

How the Scriptures Constrain the Gender Mainstreaming Process

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ABSTRACT This paper argues that much as the gender mainstreaming process was a noble venture, the cross-cutting nature of the gender mainstreaming was not fully understood and appreciated by some very powerful and influential sectors and stakeholders in the religious world. In short, their belief that what has been created by God cannot be changed by man frustrates any gender mainstreaming interventions as they are above the constitutions of the states.

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that the status of women in history and modern times has been formed and influenced in whole, or in great part from the religious beliefs of the times. It is not surprising considering the almost total domination of church leadership by men, that the status is somewhere between property and personal slave to those men. One of the two most influential religions which permeate both the traditions and cultures of a large portion of the world's population, Christianity, particularly through the (mis)guidance of the Bible believe that the principles entrenched in this book are divine and cast in stone, therefore beyond human influence. This is particularly so when one considers the fact that about 53% of the earth's population is made up of Christians and Muslims, plus other groups that are not as many such as the Buddhists, Hindus, Jews and Baha'i Faith all which worship the God of Abraham (David Barrett's World Christian Encyclopedia). Whereas Christianity at 33% might be dropping slowly, Islam at 20% is growing very fast. In some countries such as Botswana, it is believed that the Christians and Muslims constitute almost fifty percent each, a small number being the indigenous religions and Baha'i Faith; in Angola, Muslims make 47%, while Christians make 53%. In the Democratic Republic of Congo there are 79% Christians and 10% Muslims, while 11% are indigenous religions; in the Republic of Congo, 52% are Christians while 48% are Muslims; in Namibia, fifty percent is Lutheran while other Christian and indigenous religions make the rest. This paper therefore discusses those aspects of the Scriptures that

perpetuate gender disparities under the guise of divine instructions, particularly as SADC is mostly Christianity and Islam.

PROBLEM

This paper adopts the definition of the strategy of gender mainstreaming as espoused in the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2 which says:

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

With reference to the above definition, this paper analyses those aspects of the Scriptures that have some bearing in constraining the gender mainstreaming process. The influence of religion on the populations of the world is of a magnanimous magnitude. It is a statement of fact that Christianity and Islam are global religions which inform and guide a majority of individuals, institutions and governments the world over. Political and individual businesses' activities begin with the readings from the two books, the Bible or the Koran because it is believed their recitation will give guidance. Despite the naked daunting picture painted by the Scriptures,

women still remain the most loyal majority believers of the Scriptures and this constrains the gender mainstreaming process.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. identify those Scriptures that discriminate against women.
2. establish reasons why both men and women uphold the Scriptures despite their discrimination nature.
3. come up with conclusions and recommendations to help the gender mainstreaming process.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Many Africans have embraced the two religions and have discarded their own as it is viewed as inferior. The two religions' advent into Africa was used as tools by the imperialists to conquer the indigenous populations, and this is still happening as new religions and faiths are encroaching the continent with new promises of a happy life for the converts. This was, and still is cultural imperialism at its highest. However, when looking at religion, especially Christianity and Islam, people regard it as something beyond human reproach which should be accepted and practiced without any adjustments. This is so because to question it is to lack faith and results in eternal suffering in Hell. But in reality, it is a known fact that the colonialist came to Africa with a Bible in the right hand and a gun in the left hand. The gun was physically used to intimidate into submission and/or kill those who resisted conversion while the Bible killed the Africanness as it targeted the mind. What one would like to emphasize at the outset is the fact that the introduction of Christianity and Islam into Africa was cultural imperialism *sui generis*. In order for the missionaries to help their brothers and sisters to gain both political and economic power over the vanquished, they had to provide tools which appealed to the moral requirements, and the Scriptures of the Bible became handy. For the Christians, this is in response to the words of Jesus Christ who declared: *I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (John 14:6). Therefore, those who seek guidance on the way to success follow the Scriptures.

