rows of flourishing vegetables. Each woman has her own plot, where she grows food for herself, her family and neighbours.¹⁰⁷ Often, there is also a communal plot where the women work together and from which they share profits. More gardens are springing up annually as others also start their own micro-farming encouraged by the success of their neighbours’ backyard farms. A township often has up to 300 gardens. More and more HIV/AIDS-affected people are now shunning poverty by producing vegetables for their diet and income.¹⁰⁸

Taking inspiration from the Magnificat, such projects by poor and marginalised women could be supported and carried out at a more extensive scale. Though some townships are supported by town councils, central governments and NGOs such as Soil for Life and ActionAid International, there is not enough support to bring about a radical transformation of women’s lives. As more Africans become urbanised, urban agriculture presents an opportunity for the poor to transform urban land into open fields and gardens and to unleash the potential of Africa’s smallholder farmers to achieve food security and prosperity.

The programs, still isolated in urban areas, should be expanded with drip irrigation kits and technical assistance, so that they reach more women. They could include livestock, poultry, and fruit-tree training. From Cuba, we learn that on a large community scale, micro-urban farming has the potential to revolutionise the agricultural face of the country, providing adequate food, nutrition and self-worth to millions.¹⁰⁹ With the help of land grants, front lawns of houses and municipal buildings could be used to grow vegetables.¹¹⁰ Offices and schools could cultivate their own food, and food quality could improve. In a place with wide stretches of underutilised rich land and perennial widespread food shortages, southern African urban planning laws should place the highest land use priority on food production.

On a wider commercial agricultural scale, it is also smallholder farmers - the majority women - who produce most of Africa's food, with minimal resources and little government support.¹¹¹ Years of policies of neglect have left some southern African women farmers locked in low level productivity and poverty traps. They should be supported and on the forefront of the agenda of the “African Green Revolution” – an organisation which bolsters agricultural production through transforming many small, subsistence farms into commercial ventures.¹¹² For the green revolution to work, there is need for much stronger political will, supportive policies and large scale financing for the women farmers. With enough support, today’s southern African women farmers could easily produce far more food than they currently do. They need improved access to finance, improved working relations with local commercial banks to unlock financing through market-based and affordable loans to cover production costs. They also need a ready market and fair prices to give them a minimum profit margin. Governments should support women’s uptake of new technologies, and provide price incentives for the use of

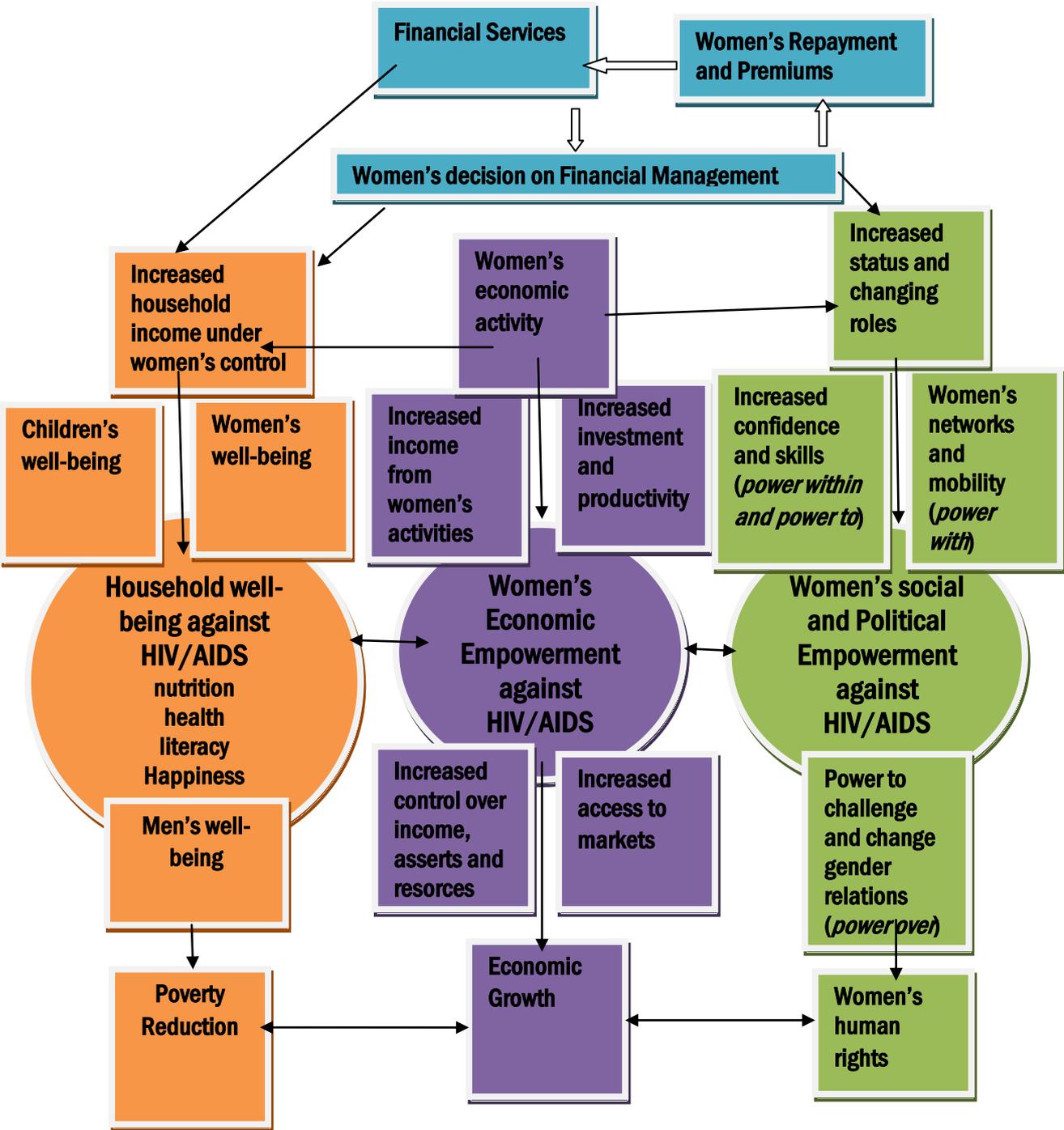
improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation extension and roads. Such transformations would bring to actualisation God's kingdom where the poor and the lowly are uplifted.

Organisations such as the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa¹¹³ and the African Green Revolution Forum,¹¹⁴ which aim to promote a food secure and prosperous Africa, would do well to target women, the majority of farmers. They also need to come up with revolutionary ideas of technologies, policies, market access and incentives – and revolutionary thinking on development financing to help the women achieve the revolution. They should help women to access the best farming knowledge and the best agricultural science and technology.

Another practical way of enhancing an economic revolution is the provision of microfinance to women. Beginning in the early 1970s, there has been a ‘microfinance revolution,’ which is “the expansion of small-scale financial services to the poor with high repayment records in developing countries.”¹¹⁵ According to Audrey Haylins, microfinance has led to fundamental changes in the lives of many women, who now have increased access to resources, improved material well-being and enhanced identity and power.¹¹⁶ It has shown its potential to kick-off a series of “virtuous spirals” of economic, social and political empowerment for women, and through them, their families and the wider society. Women-led microfinance institutions such as SEWA Bank¹¹⁷ and Women’s World Banking¹¹⁸ have pioneered many innovative services in the field. Compared with other regions of the world, however, southern Africa has lagged behind in the micro-finance revolution.¹¹⁹

Below is a diagram which illustrates how increasing women’s access to microfinance services could lead to empowerment against HIV/AIDS at least in three dimensions.

Microfinance and Women's Empowerment: Virtuous Spirals against HIV/AIDS¹²⁰



First, the economic (central) dimension shows that women may start their own economic activities, acquire assets or raise their status in household economic activities. Increased control over income and assets reduces their exposure to HIV.¹²¹ This, in turn, may lead to longer-term investment in, and productivity from, their economic activities, and may intensify their involvement in the market.

Second, increasing women's access to microfinance could increase household well-being. According to some evidence, microfinance may enhance women's decision-making in the household and decrease their vulnerability to abusive relationships.¹²² This could bring about changes in gender inequalities in the household, and also benefit men and children, particularly girls.¹²³

Third, increased economic activity and decision-making could lead to wider social and political empowerment.¹²⁴ Women gain greater confidence, sense of self-worth, skills, expand knowledge and form support networks through group activity and market access which could lead to enhanced status for all women in a community. The women could become role models for others, and lead to a wider process of change in community perceptions and men's increased willingness to accept change. Several microfinance and microenterprise support programs have observed improvements in women's status in their communities.¹²⁵

Finally, women's economic empowerment at the individual level (the connections across the lower part of the figure) could make potentially significant contributions at the macro-level by enhancing women's importance as contributors to economic development and their voices as economic agents in policy decisions. This in turn increases their

effectiveness as agents of poverty reduction.¹²⁶ Microfinance groups often deliberately embrace collective action to fight gender inequality issues in communities, including gender violence, decision-making and access to resources. They enhance higher-level organisation, which may further strengthen local changes, and lead to wider movements for social and political transformation. Savings and credit groups have often become the basis for assembling women's political and revolutionary movements.¹²⁷

Micro-finance indirectly addresses many other issues that affect women's vulnerability to HIV. For instance, providing skills training and small business loans could contribute to the raising of the local age of marriage. They have great potential to reduce some behaviour associated with poverty which increases HIV-infection risks. For HIV-positive women, microfinance could help to improve their diet and boost their sero-status. In southern Africa, large-scale microfinance programs are needed as a key strategy for revolutionising the economy and uplifting the poor women against oppression and HIV/AIDS.

One biblical instance where the economic revolutionary message of the Magnificat is concretised is in the post-resurrection community (Acts 4: 32-35). Changes are brought about so that "there is no one in need" and that, in a meaningful sense, "everything is held in common." The whole group was of "one heart and mind," and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions. This was counter-cultural to Jewish and Roman societies.¹²⁸ As in the psalm at the beginning of the chapter, here is "An unbreakable bond in the Spirit that binds as one all brothers and sisters, transcending class, colour, culture, religion, race, and gender, that treats no personal preference, no physical or spiritual difference as aberration or handicap."¹²⁹ Balasuriya notes that Mary would have

been an important participant in this approach to social and economic life, for this is how the first disciples of Jesus interpreted his message and lifestyle.¹³⁰ It could be deduced that Mary and her community represent liberated interpersonal relations, a community which shares its goods and values of human dignity, equality, sincerity and social justice. In their revolutionary cause for economic justice, women could conceptualise Mary as a woman in the struggle for a new type of economic relationship where no people are enslaved due to impoverishment.

8.6.7 Spelling-out Some Revolutionary Content of the Magnificat in Liturgy

The revolutionary and unitive aspects of the Magnificat should be expressed especially by religion-orientated groups such as Marian guilds whenever they meet and pray. Hymns and prayers that bring out women's social struggles should be composed, promoted and used regularly. For instance, Balasuriya finds in the Hail Mary¹³¹ - very much a Marian guilds group prayer - the absence of a socially liberative dimension, and argues that this can significantly tranquilise those who use it. For him, the Hail Mary should include an invocation for Mary's deep-seated support for social change as highlighted in the Magnificat. He argues that the "pray for us sinners . . ." part of the prayer could be reformulated and replaced by "help us the oppressed to bring down the mighty and exalt the humble, to fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty handed."¹³²

Borrowing from his idea, in the HIV/AIDS context, 'pray for us sinners.....' could be replaced by 'Help us the disproportionately infected and affected to bring down the structures that render us vulnerable and exalt the powerless with prevention skills, education and employment; fill us in our hunger for food and medication, and send away

empty-handed those rich in violence and gender oppression.’ This part of the ‘Hail Mary’ is not biblical - it has been made up by the church to meet their need for, and to express their belief in, Mary’s help.¹³³ It is therefore alterable for invoking women’s revolutionary spirit for liberation from infection, subjugation and lack of power.

In the same spirit, in place of Marian litanies indifferent to women’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, empowering ones with a Magnificat’s revolutionary edge could be composed and recited.

A Litany that Inspires Empowerment

Holy Mary, (Response: pray for us)	Holy Mary, (Response: Empower Us)
Mother of God Mother of our redemption Mother of a lost child Mother most merciful	Mother of the infected Mother of liberation from HIV/AIDS Mother of women HIV-survivors Mother of denouncers of patriarchal oppression
Woman responsive to God's word Woman who rejoices in her lowliness Woman with an undivided heart	Woman willing to believe the impossible Woman who faced cowardly murderers at the cross Woman most defiant
Model of gentleness Model of trust Model of patience Model of openness	Model of strength Model of courage Model of risk-taking revolutionaries Model of perseverance
Woman of mercy ... Woman of contemplation Woman of understanding Woman of grace and truth Seeker of God's will	Marginalised woman Woman of vision Woman pregnant with hope Sign of contradiction Breaker of bondage
Queen of the fullness of times Queen of beauty unalloyed Queen of our destiny Queen of peace Queen of tenderness	Queen of women’s solidarity Queen of power over one’s body Queen of full womanhood Queen of revolutionary meetings, Queen of social transformations

In the exemplary sample above, I have tried to improve the litany on the left side with the one on the right, by replacing some lines that do not reflect an HIV/AIDS context and that seem to lack some revolutionary content with those that do.¹³⁴

In such ways, women could always take advantage of flexible Marian prayers to express their own revolutionary message. They could help society to change in the way it conceptualises Mary. Such changes affirm, for instance, the theology of the Madonna of Soweto, a participant in the liberation struggle of the suffering and subjugated.¹³⁵

The revolutionary message of the Magnificat could be further spelt out more clearly in the way it is recited, read out or sung. Janet Wootton complains that the way the Magnificat is often said or sung in churches is so dull and uninspiring that it does not do justice to the revolutionary message in it.¹³⁶ Her experience is not foreign to southern Africa. The structure of many southern African hymns consists of chanting, responsorial and meditative verses. The chanting verse, sung by the lead singer, usually introduces the song followed by the responsorial verse, where everybody else joins in. Usually only one verse makes the chant and another the response, and these are repeated several times during the singing. The rest of the song is made up of meditative verses, and these are usually sung, each one in turn, by the lead-singer before reintroducing the chanting verse. The meditative verses do not have to be sung, and if sung, this usually happens only once. This structure emphasises the words in the chanting verse as the most important, followed by the words in the responsorial verse. The optional meditative verses come out as the least important.

When this is applied to the Magnificat, it is the verses with a revolutionary edge that come out least important. In many Zimbabwean Magnificat hymns, the first few lines usually make up the chant (46b-48) and the response (49-50). The rest of the Magnificat (51-55) makes up the optional verses that, when sung, are usually mentioned only once at most. The most revolutionary part of the Magnificat usually goes unmentioned and unnoticed. The revolutionary words are usually not part of the climax of the song. All of the message about God using his mighty arm to scatter the proud hearted, bringing down the rulers from their thrones and lifting up the lowly, or feeding the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty remains veiled due to the words chosen for emphasis. What would make the Magnificat more revolutionary is to sing these strong and revolutionary words in the chant, in the response and at the peak-points of the hymns. It is mostly women in southern Africa who fill up churches and sing Magnificat hymns. If sung in this way, the Magnificat could continually conscientise women on God's intentions for the weak and the marginalised.

