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FORUM OF BIBLE AGENCIES - INTERNATIONAL  
HIV/AIDS CONSULTATION

*SEPTEMBER 30 – OCTOBER 4, 2007*

*NAIROBI, KENYA*

*SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS*

*FOBAI Executive Director's Office*

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## INTRODUCTION TO CONSULTATION PROCEEDINGS SUMMARY

In October 2007, strategic leaders of FOBAI and FOBA-Africa member agencies, together with other mission agencies, came together for a working “strategic consultation” in Nairobi Kenya to explore how the Bible might be brought to engage within the HIV & AIDS situation in Africa.

The consultation had four focus areas: 1) Describing the HIV&AIDS situation in Africa, 2) Exploring the theme of "Bible engagement in church and cultures" with particular reference to Africa and the HIV & AIDS situation; 3) Providing an overview of "Bible initiatives" in Africa (by Bible agencies and others) focused on HIV & AIDS and identifying key issues that should be addressed in order to increase effectiveness; and 4) Determining what the Bible agencies needed to hear coming out of the consultation process, and what the implications were for us (alone and together) in terms of future activities.

The consultation aimed at creating an ethos that was appropriate for the subject matter, the context, and the mix of Western and African participants. An environment of community, listening, and active conversation was established throughout the event. The program incorporated elements including community groups, presenter talkback sessions, and extended plenary Q&A to foster dialogue and participation.

The consultation was blessed with the presence of distinguished guest speakers (three theologians and a medical doctor) in our midst who delivered plenary sessions and stretched our understanding of how to engage Scripture in the HIV& AIDS context.

- The Rt Rev. Dr. D Zac Niringiye is a theologian, pastor, Bible teacher, counselor, trainer, and organizational development consultant. Currently he is Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Kampala, a position he assumed after four years as Regional Director of the Church Mission Society’s work in Africa and 20 years of ministry among students in Uganda and all over English and Portuguese Speaking Africa.
- Madipoane Masenya is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of South Africa. She earned her masters degree from UNISA and did her doctoral research at Garrett-Evangelical Theological seminary in Evanston. She is originally from Moletjie, Ga-Manamela, a village located in the Western side of Polokwane, South Africa.

- Colin Greene is Professor of Theological and Cultural Studies at Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle. He is author of 'Christology in Cultural Perspective'. Before joining Mars Hill Graduate School as Scholar in Residence in 2005 he was for two years Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Systematic Theology at Seattle Pacific University. He is originally from Northern Ireland and is an ordained Anglican minister.
- Dr Geoff Foster, a paediatrician from Zimbabwe and founder of the Family AIDS Caring Trust

The consultation would not have been possible without the commitment and dedication of all those involved in preparing and carrying out the event. We owe a special acknowledgment and immense gratitude to:

The planning group: Wambura Kimunyu (IBS-STL), co-chair; George Hoskins (Book of Hope), co-chair; Bill Jefferson (ABS); David Traher (Lifewords); Evariste Munyabarambe (UBS-Africa); Linsi Simmons (Lifewords); Erin Burton (FOBAI); Neil Crosbie (Lifewords and representing the FOBAI Scripture Engagement Group) and Roberto Laver (FOBAI-Executive Director)

The consultation facilitator: Neil Crosbie

The support team: Kami Ecker (Book of Hope); Jon Johansson (Book of Hope); Sarah Oiro (IBS-STL); Sammy Kamore (Lifewords) and members of the FOBAI communications committee Nicole Johansson (Book of Hope) and Carol Dowsett (Wycliffe/SIL International)

What follows is a brief summary of the event.

## “ENGAGING CHURCH AND BIBLE” WITH ZAC NIRINGIYE

Zac spoke to us from the starting point of his own story, growing up in a Christian minister’s home in East Africa, doing HIV/AIDS work in the 80s, and trying to make sense of life, church, and God in the face of the devastation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other natural and human catastrophes affecting Uganda. He then laid the theological groundwork for his position: that God is sovereign in and over creation, that history is the unfolding of God’s purpose, that God orchestrates the evolution of peoples, nations and cultures across continents and generations toward the fulfillment of his purpose, and that the Bible tells both the story of Jesus Christ and of God’s unfolding will and purpose. He further posited that God elects in every generation a chosen people, and that the challenge for the people of God in every generation and culture is to be faithful followers of Jesus, living by God’s word.

Zac raised for us some critical questions stemming from the HIV/AIDS pandemic and by church and Christian community interventions therein. How do we make sense of the pandemic in light of what we know about God’s sovereignty and purpose for mankind? (i.e. where is God in all of this? What is he doing?) How do we make sense of the church using HIV and AIDS as a litmus test of authenticity? Have the Bible Agencies been too preoccupied with institutional forms of church? How is HIV/AIDS transforming the church, what questions is it bringing to the fore? Is the church a voice against the marginalized, and is the Bible misused as a means of stigmatization? Or is the church a voice FOR the marginalized? He spoke about the NGO-ization of the church due to the dominant role played by NGOs in HIV and AIDS intervention. He said that there is a danger when churches reform themselves to become like NGOs, and focus on delivering programs. The pastor becomes a project manager, and funders want to see institutions that are easily monitored, as opposed to care for AIDS patients and orphans integrated into the community in a holistic way.