Those who follow Jesus Christ believe that

they are on their way to Heaven, the place of eternal happiness. Such Scriptures provide indoctrination of the first order, especially to people whose lives were, and are characterized by misery borne out of poverty and powerlessness. The cultural colonization of the Africans provided their subsequent submission. Both religions are cultures that are foreign to Africans and the consequences of a combination of the indigenous and these foreign cultures on the spiritual lives of the Africans is too ghastly to contemplate as manifested in the problems faced today caused by the embracing of the religions. One just has to look around the world and take count of women who have been oppressed under the justification of religion.

Some governments have laws that are enshrined in religious undertones guided by the Scriptures. The marriage laws in most countries in Southern Africa are based on the dictates of the Roman Dutch Law which gives the man an upper hand in the activities of the married couples. However, most of the marriages are guided by the laws in the Scriptures. While Christianity preaches monogamy, some of the followers including priests have concubines in secret; Islam allows a man to marry up to four wives as long as the man loves them all equally. The governments do not interfere because they subtly want to preserve the African culture where polygamy was allowed. This puts men at an upper role. If this is allowed to happen, there is no way that humanity can win the war against HIV/AIDS as society's actions defeat the gender mainstreaming process.

In most cases, it is a woman who is charged with adultery when it is common knowledge that it takes two to tango comes to mind as a typical example of religious influence on governance. It is a known fact that men usually propose love to women but when they are caught up, women are accused of wrecking marriages. Although African societies themselves were to some degree patriarchal by orientation, the white man's faith only helped to perpetuate what was already entrenched. As a result, African women are faced with a war on both fronts as they have to grapple with the consequences of Christianity and Islam (and the other foreign religions) on the one hand, and the indigenous culture on the other, with the foreign one more attractive as it has both glamorous political and economic structures that back it, and the culture which is entrenched in the environment they live in. Here one is only

emphasizing the dilemma currently faced by the African woman.

Organizations that effectively mainstream gender into their activities are said to have a gender responsive culture. They are said to be aligning themselves with the times in which they operate. However, it can not be said of most of the Churches as men and the clergy in the Church in Southern Africa, as elsewhere presume to speak for God, and to demand the obedience of women, and therefore it is not easy to experience God as empowering and liberating when one is in the Church's ambit. In these churches, women should experience God as the one who orders their subordination, who requires them to serve and never be served. God is the one who made them women (because He is all powerful *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ...* Genesis 1), with a body deemed to be the locus of sin and impurity. God should be experienced as a source of women's oppression and Jesus Christ, Mohammed and the prophets of other religions as the authors of the exclusion of women from important spiritual activities in the Church.

Countries in Southern Africa are democratizing with their constitutions espousing democratic ideals. For instance, it is said that South Africa has one if not the most progressive constitution in the world equivalent to the so-called advanced democracies. It stipulates such rights as freedom of expression and association, equality, political and property rights, education and health care, access to information and the courts. It does not allow any form of discrimination. It also encourages gender and racial equality (http://www.southafrica.info.ess_info/sa_glance/facts.htm). Botswana is also one of those countries that espouse democratic ideals in their constitutions.

Although these countries espouse democratic constitutions and democratic ideals and ideologies, they at the same time have overtly embraced Christian and Islamic ideologies which espouse dogmatic, patriarchic constitutions. These religions' organizational structures are hierarchic, patriarchic with power residing in the Most High, followed by the Son, and the Holy Spirit; on earth by the Pope, the Archbishops, and the others who follow in the line. The high offices in the churches are reserved for men in line with the choosing of the apostles. With countries such as South Africa and Botswana

having approximately 50% of their populations being women and the majority belonging to either of the two religions, the effect of these religions affects many souls. Because these people believe that the Scriptures depict their lives, they will be saved from suffering. The Christians base this on the contents of the Sermon on the Mount (Mathew 5:1-20) where Jesus Christ comforted those who are suffering like the women today by promising them good things after death. In other words, they should not bother about the (wo)manly rewards of the earth as theirs will be in Heaven.