The Magnificat also leaves room for women to name their particular needs in their own context without fear or hesitation. It only speaks in general about God lifting up the lowly (Luke 1:52), and about the "good things" which will fill them up (Luke 1:53). It is up to women to name the particular "good things" they need. Mary decisively and confidently names one such need at the marriage at Cana: "They have no wine" (John 2:3). She took the initiative, and more than enough of the "good thing" needed soon flowed among the guests. Johnson views here a woman revolutionary whose actions typically run counter to the expectations of idealised femininity:

Far from silent, she speaks; far from passive, she acts; far from receptive to the orders of the male, she goes counter to his wishes, finally bringing him along with

her; far from yielding to a grievous situation, she takes charge of it, organizing matters to bring about benefit to those in need, including herself.¹³⁷

Her Magnificat promises the plentiful provision of what women need, and is a platform for them to claim it. Starting on her shrines and grottos, women could declare: We have no - security from bodily violation, economic opportunity, political power, cultural respect, voice, peace, freedom, human rights, housing, health, land, property rights or dignity. By declaring “we do not have it, we should have it,”¹³⁸ women could be empowered to turn away from socialised lack of self-esteem and docile acceptance of marginalisation, and instead, engage in critical actions for a revolutionary empowerment.¹³⁹

For Johnson, not only at the foot of the cross does Mary say ‘no’ to her oppressors. The Magnificat in its content is a song of saying ‘no’ to women’s oppressions. It radically portrays Mary saying ‘no’ to domination and to what tears down the lowly. It is a ‘no’ in solidarity with divine anger over the deprivation of life and with the divine pledge to overhaul the world order. In the process, Mary breaks out of the boundaries of male-defined femininity and becomes, not a conquered or dominated, but a prophetic woman. In their different forms of solidarities worldwide, and at Marian prayer-groups, grottos and shrines, women could resolutely and defiantly say ‘no’ to HIV infection, AIDS, poverty, discrimination and high prices of AIDS drugs. Places of Marian prayers could be used for informing one another how to boldly say ‘no’ against cultural subjugation and lack of power in homes.¹⁴⁰

For Balasuriya, if for two weeks women said ‘no’ to donating funds to the Church until women’s rights were seriously honoured, there would be an immediate impact on the

power-holders.¹⁴¹ Borrowing from his idea, if instead, they named what they needed (such as AIDS drugs) and contributed the funds for its acquisition, they could have more effective power as women in Church. This could be a revolutionary, non-violent way of expressing the 'no' and the 'let us have it' inspired by the Magnificat - a 'no' cry to oppression and a naming of what they do not have and doing something about it. Such actions could help to bring about a turnaround or reversal against infection.

8.7 The Revolutionary Post-Resurrection Community

Arguably, the crowning point of Mary as a revolutionary in her life-story was the post-resurrection moment, when, through Jesus, she and all his followers, experienced victory over evil and oppression. After the resurrection, Mary's hope showed its true face and she experienced the transformation of the promise of blessing upon her into reality. Because of the resurrection of her Son, Mary is remembered to this day not as the lonely, weeping and depressed mother of a crucified man, but as the Mother of God who all generations will call blessed.¹⁴²

Balasuriya describes the resurrection as a revolutionary experience which illustrates the supremacy of good over evil, the toppling of evil by the good, the overcoming of evil.¹⁴³ Women, who were present at the death of Jesus, were also the first to witness his revolutionary resurrection (Matthew 28:5-10). The men, on the other hand, stayed at a distance and were slow, dull and obstinate in believing the women's experience of the risen Redeemer. In the garden of Olives, the men had fallen asleep (Matthew 26:35-39). They had failed where it seemed to matter most – when Jesus had needed their mutual support. Peter had even denied Jesus thrice (Matthew 26:69-75).¹⁴⁴

The resurrection event speaks to us about the important role of women in a revolutionary ending of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and era. It points at women as the ones with a stronger instinct, a more acute sense of the right moment to act, and a stronger sense of commitment to the end. Just as in man-woman relationships in southern Africa, women were apparently more faithful and closer to Jesus during his darkest moments. Recognition of this is needed for a timely and radical end to the pandemic.

After the resurrection, Mary was present at the centre of Jesus' community (Acts 1:40). As the mother of Jesus, she most likely would have been a key personality in this group, for instance, in telling Jesus' followers about his childhood and growth. She helped the community to carry on Jesus' message of human liberation and fulfilment. For Gebara and Bingemer, she was a bearer of new hope that is beyond death and a new way of being woman (Acts 16:13ff; 17:4,12,34; 18:18).¹⁴⁵ She was there in the midst of the disciples trying to establish the justice of the kingdom, and she could symbolise the hope of the post-AIDS era for those who fight for justice and give a new impulse to their hopes.

However, this community was still characterised by persecution. They were opposed as they contested the false values of society and preached freedom against oppression (Acts 7:34, 52). Acts mentions how the apostles were suspected, threatened, persecuted and arrested (Acts 4:3), but did not give up (Acts 4:23). The women were with them, supporting them in word and prayer and possibly in helping them to hide (Acts 12:12-14).¹⁴⁶

Mary would have been painfully aware of the killing of John the Baptist, Stephen, and her Son Jesus. She personally could have consoled the mother of James after his beheading

(Acts 12:2). Here was the mother of Jesus staying firm with the small group which spread around a revolutionary message despite threats, arrests and killings. For Balasuriya, in this situation, Mary was conceivably the mother central to the steadying of the group. She would have helped to keep the group together and also contested the social evils of her day.¹⁴⁷

This Marian symbol could encourage us to fight for liberation from the social evils which are part of the cause of our misery. Women could sustain commitment even when some of their members are killed in the process. Mary's motherhood could be appropriated to women's experiences as mothers, community mothers, educators, church leaders, labour union and community leaders, and her symbol could provide some motivation for self- uplifting and for revolutionary acts of social transformation. In the fight against HIV/AIDS and the structures that support it, it is also possible to imagine Mary as our bedrock of strength and understanding.

8.8 Conclusion

Conceptualising Mary as a revolutionary allows us to see her in sharp contrast to systems exploitative of poor and powerless women. As a revolutionary, she has the potential to change the way we conceptualise and use the multidimensional systems of society often oppressive to women - that whole complex web of economic, social, cultural and political factors. She could motivate us to curb the multiplicity of evils that nurture infection in these systems. She supposedly knew nothing about some important aspects of our modern life, such as the media, the human rights concept and non-governmental international development organisations. Yet she could inspire us to use them to end

oppression. Her motivation could come partly from Marian liturgy and Marian rituals. The next chapter gives an example of a Marian healing ritual in an HIV/AIDS context.

ENDNOTES

¹Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter - Women of the New Testament* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 31.

²Clifton B. Kroeber, 'Theory and History of Revolution' in *Journal of World History*, vol. 7, no. 1, (1996), 21-40. Kroeber describes a revolution as a fundamental change in power or organisational structures that takes place in a relatively short period of time, though he notes that it can include some slow but sweeping transformations of the entire society that take several generations to bring about.

A feminist revolution is typically considered to consist of multiple agenda for women, including equal opportunities in education, employment and pay, self-determination on matters regarding sexual contact and behaviour, better public services for child care, tough legal actions against violence against women, and an end to inequity on grounds of gender. [Jo Freeman, 'The Women's Liberation Movement: Its Origin, Structure and Ideas' in Hans Peter Dreitzel (ed.) *Recent Sociology No. 4: Family, Marriage, and the Struggle of the Sexes* (The New York: Macmillan Co, 1972), 202].

³Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 19.

⁴Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 19.

⁵Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 19.

⁶Elsa Tamez 'Introduction: the Power of the Naked', 5.

⁷Elsa Tamez 'Introduction: the Power of the Naked', 5.

⁸McCamy Taylor, *Who's Afraid of the Virgin Mary? Reclaiming Our Slice of the American Spiritual Pie*, accessed on 3-01-2009

http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=230x1941

⁹Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), 63.

¹⁰Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 63.

¹¹Alma DeRojas, *Cubania and Caridad: A Comparative Analysis of Cuban Marianism* (MA Diss., Florida International University, 2004), 13.

¹²Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary Mother of God*, 72.

¹³Clara Bayembe, *The Growth of Liberation Theology in South America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989), 80.

¹⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Basic Christian Communities: Renewal at the Roots' in *Christianity and Crisis*, no. 41, (1981), 235. Christian Base Communities are self-run religious groups that emphasise liberation theology. Both rural and urban based, they organise uneducated peasants and workers into self-reliant worshipping communities through the guidance of a priest or local lay member. The Base Christian Communities consider mainstream Christianity as having failed to condemn the injustice, poverty and misery they experience.

¹⁵Kyung, Chung Hyun, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 82.

¹⁶Rolf Bouma, *Feminist Theology*, 902.

¹⁷Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 62.

¹⁸Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 339.

¹⁹Monica Furlong, *A Dangerous delight*, 44.

²⁰Cited in Kilian McDonnell, *Feminist Mariologies*, 565.

²¹Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 72.

²²Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology*, 13.

²³Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 152.

²⁴Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 152.

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- ²⁵Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 152.
- ²⁶Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 153.
- ²⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 153.
- ²⁸Phil Greetham, *The Nativity Pages: Bethlehem*, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.btinternet.com/~prgreetham/Wisemen/ana2.html>
- ²⁹Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 57.
- ³⁰Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 59.
- ³¹Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 58.
- ³²Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 59.
- ³³Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 63.
- ³⁴Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 59.
- ³⁵Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 222.
- ³⁶Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 222.
- ³⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 222.
- ³⁸Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 226.
- ³⁹Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 58.
- ⁴⁰Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 58.
- ⁴¹Chana Weisberg, *Miriam: The Mother of Rebellion* (a Presentation of Women in Bible Series at Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center, Brooklyn, New York, 14 July 2011). Wesberg argues that, in Exodus, the meaning of the name Miriam exemplifies the qualities of the character of Miriam the elder sister of Moses and Aaron. Firstly, Miriam was born in a difficult period of oppression and she experienced bitterness when she witnessed the murders and the torment of her people around her. Secondly, Miriam exemplified rebelliousness against the bitterness of her circumstances when she defied Pharaoh's order to kill the newborn Israelite males, when she cunningly made arrangements for the care of her brother Moses (Exodus 2:3-9). She also expressed her rebellious resilience by initiating a song and dance to celebrate the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:21).
- ⁴²Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 274.
- ⁴³Quoted in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 274.
- ⁴⁴Richard A. Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas: Infancy Narratives in Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 110.
- ⁴⁵Richard A. Horsley, *Liberation of Christmas*, 111.
- ⁴⁶Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 129.
- ⁴⁷R. J. Raja, 'Mary and the Marginalised' in Vidyajyoti, vol. 51, (1997), 223. According to R. J. Raja, Mary will "not stop short of subverting all satanic structures of oppression, inhuman establishments of inequality, and systems which generate slavery and non-freedom," including those that oppress the weak, the poor and women.
- ⁴⁸Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 268.
- ⁴⁹Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 73.
- ⁵⁰Susan Geiger, Jean Marie Allman, Nakanyike Musisi, *Women in African Colonial Histories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 305.
- ⁵¹Susan Geiger Jean Marie Allman, Nakanyike Musisi, *Women*, 305.
- ⁵²Susan Geiger Jean Marie Allman, Nakanyike Musisi, *Women*, 317.
- ⁵³Susan Geiger Jean Marie Allman, Nakanyike Musisi, *Women*, 305.
- ⁵⁴Marc Roberts, *Pillage and Plunder: An Anthology of African Dictators*, accessed on 14-03-2009 <http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/global/africa/marcroberts/>

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- ⁵⁵ Augusto Lopez-Claros and Saadia Zahidi, *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap* (Cologne/Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2005), 4.
- ⁵⁶ National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001 (Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India).
- ⁵⁷ National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001.
- ⁵⁸ Anthony D.G. Mawaya, *The Sixth African Regional Conference on Women*, 1.
- ⁵⁹ Richard Ostling, *Mary: Handmaid Or Feminist?* in Time Magazine, 30 December, 1991.
- ⁶⁰ Richard Ostling, *Mary: Handmaid Or Feminist?*
- ⁶¹ Richard Ostling, *Mary: Handmaid Or Feminist?*
- ⁶² Laurence Vincent Scully, *the Black Madonna and Child*, accessed on 24-04-2007.
- ⁶³ Laurence Vincent Scully, *the Black Madonna and Child*, accessed on 24-04-2007.
- ⁶⁴ Laurence Vincent Scully, *the Black Madonna and Child*, accessed on 24-04-2007.
- ⁶⁵ Laurence Vincent Scully, *the Black Madonna and Child*, accessed on 24-04-2007.
- ⁶⁶ Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 167.
- ⁶⁷ Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 167.
- ⁶⁸ Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 167.
- ⁶⁹ UNIFEM, 'Justice' in *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability: Progress of the World's Women*, (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2008/2009), 75. Legal empowerment focuses on legal and legal-related services to increase disadvantaged women's control of their bodies and lives against HIV/AIDS. It involves legislative change, and encompasses engagement with the judiciary, ministry of justice, prosecution and investigative authorities, lawyers' associations, traditional systems and customary practices.
- ⁷⁰ UNIFEM, 'Justice', 76. In the public arena, the judiciary is the final arbiter of complaints against other systems (such as electoral systems, legislatures and public administration). It is a critical field where abuses against women, such as sexual harassment by public officials, gender-biased distribution of resources or flawed electoral processes are addressed.
- ⁷¹ UNIFEM, 'Justice', 76. Normative justice concerns changes in the constitution and legal framework.
- ⁷² The Global Network for women Peace Builders, *Women for Justice in Africa*, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.gnwp.org/members/women-for-justice-in-africa>
- ⁷³ UNIFEM, 'Justice', 77.
- ⁷⁴ UNIFEM, 'Justice', 75.
- ⁷⁵ UNIFEM, 'Justice', 78.
- ⁷⁶ UNIFEM, 'Justice', 77.
- ⁷⁷ UNIFEM, 'Justice', 75.
- ⁷⁸ The Global Network for Women Peace Builders, accessed on 23-09-2010.
- ⁷⁹ The Global Network for Women Peace Builders, accessed on 23-09-2010.
- ⁸⁰ Cephas Ward and Denise Samuels, *Summaries of Community-Based Research on the Gender Dimensions of HIV/AIDS*, (Study Conducted for the Research Unit of the College of the Bahamas, October 1999), 3.
- ⁸¹ Cephas Ward and Denise Samuels, *Summaries of Community-Based Research*, 3.
- ⁸² Erin Henk, *Leadership and HIV/AIDS Training Give African Women Journalists Support in the Newsroom* (The International Women's Media Foundation, February 2009)
- ⁸³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 260-261.
- ⁸⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 260.
- ⁸⁵ Kubatana - *Women of Zimbabwe Arise* (WOZA), accessed on 23-09 2010.