In conclusion he challenged us to question the paradigms, traditions, and perspectives also challenged by HIV and AIDS. “How then shall we live?” he asked – pressing us to think about how we engage with the Bible not as a tool but rather submitting ourselves and our stories to its scrutiny. He ended by asking us which forms of the Bible enable the Church to liberate the Bible and its messages from ‘religious captivity.’

## DELEGATES TALKBACK

Following Zac’s presentation, the discussion time focused on several issues he had raised. Delegates asked questions regarding the rates of infection on the continent that

aren't a result of sexual activity. One delegate asked about the idea of AIDS as a punishment from God, and how a loving God can allow such suffering, and how to deal with the concepts of love and judgment. Zac's response dealt with that question not just in regard to AIDS but other suffering around the world, and spoke about judgment in relation to redemption, that judgment happens because God is love. The problem, he went on to say, is when people (particularly in the West) think that they are with God in judgment, or that judgment is reserved for people outside the church.

The issue of stigma was raised and several participants shared stories and experiences around stigma. Stigma also related back to the topic of judgment, because if people perceive that, for example, HIV acquired through drug use is somehow less stigmatized than sexually transmitted HIV, they will judge others accordingly. Zac's response pleaded for greater introspection on these issues, suggesting that discipline was a better word than punishment. He said that when someone has HIV/AIDS, Christians are always anxious to know how the person got it. He urged us to not read the Bible in a way that is oppressive of others, but to read the Bible differently. He said the Gospel is more than just salvation from sin, and that Christian leaders can help reduce stigma by being tested for HIV.

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

In the ensuing Community Group time, participants were challenged to answer 3 questions: What are your personal issues/questions arising out of Zac's presentation? What is the story/perspective/tradition/paradigm that has shaped your understanding of the Bible and the Church? And in what ways is God present and active in the HIV and AIDS pandemic and how might this help us in the reshaping of our communities?

Responses to the first question expressed confusion, fear, and uncertainty at the complexity of the issues raised by Zac. There was, however, recognition of the failure of a western individualized approach to such a complex pandemic. There was also an acknowledgment that the pandemic is global and that it affects all of us in some way.

The second question caused community group members to struggle with issues of why our paradigms and traditions can blind us to the heart of the issue, and why access to and engaging in Scripture doesn't seem to always affect things like infection rate and attitudes toward sexuality. Discussion also revolved around the individualistic attitude of the American church contrasted with the community emphasis in the African church. Lastly, participants discussed opportunities to rethink the way the church and community relate to one another, as well as new ministry opportunities and new theological questions. HIV/AIDS is breaking down barriers and exposing hypocrisy in the church, and thus should not necessarily be viewed as a 'problem.'

### “ENGAGING BIBLE” WITH MADIPOANE MASENYA

On Tuesday, Madipoane spoke to us about what it is like to read the Bible in the context of HIV and AIDS, and from the perspective of an African Christian woman. She told of the painful realities of the Bible being used to perpetuate both slavery and apartheid.

She went on to speak about how marriage is sometimes ‘idolized,’ both in the Biblical world and in African cultures. She shared the shocking story of a young woman who willingly infected herself with the HI-virus carried by her husband. Madipoane then drew a comparison between this young woman’s story and the Biblical stories of Ruth and Tamar. She illustrated for us how both of these stories could be read using the lenses of gender, history, cultural context, and socio-economic status to be quite troubling commentaries on the pressures faced by their respective heroines.

In the case of Ruth, she was in such an economically precarious position that security could only be found through marriage. Her mother-in-law’s advice to make herself available to Boaz on the threshing floor in the night drew the following response from Madipoane: “Parents should be wary of being so overwhelmed by poverty to the extent of encouraging their girl children to use their bodies as objects for prostitution.”

Similarly, Tamar, constrained by the cultural and marital norms of the time, resorts to ‘temporary’ prostitution in order to fulfill her role as a wife and mother. Madipoane points out that African institutions such as polygyny, levirate marriage and “multiple-sex-partner” monogamy confront African women with similar dilemmas, and that given the dangers posed by HIV, actions such as Tamar’s could prove fatal.

Madipoane concluded by challenging us to be informed by thinking critically about how we use the Bible. She suggested three specific ways to effectively engage the Bible in the context of HIV and AIDS. 1) By being very conscious about the dynamics of the context of the interpreter. 2) By taking this context seriously in our Bible translation processes. 3) By affirming the dignity of all people as human beings created in the image of God.