Women continue to face increased exclusion from participating in leadership and decision-making in the church despite their numerical majority. Instead, they are encouraged to take minor positions that reflect their traditional roles such as teaching in Sunday schools, visiting the sick and bereaved, raising funds (but having no control over their usage), cleaning the church, cooking and serving food. Most of the teachings of the Scriptures are appealing to the oppressed such as women, and most women believe that what is in the Bible or Koran was written by God and therefore their oppression has been sanctioned by God. This blind believe in the power of the Scriptures constrains any gender mainstreaming process by the most powerful ideology which is followed by almost every body, religion. However, it should be pointed out that although women may still have far to go to achieve total equality in all matters, some religions such as The Baha'i Faith have embraced the gender mainstreaming process full force as illustrated in the statements of the Baha'i International Community presented to the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet (1991) where the link between the unity of the human race and equality of the sexes is emphasized base on the Baha'i Writings. It is stated that:

... woman must be given the privilege of equal education with man and full right to his prerogatives. That is to say, there must be no difference in the education of male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation. ...

However, like all faiths guided by the teachings of God, when it comes to sex, they preach abstinence and condemn the use of condoms. They believe in indoctrinating the young ones to grow up knowing that there should be sex only in marriage.

It has been argued that for a long time, most systems of social organizations such as churches have marginalized women under the guise of the scriptures as created by God, the Almighty. An example of the magnitude of this belief in the sanctity of the word of God is the reaction to the introduction of the Marriage Bill introduced in Botswana at the close of 2004 where there is so much noise backed by the teachings found in the Bible. During the debate, women did not come out to publicly support the Bill but it were men of the cloth who castigated the Bill as something against the wishes of God. The Bill was viewed as blasphemy of the first order by the churches. Even priests came on the public media such as Botswana Television, Radio Botswana live programmes, and print media to castigate the Bill as ungodly and blasphemous as it was against the Scriptures. A recent article in a mid week newspaper in Botswana, *Monitor: Monday 07 March 2005: Volume 5 No. 9* under the heading: "Pastor Criticizes Abolition of Marital Power" revealed that a representative of the Church Minister's Fraternal in Francistown, Pastor John Ramotshabi has criticized the abolition of marital power saying it is a direct violation of the will of God. ... Ramotshabi said that though women were not lesser humans, God created men to be the heads of families. He emphasized that *if we take that (the superiority of the husband) away from the husbands, we would be rebelling against God*. He justified his assertions by referring to the Scriptures.

Because priests are respected leaders in communities with a large following comprising women as the majority, the gender mainstreaming process which the law was trying to facilitate is faced with a formidable resistance. Religion becomes the real enemy of the process. The question is where were the women organizations to support the Bill? The same newspaper quotes a Customary Court President, Paul Motshwane as saying that the amendment of the Marriage Act was long over-due as the Act had disadvantaged women for a long time. Is it that they were not allowed to speak in *public* that they kept quiet? There was also a saga concerning one woman who was appointed a pastor in one of the churches locally and there was a lot of resistance from the members including *Basadi ba seaparo* (the women of the cloth) as they are usually called in Botswana. The other churches did not come to her rescue

which sent a signal that what was about to happen was contrary to spiritual expectation. The government did not interfere either. To most Christians, the Bible is the law which cannot be changed except by God himself. Should we wait for His arrival? It is above all laws of countries?

The Bible, as the life-guiding tool for many religious faiths and people has a great impact on the gender mainstreaming process as it is full of life lessons that are gendered which Christians believe without question. The Bible, and the Koran are patriarchal in outlook as the main characters are men. The Lord is male and the children, Satan, Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed are all male. The Bible is not gender neutral in many respects and most prominent is the use of the male pronoun *he* in all important communications. God communicated important messages to His flock through men such as Moses, Abraham, Noah, and the others. Most of the prominent characters in the Bible are men, and all the authors of the various books are men. So God favours the birth of sons over that of girls, and this makes fathers and patriarchal societies to celebrate the births of boys. Right from the Book of Genesis, the birth of men is pronounced over that of females who are only mentioned when they give birth, maybe as a reminder of the punishment given to Eve for tempting the Son of God: *I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; and in pain you shall bring forth children, ...*. For instance, Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel, Cain's wife bore Enoch who bore Irad who bore Methushael who bore Lamech and so forth (Genesis 4:17-32). Was this by accident or design? Surely it was by design as the Bible stories reflect a patriarchal times in history. It is these stories which many people follow in order to be regarded as good Christians and Muslims. If the Bible gives prominence to sons, what can people do but follow the Lord's example. The role played by Christianity in enhancing and institutionalizing gender disparities is emphasized by Walker (1990:13) who asserts that:

... the missionaries vision of what constituted appropriate female behaviour set severe limits to African women's continued involvement in agriculture.