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- ⁸⁶David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History* (Harare: General Publishing Company, 1984), 14.
- ⁸⁷David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History*, 27.
- ⁸⁸David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History*, 27.
- ⁸⁹David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History*, 27. Nyakasikana encouraged the Shonas to expel the British colonialists from the land, rallying the Shonas on and encouraging them to intensify the struggle. She convinced them that God blamed the whites for all their suffering and decreed that the whites should be driven from the land.
- ⁹⁰David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History*, 31.
- ⁹¹David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History*, 54. Her followers understood this to mean she will return in spirit to fight the settlers. After her death, people still believed that the spirit of Nehanda lived on to free the land of the colonialists. During the second war for independence in the 1960s and 70s, for instance, her heroism was a significant source of inspiration. The guerilla war fighters believed her spirit was always present with them to protect and guide them to victory. They regularly prayed to her for protection and sang hymns dedicated to her.
- ⁹²David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History*, 66.
- ⁹³Federation of South African Women, accessed on 19-03-2009 <http://africanhistory.about.com/od/apartheidterms/g/FSAW.htm>
- ⁹⁴Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth-Century South African Prophet* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999).
- ⁹⁵Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 19. Though she could neither read nor write, she "read" messages from God by looking at her hands. She rose to prominence as a Xhosa diviner and prophet and attracted a sizeable following. Africans were developing imaginative ways of coping with the traumas of rapid change, and spirit possession cults acted as vehicles of protest, for mutual aid, or alternative structures for women.
- ⁹⁶Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 29.
- ⁹⁷Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 29. Official reports were made that some farm workers around Fort Beaufort had been enraptured by her message and were reluctant to return to work, and that she was encouraging Africans to boycott white churches. Some established mission churches, worried about her growing following, had also complained about her activities. It was common practice for authorities to remove 'troublesome' people from society by placing them in mental institutions, even without proof or insanity.
- ⁹⁸Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 29.
- ⁹⁹Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 32.
- ¹⁰⁰Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 32.
- ¹⁰¹The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *Native African Religions*, University of Dayton, Ohio, May 2007. There are also countless women's solidarities that are non-political. Wherever women coexist, they tend to form friendships and networks at different platforms: family, club, church, village, burial, societal and so on. At funerals, when undertaking hospital visits or nursing the sick, women usually work collectively. Currently there are many groups that stand together to empower themselves against HIV/AIDS. Examples include Positive Women's Network (accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://pwn.bc.ca/about-us/>) Mothers2Mothers in South Africa, and The Family AIDS Caring Trust in Zimbabwe (accessed on 09-04-2008 <http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:pilO94MvOT0J:www.popline.org/docs/1242/1328>

16.html+infected+women+groups+africa&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=9&gl=uk). Religious groups include the African Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (accessed on 09-04-2008 <http://www.anerela.org/>). It is important for such groups to become politically conscious of HIV/AIDS causes and effects, though not necessarily in the sense of party politics.

¹⁰²Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 33.

¹⁰³Robert Naiman and Neil Watkins, *A Survey of the Impacts of IMF Structural Adjustment in Africa: Growth, Social Spending, and Debt Relief*, (Research Associates at the Preamble Center, Washington, District of Columbia, April 1999).

¹⁰⁴Robert Naiman and Neil Watkins, *A Survey of the Impacts of IMF*.

¹⁰⁵Mahdi Ebrahimi, *A Revolution Fuelled By Organic Vegetables*, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://persianoad.wordpress.com/2008/01/10/south-africa-a-revolution-fuelled-by-organic-vegetables/>

¹⁰⁶Mahdi Ebrahimi, *A Revolution Fuelled By Organic Vegetables*, accessed on 23-09-2010.

¹⁰⁷Mahdi Ebrahimi, *A Revolution Fuelled By Organic Vegetables*, accessed on 23-09-2010.

¹⁰⁸Mahdi Ebrahimi, *A Revolution Fuelled By Organic Vegetables*, accessed on 23-09-2010.

¹⁰⁹Raquel Pinderhughes, 'Urban Agriculture in Havana,' in *Annual Journal of Urban Affairs*, 2000, Urban Studies Program, San Francisco State University, 3.

In Cuba, there has been growth of urban agriculture largely due to the State's commitment to making unused urban and suburban land and resources available to aspiring urban farmers.

¹¹⁰Raquel Pinderhughes, 'Urban Agriculture in Havana', 4.

¹¹¹FAO Focus, *Women and Food Security*, (Food and Nutrition Paper No. 46, Report of an FAO expert consultation, Jakarta, Indonesia, 5-9 December 1990), 4.

¹¹²The African Green Revolution Forum, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://agrforum.com/about>

¹¹³The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.agra-alliance.org/>

¹¹⁴African Green Revolution Forum, accessed on 23-09-2010.

¹¹⁵Hisaki Kono, Kazushi Takahashi, 'Microfinance Revolution: Its Effects, Innovations, and Challenges' in *Developing Economies*, vol. 48, no. 1, (2010), 16.

¹¹⁶Audrey Haylins, 'Micro-finance Revolution Comes to Africa' in *OFID Quarterly*, vol. 1, no 2, (2009), 12.

¹¹⁷Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.sewabank.com/>

This is a group of self employed women who first formed their own organisation in 1972 when the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was registered as a trade union in Gujarat, India, with the main objective of "strengthening its members' bargaining power to improve income, employment and access to social security."

¹¹⁸Women's World Banking, accessed on 23-09-2010 <http://www.swwb.org/>

¹¹⁹Letenah Ejigu, *Performance Analysis of a Sample: Microfinance Institutions of Ethiopia* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, March 2009)

¹²⁰Adapted from Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment*, 8.

¹²¹Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment: Virtuous Spirals in Gender and Rural Microfinance: Reaching and Empowering Women, Guide for Practitioners*, (Prepared for IFAD, 2009), 8.

¹²²Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment*, 8. For example, Working Women's Forum found that 40.9 percent of its affiliates who had experienced domestic violence stopped it due to their personal empowerment, while 28.7 percent used group action to stop it.

¹²³Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment*, 9.

¹²⁴Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment*, 9. However there is no automatic connection between women's individual economic empowerment and involvement in micro-finance groups and social and political empowerment.

¹²⁵ Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment*, 9.

¹²⁶Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment*, 10.

¹²⁷Linda Mayoux and Maria Hartl, *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment*, 10.

¹²⁸Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 85. According to Balasuriya, inequality was prevalent in the society between the colonised Jews and the Roman colonisers, between the rich, the Jewish powerful and the poor, and within the Jewish gender system.

¹²⁹Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord*, 31.

¹³⁰Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 85.

¹³¹John Hughes, *Marian Prayers* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1999), 45.

The prayer is as follows: Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

John Hughes, *Marian Prayers* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1999), 45.

¹³²Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 30.

¹³³Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 30.

¹³⁴Adapted from Marian Litanies, accessed on 23-09-2010

<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/prayers/litpray02.html>

¹³⁵Laurence Vincent Scully, *The Black Madonna and Child*, accessed on 24-04-2007.

¹³⁶Janet Wootton, *Introducing a Practical Feminist Theology of Worship* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 13.

¹³⁷Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 289-290.

¹³⁸Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 290.

¹³⁹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 268.

¹⁴⁰Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 268.

¹⁴¹Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 103.

¹⁴²The Franciscan Crown and the Rosary, accessed on 23-09-2010

<http://www.shrinesf.org/rosary.htm>

For the 7 sorrows of Mary, there are also 7 joys to eclipse them. The seven joys are usually listed as:

1. The Annunciation
2. The Nativity of Jesus
3. The Adoration of the Magi
4. The Resurrection of Christ
5. The Ascension of Christ to Heaven
6. The Pentecost or Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and Mary
7. The Coronation of the Virgin in Heaven

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- ¹⁴³Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 75.
¹⁴⁴Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 75.
¹⁴⁵Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary Mother of God*, 77.
¹⁴⁶Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 84.
¹⁴⁷Tissa Balasuriya, *Mary and Human Liberation*, 84.

CHAPTER NINE

A MARIAN HEALING RITUAL FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter a Marian healing ritual for infected women is given as a suggestion. After expressing the need for feminist ritual-healing for infected Christian women, the chapter goes on to explain the main features of a feminist ritual healing particularly as suggested by Elaine Emeth, Janet Greenhut and Janet Jacobs. Where possible, I will try to relate the features to a southern African context and experience. An attempt will then be made to explain a Marian healing ritual based on a feminist healing ritual structure. At the end will come the Marian healing ritual proper.

9.2 Women's Traumatic Experience of Infections

Research has shown that most of the infected women in southern Africa have been faithful to one partner and as such, knowledge of their infection comes as a terrible and extremely distressing experience. At the same time many women feel powerless to prevent their infection.¹ This experience leaves the women's feelings gravely hurt. They are left feeling dirty, evil, filthy and despicable and they undergo a traumatic experience, which fragments the self, leaving them 'in pieces' and taking away their coherence and integrity.²

Given this experience, infected women are in serious need of healing which integrates their fragmented selves. By healing I mean the restoration or the 'making whole' of

the body into a total system of an integrated mind-body–spirit relationship, which increases personal power and growth, and improves the mental health outlook of those traumatised by infection. For different people, however, this healing could mean different things: total cure; the restoration of integrity in torn personalities, families and societies; reconciliation with others, God or self; a realisation that one is loved; or experiencing profound peace during times of intense pain.³ Feminist ritual healing is a group healing in which group activity enhances the healing of individuals, and through them and their social activities, the society as well.

As some advocates of feminist ritual healing have observed, currently most major healing systems around the world do not offer holistic healing which enhances integration of fragmented personalities. Anna Thomas, for instance, observes that medical treatment has largely failed to heal the psychological and social destruction wrought by HIV/AIDS, and that the medical profession is also quite often beyond the financial reach of some infected women in southern Africa.⁴ Naturally, the Christian church should follow up and offer love and healing to those dismissed by hospitals. By and large, however, the Christian church has manifested deep spiritual poverty in the face of the HIV/AIDS turmoil. Church groups have often interpreted infection as a punishment for sin, and have associated HIV with death, which has groomed fear and helplessness.⁵ Women are also largely barred from religious authority and ritual leadership in churches, which undermines female power and leaves women with inadequate responses to the disease.⁶

The African traditional healing system is another major form of healing in Africa. Treatment in this system, unlike in others, involves recovery from bodily symptoms,

and the social and the psychological reintegration of the patient into her community. According to Marlise Richter, traditional healers have a crucial role to play in building the health system in southern Africa and strengthening and supporting the national responses to HIV/AIDS. However, while this system often fails to get the credit it deserves, some traditional healers, their medicine and healing methods are largely unregulated. They do not always apply human rights principles within the traditional healing profession. The system is also deeply rooted in patriarchal culture,⁷ and fails to challenge women's subjugation, a contributor to their infection. Some of the traditional healers have also misled the infected by claiming they can cure HIV/AIDS, and the system is normally shunned by Christians as incompatible with some Christian ethical and religious values.⁸

9.3 Feminist Rituals of Healing

On the world scale, feminists are developing a deeper liturgical dimension of healing by designing healing rituals to increase personal power and growth, and to improve the mental health outlook of women who have been victims of violence and abuse. In general, the feminist rituals are meant to radically change paradigms of faith rooted in male experience, male symbols reflecting and reinforcing a patriarchal bias, fundamental male assumptions at the heart of the religious rituals and the ritual behaviours that come from such assumptions.⁹ Research from a number of feminist scholars suggests that such rituals, based on feminine symbols of power, indeed heal abused women of fear, shame, emotional pain, anger, and increase their sense of power and their overall mental health.¹⁰

9.4 Marian Liturgies in Africa

Examples exist in Africa of overlapping and resonating theological viewpoints between feminists' and Marian guilds' liturgies. The Marian guilds' devotions include rites and prayers such as the Marian Stations of the Cross, Mary's Seven Sorrows and the rosary.¹¹ The coming together of their liturgical ideas with those of feminists is observable, for example, where in both liturgies Mary's birthing powers are hailed in every woman;¹² where Mary before the cross is seen as representative of all women suffering for their children;¹³ and where Mary is seen as the exemplary priest.¹⁴ There are, however, many differences in theological orientation, and Theresa Burger states that there are no institutional forms of feminist regular ritualising in Africa.¹⁵

9.5 Essential Elements in a Feminist Healing Ritual

Since feminist rituals are open to women's creativity, they have varying essential features. However, according to Emeth and Greenhut, there are four elements involved in any ritual healing process: recognition of need, a pilgrimage to a sacred place, ritual purification, and transformation.¹⁶ J. Janet observes three distinct acts of participation in a healing ritual: shared emotional distress, emotional discharge and meditation. She also analyses the aspects of emotional distancing, social bonding and transformation.¹⁷

9.5.1 Recognition of Need

According to Emeth and Greenhut, first there is the sincere realisation of necessity in a healing ritual, where the person expresses her problem, and admits her dependence on God for healing. Regularly, there is an invitation to experience the Holy.¹⁸

9.5.2 Sacred Space

Emeth and Greenhut suggest that this often includes a pilgrimage or sacred journey to a sacred place. Sacred space need not be one that conforms to traditional church structures.¹⁹ The St. Hilda Community prefers the circle, “which is a symbol of containment, the womb, the vessel, which includes and births the divine in us.”²⁰ For infected women, the sacred space could be at one of the women’s homes. African women often meet to discreetly discuss matters that affect them as women in their homes. However, Janet Jacobs stresses that the group should meet at a safe place for women to express feelings of anger without fear of being hurt, hurting others or doing harm to themselves.²¹

9.5.3 Shared Emotional Distress

This first phase of the ritual involves public acknowledgement of abuse by group members. In this case it would be acknowledgement of infection. For Jacobs, this lays the foundation for developing ties to other women as each of the participants shares her grief openly and in so doing becomes aware of the pain and humiliation of others.²² The women share things with one another that they never share in any other

way. The shared emotional distress can involve a physical act such as writing down the name of one's sexual abuser and shouting it out as one tosses it into some flame. This sharing aspect is one of the most powerful aspects of the ritual. It is also the most painful part and can be traumatic.²³ The simple act of telling a woman's story in the sharing of their distress can be revolutionary in healing. Emeth and Greenhut assert that as women do so, they claim the experience and allow it to change them and they become more of themselves in the process.²⁴ In Africa, storytelling is widely valued as a healing method. It is one of the major ways of doing theology for The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians with the intention of bringing about healing.²⁵

9.5.4 Emotional Distancing

Emotional distancing refers to the process whereby past repressed feelings are triggered when a participant expresses similar experiences and emotions. In the process, one should achieve double vision: being simultaneously a participant and an observer of one's emotional release. Distancing refers to the extent to which the individual is an observer of his or her emotions.²⁶ In a feminist healing ritual, this happens when a woman feels another woman's pain and rage because of similar experiences and then experiences her own pain and rage coming to the surface. The importance of emotional distancing is in providing one with the opportunity to learn to control one's anger or stress, which may also speed up the healing process. Such sharing of experiences is not alien to African women. In a Zimbabwean set-up, a young married woman would regularly have recourse to her paternal aunt, for sharing her experiences, and for advice and counselling when difficulties in married life

ensue. The aunt would often relate her own experiences to those of the younger woman and they would often shed tears together, reassuring and strengthening one another in the process.²⁷

9.5.5 Discharge of Emotion

According to Jacobs, this marks the second phase of the rite, which involves the participant's release of anger. The cathartic quality of the women's healing rite is evident in the release of emotion that goes together with the public disclosure of victimisation and the ritualised sharing of anger that follows the confessional act.²⁸ This release of emotion is probably the most provocative act of the rite. Jacobs adds that there should be a physical expression of anger accompanied by a verbal acknowledgement of it. In one feminist healing ritual which Jacobs observed, the physical expression was the violent shattering of an egg on which the name of the victim's sexual abuser was written. The idea was to bring the anger to the surface. The egg-smashing rite intensified the catharsis through a discharge of emotions that involved the participant in an act of direct rage. It included emotional acts such as crying and shouting.²⁹ This outward expression of rage embodied by the ritual reverses the inclination to internalise and suppress anger, which can be detrimental to healing.