### PRESENTERS TALKBACK

Following Madipoane’s presentation, a panel further discussed the themes she had raised. She was pressed on the issue of marriage and her seemingly critical attitude towards it. But she insisted she was not suggesting we do away with the institution of marriage, but rather the idolization thereof. She also entertained the question, regarding the story of Ruth, of “what about the bigger picture?” She said that she too

had been taught that, but that in light of the HIV plight, she would have a problem encouraging a daughter to lie at the feet of a drunken man. She also stressed the need to develop a theology around the single women who tend to get pushed aside in churches.

Zac talked about the need to understand Scripture relationally, rather than in the post-Enlightenment, 'problem-in-need-of-solution' framework. When we look at situations just as problems in need of solutions, we lose the priority of relationships, which are themselves problematic. The NGO model is built on that kind of paradigm, you develop a structure to deal with a problem, there are goals, progress is monitored. Christian communities need to go beyond that, beyond using the Bible as our 'answer book' and seeing God as merely a problem-solver.

The concepts of Scripture and Culture were discussed at length, with Colin explaining the various ways in which religious communities either choose to reject the culture around them entirely or try to live in uneasy tension with it. Madipoane tied this idea of culture to her own connectedness with the Old Testament, pointing out that the culture that brought forth the Old Testament is similar to traditional African culture.

Geoff came into the conversation with some statistics on infection rates and challenging us as Christians to think about the assumptions we make vis-à-vis the morality of the infected. He stressed that while individual behavior change is important, things like a higher infection rate among orphaned teenage girls show us that there are cultural and economic determinants of behavior, and that we need to address issues of vulnerability and protection as well.

Zac pointed out that the virus reveals things; problems in relationships, dysfunctionality in the body of Christ. In particular it is revealing the economic and power dynamic between the global North and South and perpetuating an image of poor Africans in need of outside help. Rather than jumping quickly into the question of "what can we do?" he called us to self-reflection, challenging the Bible Agencies to grapple with ways in which they may have contributed to the misuse and abuse of Scripture.

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

In the community groups, people were given three questions to discuss: 1) Have you, as an individual, experienced the Bible in a way that has marginalized, ostracized, or dehumanized you? Give examples, how did you react to this? 2) How does Galatians 3:28-29 challenge the way we interpret Scripture through our particular cultural lens? 3) What, in your view and informed by your own understanding of the Scriptures, is ideal womanhood/manhood? Why?

Response to the first question varied based on the experiences of the participants. Gender, denomination, race, theology of the Spirit, position within churches, wealth or lack thereof, and marital status were among the factors that had contributed to people feeling ostracized or dehumanized.

On the second question, there was a struggle to deal with Galatians 3 as an ideal while living in the reality of the cultural context. Respondents questioned to what degree the church should be different than the world around them in this respect, given that there are differences of gender, language, race, etc., created by God. At the same time, we are all created in the image of God, and this needs to be reaffirmed.

Ideal manhood and womanhood were pictured differently by the various participants. Christlikeness in attitude and deed were stressed for both, tender care and compassion for women, providing and protecting for men. A recurring theme in the responses was that the differences between the genders are Scriptural and God-created, and should not be lost or overlooked.

### “ENGAGING IN THE STORY” WITH COLIN GREENE

Colin gave us a presentation on the theology of suffering that was rooted in his own experience of coming to know the Lord in a time of great physical and emotional pain. He was 18 and a successful athlete with a promising career ahead of him when a debilitating bone disease left him in pain and without the sports career he had wanted. At the same time, however, he was coming to faith in Jesus Christ and learning how to read Scripture, pray, and be part of a Christian community. He found that in Jesus he had a friend who entered into his suffering with him.

After sharing this, he then turned to the passage in 2 Corinthians where Paul talks about loss and suffering so great that he is ready to give up on life itself. But he discovers the true meaning of comfort and consolation, in a God who enters into our suffering, stays and weeps with us. Colin compared this to Ezekiel, where God says to the prophet, if you want to be where I am, I am with the exiles along the Kebar River. Ezekiel goes down to the river just to be with the exiles and be overwhelmed by their devastation. Colin calls this a pattern of exchange, where a Messiah who bled and was broken for us then rose triumphant, and then enters into our suffering with us. This type of exchange breaks apart individualized Christianity, as it can only be experienced together. Whereas the consumer capitalist story encourages us to hoard resources and stay in the present, the Kingdom story is community oriented and eschatologically focused, and the resources come from the future.

Colin posited that HIV/AIDS is a paradigmatic disease; that it breaks our assumptions about marriage and sex and the church and makes us question everything we think we know. “Maybe we need to forget our programs and just go down to the Kebar River where God is, and just be overwhelmed,” he suggested. Then, we will be brothers and sisters and then, the Consultation will be a turning point.