He elaborates that the missionaries espoused an ideology of female domesticity that laid stress on women's reproductive and nurturing roles above their autonomy and productivity. A good

Christian woman should possess the feminine characteristics displayed by the Virgin Mary who was betrothed to Joseph. Before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost, thus the first publicly accepted breaking of one of the ten commandments: *Thou shalt not commit adultery* (Exodus 20:14). Or only the followers commit adultery? The attributes of the good Christian woman were obedience to the authority of the husband and father, piety, decorum, thrift, and service to the man just as Mary was to the Lord. This requirement of a good Christian woman is enshrined in the Holy Bible in the first book of Corinthians 14: 34-35 which commands that:

34. *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.*

35. *And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is a shameful for women to speak in church.*

The above sentiments were also emphasized in the book of first Timothy 2: 11-12 where it is declared that:

11. *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.*

12. *And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*

13. *For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*

14. *And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. (N.I.V.).*

It is clear that the Holy Bible discriminates according to gender and this has greatly influenced many societies and individual lives. The Bible clearly relegates women as second class citizens under the power and mercy of their husbands, as *silence* and *submissiveness* are emphasized. This is a clear instruction that women should not teach or hold any leadership position in church. For a long time, there were no women pastors maybe as a result of the way Jesus chose His disciples. Even today, women who want to ascend to management positions in the church such as being pastors are shunned by the communities as it is believed it is not the norm. The women's place in church is as singers and fundraisers. The church choirs are made of women punctuated here and there by male conductors (This author has also observed that most gospel singers in the market are men). A case in point is the issue of the ascendance of a

female pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana where even the local authorities such as the Paramount Chief refused to recognize the woman pastor. This is a clear indication of the extent to which the gender mainstreaming process is faced with resistance. It is common knowledge that globally, Chieftainship, belongs to the traditional religious orientation of royalty and is elevated to the levels of omnipotence. African chiefs, just like those from Europe are revered, hence the ascendance of female chiefs is a modern development just like that of the pastors, and is regarded as ungodly and is resisted. As illustrated earlier, the main characters of the Bible are men and God spoke through them. The genealogy of God is patriarchal, starting with David to Jesus Christ, and many are waiting to join the list, hence they guard against the intrusion of women at all costs. Internationally, we are still to see women become Bishops of Canterbury, Popes in the Roman Catholic, and in Southern Africa the Bishop in the Zion Christian Council (ZCC), priests in the Dutch Reformed Church without litigations making decisions (the story referred to earlier in Botswana is a clear example). Women are usually excluded from positions of responsibility in the church because Jesus also chose men only to be his disciples, sending a message among His followers that it is only men who can occupy positions of responsibility. This is further emphasized in Ephesians 5:21-4 where Christ is said to be the head of the Church:

21. *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

22. *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.*

23. *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, and is himself its saviour.*

24. *As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.*

In Islam, women cannot be leaders in Church because the portrayal of God and his son Mohammed is male. It is also believed that due to their monthly menstruation, they are unclean to preach the word of God. Furthermore, during menstruation, they are temperamental and therefore not fit to lead a congregation of God. They are regarded as unclean.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the issue of women ascending to leadership positions was

clarified once and for all in the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* of John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on reserving Priestly Ordination to men alone. In part the letter states:

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, Priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone. This tradition has also been faithfully maintained by the Oriental Churches.

The Scriptures as guiding instruments for individuals and communities are in most cases placing women at very dangerous positions. The way the issue of rape is introduced in the Bible does not help women at all, especially in times of war, and our continent is at war now including that against AIDS. Although Deuteronomy 21: 10-14 refers to the treatment of sexually desirable non-Jewish women who are captured in war, it is clear that some men in conflict areas rape innocent women and justify their actions with lessons from the scriptures. These soldiers might win the war against their enemies but end up not only losing the war against HIV/AIDS but also exacerbating it, as usually in war times, people have no time to take measures such as using condoms, as the situation is disparate. Even then, what kind of father treats his children in this way?