9.5.6 Social Bonding

Social bonding provides the social structure through which the release of emotion is expressed, supported, and validated.³⁰ Within the confines of the women's healing

group, a sense of community is developed that offers a support system for those experiencing emotional pain in their lives. Jacobs holds that such collective emotional healing can bring about a very powerful sense of togetherness within the group.³¹ For victims of abuse, the effects of group solidarity contribute to improved self-esteem through the affirmation of collective injury that reduces the tendency toward self-blame.³² According to Judith Herman,

The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatises; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanises the victim; the group restores her humanity.³³

9.5.7 Meditation

In guided meditation, the final phase of the ritual, one of the women guides others to assume the strength of a sacred symbol, and to directly confront the abuser in an act of strength. According to Anthony Padzeni, meditative prayer is a transforming act and a powerful 'medicine' through which words, thoughts, and beliefs create expectations and images that affect our health.³⁴ The body, which is very responsive to images, thoughts, emotions and perceptions, can allow somatic changes to occur in meditation. Its natural defences can be mobilised to enhance healing. Expectations that increase hope can marshal the self-healing abilities of the body and call the immune system into action. During meditation, God's infilling grace can bring energy for change. New light and energy may be experienced as subtle or astounding or anything in between.³⁵

9.5.8 The Transformative Function of the Ritual

The concept of transformation in ritual healing refers to the process whereby a participant experiences an alteration in consciousness that reflects a better and healthier image of self.³⁶ Transformative imaging contributes to a reform of self which promotes the process of personal healing and empowerment. In the transformation, the feminine sacred symbol influences against such negatives as bodily experiences of pain, the changes caused by the virus or disease, and the emotionally charged negative understanding of suffering. According to M. McGuire, the transformative characteristics of ritual are represented in the words and metaphors of ritual acts:

Another feature of ritual language which is effective in the healing process is the ability to represent at one level of meaning, realities at other levels of meaning. Specifically, ritual words' metaphoric and metonymic operations enable them to work at multiple levels in people's lives. Metaphorical usage of ritual words places them as surrogates, having reference both to the original object and to some additional symbolic object.³⁷

McGuire adds that at the heart of any healing exercise are metaphorical transformations of the quality of experience (from feeling ill to wellness) and the identity of the person (from afflicted to healed).³⁸ In the ritual, the feminine symbol acknowledges the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power. It affirms the beauty of the female body, will, and women's bonds and heritage.³⁹

Without inciting violence, it is important that there be a ritualised role reversal, in which the victim becomes the more powerful actor than her infector or her cause of infection during the ritual. Such a symbolic exchange of power is enhanced by

merging the powerful feminine symbol with that of the woman. Jacobs asserts that the transformative aspects of the healing ritual are expressed in imagery and language that may be integrated “at various levels of the psyche, affecting both content of cognitive reconstruction and rational consciousness.”⁴⁰ For her, the ritual is meant to “untape the symbolic content of the mind,”⁴¹ and it not only transmits perspective, but also makes reality according to its worldview. It should evoke a shift in consciousness, stir up a strong emotional response to one’s needs and create an experiential link to unlimited possibility. This can provide a means for women to experience mastery and more power over their perpetrators and this role reversal can become a source of healing.

9.6 Music, Dancing and Drumming in African Rituals

In addition to the above features of ritual healing, music, dancing and drumming is an essential element of ritual for Africans. African music, dancing and drumming is a means for personal transformation, psychological and physiological healing, and creating community.⁴² It allows the African to reach deep down into the core of her being to get in touch with her very primal aspect of what it means to be human and to tune in to the sacred where life is affirmed positively. It raises levels of consciousness, eases physical and spiritual afflictions and unites the body, mind and spirit, transforming the sense of self.⁴³

If the dance, drumming and singing is done by infected women, it could become a revolutionary gesture. Dance involves the culturally mediated body, emotion, and mind. Infection, illness and pain involve the same things. The women would sing

and dance in the midst of their suffering to celebrate the mystery of life and to give and receive of the sacredness of life from one another. Their drumming and dancing could therefore become a symbol of defiance, a declaration that their bodies are alive and a continual source of joy for them. Dance would allow them to express bodily joy and the pain of their lives. Their finding joy in the midst of sorrow and hope at the edge of despair would witness to their courage and their gift of new life to all infected and affected.

9.7 APPLYING THE SYMBOL OF MARY TO THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A FEMINIST HEALING RITUAL

In a Marian ritual, Mary becomes the symbol of feminine power whose inspiration has therapeutic value for the infected women. Centuries of rituals that have involved Mary suggest that her symbol can take seriously women's innate hunger for meaning and their cry for systemic justice and healing.⁴⁴ This use of the symbol of Mary for ritual healing shall accommodate different levels of belief in, or reverence of Mary: from the simple view of her as an ordinary and lucky woman chosen by God to that of her as the Queen of Heaven. Usually underlining such varied views of her is the common recognition that she deserves respect as the mother of Jesus.⁴⁵

Emeth and Greenhut argue that the healing power of storytelling can be augmented by linking one's personal story with larger stories of one's faith tradition.⁴⁶ In applying the Marian symbol to feminist elements of ritual healing, I hope to draw from Mary's biblical story. I think her meeting with Elizabeth (Luke 1:26-56), especially as it is

portrayed by Elaine Storkey⁴⁷ could illustrate some therapeutic effects of ritual healing.

9.7.1 Recognition of Need and Invitation

The Annunciation brings to light a number of common aspects between Mary and Elizabeth. They both share the experience of being women under Jewish patriarchy. Both are anticipating becoming mothers. They are carrying their first children. They are cousins, belonging to the same family. For Storkey, both must have had the shock of unexpected pregnancy. Like Mary, Elizabeth had to handle her own sceptical husband, and probably a sceptical neighbourhood.⁴⁸ They each had the knowledge that God's miraculous powers were involved and they both had faced and dealt with the possibility of doubting their pregnancies. These common features most likely contributed to the need for Mary to take off hurriedly (Luke 1:39) to meet Elizabeth. They needed to offer healing to one another through sharing their experiences. According to Storkey, Mary goes to her older cousin for wisdom and understanding. On the other hand, Mary goes to offer healing through bringing physical help to Elizabeth. Elizabeth is much older and her pregnancy means she needs physical assistance. The older would also receive the joy of newness and insights full of fresh vision.⁴⁹ Mary also goes to heal by bringing Jesus to Elizabeth. Though only as an embryo, Storkey contends that the very Word of God is already on a healing mission. The two need to break free from their daily patriarchal experiences and acknowledge an enriching interdependence.⁵⁰

9.7.2 Sacred Space

The sacred meeting-place for Mary and Elizabeth was not the temple, where Zechariah had been struck dumb in the Holy of Holies (Luke 1:20), but the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-40). According to Storkey, though it was not a neutral ground, it was made safe by the absence of men, and the strategic divine silencing of Zechariah, which must have allowed the women more time and space to themselves. The moment they met with the intention of celebrating the intervention of God into their lives, the ordinary space immediately became sacred.⁵¹

9.7.3 Shared Emotional Distress

This marks the first phase of the ritual. In the story of Mary and Elizabeth, emotions erupt as they share what they have in common. Before that, the news of the angel to Mary must have been stressful (Luke 1:39) in that she is most probably taken completely off guard by the very suggestion that she is herself central to God's plans, that she is chosen as the one through whom God is to fulfil his promise.⁵² Any normal woman would be shocked at having unexpected pregnancy. According to Storkey, as a young virgin, Mary could have expected an uncomplicated life as the eventual wife of a respectable local carpenter, but she suddenly takes on dimensions of responsibility which she had probably never thought possible in their early days of betrothal.⁵³ She was to know the unease of being an unmarried pregnant mother, where the penalty for it was death by stoning.⁵⁴ It was to strain relations with her fiancé, who thought she had been unfaithful to him. She was forced into a quick

marriage as some legal protection. She must have felt vulnerable and distressed, for Joseph could have refused to marry her.⁵⁵

On the part of Elizabeth, for years she had felt inadequate and diminished, where the hallmark for womanly success had been to produce many children for a husband. Even then, her pregnancy at a time when she her body was naturally too old for it should have caused her much distress. She also had the anxiety of being unable to share her news with people who could not understand her. For Storkey, no doubt her neighbours thought of her as ridiculous, gossiped and questioned whether she was not “under some pathetic delusion.”⁵⁶ Naturally, this would have been compounded by Zechariah’s dumbness, which left her virtually with no one to freely share the news of her pregnancy. Hence at Mary’s arrival, Elizabeth could not delay crying “out with a loud voice” (Luke 1:32). The reaction of the baby in the womb could also signify the intense emotions at hand - hardly containable and prone to cause some stress.

Within the HIV Marian ritual, at the stage of shared emotional release the women living with HIV/AIDS write the names of their infectors, or the reasons for their infection, on the head of a spear-imitation (a more culturally attuned variant of the egg).⁵⁷ They also dip the ‘spear’ into a bowl of ‘blood’ – it could be chicken blood (or, in place of blood, some blood-like substance such as red paint). This symbolises the bodily harm that patriarchy has done to the women’s bodies, and how deeply each woman has been hurt in her womanhood and her humanity. It could also be a sign of the betrayal that happened at her infection, just as Judas’ betrayal of Jesus’ blood was exposed by his dipping into the bowl (Mark 14:20). With the tip of the spear, she marks with the ‘blood’ a cross on her forehead and hands or any other part(s) of the

body, to symbolise the piercing of her body by the patriarchal sword. The blood marking also symbolises the humiliation, brokenness, fragmentation and bodily defilement done by the virus. She is then encouraged to tell her bitter story of infection. The outward acts of this ritual help to invoke the emotions.⁵⁸

9.7.4 Emotional Distancing

Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56) could be looked at as a confrontational declaration of struggle against the oppressive rich and the powerful in an environment of emotional distancing. Elizabeth's cry, "why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?" (Luke 1:43-44) bears witness to how her spirit rose within her to a powerful vision of happiness and truth that was to come to fruition through Mary.⁵⁹ As Elizabeth cries out emotionally, Mary apparently becomes aware of, and engages in, her own feelings. She sees her emotions for God's coming kingdom reflected in those of Elizabeth's outcry, and this prompts her to confront the anger inside herself against the rich and the powerful. She does this in a place where she could safely vent her emotions out without hurting anyone or herself.⁶⁰

9.7.5 Discharge of Emotion

For this second phase of the ritual, geared towards emotional release, the spearhead is broken off the main shaft, bitten into pieces by each participant using a rubber hammer, as an emotional act that should help release her anger. The pieces can be tossed into a fire and burnt. The removal of the spearhead symbolises women's refusal to remain subjected to male violence and sexual subjugation. The burning

heralds the end of the period of self-pity. The women destroy the spearhead to declare a new era, a new life, where they look forward to a fulfilling future. It is a denunciation of their definition according to male sexual needs. The remaining shaft is also broken into two pieces that form a cross - a symbol of peace in contrast to the sword - a symbol of war and violence. The women thus declare peace upon themselves from the sexually violent patriarchal world. The cross also symbolises their willingness to strive for victory. Like Mary, they will carry their own crosses into the 'post-resurrection community' that celebrates victory (Acts 1:14).

The smashing of the spearhead is analogical to Mary's declaration of the fall and the humbling of the self-centred rich (v.53) or the self-conceited powerful (v.52). Its smashing by the 'lowly' woman symbolises her empowerment so that through her, her oppressors are overcome. The movement of the powerful hand downwards to smash the spearhead signifies women being used by God's hand to bring down the mighty. As Mary demonstrated in her own person and song, God chooses the weak to confound the strong. The crushing of the spearhead shows that the powerful are actually weak. As she crushes the spearhead, the woman should vent out all her anger until she feels it is all emptied out and she is free of it.⁶¹

The spearhead smashing is followed by the washing away of the blood and the anointing of women's bodies with oil. The washing away represents cleansing from shame, humiliation, dishonour or stigma. Anointing with oil is a symbol of new life, of new strength and health, and a life in which the stigma of infection is sidelined by the strong intention of the women to reclaim their lives. It also depicts the women's

reclaiming of their bodies as vehicles of divine revelation and of embodied action against their oppression.

9.7.6 Social Bonding

The three months which Mary and Elizabeth enjoyed together must have been times of great refreshment and peace. Storkey writes that we get a powerful glimpse of their relationship, and their joy in each other's company at their mutual blessing and outpouring of praise to God. We get a snapshot in a small flash of how they loved, saved, encouraged and healed each other. This tiny passage of their self-healing and encouragement (Luke 1:56) has encouraged some women to bond under Mary's banner in the world.⁶² Mary's exemplary bonding with other women is also noticeable before the cross (John 19:26) and in the post-resurrection community (Acts 1:14).

9.7.7 Meditation

This meditation aims at individualised transformation through identifying with Mary's image of female strength and power. It is intended to enhance healing through bringing attentiveness to the symbol of inspiration, and allowing one to dream and fantasise about it. The meditation is a waiting on the Marian symbol, listening for the inspiring word or idea to be spoken, for the image or symbol to be revealed or for the knowledge of what to do or what to be discerned. It is a time of being made whole by God through Mary, an encounter with God through Mary.

For this meditation, a selection of ‘empowering’ pictures, images or statues of Mary that go along with healing can be placed before women for them to choose the image that most inspires them. Examples of Mary’s empowering images can be the Madonna and Child of Soweto,⁶³ Mary as consoler of Eve or as the woman clothed with the sun (Revelation 12).⁶⁴

The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Revelation 12)



In Revelation 12, Mary shines brightly as the exemplar of victory under suffering and pain; the powerful woman who knows how to combat the strategies of evil. Like the

Madonna and Child of Soweto, the image in Revelation could depict Mary as a mother of sorrows, struggling against evil; a powerful virgin, who fights and is not subjugated; or a revolutionary victorious against evil and oppression. Although the “woman” is "suffering the pangs and anguish of childbirth" (12:2) before the dragon, she is a woman of glory on a cosmic scale, clothed with the sun, standing on the moon and having a crown of twelve stars. She is empowered in and through her body – the child she bears is to rule the world against evil (Revelation 12:5). She could also relate to the women as their powerful mother. Revelation 12 suggests that though she is exalted in the midst of visible creation, she is also a fellow sister to women, who continues to take part in their spiritual battles against evil. Her war could be understood as the same combat waged by feminists against the world rulers, or by women in southern Africa. In meditation, the women could try to visualise themselves as empowered in their bodies, and overcoming their dragon - the pandemic and its causes. As pain and suffering enter their lives, they must fight with courage.

The women may meditate on such an image, so as to be merged with it, or to assimilate from Mary’s image her strength, greatness and empowered relationship with God. The meditation should seek to integrate the symbol of Mary into the consciousness of the participant, contributing to a redefinition of self as powerful actor rather than helpless victim.

9.7.8 The Transformative Function of the Ritual

The transformation of Mary herself, which she asserts in the Magnificat, took place at her becoming the mother of the saviour. The merging of two ideas, that of Mary the young, unassuming virgin, and that of Mary the mother through whom the world would be changed, was the transformative process of Mary into a great woman who overpowered challenges in her life. Her motherhood legitimises and affirms the transformed beauty of female power, body, will, and of women's bonds.

There is an aspect of role reversal in the Magnificat, where Mary declares herself empowered over the worldly powerful who are dethroned and left empty handed. For her, this narration is only the beginning of a transformed life which she actually lives in person. Bringing into the world its transforming Saviour means she is empowered beyond the reach of the worldly powerful who are dethroned and left empty handed (Luke 2:52-53). In the same spirit, women could find ways of expressing themselves as more powerful than their infectors and causes of their infection.