### CEO PANEL

In the second session, a panel of Bible Agency representatives was given a chance to open up the dialogue a little more on the question of the role of the Bible Agencies in Africa. The panelists spoke about their personal responses to things taking place at the Consultation; about their lives, perspectives and ways of engaging around the issues being changed. Their personal experiences of grief and loss informed their responses to the stories being shared at the Consultation. Dale said that the Lord was trying to change his mentality from a “fix it” mentality to a “live in it” one. Then they looked at it from the professional perspective of Bible Agencies, about the need for more dialogue about the positive impact of Scripture, about the need for

better modes of communicating Scriptural truths and about the need for culturally appropriate ministry. It was acknowledged that we are all on a journey and in a state of constant change, and that the need exists for more collaboration and sharing between Forum members. There was some frank discussion about challenging the corporate structures, values, and ways of doing ‘business.’ Roy pointed out that while programs could be devoid of the Spirit’s leading, a program could also be a genuine response to the Spirit’s leading. On the question of collaboration, Kofi noted that in order to relate together, there must be a common agenda, something specific that we can do rather than just a statement that gets put on a shelf. All four responded to a question about tension between personal and professional, and the need for authenticity, trusting God, and walking step by step.

## ENGAGING CULTURES AND BIBLE: DIALOGUE BETWEEN SPEAKERS

In the third session, the panelists were back to further explore the issue of Scripture Engagement, the Bible Agencies’ roles, and the issues raised by HIV/AIDS. Power structures were discussed, as well as the idea that the Bible Agencies could be more intentional about what traditions are impacting upon us and how we do translation. They grappled for awhile with the Bible being not just a book, not just a product, but the Word of God, and experienced by people in different ways. There was also some discussion as to the relationship between the church and Bible Agencies. Are the Bible Agencies there to support the church? Are they part of the church? People had different perceptions of this.

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

In the community group sessions that day, people were given two questions: 1) What should we, as a community, say to each other at the end of our time together? 2) What should we commit ourselves to do as a result of the consultation?

In response to the first question, group members reiterated that HIV is a complex issue, and not just affecting Africa. We should recognize we are on a journey, and also recognize that we need one another, and would like to remain in relationship, sharing resources and ideas and collaborating in the struggle to develop an effective response. Some talked about the need to do a better job of listening at the local level.

On the second question, the result of the Consultation, participants felt that they should commit to continuing in the learning process and self analysis, to collaborate more effectively, to more sincere and fervent prayer, to being open to God’s leading in shaping the agenda moving forward. Flexibility was emphasized as an important part of the process, as was increased communication and continuous evaluation.

The consultation concluded with work on the joint statement on Bible Engagement in the Context of HIV/AIDS in Africa:

**Bible Engagement In The Context Of HIV/AIDS In Africa:  
A Strategic Consultation For The Forum Of Bible Agencies  
Nairobi, Kenya 30 September - 4 October 2007**

In these days together we have been on a journey and have been formed into a temporary learning community. We have sought to wrestle with complex and challenging issues, which we acknowledge includes systemic/societal factors. We recognise that we are faced with enormous challenges to which there are no easy solutions. The HIV & AIDS pandemic forces us to face our collective vulnerability and our inability to control our destiny. This situation should lead us to a new way of being, shaped by our own engagement with Scripture, that could creatively realign our priorities with God and the ways in which we carry out our mission, hopefully creating greater togetherness and collaboration.

Our understanding of the Bible, the Church, and our approach to ministry has been challenged. In this, we acknowledge instances where the misuse of the Bible has contributed to this situation. Yet in the midst of this, we have learned to value each other more than we did before. We acknowledge the need for better communication between us both as individuals and as agencies, and between the agencies and those at the local church/community level.

We have glimpsed a different way of being - as mission agencies carrying out our calling under God, yet we find ourselves with more questions than answers at this stage. As we go forward, we need each other; we need to become vulnerable to each other, developing trust and transparency such that we might recognise and share specialisms instead of duplicating each others' work. We need to share resources more openly and effectively, listening to each other and the church as we struggle to develop more effective ministries, not least in response to HIV & AIDS.

Going forward we commit ourselves to:

- Work towards greater understanding and responsiveness to those infected or affected by HIV and AIDS.
- Share with each other the full outputs of our time together, and to share a selection with our agencies and colleagues, processing these through both FOBA Africa and FOBA International.

- Continue learning more of the mission challenges we face, learning to ask the right questions, and grappling with how we might more effectively address them through Bible engagement and an integral approach to mission
- Encouraging approaches to the Bible that enable people to discover and experience its life transforming and liberating power.
- Continue to build stronger relationships amongst us and with those amongst whom we work
- Respond to the need for more localised church- and community-based approaches and to share resources more equitably and justly
- Sincere and fervent prayer, to openness to God, to shape our strategies, research agendas and the management of our resources.

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# APPENDIX A

## *SPEAKER BIOS*

### CURRICULUM VITAE FOR RT REV DR D ZAC NIRINGIYE

#### **Personal Profile**

The Rt Rev. Dr. D Zac Niringiye is a theologian, pastor, Bible teacher, counsellor, trainer, and organizational development consultant.