The Lord's Prayer is gendered in that it glorifies God as the Father who stays in Heaven, the implication being that those fathers who are on earth are also paramount. They deserve to be respected as they occupy roles on earth similar to that of God in Heaven. When children go to school, the first lesson in most schools is to learn the Lord's prayer as it is usually recited every day before lessons. The children internalize this gendered prayer and come to believe that is the hierarchical order in life.

In Africa, the choice of men as managers as was done by Jesus Christ augured well with succession procedures in Africa where the eldest son not child took over the chieftainship. Christianity was accepted by most rulers in Africa as it had some similarities with the practices they were used to. For instance, there is always a question of when a woman who is married becomes chief, it means that the chieftainship changes hands as the eldest son of the chief succeeds. It is such institutions that thwart gender-mainstreaming processes as they are part

of the cultures of people. Rulers do not support the process wholeheartedly as they may be destroying their power base as the ascendance of women will dilute the succession line because when women marry, they change surnames and therefore their offspring are regarded as foreign. However, one may pose a question as to which is strong in the fusing of cells during mutation, the man's or the woman's, or it is just a figment of male chauvinism? Does it mean that genetically, when women meet their husbands in the creation of children, the sperm of the man is the most powerful? Is the adoption of the male surname at marriage by the woman not a societal creation which has no base except in the minds of people? In the Bible, it is in line with Jesus Christ who although the son of Mary, he had to take that one of God, with Mary only referred to with the first name. Therefore the use of double-barreled names is seen as blasphemy in the eyes of God.

However, it has been argued that these Scriptures are not referring to roles in the church but marriage relationships. It is contended that Paul is:

... instructing people that it is not right for the wife to boss her husband around and try to be head of the household. That would be an inversion of God's order of the home.

Ephesians 5: 22-24 supports this by saying:

22. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of, his body, of which he is the Saviour. 24. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

It has been argued that it appears *unnatural when a man is cowed and hen pecked and reduced to weakness by a domineering wife*. Furthermore, Ephesians 5: 24-29 appeals to husbands to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

In other societies, such writings in the Bible are understood to refer to any biological man, which includes boys. Talking about the situation in some parts of Nigerian, Akintunde (2000:86-87) gives the following description to illustrate that Nigerian women are generally regarded as inferior to men, and that there is a belief that intellectually and physically they cannot compete with men.

The Nigerian woman is hardly presented as

somebody who is active, independent, and decisive. She is seen as busy with household activities, but never a professional in the masculine areas. The traditional belief is that her role is in the kitchen. She is regarded as *alawoku* (someone whose tutelage never ends). As a child she takes instruction from her father, as a woman from her husband; and at old age or as a widow her male child takes over the tutelage.

Women are also treated as children, and are expected to behave in that way. They are supposed to take instructions from their husbands just like good children do. People expect that children must be taught the norms, values, traditions and behaviours of the society, and should take these without questioning as it is the duty of the elders to pass this knowledge from generation to generation. The Church also supports this in its teachings with regards women.

The state of the position of women in society was made worse by the authors of the Bible who decided on the nature of the creation story whereby Adam was born first and was made in the Image of God while from his rib was made Eve. Eve unlike Adam was made in the image of man, and Adam emphasizes this relationship when he says: *This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man* (Genesis 2:25). This makes Eve, or women nonentities in that at least if they were made from half of Adam's body, their existence would equals that of man but an insignificant rib which does not have a major role to play like the heart or any organ relegates the creation of women a mockery and this among others make men to believe that women are inferior. A woman was never created to be on equal footing with a man because she is regarded as a *helper* as illustrated in Genesis 2:18 which says: *Now the Lord God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*