The transformative images of Mary could vary depending on individuals' view of Mary's empowering possibilities and healing power. For instance, she could be experienced as a huge figure, or as an aggressive denouncer of the oppressive rich and powerful. In the ritual below, the experience of Mary as mother leads to a symbolic merging of child with mother. The participant images her mother (Mary) as self in the form of a powerful female figure.

9.8 THE MARIAN HEALING RITUAL

In this section I suggest the Marian feminist healing ritual for women who live with HIV. About ten women gather in a circular setting at the home of a woman who has recently discovered she is HIV-positive, and who has invited the group to her house for healing. All present may begin with a sorrowful hymn, reflecting the mood of the woman struggling to come to terms with her infection. Though drums may be played, it is not yet dancing time. For this ritual, the women will need a rubber hammer; a pounding board; some fire; Mary's empowerment-enhancing pictures and images, scriptural passages with reference to Mary, writing material and some washing water. Each woman will need an imitation of a spear, breakable into three parts, with the head coming off, and the rest of the body broken into two and fitted into a cross. The spearhead should be easily ground into pieces or pounder and burnt (it could be made of semi-hard paper, candle or thin, light wood). Also needed is a bowl of animal blood, such as chicken blood, or some blood-like liquid, such as red paint; and anointing oil.

Hymn

Chant O Mother of Sorrows, with strength from above

All **You stood by the Cross, sharing in Jesus' sufferings;
with tender love, had your soul pierced through his,
your heart torn through, mourning and weeping.**

Chant O Mother of Sorrows, with strength from above

All **We bless you for your faith, not overcome by misery;
for your hope, trusting he would do great things for you;
for your strength, in bearing with Jesus in his passion**

Chant Holy Mary, may we, like you, with faith, hope and strength in him,

All **overcome our torn bodies,
dismembered at our own cross.**

Stand by us in our trials and in our many needs.⁶⁵

Introduction (leader 1)

We are gathered here in solidarity with our fellow sister, on whom the misfortune of the pandemic has befallen just as in our case. The brutal experience of our sister here is basically similar to ours and her suffering resonates with our own. During such difficult times we need one another to overcome this huge life-time challenge we

face. This evil also challenges us to look closely at the lives of other women in Christian tradition who went through difficulties of their time and came out of them victorious, so that we may learn from them and be helped by them in dealing with our own problems. Right at the beginning and centre of the Christian salvation story is Mary who asked the question that intimately concerned her body: “How can this happen to me?” She faced her own challenges, stood firm on her ground and overcame them. We too ask:

All: How can this happen to us?

Prayer Dear Lord God, we have become HIV infected due our lack of power. We ask today that we be restored to wholeness from the illnesses caused by this infection, and that we be empowered against it. Give us Mary’s courage to make decisions that revolutionise our lives and empower us to health and freedom against oppression.

Reading: The Annunciation and the Visitation: (Luke 1: 26-45)

Leader 2 Mary asked the question: How can this happen to me? – the same question our sister here must be asking herself. This was a vital question for Mary, whose life and personhood as a woman was to be wholly transformed by what was to happen to her. Her womanhood and maternal heart were to be caught up in great suffering in the process. After asking this question, she set on a journey to be in solidarity with Elizabeth, a fellow woman who shared her experiences. *(To the host)* Like Mary in solidarity with Elizabeth, we are here to share our experiences with you. We are with you one community, one body. Your pains are our pains, your sorrows our sorrows. Like Mary who stayed with Elizabeth we ask in solidarity:

All How can this happen to us?

[First Phase of Participation: Shared Emotional Release]

Leader 3 Not long after, Mary was told: “. . . a sword will pierce your own soul . . .” (Luke 2:35). Indeed, at the foot of the cross, the sword of Longinus⁶⁶ pierced her son’s side as she watched. And as the sword that thirsted for her son’s blood entered deep into his side and quenched its thirst therein she experienced this piercing in her own heart and soul. She must have seen with her own eyes the tip of the sword come out covered with the red colour of her son’s blood. Our own health and blood too,

have been sacrificed to quench the thirst of the patriarchal sword that knows no dignity, no respect for women in its quest to satiate its self-indulged thirst.

Reading Jesus' Side is Pierced: John 19:25-37.

Leader 3 Though Mary was innocent, in her womanhood she was caught up in the pains and pangs of the patriarchal world. A sword has pierced the soul of our sister here in her womanhood.

All: **It is a dark hour for us. Our souls are pierced by the sword.** [to the host] **We will watch with you at the foot of the cross, at our Golgotha. With Jesus we cry out: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? How can this happen to me?**

Prayer Dear Lord, we thank you for the example of Mary and Elizabeth, who sought to emotionally console and heal one another by sharing their stories. Many of us too need to let out our emotions, but often there is no one to understand us. Our unshared experiences often become toxic and eat us away. Help us today to bring healing to ourselves by letting out all our painful thoughts, words, and feelings.

Going round the circle, each woman tells her story of infection. She goes on to write on the spearhead the name of the person or thing representative of the patriarchal subjugating powers that have led to her infection. Each woman then deeps the spearhead into the bowl of blood. With the tip of the spear, she marks with 'blood' a cross on her forehead and hands or any other part(s) of the body. Others can sympathetically listen, reassure, reaffirm, or validate the experience of the storyteller in the process. The women can briefly sing a song and dance to the drum at the end of their story-telling.

Hymn **My blood is precious, let me praise it, honour it,
Like Mary in her Magnificat, let me stand up to my enemy,
by the power of Jesus' Blood, mingled with mine at the cross.**

**My body is precious, let me love it, celebrate it.
Like Mary at the foot of the cross, let me stand up to my enemy,
by the power of Jesus' Body visible in my own.**

[Second Phase of Participation: Emotional Discharge]

Leader 4 Daughters of Africa, my sisters, today we weep for ourselves, we mourn for our womanhood. We turn our attention to our own crosses. ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Yes, blessed are they who never define themselves by the pleasures they can give to a man, by their wombs and breasts. Blessed are they who never fell in love with a man, who never got married, who never got lured into subjugation, who never fell under a man’s rule, under his sword.

Reading Jesus Tells Women to Mourn for Themselves: Luke 23:27-29.

Leader 4 Who is a blessed woman then? Though she is told, by the one she bore and nursed, to mourn for herself, Mary is a blessed woman, a woman fully human in herself. At her blessed conception of him, her fiat is not in the interest of any man; it is her personal, independent and mature decision. And in her Magnificat, this blessed woman boldly calls out for the uplifting of the lowly, such as you and me. She cries out against her oppression and that of others by the rich and oppressive powerful. She lets out her emotions and makes a revolutionary call for their defeat. She is the one who crushed the serpent’s head by her feet. Today let her outrage be our rallying call. Let her inspire our liberation and empowerment.

All **Blessed is the woman fully liberated, self fulfilled and wholly mature because she is fully human in herself.**

Prayer Dear Lord, most of us have been really shocked, upset and distressed and have been left in terrible sorrow, agony and misery. We pray for the power to discharge our distress and agony and for the gift to start afresh, to go on with life, to accept changes boldly and to be determined to enjoy life again. May we learn from Mary and Elizabeth that letting out our emotions and feelings enhances our healing, courage and confidence.

Leader 4 My dear sisters, it is now time to let out our fury against our enemies. We must now face the cause of our infection and pour our rage at ‘him’. We must be cleansed and healed of all our rage. Remember the ‘blood’ on your spear and on your body stands for your infected blood and body. Therefore pound on the spear-head, emit all your anger, hidden and avoided, and be renewed again. Say out all you think

and feel. This is our healing place. Shout, cry and pound heavily on the one who stole your life. Do not go out of this hut with your rage still.

At this phase, in turns, each woman speaks to the spear as if speaking to her infector, or to her cause of infection. She goes on to break off the head of the spear, and to emotionally pound upon it using a rubber hammer, until the spear-head turns into powder-like bits and pieces. As she does so, she angrily empts out her rage at the cause of her infection. She then scatters the powder into the fire while the other women shout:

All **N..., scatter the proud, bring down the powerful from their thrones, and send the rich away empty. Crush the serpent by its head. You will be lifted; you will be filled with good things.**

The woman goes on to break the remainder of the spear into two parts and to make a cross which she can keep with her. She also washes away the marks of blood on her body, and others anoint her with oil on her forehead and hands, while all say:

All **We are the poor, we are the hungry, we are oppressed, and we are the humble who fear the Lord; we are the downtrodden. We will be blessed, the Lord will have mercy on us, great things shall be done to us, we will be filled with good things; we will be uplifted, we will rejoice, and we will overcome.**

At the end of the emotional discharge' stage, the women can celebrate by singing, drumming and dancing their local version of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

[Third Phase of Participation: Meditation]

Some pictures of Mary as mother, previously selected as empowerment enhancing, for and by the group members, are passed around for viewing and discussion. Then each of the women chooses the picture she likes to use for her meditation.

Prayer Dear Lord, our lives have been condemned and damned by our society, but we have not resigned them to our fate. We believe in transformation, in healing, empowerment and resurrection. By the power of your Holy Spirit, you transformed the lives of Mary and Elizabeth, and made the seemingly impossible possible. Come and transform us now. Send us your post-resurrection Spirit of victory and transformation, to make us healthy, whole, and happy. May we get the transforming

insight from the exemplary figure of your mother Mary. We now want to assume and enjoy the power of her great figure and to be empowered against all our challenges.

Reading The coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4)

Leader 5 We know that some of the women in this post-resurrection community had carried their crosses all the way to it, and when Jesus rose from the dead, he shared with them his transforming Spirit. Through the spirit they shared his resurrection power which strengthened them to face the world again without fear, and with faith and hope. Mary, who had already been transformed at the annunciation, continued to enjoy more empowerment and uplifting. In Mary we see the transformative woman-power, the possibilities of woman's uplifting, empowerment and woman's rising spirit. And Mary can share with us this power. From her we can embrace it, assume it, be enveloped and transformed by it. Let all of us today drink from her motherly powers and let her equip us to face the world.

All **The Holy Spirit will come upon us, and the power of the Most High will overshadow us. Nothing is impossible with God. We, the lowly, will be uplifted. We will subdue the serpent. Blessed are we when we believe that what the lord said to Mary, and to us through her, will be accomplished!**

Leader 5 Now we come to the time of silence, meditation and transformation. Behold the mother, she is strong, uplifted, powerful and invincible. She has overcome challenges, and is victorious. She looks down upon the proud, who are weak and paltry. In thinking they are great, they are foolish and stupid in her eyes. They know nothing, are destructive and dangerous to the innocent. She fears them not, and loathes their lack of repentance in their destructive ways. But she loves you. She knows what has happened to you. She wants you to be transformed, so you become like her. Welcome her, open up your inner-self, and let her become you. Become her. In silence, let her image merge with yours. Drink from her until you are full.

After a while of silence and meditation, the leader speaks quietly:

Leader 5 Now, behold your infector. Behold your cause of infection. So powerless, so inferior, so insignificant, small and nonsensical! Take this time to come face to face with him. See how powerless he is. Resolve now to face your life with courage, vigour and power again. Brace yourself for its challenges. Tell them you are strong

and ready. Tell them, like Mary, you are an invincible fighter, a social and political revolutionary. Like her, let your womanhood be groundbreaking, your virginity revolutionary, and your motherhood a triumph for women and the human race.

There is more silence. At the end, the women burst into music, drumming and dancing, celebrating their transformation.

Hymn

All **Woman was born of You, Mother God,
Yet Jesus was born of a woman
whom we call, Mother of god.**

**Mother God of the mother of God,
we praise You as we struggle to comprehend
Your incomprehensible ways.**

**May we who are sister of Mary take part in her God-bearing,
God-sharing spirit for your greater glory
and praise now and forever.⁶⁷**

They could end with discussions of their experiences

8.9 Conclusion

Such feminist healing rituals could make a difference in southern Africa, currently marked by much suffering of women. Women who live with the virus and its impacts have often been let down by their traditional support and healing systems, and need healing processes specifically built to meet women's needs. The symbol of Mary could play a huge role towards meeting this need in feminist rituals.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 29.
- ²UN Secretary General's Task Force on Women, *Facing the Future Together*, 29.
- ³Elaine V. Emeth & Janet H. Greenhut, M.D., *The Wholeness Handbook: Care of Body, Mind and Spirit for Optimal Health* (New York: Continuum, 1991), 38.
- ⁴Anna Thomas, *AIDS and Christianity in the Context of Development*, (Geneva: UN Research Institute for Social Development/UNAIDS, 2000), 73.
- ⁵Anna Thomas, *AIDS and Christianity*, 42.
- ⁶Anna Thomas, *AIDS and Christianity*, 49.
- ⁷Anna Thomas, *AIDS and Christianity*, 49.
- ⁸Marlise Richter, *Traditional Medicines and Traditional Healers in South Africa* (Discussion paper prepared for the Treatment Action Campaign and AIDS Law Project, 2003).
- ⁹Patricia McLean 'Ritual that Transforms: the Women's Center at Brescia College, London, Ontario, Canada' in Teresa Burger (ed.), *Dissident Daughters: Feminist Liturgies in Global Context* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 109.
- ¹⁰Janet L. Jacobs, 'The Effects of Ritual Healing on Female Victims of Abuse: A Study of Empowerment and Transformation' in *Sociological Analysis*, vol. 50, no. 3, (1989), 266.
- ¹¹Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 26.
- ¹²Compare: Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 46; and 'Women Bear the Waters of Life' in Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord*, xv.
- ¹³Compare: 'Act of Entrustment to Mary' in Nzanga yaMaria, *Chita chaMaria Hosi Yedenga*, 56; and 'A Psalm of Crucifixion' in Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord*, 37.
- ¹⁴Compare: *Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (Dublin: Concilium Legionis Mariae, Revised Edition, 2005), 55; and 'A Priestly Psalm for Women,' in Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord*, 28-29.
- ¹⁵Teresa Burger, 'Introduction: Mapping the Global Struggle for Women's Rites' in Teresa Burger (ed.), *Dissident Daughters*, 25.
- ¹⁶Elaine V. Emeth & Janet H. Greenhut, M.D, *The Wholeness Handbook*, 79.
- ¹⁷Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 265.
- ¹⁸Elaine V. Emeth & Janet H. Greenhut, M.D, *The Wholeness Handbook*, 79.
- ¹⁹Elaine V. Emeth & Janet H. Greenhut, M.D, *The Wholeness Handbook*, 79.
- ²⁰The St Hilda Community, *The New Women Included: A Book of Services and Prayers* (London: SPCK, 1991), 8.
- ²¹Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 266.
- ²²Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.
- ²³Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.
- ²⁴Elaine V. Emeth & Janet H. Greenhut, M.D., *The Wholeness Handbook*, 216.
- ²⁵Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, accessed on 20-05-2010.
- ²⁶T.J. Scheff, *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama* (California: University of California Press, 1979), 62-3.
- ²⁷The African: Our Culture, Our Voices, Our Vision, accessed on 12-11-2009 <http://www.africanmag.com/viewer/magazines/article.asd/id/474/vts/design001>
- ²⁸Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.
- ²⁹Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.