Currently, he is Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Kampala, a position he assumed after four years as Regional Director of the Church Mission Society's work in Africa and 20 years of ministry among students in Uganda and all over English and Portuguese Speaking Africa, initially with the Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS) Uganda and then with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES).

Kampala Diocese, for which he is Assistant Bishop, is one of the 33 dioceses in the Church of Uganda and is constituted by 30 churches, with about 50 pastors – both stipendiary and non stipendiary. The Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, is the Bishop of Kampala. Bishop Zac' role as Assistant Bishop is to provide Episcopal oversight – the pastoral, liturgical, strategic mission and ministry leadership to Kampala Diocese, as Archbishop Henry leads the work in the whole Church.

Dr Niringiye holds an honours Physics degree from Makerere University, a Masters degree in Theology from Wheaton College, USA, and a PhD in Theology and Mission History from Edinburgh University. He has written widely on theology, leadership and mission. He has also been instrumental in the founding of many organisations and ministries, including: the Evangelical Fellowship of Uganda, Kampala Evangelical School of Theology (KEST), Aclaim Africa (a leading leadership and management consulting firm) and *Relate* Communications, the publishers of *Relate* magazine. He is also a marriage and family life Counsellor. At the heart of his life and work is a passion for God's Kingdom and His Mission. Dr. Niringiye's multicultural ministry, leadership and mission experience has made him a sought-after Bible Teacher and speaker at mission and leadership conferences globally. He speaks regularly at conferences and churches in Africa, Europe and North America.

Born on 30 April, 1954 in Bufumbira, Kisoro District, Bishop Zac is married to Theodora, an HIV/AIDS, trauma, marriage and family counsellor with *Relate* Communications and Wakisa Ministries, and they have three children – Joshua, 23; Grace, 21; and Abigail, 18.

#### **Education:**

1979 Graduated from Makerere University with a BSc (Hons) in Physics and a Diploma in Education.

1987 Graduated from Wheaton College Graduate School with an MA in Systematic Theology.

1995 Completed Ordination Course at Bishop Tucker Theological College, Mukono

1998 Graduated from Edinburgh University with a PhD in Theology and Mission History.

### **Awards**

The Billy Graham Scholarship Award 1985-1987

The Langham Foundation USA award, 1985-1987

The Wheaton College Christian Theology and History award, 1987

The Christian International Scholarship Foundation award, at Edinburgh University 1993-1997

The Langham Trust Scholarship award at Edinburgh University 1993-1997

### **Work experience:**

1979-80 Graduate Fellow

Physics Department, Makerere University

1980-92 General Secretary

Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS), Uganda FOCUS is an evangelical student movement working among universities and colleges and professionals throughout Uganda with a mission of pioneering, establishing and building holistic witnessing communities. Zac was the pioneer full time staff work for this work in Uganda.

1993-2000 Regional Secretary

International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), English and Portuguese-speaking Africa, covering 25 countries. IFES is a worldwide interdenominational evangelical movement of students and graduates, which links together work among students in over 140 countries and has more than 300,000 members throughout the world.

1995 Ordained Deacon in the Diocese of Muhabura, attached to All Saints Cathedral, Diocese of Kampala

1996 Ordained Priest in the Diocese of Muhabura and assigned as Chaplain to Muhabura Diocese Community in Kampala

2001- 2005 Regional Director, Church Mission Society (CMS) Africa CMS is a mission agency working in partnership with churches in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Established in 1799, the Society's goal remains the same - to spread the Gospel to every part of the world. The Africa Region covers the 20 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in which CMS has some work.

2003 Commissioned Honorary Curate, Christ Church Beckenham, Diocese of Rochester, to serve as Missioner-at-Large'

Jan 2005- Assistant Bishop, Kampala Diocese Boards/Councils Involvement: Co-Founder (with Professor Steven Noll) of the Global South Institute at Uganda Christian University Mukono;

Founder and member of the Board, Kampala Evangelical School of Theology, 1989-

Founder Chairman, Evangelical Fellowship of Uganda (EFU), 1989-1999

Founder and Chairman, Relate Communications Ltd., 1998-

Director, Associated Consultants in Leadership and in Management, (Aclaim) Africa 1996-

Chairman, Associated Consultants in Leadership and in Management, (Aclaim) Africa 1999-

Founder and Director, FARST Africa, 2003-

Founder and Trustee, WAKISA Ministries, 2005-

Chairman, Feed the Children Uganda Advisory Board 1990-1998

Board Member, International Bible Society (IBS), East Africa 1988-1999

Board Member, Christian Children Fund, Uganda 1989-1999

Founding Member of Council, African Theological Initiative, 1992- 2000

Member, Daystar University Company, 1995-

Some of the Presentations at International Conferences/ meetings: Presented a Paper at the "Christianity in Africa in the 1990s" Conference 1991, at New College Edinburgh University on "The Para-Church Movement in Africa in the 1990s"