The way the Bible treats Eve explains the reasons behind all the problems that the women are suffering today. The progenitor of all sin and death was a woman as it was decided that Eve should be the one who has to be deceived by the snake, not Adam who was experienced in that he came before Eve. All the blame for the sin is placed on Eve by Adam as illustrated in Genesis 3:12 when God asked Adam whether he had eaten the forbidden tree and he answered: *The woman you*

put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it. The punishment that follows the disobedience by the two is more heavy on the woman as it is said to the woman in Genesis 3: 16, *I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.* Why did The Almighty not realize that to really test the strength of human beings, it would be logical to test somebody with experience. Adam was born first and therefore a good candidate for a test. Furthermore, although the Book of Genesis 3:16-19 takes both men and women as responsible for the first sin, first Timothy 2:14 places the blame of the commission of the first sin squarely on a woman alone when it is declared: *And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.* But should the woman be blamed alone? Why did Adam agree to be an accomplice?

There is nowhere in the Bible where women's positions are held high except when they committed sin, obstructed God's first instruction to Adam and Eve be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth by being infertile. The picture mostly painted by the Scriptures of almost all religions is that women as wives, mothers, and daughters are typically unreliable, inadequate, deceitful, or simply by virtue of their womanhood an outright liability, always threatening to undermine God's will (Mauer, 2000). She goes on to point out that women are portrayed to destroy paradise, delay the propagation of the human species, defy the patriarchal structure, and endanger the proliferation of God's blessed nation. Although Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ the Son of God, she is not given much recognition. Jesus somehow denounced her in Mark 3:33-35 when he was told that his mother and brothers were outside looking for him and he said:

33. *Who are my mother and my brothers? He asked.* 34. *Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said: Here are my mother and my brothers!* 35. *Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.*

She has no place in Jesus's life after the age of twelve, and she is hardly mentioned in the Bible as playing any role. Jesus discriminated his mother by favouring His Father, just like what sons always do.

Other women in the Bible are not allotted prominent roles, but they were there; for instance he praised the woman who anointed Jesus Christ

in Mathew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 as an act of good faith in preparation for his burial. The women who went to his grave are playing the role of messengers, which is a very low position. Women are generally perceived as dependants of men and their contributions are largely seen as secondary and supplementary rather than essential to the success of the religious sector, for instance the role of Mary in the Bible is that of a lucky woman who was used to give birth to Jesus Christ as it will be unnatural for a male (God is male) to conceive a give birth (although he is so powerful). In Hinduism, it is said that a woman's role is often seen within the context of the family performing tasks such as cooking, making sure the family keeps the religious rituals and celebrations important to the faith. In short they keep the home running smoothly.

The holy prayer as communicated to Moses is patriarchal. It uplifts the Father above everybody else, a position that is maintained in families. Does the father stay alone without a woman when it was the same father who realized that Adam needed a helper? If there is that woman, she is never mentioned. The Holy Trinity does not make matters easier at all.

The world is fighting a war against HIV/AIDS and one of the constraints in this fight is the Scriptures which inform the religious structures. Governments the world over have decided to wage their own wars against the disease and in countries such as Botswana, the President has taken it upon himself to lead the war under the slogan, *ntwa e bolotse* (the war has been declared). Billboards with messages encouraging people to engage in safe sex are found at every corner where it is convenient to display the message. Workshops to teach people about the disease and how it can be put under control are held at very high costs. Patients are provided with condoms free of charge in government clinics and public areas such as hotels. People are also encouraged to obstinate. In South Africa there is an advert in SABC Africa which is flashed regularly warning the young ones to obstinate if they have not yet started having sex and if they have started they should condomize. Families see the words of this advert everyday and after some time perceive it as part of the TV screen. What more is expected of Governments? It is time for the civil society to play its part and stop pointing fingers. HIV/AIDS is real and it needs real down to earth methods to combat it. If AIDS