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- ³⁰Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.
- ³¹Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.
- ³²Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.
- ³³A Psychological Model of Healing from Traumas, accessed on 09-04-2008
<http://www.iktk.se/publikationer/rapporter/pdf/Healingmodell.pdf>.
- ³⁴Anthony Padzeni, *Faith, Prayer and Healing in Christian Worship* (Soweto: Melberg Press, 2008), 228.
- ³⁵Anthony Padzeni, *Faith, Prayer and Healing*, 228.
- ³⁶Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 276.
- ³⁷M. B. McGuire, 'Words and Power: Personal Empowerment in Healing' in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, vol. 7, no. 1, (1983) 230-231.
- ³⁸M. B. McGuire, 'Words and Power', 231.
- ³⁹Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 276.
- ⁴⁰Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 276.
- ⁴¹Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 276.
- ⁴²South America and Africa Music Festivals, accessed on 09-04-2008
http://www.dragoman.com/destinations/festivals.php?seref=adwords_African_Drum_Music&serad=1
- ⁴³Historical Perspective on African Drumming, accessed on 09-04-2008
<http://home.acceleration.net/clark/papervu/ensomme.htm>
- ⁴⁴Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Mary of Nazareth'.
- ⁴⁵Sidney Callahan, *Mary and the Feminist Movement*. There is a lot that could be derived from Mary for the healing of women's bodies. When taken positively, Mary's alleged freedom from sin and her bodily assumption into heaven could give witness to the goodness of the female human body and the truth of the promised resurrection (or healing from evil), of all bodies. Marian shrines are popular for healing. There are legends of how she healed the sick by nursing them with her milk. Mary was understood as one who offered tangible physical help, such as wiping the sweat from the forehead of the dying, the sick and the poor. She unlocked the wombs of infertile women, helped brides without a dowry and attended to birthing mothers. Love for her physical healing of the ill resulted in popular shrines and witnessed to Christ's healing powers. Devotion to Mary also served the human need for emotion, for poetic beauty and for the unity of emotion and reason in people's expressions and reflections.
- ⁴⁶Elaine V. Emeth & Janet H. Greenhut, M.D., *The Wholeness Handbook*, 216.
- ⁴⁷Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 23-36.
- ⁴⁸Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 23-24.
- ⁴⁹Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 24.
- ⁵⁰Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 25.
- ⁵¹Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 26.
- ⁵²Medicine.Net.com, accessed on 24-04-2008 <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=20104>. According to this source, stress releases powerful neurochemicals and hormones that prepare us for action (to fight or flee). If we don't take action, the stress response can lead to health problems. Distress occurs when stress continues without relief, or as a result of chronic stress.
- ⁵³Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 17.
- ⁵⁴Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 17-18.
- ⁵⁵Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 17.
- ⁵⁶Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 33.

⁵⁷The choice of the spear has been made for various reasons. First, in southern Africa, the spear is a symbol of patriarchal/male authority and power. Traditionally, spears were used for hunting down animals, but were also the main weapons for killing the human enemy. They were used to invade other people's lands, to kill the male land-owners and to rob them of their cattle and women. The spear hung in a family house generally symbolises the ability and preparedness of the man at the household to defend himself, but also to kill if necessary at the same time. It could represent the overall pervading patriarchal spirit of men to get whatever they want regardless of others' suffering. In the Zimbabwean culture today, the spear is one of the symbols that shows men's higher place at home and in society. Male tools, such as spears, knives, bows and arrows are placed 'high' on the wall of the hut, while the female pots and mortars are placed 'low' on the ground. This spatial symbolism impacts on the everyday social life of men and women. (Anita Jacobson-Widding, 'Pits, Pots and Snakes - An Anthropological Approach to Ancient African Symbols' in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol.1, no.1, (1992), 5–25).

Secondly, the spear is a symbol of manhood or "a phallic symbol of maleness." (Osaka International School's English Department Educational Links, *Traditional Symbols*, accessed on 24-04-2008 <http://www.senri.ed.jp/Departments/english/tradsym.htm>). It symbolises the male sexual potency (African Tribal Charms, accessed on 24-04-2008 <http://www.magickalgifts.com/tribal.html>). When female traditional diviners of the Zulus in South Africa pray for rain, for instance, they carry the spears and shields of warriors, the symbols of male potency to pierce the clouds. (The Gender Centre Inc, accessed on 24-04-2008 <http://www.gendercentre.org.au/9article7.htm>). Among the ancient fertility religions, the spear has been widely recognised as representing male fertility, where a vessel has represented female fertility [Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Kent: Dover Publications, 1997), 71]. Jessie Weston argues that in pre-Christian Western cults of Europe, the dish is a symbol of the female reproductive organ and the spear is a symbol of the male phallus. In Phoenician iconography, a jagged spear thrust into the earth symbolises male fertilizing potency, [Jack Tresidder, *1,001 Symbols: An Illustrated Guide to Imagery and Its Meaning* (San Francisco: Duncan Baird, 2003), 115], and in south-east Asia, the sword is also a symbol of male potency and fertility [Charles F. Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 66].

Thirdly, the deep African cultural relationship of the spear with blood makes it suitable to women whose infection is largely in their blood system. The sign that the spear has done some harm is the presence of victim's blood on its tip. For these women their blood has been affected.

Fourthly, in the bible, the spear resonates with the sword that pierced Mary's heart or soul (Luke 2:35). It also resonates with the sword that pierced Jesus' side in Mary's presence. Like Mary, these women have their hearts and souls pieced by the patriarchal sword..

Fifthly, the breaking of the sword is a symbol of peace: "And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war." (Isaiah 2:4), When the

spear is portrayed as lying down, that symbolises peace. (National Symbols of South Africa, accessed on 24-04-2008

http://www.scouting.org.za/tshwane/forms/downloads/National_Staff.doc). In John 18:10 Simon Peter uses a sword to cut off the ear of Malchus who had come to arrest Jesus, but Jesus, in preference for peace, criticised the violent act and heals the wound.

⁵⁸Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 268.

⁵⁹Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 52.

⁶⁰Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 167. As already noted, Storkey argues that, in her culture, Mary must have experienced many of the limitations of women in all patriarchal societies. She would have known she was not equal to Jewish men. Elizabeth's cry would have reminded Mary of her inferior position. Mary would have remembered how Jewish men regularly recited the prayer of thanking God because they had not been created women.

⁶¹Janet L. Jacobs, 'Effects of Ritual Healing', 269.

⁶²Elaine Storkey, *Mary's Story, Mary's Song*, 52.

⁶³Laurence Vincent Scully, *The Madonna and Child of Soweto*, accessed on 24-04-2007.

⁶⁴While not all theologians see any reference to Mary in this passage, some do, and these can be divided into three groups: 1), those who say the writer is primarily describing the church, but describing it with the traits of Mary; 2), those who say he is describing Mary in the first place, but as the archetype or exemplar of the believing Church; and 3), those who think he is equally describing both Mary and the Church at one and the same time. According to John McHugh, the three positions, however, are not without their problems. [John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), 48].

Among feminists, Ivone Gebara and Maria Bingemer have argued forcibly that this passage is about Mary because only Mary of Nazareth is in the strictest sense the mother of him who crushed the serpent as referred to in verse 9 ("the serpent of old"), 15 ("the serpent"), and 17 ("the rest of her seed"). She is the only one who "brings forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with an iron rod" (Rev 12:5). Gebara and Bingemer add that even if the woman of Revelation 12 stands for the faithful remnant of Israel, then Mary is according to the gospel of John the most outstanding of them (Ivone Gebara and Maria C. Bingemer, *Mary Mother of God*, 85).

⁶⁵Adapted from Stabat Mater hymn, accessed on 23-09-2010.

⁶⁶Howard W Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 241. Longinus is the name given in medieval and some modern Christian traditions to the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus in his side with a lance while he was on the Cross in John 19:34.

⁶⁷Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord*, 27.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

This thesis is based on the understanding that southern African women are disproportionately infected with HIV and affected by the AIDS impact. My own Zimbabwean experience finds support in the findings of sociological researches that have concluded that HIV/AIDS is feminised. Southern African women are numerically the most infected – they get the virus mostly from their partner even though most of the women appear to be faithful to their only partner. The women also shoulder most of the HIV/AIDS related care burdens. They are mostly the ones who look after the sick, who provide for the family and take in orphans when AIDS strikes at home or in the community.

Evidence shows that many southern African cultural ways of life such as domestic violence, restrictions to women's property ownership, and the expectation for them to submit to, and rely, on men expose women to risks of HIV infection and AIDS effects. Poor education, poor job and career opportunities, lack of involvement in public and political affairs are some of the indirect reasons why women are more affected by the pandemic than men. In short, women lack power to prevent their infection and to withstand the effects of HIV/AIDS.

My aim has been to propose Mary as a symbol that could inspire Christian women's empowerment against such disproportionate effects of HIV/AIDS. I set out to portray Mary as an empowered symbol, in comparison to the southern African women who lack power. Using analogy, I have drawn parallels between the empowered Mary and the women who lack power, in order to highlight how southern African Christian women may be empowered

too. While attempting to be sensitive to the time-gap and to differences between Mary's society and ours, I have portrayed Mary in different symbolic connotations as model, archetype, example, priest and so on.

My chapter contributions are based on the themes of Mary as mother, mother of sorrows, virgin, revolutionary, symbol for healing rituals, and as one who plays an important role at the incarnation. However, the idea of Mary as an important and empowered figure within southern African Christian communities is not entirely new for at least three reasons.

The first, which is a point of fundamental importance to the main argument of the thesis, is that at the basis of Christian belief is found respect for Mary due to her role in mothering Jesus. This basic respect for Mary seems to be shared by most women theologians in Africa and by Christians in southern Africa in general. Within the thesis, Mary's motherhood functions as a common denominator on which the proposal to have Mary as a symbol of empowerment for Christian women is based.

Secondly, African women theologians are already proposing Mary as a potential symbol for women's empowerment. Though most of the Marian theology appears to be largely undeveloped, they are writing on Mary using most of the themes that make up my chapter contributions, particularly on Mary as mother. African feminists and women theologians are usually passionate about their motherhood and this resonates with the idea of Mary as mother.

Thirdly, Mary is already a leading figure in some religious communities and Christian denominations. Though this does not apply to all southern African Christian denominations,

Mary is at the core of existence of some religious groups and their understanding of her is hugely decisive in what they do. In such religious organisations, Mary seems to have a huge potential to inspire the empowerment of women. Different religious groups within which Mary has a special place share Mary as a common symbol among them. Apparently some groups have formed Marian networks and meet occasionally for prayers, celebrations, and for undertaking some religious duties together.

While these three factors are to some extent already a part of the southern African Christian way of life, what I try to bring in as my own contribution is how Mary could function as a symbol of empowerment within the particular HIV/AIDS context. This contextual application of the symbol of Mary to an urgent need for women's empowerment seems to augur well with feminist Mariology which is basically a contextual theology beginning with women's bodily experience.

I begin my chapter contributions by proposing Mary's motherhood and her birthing of Jesus as an important symbolic connotation of empowerment within the thesis. This is in line with some African women's passion for their motherhood and for that of Mary. A number of African women feminists argue that they were traditionally empowered in society as mothers. Their disempowerment mainly happened when colonialism came, along with Christianity. They believe a restoration of their traditional status of motherhood within the family and society will result in their empowerment. I argue that Mary as mother is a symbol with great potential to help restore women to their original empowered status and fight against HIV/AIDS. I assert that, as an empowered mother, Mary exclusively gave Jesus his physical being. I suggest that Mary's motherhood could give us insight into southern African women's important roles at the beginning of life. Mary could inspire acknowledgement and respect

for women as life-givers and as people at the foundation of our society. This stands in contrast to the apparently easy infection of women, which suggests disrespect for their bodies and for their potential to give life. Taking seriously the respect that women deserve will mean taking seriously the need to reverse the causes of the disproportionate HIV infection and AIDS effects on women.

I also argue that Mary's contribution to Jesus' life does not end with her biological mothering. In her womb and in caring for Jesus, Mary contributed to the psychological formation of Jesus' character. This could also illustrate how mothers are part of God's plan for the 'salvation' of our society from HIV/AIDS. First, like Mary, mothers make a huge contribution to the character and psychology of their children. When allowed to have more say and power over their children, as it seemingly was in the case of Mary and Jesus (Luke 2:51), they have the potential to bring up healthy individuals for the social good. In this sense they are part of the psychological social wellbeing. Secondly, Mary shows that mothers are covenanted with life. In their own right as persons, their input to society improves and enriches the social life. I argue that Mary was active in Jesus' mission where she was as good and capable as the male disciples. Like Mary, women should not just be seen but be heard and their insights and opinions taken on board. They should be part of decision-making bodies on HIV/AIDS plans and on public issues that affect society. They should be leaders in society.

Another argument that comes out of the concept of Mary's motherhood is that she could also inspire the empowerment of single mothers and mothers considered social misfits. While the southern African general cultural trend seems to stigmatise single mothers and to give them little respect, Mary's pregnancy did not involve a man. Her inclusion in the genealogy of

Jesus among four women who were considered social misfits (Matthew 1:1-17) suggests God's blessing on the motherhood of women whose social status was disreputable. Mary's status suggests that single mothers should not be seen as misfits or disreputable, but as full and dignified members of society who can contribute to our social transformation. Men and society should also accept responsibility and be accountable for making these women and their children what they are.

The theme of Mary as mother of sorrows particularly reflects the suffering that Mary experienced in her motherhood. This theme could appeal to southern African women due to the sorrows that HIV/AIDS brings to them. In itself, concentration on Mary's sorrows is unlikely to result in women's empowerment. It could even reinforce acceptance of the oppressive status quo by disempowered women – something the Marian symbol has been associated with in Christian tradition. The chapter on this theme, however, sees Mary as one who resisted suffering and oppression, and went on to overcome her suffering through the resurrection of her son. The thesis suggests the sorrowing Mary as motivational to turning sorrow into positive energy for defiance and for fighting HIV/AIDS towards empowerment. When southern African women, for example, in Marian groups, empathise with her sufferings, they are encouraged to resolve that they will not allow such suffering to happen in modern times to themselves and to their fellow women. They are urged to fight, for instance, for recognition and support in care-giving. Bereaved mothers could, like Mary near the cross, allow their motherhood to transcend their immediate families, and become, in AIDS activism, mothers to other people in need of support and care.

I also argue that Mary's suffering together with other women beneath the cross (John 19:25) is an indication that women could better cope and overcome difficulties if they bond together.

Mary is suggested as one who inspires solidarity. While some women already come together under the banner of Mary in Marian guilds, in different denominations during church activities, and in religious groups and organisations that have Mary central to them, I also propose other ways of women coming together to fight HIV/AIDS. For instance, Marian mother centres could become places where women could find their own space in working towards their empowerment, free from the oppressive experience they encounter in patriarchal contexts. Marian Post-Test Clubs could give southern African women an opportunity to recover from the HIV/AIDS effects, to restart their lives and to support one another in living quality lives. Marian spirituality could play an important role in such groups of women.

The theme of Mary's incarnational role in the birth of Christ gives a somewhat different dimension to the theology of her motherhood in general. This theme particularly concerns the body theology of Mary's body in analogical comparison to the bodies of women in general. I argue that positive changes in the society's attitude towards women's bodies could result in transformational changes against the AIDS pandemic. Beginning with Mary as a woman whose body was favoured by God (Luke 1:43), I develop the theme basically into a defence for women's bodies, portraying them in positive light where they are apparently understood negatively in our society. I associate with life (as opposed to AIDS and death) occurrences unique to women's bodies, such as the development of breasts, menstruation and pregnancy. Given the stigmatising nature of HIV/AIDS for women in southern Africa, I also engage the Eve–Mary analogy, arguing that if woman was seen as a sinner in Eve, she has been redeemed from that notion in Mary.