Speaker at the 1993 IVCF Urbana Missions Convention, USA

Speaker at the Global Consultation of the Forum for Bible Agencies, Dalfsen Holland, April 1994

Main speaker at the 1995 Evangelical Missions Association Conference, UK

Featured speaker at the Spring'97 Annual College Church in Wheaton Missions Conference

Featured speaker for the 1997 Annual Church Mission Society (CMS) Sermon: London, Bristol, Durham, on "The Christ of the Cross and the World Mission of the Church"

Main speaker at the 1998 Tear Fund International Conference at Swanick England

Presented a paper on "Christian Mission and the Church in Sub-Sahara Africa in the 21st Century" at a CMS consultation, Kampala, November 1999

Presented a public Lecture at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan USA on 'Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Christian Mission in Africa', March 2000;

Keynote speaker at the Anglican Communion conference for Mission and Evangelism Coordinators, Cyprus, May 2002.

Keynote Speaker at the Africa AIDS Initiative in partnership with the Churches in N America, October 2003.

Bible Teacher at the IVCF Urbana Missions Convention (attended by 20,000 students, Pastors, and Professionals), Urbana, Dec 2003

Commencement Speaker at Wheaton College USA, May 2006

Works, Publications include: "Prolegomena to an African Theology: An examination of the Sources and Methodology of Mbiti's Theology", an unpublished MA Thesis, Wheaton College, USA, 1987.

"Jerusalem to Antioch to the World: a Biblical Missions strategy", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 26(1), January 1990, pp 56-61.

"Africans in Missions: the possible dream", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 31(1), January 1995, pp 54-61.

"The Nature and Character of God's Mission", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 32(1), January 1996, pp 60-68.

"The Para-Church Movement in Africa in the 1990s", in *African Christianity in the 1990s*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997

*The Christ of the Cross and the World Mission of the Church*, London: CMS, 1997  
*Relationships*, Kampala: IFES Anglophone Africa, 1997

"The Church in the World: a Historical-Ecclesiological Study of the Church of Uganda with particular reference to the Post-Independence Uganda, 1962-1992", unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1998

Series Editor, *Christian Perspectives Series*, a series of Bible Study guides and books published by IFES Anglophone Africa; "Christian Mission Today: The Power and Weakness of the Cross" in Paul Gardner, Chris Wright and Chris Green (eds), *Fanning the Flame: Bible Cross and Mission*, Grand Rapids Michigan, 2003. May 2006

## PROF M J MASENYA

### Personal details

Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) was born in Moletjie, Ga-Manamela, a village located in the Western side of Polokwane, South Africa. Having been nurtured by a patriarchal Christian church at Ga-Mphahlele, her home village, never, has Masenya, even in her wildest dreams, ever thought that she would end up not only earning a terminal degree in the Biblical Sciences (Old Testament Specialisation), but also receiving ministerial credentials for ordained ministry!

She earned her Masters degree from the University of South Africa with the following topic of research: "In the School of Wisdom: An Interpretation of Some Old Testament Proverbs in a Northern Sotho Context". As part of her doctoral research, Masenya engaged in research on womanist/feminist biblical hermeneutics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological seminary in Evanston, Illinois during the months of March 1995, through to June 1995. Her doctoral research focus was on the Old Testament and Bosadi (womanhood) Hermeneutics and the title of her thesis was: *Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A Bosadi (Womanhood) Perspective*. Her doctoral work is now available in the form of a book titled: *How Worthy is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa*, published by Peter Lang in New York, USA.

She started her career as a junior lecturer at the University of the North, now University of Limpopo in 1982. She then moved to Setotolwane College of Education until when she rejoined the University of Limpopo as lecturer in 1991. In 1996, she joined Unisa as lecturer in the then Department of Old Testament. She is now Associate Professor as well as Chair of this same Department, now called, the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies.

### Qualification

B A (University of the North/ now University of Limpopo): 1979

B A (Hons) Biblical Studies with Old Testament Specialisation (University of Limpopo):198

Higher Education Diploma (Unisa): 1984

M A in Biblical Studies (Old Testament Specialisation) (Unisa): 1989

Doctor of Literature and Philosophy in Biblical Studies (Old Testament Specialisation) (Unisa): 1996

### Field of interest

Old Testament and Contextual Concerns affecting Africa (e.g. landlessness, poverty, patriarchy, HIV/AIDS, etc)

Old Testament Wisdom Literature (cf. particularly the Book of Proverbs)

The Christian Bible and Women

## **Publications**

*Articles in Journals Accredited by the South African Accreditation Board*

Old Testament Essays, Vol 2 (1): *In the School of Wisdom: An Interpretation of Some Old Testament Proverbs in a Northern Sotho Context*, 171-191.