is a punishment for disobeying God, then all sicknesses are. We can no longer close our eyes and utter some magic words and expect the disease to disappear. One of the stumbling blocks is the Scriptures which regard condomizing as against God as it obstructs the will to multiply. To the Muslims, using condoms or any other form of contraception is regarded as *haram*, and therefore the followers of Islam do not use condoms. Christians also regard it as blasphemy. Churches should know that HIV/AIDS is not only caused by promiscuity and prostitution as these people are not in the majority of those affected. They know their trade well and play it by the safe rules, that is, condoms. They play it safe. Most of the people are infected when they are helping accident victims who are already infected; or giving birth to a child whose father may have acquired the virus while helping a victim; thus infecting an innocent mother who is going to die whereas if they had used condoms, the virus would not have passed to the innocent mother. But because women have no choice of which rules to apply during the game, they end up being victims. Some of the churches even bar their followers from going to the hospital and get drugs such as anti retroviral drugs which are provided for free in countries such as Botswana.

For as long as people believe in the superiority of God and his Son, and that the way to salvation is living the life of the duo, any gender mainstreaming will remain a pipedream. Stories abound the media of some priests who sleep with female patients with the promise that his sperms will cure the disease. This is the real world that we inhabit and needs head on attack methods to tackle it or it will wipe every body including the Most High on earth.

CONCLUSION

It has been illustrated that that the strategy of gender mainstreaming was a noble undertaking, but Southern African countries find themselves fighting a losing battle because they left out one of the main influencing factors which facilitates gender power imbalances and gender based discrimination. The survival of the church as an institution in democratic environments found in Southern Africa, and to a large extent globally is long over due. The structures and activities need to be reconstructed to reflect the current existing environments. Religion, especi-

ally Christianity and Islam, and all the other churches that follow the dogma of God have overshadowed the status of women and girls in their societies. They have dismally failed to link with gender mainstreaming efforts due to the nature of their values, norms and beliefs which are based on the principles inherent in the Bible and the Koran, and other teachings and writings which are God's statutes, and churches are High Courts. Because of the large following, which comprises mainly women, the process of gender mainstreaming was and will always be the loser.

As a result of the problems raised above, the following are some of the recommendations that can help the process of gender mainstreaming. Firstly, societies should reconstruct their spiritual orientation taking cognizance of the prevailing situation. This is because the Bible and Koran reflect the times they were written, which were paternalistic and gender insensitive. Their beliefs are not global but regional and time-framed, reflecting the Judeo-Christian era with its philosophers who saw women as second class citizens who were dependent on men for survival. It is just like during the times of Shakespeare when women were not allowed to act and their places were taken by men. The times have changed and therefore our spirituality has to be in line with the times. However, it is not suggested that the Bible should be discarded but be aligned with the social and political climates prevalent now. Discriminating parts should be done away with as they are irrelevant.

Secondly, much as political leaders are passing legislation in line with gender mainstreaming processes, that is not enough as they are not at all dealing with institutions that perpetuate gender disparities. They have to utilize their political will to fine-tune the churches and their values. Constitutions of countries have been amended to be in alignment with the times but the Bible has remained unchanged, except in the interpretations that suit men. Much as the churches preach equality in the eyes of God, they do not preach equality in the eyes of people, and they use the Bible to justify their actions. As long as governments can dictate to their subjects how they should behave in line with the dictates of the constitution, the churches should also be called upon to do the same. Churches should be democratic in all respects and they should be monitored to abide by the constitutions.

Thirdly, when the Africans, including most

countries in Southern Africa were faced with colonialism, the churches preached Black Theology values. We had people like Bishop Tutu, Alan Boesak in South Africa who used the churches to spread the gospel of decolonization. Both men and women should be called upon to do so more than ever as this one is a war against the two sexes which is a war of its own unique kind where the combatants sleep together. There is need for the cultural decolonization and deconstruction if we are to meet all the Millennium Goals. All attempts should be made to bring all the combatants to a round table to discuss the place of gender in religion. It is time for the Bible and the Koran to be reviewed in line with globalization.

Fourthly, the concept of gender should be made part of the core curriculum in schools from pre-primary to universities. This is the only way in which gender as a concept can be understood. Just as the history of colonization is taught, gender should be taught as part of the democratic principles.

Fifthly, as most of the members of churches are women, they should wake up and fight for their rights. Men cannot do it on their behalf as on the way they may compromise the struggle when they realize that their power base is being eroded.

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