An important aspect of Mary's incarnational role is the observation that it is not limited to her bodily contribution. At the incarnation event (Luke 1:26-38), she showed her intelligence and her ability to think in clear and complex ways. She listened, discussed the question of her virginity, accepted God's plan and actively joined in the plan. She showed trust in her own powers of discernment with regard to the appearance of the angel to her. She searched within herself the right choices for her and made decisions based on her own life values and purposes. She made the decision not to go along with the customs or cultural expectations of her society. In so doing, she exhibited skills of assertiveness. From this, I argue that Mary demonstrates she is gifted with an ingenious, creative, and imaginative side; and like Mary, women are called to use fully and without hesitation, their intelligence. I also encourage the southern African society to allow women to take initiatives and to express their wisdom.

I also perceive from Mary's incarnational role, God's blessing for women to take up priestly duties. In southern Africa, I particularly propose the ordination of women living with HIV. I take the position that Mary was a priest, and side with feminists' popular argument that Mary is the only one who could say with Jesus 'This is my body' in reference to Jesus' body. I also consider the fact that a woman mothered Jesus to imply that God does not shun women from coming closer to him. Mary's closeness to Jesus' body qualifies her for priestly functions, and by extension, all women can become priests. Within the HIV/AIDS context, however, the ordination of women living with the virus could be a statement that the church and society are in communion with women disproportionately infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. It could be a way of allowing them to partake in church leadership, and of the church and society expressing repentance from their oppressive understanding of women's bodies and dignity. Ordaining infected women could change the Eucharist liturgies to honour women's bodies and their roles in a more visible and practical way.

While virginity may not be as celebrated as motherhood in southern Africa, HIV/AIDS has brought the concept under spotlight. Of late, feminist theology has interpreted virginity mainly in the metaphorical sense, citing its interpretation in the physical sense as basically oppressive. In southern Africa, however, total abstinence from sex is the only sure way of ensuring one stays uninfected with HIV. Our hope of an uninfected race in southern Africa is tied to virgins. This makes physical virginity very important, particularly for girls and boys not yet able to make sound decisions about their sexual lives. In this sense, the concept of Mary's physical virginity could encourage society to fight against HIV/AIDS.

However, the concept of metaphorical virginity could be promoted to fight oppressive, degrading and inaccurate cultural systems such as virginity testing. Metaphorical virginity, as women's autonomy and self-definition, also opens up unlimited possibilities for women's uplifting for empowerment. In a somewhat negative sense, it could imply what men should refrain from doing - that which contributes to women's infection - such as practising polygamy, stigmatising women and violence. Metaphorical virginity could also imply what men should do to help end women's infection, such as getting circumcised to lessen the spreading of the virus. Yet it could more positively mean what women could do to become autonomous, such as undertaking further education and striving for top jobs decision-making positions in society.

Because both the physical and metaphorical virginity is important in southern Africa, I have proposed the collapsing of both meanings into one, while simultaneously allowing metaphorical virginity to overlap physical virginity. Mary's virginity (as virgin-mother, for instance) transcends the physical status of her body. Such a collapsing of the two concepts

could help end obsession with physical virginity, while at the same time recognising all women as autonomous and assertive, whether sexually active or not. Such collapsing or merging of concepts is not new in southern Africa. For instance, motherhood transcends physical birthing, such that all women are understood to be mothers. In such ways, any understanding of Mary's virginity in an oppressive sense would be replaced by her empowering 'virgin' symbol.

I also depict Mary as having lived in a revolution-ripe environment, just as it is arguably the case within the HIV/AIDS environment in southern Africa. When placed among other women revolutionaries in Jewish history such as Shiphrah and Puah (Exodus 2:15-21); Deborah (Judges 4-5); Jael (Judges 4:17-22; 5:24-27); Hannah (1 Samuel 1-2); Esther; Judith and the mother of the Maccabean martyrs, the women together demonstrate how, over a long period of time, the actual power and potential of women in society to decisively reverse and end oppressive situations has been exercised. Considering also the claims by modern women in Latin America, Asia and other parts of the world, that Mary helped them to bring about a reversal of their social order, I urge southern African women to work towards a revolutionary ending of the pandemic.

Central to the concept of Mary as a revolutionary, however, is the Magnificat. The message of the Magnificat suggests a revolution in various societal dimensions where oppression is experienced. In the southern African context, such dimensions include the economic, media, political and the liturgical. In the thesis I demonstrate the practical ways in which the various revolutionary dimensions can become a reality. I also interpret the presence of Mary in the post-resurrection community (Acts 1:14) as suggesting the crowning of her own revolutionary earthly journey. She is one who steadies the post-resurrection group and helps

them contest the social evils of her day. In that community, Mary is an example of an elderly woman who supports others in the struggle against evil. She is there as a bearer of new hope beyond death and a new way of being woman.

The last chapter, of Mary as a healing symbol in a ritual, diverges slightly from the traditional Marian themes, though Mary is no stranger to being associated with healing. The chapter is a more practical way of suggesting Mary as a symbol of empowerment. I formulate a healing ritual as an example of Marian rituals that could be used by women living with the virus. The ritual follows the basics of feminist group-healing rituals which enhance the healing of individuals, and through them, the society as well. The ritual is meant to integrate women's fragmented selves, to make the body whole into a total system of an integrated mind-body-spirit relationship, and to improve one's mental health outlook.

By looking at Mary in such ways I suggest she has the potential to inspire empowerment for women under the HIV/AIDS burden in southern Africa. It appears possible to unmask and remove regressive and denigrating meanings of Mary in southern Africa and to replace them with positive interpretations for women, which depict women as self-determinant and autonomous, with power over their bodies, and with freedom to shape their own destiny.

Appendix A

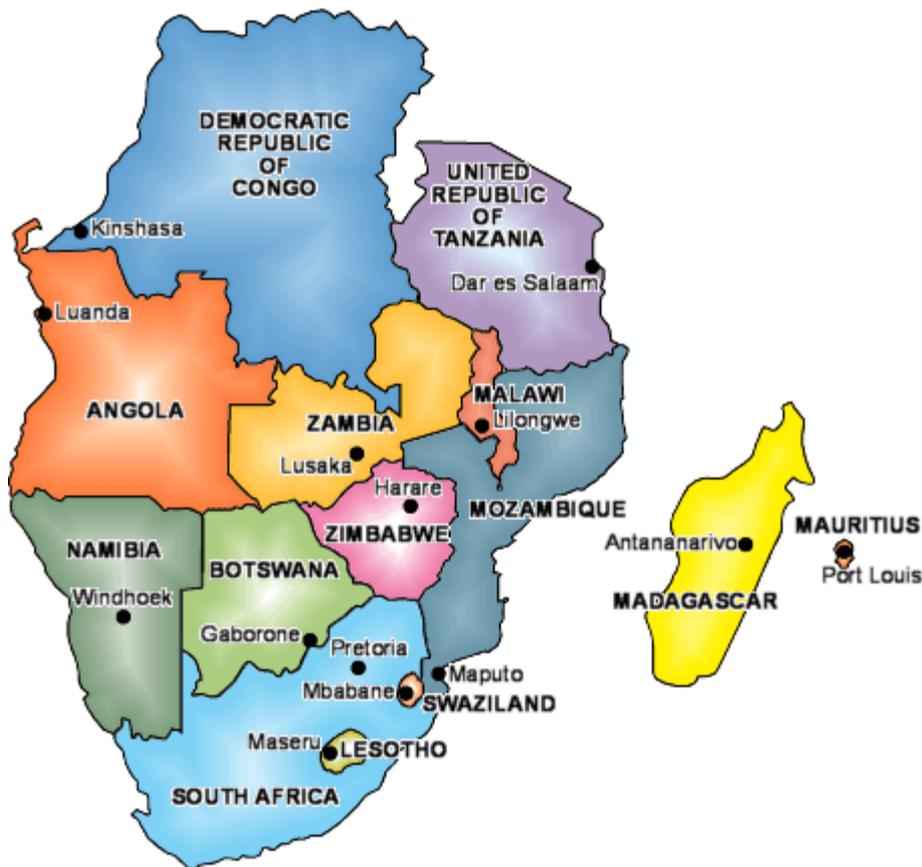
A DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN HIV/AIDS SITUATION

A. 1 Sources Used

In this section I describe the southern African HIV/AIDS situation and analyse the causes of women's infection. For my sources, I draw upon a range of professional researches on HIV/AIDS and women, including UN women's organisations and other non-governmental organisations, government departments and individual scholars. The sources, however, are not immune to biases and inaccuracies. Some research figures are based on estimates, while others involve constantly changing statistics and factors.

A. 2 THE SADC REGION AND SOME HIV/AIDS STATISTICAL DATA

Southern Africa is the area worst affected by HIV/AIDS in the world. Southern African countries belong to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Currently SADC has 15 member states: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Madagascar, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Seychelles and Zimbabwe¹ Three of the member states, Mauritius,² Seychelles³ and Madagascar,⁴ however, do not belong to the mainland of the continent and their infection rates are below 1%. This thesis will focus on the twelve continental or mainland states.⁵



SADC Countries

In 2010, Sub-Saharan Africa was home to 67% (22.5 million) of all people living with HIV in the world. SADC is home to more than a third (37%) of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world,⁶ making it the epicentre of the global AIDS pandemic. About a third (34%) of global deaths due to AIDS occur there, yet the region has less than 3.5% of the global population.⁷ HIV transmission in the region is predominantly heterosexual (92%).⁸ Table 3 below shows some rates of infection at certain periods in the southern African countries.

Adult HIV-prevalence rates (%) in continental SADC states, 1997–2010⁹

	Dec. 1997	Dec. 1999	Dec. 2001	Dec. 2003	Dec. 2005	Dec. 2007	June 2010
Angola	2.1	2.8	5.5	3.9	3.7	2.1	2.1
Botswana	25.1	35.8	36	37.3	24.1	23.9	23.09
DRC	4.4	5.1	4.9	4.2	3.2	1.5	1.5
Lesotho	8.4	23.6	31.0	28.9	23.2	23.2	23.2
Malawi	14.9	16.0	15.0	14.2	14.1	11.9	11.2
Mozambique	14.2	13.2	13.0	12.2	16.1	12.5	12.05
Namibia	19.9	19.5	22.5	21.3	19.6	15.3	15.03
South Africa	17.0	22.4	24.8	27.9	30.2	18.1	13.9
Swaziland	18.5	25.3	33.4	38.8	33.4	26.1	26.01
Tanzania	9.4	8.1	7.8	8.8	6.5	5.4	4.5
Zambia	19.1	20.0	21.5	20	19	15.2	15.02
Zimbabwe	25.8	25.1	33.7	24.6	20.1	15.3	14.3

As indicated above, 9 of the 12 countries had an adult HIV prevalence greater than 10% in 2010. In three of these, more than one in five adults were infected.¹⁰ With an adult HIV prevalence of 26.01% in 2010, Swaziland had the most severe level of infection in the world. Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe had around 15-20% of adults infected. For a long time, South Africa has remained home to the world's largest population of people living with HIV.¹¹ While the rate of new HIV infections in the region has slowly declined, the

number of people living with HIV slightly increased from 2008, partly due to increased longevity stemming from improved access to treatment.¹²

A. 3 THE FEMINISATION OF HIV/AIDS

A. 3.1. Some Statistical Data

In sub-Saharan Africa, more than three quarters (76%) of all people living with HIV were women in 2010.¹³ For every ten men with HIV, fourteen women were likely to be infected. The proportion of women living with HIV (ages 15 to 49) was 1.9 times higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions of the world.¹⁴ The infection of young women and girls aged 15-24 was much greater: they were three times more likely to be infected than men in the same age group.¹⁵ Sixty-seven per cent of those infected were women (15-49 years).¹⁶ Almost half (45%) of those infected were between the ages of 15 and 24.¹⁷

In southern Africa the gap between men and women's infection rates was even larger. Young women (15-24 years) made up almost 80% of all young people living with HIV/AIDS.¹⁸ Up to 52% of all women (15 years and older) who lived with HIV globally were in southern Africa.¹⁹ In South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe young women (15–24 years) were reported to be three to six times more likely to be infected than young men.²⁰

A. 4 REASONS FOR THE FEMINISATION OF HIV/AIDS

A. 4.1 Introduction

According to the UN, southern Africa is one of the poorest regions of the world, with their main economies agricultural.²¹ Though naturally drought-prone, southern Africa has

generally experienced less than normal and uneven rainfall since the 1990s. This has contributed to severe food crises, and year after year starvation threats. Each year, there are national disaster declarations by some member states and millions survive on international food aid.²² Apart from South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, all southern African countries are categorised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as food-deficit areas.²³ Mozambique, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe suffer a triple crisis or “triple threat of poverty and food insecurity, weakened governance capacity, and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates which are among the highest in the world.”²⁴

Besides poverty and scarcity, southern Africa is infested with other social ills:

The region's countries are beset by a wide range of economic, social and political problems. . . extreme disempowering and debilitating chronic poverty; economic recessions, foreign debt, the effects of economic structural adjustment programs and massive unemployment; underdevelopment and poor infrastructure; weak leadership, poor governance and corruption; political instability, conflict and violence; pervasive patriarchy, with women discriminated against and disadvantaged; the effects of droughts, floods and pestilence on agriculture, livelihoods and food security; and rampant disease, including malaria, tuberculosis, waterborne disease and malnutrition – and now HIV/AIDS.²⁵

A.4.2 Women at the Centre of Regional Poverty, Gender Inequality and HIV/AIDS Cycle

Poverty, at the heart of the many social ills, pervasively links with gender inequality and HIV/AIDS in a vicious circle that disproportionately impacts on women.²⁶ According to the UN General Taskforce on Women, even before the coming of HIV/AIDS, women were subservient to men in the mainly patriarchal societies of southern Africa.²⁷ This subservience was strengthened by the colonial rural/urban setup, in which, first, Africans were relegated to very remote arid farming areas with poor soil texture, and second, the tax systems forced the

African men to migrate to towns for employment. In the process, most women were left in abject poverty in the poor rural areas and had to depend on men for their survival.²⁸ This contributed to the feminisation of poverty before HIV/AIDS came.