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# APPENDIX B

## Engaging Church and Bible in the Context of the HIV and AIDS Pandemic today

*D Zac Niringiye*

*Kampala, October '07*

### **1.0 The starting point – My story (some relevant mark stones in my pilgrimage)**

- The church and the bible in my formation and pilgrimage – from birth: Growing up in a Christian minister’s home; an ‘East African Revival’ heritage; and ‘evangelical student’ (SU and IFES) spirituality heritage;
- HIV/AIDS in my family and work – death of Patrick, a Christian student in the CU around 1988 and Abel my brother due to AIDS – shifting paradigms of life and ministry;
- Journey update: making meaning of life, church and God in the face of the devastation of HIV and AIDS pandemic, natural and human catastrophes (such as genocide in Rwanda and the IDPs of Northern Uganda since late 1980s)

### **2.0 Theological assumptions, presuppositions:**

- God is sovereign in and over creation, in and over history: “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:24, 25).

- History is the un-folding of God’s purpose: “... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:10);
- The evolution of peoples, nations and cultures, spanning geography and generations, is orchestrated by God, towards the fulfilment of his purpose. It is God who “determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him...” (Acts 17:26,27);
- The Bible not only tells the story of Jesus Christ but is the account of God’s unfolding will and purpose in drawing creation and indeed all peoples, nations and cultures into that story, bringing “all things in heaven and on earth together under ... Christ”;
- In every generation God elects for himself a people that he calls his own – “... a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God... “(1 Peter 2:9), in whom and through whom God works to accomplish his purpose. Remember the words of Jesus: “... I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18);
- The challenge for the people of God in every generation and culture is to be faithful followers of Jesus, living by God’s word, “in the world but not of the world” (1 John 17:13-19);

### **3.0 Critical questions arising from the HIV and AIDS pandemic and interventions by Church and Christian Communities**

- Making sense of HIV and AIDS pandemic in our time, for our generation – in the light of God’s sovereignty and purposes? Where on earth is God in all this? What on earth is God doing?  
Describing AIDS as an apocalypse / kairos (May 06 meeting in S Africa):  
*Definition of “apocalypse”: A catastrophic pandemic that affects all people and that is destroying life and society as we know it and revealing systemic weaknesses in the fabric of the culture, church, and community but providing unprecedented opportunity for transformation.*

- Making sense of the church: Is the Church in its diverse forms today, the same as the one Jesus conceived when he declared “I will build my church...”? HIV and AIDS as a litmus test of authentic Church – community of the Kingdom of God;
- In the work of resource development for Bible Engagement, have the Bible Agencies been too preoccupied with institutional forms of the Church, equating institutional Church with the people of God?
- How is HIV and AIDS pandemic transforming the church, re-forming and forming it to conform to the image of His Son, sometimes as sign and other times as counter-sign of the Kingdom of God – a community that seeks after God, to live out his purposes and reaching out to the world? What questions has HIV and AIDS brought to the fore in the life of churches today?
  - Church as voice against the marginalised? Using (misusing!) the Bible as instrument for HIV and AIDS stigmatisation;
  - Church as voice for the marginalised? Creative and redemptive HIV and AIDS interventions that are informed by the message of the Bible have liberated Bible and biblical language from religious captivity – such language as faith and faithfulness (the language of **Being faithful** in the ABC strategy came from Church responses);
  - Church as active agent for God’s Mission (integral): the shift from Church’s social engagement in education and health care simply as means for evangelism, to social engagement as end (as integral to God’s Mission);
  - HIV and AIDS as the place for transformation of individuals and communities for good (example of pastors whose ministries and communities are being transformed);
  - The dominant role of NGOs in HIV and AIDS intervention have wrought the phenomenon of ‘NGO-isation’ of the Church;
  - However, the Church as community of “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... and love” (Colossians 3: 12, 14)? What forms of scripture are enabling this to be reality in the face of HIV and AIDS?
  - Who then is authentic people of God today (authentic Church)? Church suffering from and with HIV and AIDS;

#### **4.0 Our response: Living in the Story, finding God**

- What are the paradigms, traditions, perspectives that the HIV and AIDS pandemic is questioning?
- How then shall we live, in response to God’s action in and through the HIV and AIDS pandemic, to become God’s kingdom community? Since the purpose of the biblical narrative is forming a people whose life and community is centred in

Jesus, how do we engage with the Bible not as our tool but rather subject and submit our stories to its scrutiny?

- What kinds of 'forms of Bible' enable the Churches to liberate the Bible and its message from its 'religious captivity'?

# “... FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE”: REVISITING THE USE OF THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE IN HIV AND AIDS AFRICAN CONTEXTS

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- Female Stories and their relevance to the African HIV/Aids Contexts
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- Conclusion

## **Introduction:**

A well-known (painful) saying in Southern Africa connects the Christian Bible and the loss of land in Africa: “When the white man came to our land, we had the land while he brought the Bible. The white man said to us: “Let us pray”. After prayer, he had the land and we had the Bible”.