The gender inequality and the poverty therein that resulted generally made women more vulnerable to disease, hunger, poor health and other disasters.²⁹ The separation of couples increased the incidence of multiple sexual relationships, especially for men. It offered abundant opportunities for “exploitative transactional, ‘survival’ and inter-generational sex,”³⁰ which exposed many women’s lives to sexual infections.³¹ When AIDS came, the disempowered women could not challenge the men to prove their HIV status or to use condoms when they returned home from work. Many women feared being abandoned or economically deprived. A UN report notes that many women give in to male demands for unprotected sexual relations even when they know the danger.³² Sixty to eighty per cent of HIV-positive women in southern Africa report having had sex only with their husbands.³³

Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s and 90s were another major player in the worsening of women’s poverty. Ngozi Iwewe has noted that the programs introduced retrenchments and costs for medical care and education, which caused unemployment, insecurity in family relations, school drop-outs and poorer reproductive health services.³⁴ The social unrest that resulted led to political instability in some countries such as Zimbabwe, and encouraged dictatorships and undemocratic coercive governance, which drove away most investors.³⁵ Consequently, neither poor women nor many of the governments, crippled by debt repayments, can now access enough essential medicines and antiretroviral drugs.³⁶

From the moment of its coming, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has constituted the worst scourge and onslaught with which southern African women must contend. This is because HIV/AIDS, opportunistic infections and other problems that come along with it join forces with the other existing multiple societal problems, especially women's poverty.³⁷ For example, for women HIV-positive and poor, poverty leads to malnutrition, which weakens the immune system, predisposing them to malaria, tuberculosis and other deadly opportunistic illnesses, and speeding up the advancement from HIV to AIDS.³⁸ Concurrently, HIV/AIDS can impair the immune system, which can lead to malnutrition, and then to the worsening of the HIV/AIDS. Underlying this is the fact that women weakened by HIV/AIDS find it harder to access food, with resources not readily available to them.³⁹ Further, sexual transmission and mother-to-child transmission of HIV happen more easily when the mother suffers malnutrition.⁴⁰

A.4.3 Care-Giving

Culturally, women are expected to take the lead in domestic work and in providing care to family members. The Task Force notes that it is usually women and girls who give their unpaid time and labour "for faith-based or other community groups, to support sick neighbours, friends, relatives, orphans and vulnerable children."⁴¹ This role, in addition to the many tasks women already perform, such as looking after children and the elderly, cooking, cleaning and fetching water and fire-wood means that the impacts of HIV/AIDS on household level is very much a woman's issue.⁴² Interagency Coalition estimates that 90% of AIDS care occurs in homes, and women - the majority of the infected - also carry virtually the entire burden of nursing, feeding and additional labour.⁴³ About 70% of caregivers are female,⁴⁴ and care-giving can increase women's workload by one third.⁴⁵ About 25% of caregivers are HIV-positive themselves.⁴⁶

Usually the man falls sick first, often due to earlier infection and older age, and the woman takes over as the family head just as the family falls into deeper poverty due to income decline and increasing healthcare expenses.⁴⁷ Food production can be reduced by up to 60% when a major part of women's time and energy turns to caring for HIV/AIDS-infected family members.⁴⁸ Savings are used up, and possessions are sold to help pay for medical bills, thus lessening collateral for accessing micro-credit institutions.⁴⁹

Some women suffer from economic stress as they grapple with increased costs of living, loss of jobs/job opportunities, lack of medicine, transport problems especially to and from hospitals, and ultimately, funeral costs.⁵⁰ In a study in Zimbabwe, out of the 268 respondents who had experienced a startling and devastating income decline after HIV/AIDS had struck, 77.6% were women.⁵¹ As the crisis deepens, girls are taken out of school to provide home-based care. Research in Zimbabwe also established that 76% of children who withdrew from school to nurse the sick were girls.⁵² In Swaziland, school enrolment is estimated to have fallen by 36% due to AIDS, with girls the most affected.⁵³

Care-giving is also physically demanding. FAO has recorded that many women work 16-18 hours a day and some travel over eight miles daily to fetch water and firewood on their heads.⁵⁴ Women caregivers also face the risk of tuberculosis, HIV and other infections. Because of age, older women often experience many personal health problems and disabilities.⁵⁵ A study in Zimbabwe also noted that lack of knowledge about AIDS-related care, fear of contracting the disease, the agony of watching, awaiting and enduring the deaths of the sick, insecurity and fears about the future can all lead to emotional and psychological stress.⁵⁶ All this can be compounded by stigma. Women caregivers are often alienated from social activities, stigmatised, and accused of witchcraft, sometimes leading to physical

violence.⁵⁷ At their husbands' death some caregivers lose their homes, land, social support from family members, and are chased away from the community without any legal protection.⁵⁸

Research indicates that quite often when sickness intensifies within a household, adult male members escape; and when they themselves become sick, they characteristically return to their maternal family home to be cared for until they die.⁵⁹ It is also not unusual that when women become too sick to help themselves they are sent back to their natal family for their female family members to look after them.⁶⁰ This predicament of women caregivers is reflected in the words of the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan:

. . . today, as AIDS is eroding the health of Africa's women, it is eroding the skills, experience and networks that keep their families and communities going. Even before falling ill, a woman will often have to care for a sick husband, thereby reducing the time she can devote to planting, harvesting and marketing crops. When her husband dies, she is often deprived of credit, distribution networks or land rights. When she dies, the household will risk collapsing completely, leaving children to fend for themselves. The older ones, especially girls, will be taken out of school to work in the home or the farm. These girls, deprived of education and opportunities, will be even less able to protect themselves against AIDS. . . If we want to save Africa from two catastrophes (HIV/AIDS and famine), we would do well to focus on saving Africa's women.⁶¹

Yet throughout the sub-region there is little recognition or compensation for the caregivers. A UN report says that women's care-giving remains unpaid and therefore undervalued in economic terms. The value of time, energy and resources required to perform this unpaid work is ignored or taken for granted by governments and communities.⁶² Despite their poverty, most caregivers receive neither stipends nor incentives.⁶³ Poverty reduction strategies and national AIDS plans hardly consider women's care-giving.⁶⁴

Further, due to HIV/AIDS, more households are now headed by women, especially elderly women who care for orphans.⁶⁵ Almost a quarter of the 70% female caregivers are over 60 years.⁶⁶ The female-headed households have up to three times as many orphans as male-headed households, a much higher dependency ratio, and a greater shortage of labour due to caring for more but younger economically inactive orphans.⁶⁷ Thus female-headed households, especially those fostering orphans, become very vulnerable to poverty.

A.4.4 Property Ownership and Inheritance

Women's poverty and their vulnerability to infection are heavily linked to their lack of ownership of property and land. FAO states that about 80% of women in southern Africa live in the communal areas where they constitute 61% of the farmers and provide 70% of the labour, producing 60-70% of food.⁶⁸ This makes land one of the most fundamental resources for women's empowerment against HIV/AIDS. Yet land access is largely indirect, through men.⁶⁹ Lack of title to land restricts women's economic options; reduces their personal security and their collateral; increases violence against them, poverty and homelessness.⁷⁰ Mutangadura argues that even where women can own and control land, they still face socio-economic difficulties such as "illiteracy, lack of capital and implements, lack of collateral, lack of farm management experience, training and advice."⁷¹

One major obstacle to women's ownership of property is the customary law. Civil and customary laws are often interpreted in ways that effectively discriminate against women's fundamental rights to own or access land and property of a deceased spouse.⁷² The customary laws are often unwritten, continuously changing and manipulated for self-centred gains,⁷³ and effectively ensure women remain legal minors.⁷⁴

Other obstacles to property ownership include lack of support in cases of property-grabbing. According to the Task Force, some women are faced by unfriendly officials and unresponsive administrations,⁷⁵ while others face substantial threats at home when they report property-grabbing cases. Quite often women do not have marriage certificates or other documentation, and wills are rarely written because they are deemed incompatible with some southern African cultural aspects.⁷⁶

Women have sometimes been forced to leave their homes and property for refusing to undergo 'widow inheritance' or 'widow cleansing'.⁷⁷ Widow cleansing demands a widow to have sexual intercourse, usually with a deceased husband's relative, as a way of cleansing her of evil spirits left behind after the husband's death. Widow inheritance requires her to marry one of the male relatives in order to remain entitled to the deceased's property.⁷⁸ In one report, widow inheritance and cleansing practices exposed women to property rights abuses resulting in their poverty, homelessness, rapes, beatings, death threats, destitution and HIV infections.⁷⁹

A.4.5 Wars and Political Conflicts

Women living in militarised areas and places of armed conflict face great risks of HIV infection as a result of the violence, sexual crimes, torture, exploitation and abuse.⁸⁰ During the HIV/AIDS era, wars have been experienced in Mozambique,⁸¹ Angola⁸² and South Africa.⁸³ Some resurgence of the notorious Rwandan genocide mass-rapes has recently been reported in DRC, which still experiences some sporadic tribal gun battles.⁸⁴ Zimbabwe, of late, has been quite politically unstable, with some female opposition party supporters reportedly systematically gang-raped by ruling party supporters with intent to infect them.⁸⁵

Ranking second for assault and murder and first for rape on world scale, South Africa still suffers the violence-hangover of the Apartheid period.⁸⁶

Consequently, southern Africa has many refugees, the majority women and children.⁸⁷ Limited infrastructures of refugee camps are a sexual health challenge with reduced access to information, education, prevention and treatment.⁸⁸ Refugee women and girls often assume the role of the family head, and have to find food and care for the children. Yet, according to the Task Force, most national HIV/AIDS strategic plans do not reflect such situations of refugee women.⁸⁹

A.4.6 Domestic Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence in the home is widespread in southern Africa. A report in Harare, Zimbabwe, showed that over 60% of murder cases came from violence in the home.⁹⁰ In South Africa, 19-28% of women had been physically assaulted, while in Namibia 20% had been physically or sexually abused within a year.⁹¹ Such violence is often a result of a culture which reinforces rather than challenge women's subordination. Recent research has shown that in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, large numbers of women were convinced that a husband had a right to beat up his wife.⁹² The violence is also often inadequately accounted for in legislation. Tanzanian legislation outlaws domestic violence but has no corresponding penalties for offenders.⁹³

Gender-based violence is closely related to sexual violence. It weakens prevention efforts and the power of informed choice by women, undermines sexual negotiations and further burdens the overwhelmed health-care systems.⁹⁴ Women and girls find it difficult to talk

about safer sex or to challenge their partner to be faithful. In one study, women “who were beaten by their husbands or boyfriends were 48% more likely to become infected than those who were not.”⁹⁵ Those who were psychologically or economically subjugated to violence were 52% more likely to be infected than those who were not.⁹⁶ In a Tanzanian report, HIV-positive women were almost three times more likely to have suffered violence by their partner than HIV-negative women.⁹⁷

Some judicial and police authorities in southern Africa are still reluctant to consider marital rape a crime. Even where it is lawfully a crime, as in South Africa and Zimbabwe, police attitudes can allow lawbreakers to go free.⁹⁸ Yet when penetration is forced, scratches and cuts usually result, which helps the entry of the virus into the body.⁹⁹ Sexual violence also increases the already disproportional probability of men-to-women infection inherent in the biological makeup. Larger quantities of semen are exchanged during intercourse than vaginal fluids, and men have higher amounts of HIV in semen than women in vaginal fluids.¹⁰⁰ There is also a bigger exposed surface area in vaginal membranes than in the male genital tract during intercourse, which is further exposed to the infectious fluids for hours after sex. In women, sexually transmitted infections often go unnoticed and untreated, which increases women's vulnerability to HIV.¹⁰¹

The Task Force report that rape and sexual violence seem to be on the increase, and in some cases infected men apparently believe that sex with a virgin will ‘cleanse’ them of the virus. In some countries, up to 30% of girls report that their first sexual encounter was forced. In Zambia, in 2002, one in eight teenagers was coerced into having sex within the previous year, and one in six teenagers was also coerced in having sex once in their life.¹⁰² In Zambia, hundreds of girls whose parents died of AIDS were being sexually abused by family

members or guardians or forced into selling sex for survival.¹⁰³ With their bodies immature, vaginal tearing is more frequent and HIV passes more easily to young women than to adult women.¹⁰⁴ Research has established that, besides unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, low self-esteem and depression, sexual abuse leads to risk-taking sexual behaviour in later life.¹⁰⁵

Women also suffer more from stigma and discrimination than men. The fear of blame and violence keeps many women away from being tested, getting test-results and participating in prevention or treatment programs.¹⁰⁶ The Task Force adds that Post-exposure HIV prophylaxis (PEP) is still widely unavailable.¹⁰⁷

A.4.7 Giving Priority to Male Sexual Pleasure

According to K. Kun, some women use vaginal drying agents to please men with a tight sheath of the vagina. In Zambia, dryness is attained by applying some medicine that dries vaginal fluids and increases friction during intercourse. This implies that sex can be painful for women and can damage the vaginal walls, increasing women's vulnerability to HIV transmission.¹⁰⁸

Women are also expected to remain sexually ignorant, inexperienced, passive, and willingly submissive.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, men are expected to be already well informed, to show their masculinity by having sex with many partners at a young age.¹¹⁰ This makes it difficult for men to admit their lack of sexual knowledge and for women to improve theirs.¹¹¹ The right to information about HIV/AIDS is far from being realised for many women.¹¹²

A.4.8 Lack of Access to Treatment

In 2009, 48% of infected people in southern Africa were receiving treatment. However, these were mostly the educated and the better-off in urban areas.¹¹³ From public health clinics, most women only receive short-term AZT or single doses of Nevirapine to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. These often result in long-term drug resistance and, without continuous treatment, HIV-positive women frequently die shortly after birthing.¹¹⁴ Girls under eighteen without parental consent are often denied AZT.¹¹⁵

Unaffordable and inaccessible transportation adds to problems of women's access to treatment. In one research, women with HIV were more likely to postpone care because they lacked transportation (26%), or were too sick to go to the doctor (23%) than men (12% and 14%, respectively).¹¹⁶ Shortage of clinics and voluntary counselling and testing services in remote areas impacts negatively on poor women.

A.4.9 The ABC Message

The ABC message - 'Abstain from sex before marriage, Be faithful to your partner, or, if you can't, use a Condom' – has been promoted often without paying enough attention to its limits. For instance, married and/or faithful women, even women who abstain from sex but have been raped, have unfoundedly been accused of having multiple partners and extramarital affairs. The ABC approach has also been criticised for being too focused on the individual, when the practices that the ABC addresses have deep cultural roots that must be addressed at the structural level. The approach also assumes that both partners are able to

negotiate their own abstinence, faithfulness or condom use – while in reality it is men who usually make such decisions.¹¹⁷

A.4.10 Education

A UN report claims that girls' enrolment rates in schools are decreasing and there is diminishing investment in the education of women and girls in some countries.¹¹⁸ Yet, evidence shows that literacy above primary level is most beneficial for women's empowerment against HIV/AIDS.¹¹⁹ In Zambia, studies have shown that the more schooling young people have, the less likely they are to have casual sex partners, and the more likely they are to use condoms, to delay sexual activity and to take measures to protect themselves.¹²⁰

A 32-country study also concluded that women with secondary education were five times more likely than uneducated women to know facts about HIV/AIDS. The document also asserts that in Uganda, women and men with education above secondary level were seven times less likely to be infected than those who received less education. It notes that educated mothers make more use of health care facilities, more effectively prevent fatal childhood diseases, and are less likely to die during childbirth.¹²¹ Educated girls are also more likely to marry at a later age. Girls with no secondary education are more likely to be married by the age of 18, and the earlier the marriage the higher the risk of HIV infection.¹²² Increased education also apparently lowers the risk of violence.¹²³

A.4.11 The Political Will to Empower Women

While all SADC states have signed the CEDAW agreement, existing policies and programs in many instances remain inadequate for addressing gender inequalities in the area of HIV/AIDS.¹²⁴ Feminist groups in southern Africa have argued that there are many policy and legal gaps in SADC states “that exist with regards to discriminatory, statutory, customary and religious laws that deny women and girls their full and equal rights.”¹²⁵ For instance, in all governments, there is a serious shortage of resources for women and women’s issues, and for programs that try to address the deeper connections between gender and HIV/AIDS.¹²⁶ Budgets and human resource commitments often do not target women,¹²⁷ while few policies and programs in response to HIV/AIDS are informed by the real-life situations of women.¹²⁸ There are also very few women in top government decision-making positions.¹²⁹

A.5 Conclusion

The above different factors come together with HIV/AIDS and negatively impact on women in southern Africa. As part of the drive to empower women, all such reasons for their disproportionate infection and suffering need to be addressed.

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