Although the saying might be dubbed by some as irrelevant in the post-independent African contexts, or as being not so spiritually-informed/inspired, it reveals the painful reality of an African person’s past and present memories of how the Bible was used and continues to be used “for worse” by the powerful on the powerless others. The former category might comprise men, whites, the rich, the Western imperialists, et cetera. In the present text, I make an attempt to show how the Bible continues to be used by the powerful to perpetuate the marginalisation of the powerless in our HIV and Aids contexts. Traditional literalistic and simplistic Bible interpretations which so typify many

our ecclesial settings, not excluding those on the African continent, be it those of the African independent churches, the mainline churches, the evangelical and pentecostal churches and so forth, cannot be helpful interventions to those of our communities who are infected and affected by HIV and Aids. It may be argued that in many instances, the Bible serves as a “wounding” sword rather than a “healing” one in such circumstances. (Footnote): On the use of the Bible as a wounding sword, see Masenya, 2004:

Allow me to cite an example in this regard: The observation that the face of Aids is that of a poor Black woman, be it in South Africa, on the African continent and in the African Diaspora, is indisputable. How the Bible is read in most of these settings mostly perpetuate the already marginalised status of the affected and the infected. (Ftnote: Two recent examples at a woman’s conference: Obedience starts at home and go to the kitchen and keep quiet).

In this paper, I revisit the use of the Bible to entrench patriarchal/kyriarchal power by showing how the institution of marriage has become a risky business particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa in the face of the pandemic of HIV and Aids. I will lift the examples of two female characters in the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament, that is Tamar and Ruth. I wish to investigate how similar their struggles are to those of the twenty first century African women Bible readers. More importantly for the present text/paper, I wish to see how helpful their interventions are for African women’s struggles in the HIV/Aids era. In other words, could what they are portrayed as doing (having done) serve as helpful ways to deal with HIV/Aids-related challenges in many an African context?

I start by ruminating on my experiences regarding the use of the Bible at the Elminah Slave Castle in Ghana. I will expose the listener to how the Bible was used to endorse the policy of apartheid in South Africa and how it continues to be used against the powerless such as the women, the poor and the girl children in the time of HIV and Aids.

I will problematise the view shared by both ancient Israel and Africa that seems to dictate that human beings, both male and female can only be fully human through marriage even as I intend to exposing the dangers of idolising such a view on humanity and marriage in the face of Aids.

I conclude by making some recommendations about how the Bible can be used constructively particularly in our efforts to care for those affected and infected by HIV and Aids

## **The Elimah Castle Story**

Let me share a story of my shocking encounter with the (abuse of the) Bible in one of the Eliminah Castle's rooms in Ghana. In the year 2000, I was privileged to be part of a group of African scholars, both from the African continent and the African Diaspora who visited Ghana on a research mission(footnote). As part of the team's research mission, it (the team) undertook a journey to the Cape Coast in order to visit two castles which were used to house slaves before they could be shipped to the Americas in the seventeenth century. As we took the tour around the Elminah Castle, I was agitated by the sight of a poster with the words of Psalm132:14 in one of the rooms. The psalmist, whose words were said in the context of the affirmation of God's presence, were cited to affirm the presence of God (a god) in the house of slavery!

Although the quotation of this psalm brought shock, frustration and anger in that setting, coming from an apartheid South African context, an encounter of the affirmation of the presence of God in the house of slavery was not a new one to me.

## **The Use of the Bible by the Power-ful and the Power-less**

It is a well known fact that the previous South African government used the Bible to support the problematic policy of racial segregation. The Bible became an instrument to endorse not only the separation of peoples according to their races, but also the kind of treatment each would receive on account of the skin colour which each wore. It is no wonder that in such contexts, the same Bible could be used to support the theory that Blacks were destined to be the slaves for whites (cf Verwoerd's in this regard). Blacks could easily be associated with the Canaanites / heathens whose land could be extorted "legitimately claimed" by the chosen ones (ie, people of Caucasian descent; cf also the rootedness of apartheid theology on the notion of the choice / election of Israel). As a response to such a problematic use of the Bible, the then Black prophets (cf the liberation theologians, Black theologians, etc) dared to stand up and called/named apartheid a sin (cf their works, the Kairos document: Tutu, Maimela, Boesak, Mofokeng, Mosala, etc). They dared to challenge the view of a God who was propagated as being on the side of the conquerors of African lands against heathen African peoples. Informed by their own experiences of oppression and exploitation, they propagated a theology of the God of the poor, the God who sided with oppressed Hebrew slaves. They argued that it was in the nature of the God of the oppressed to liberate the poor not only from spiritual sins, but also from all systemic sins:

Says Maimela:

Thus drawing their vision from a theological vision in which God is portrayed as liberator of slaves from the Egyptian captivity, black theologians began to reject the dominant white expressions of Christianity and to develop a black theology of liberation whose task among others, was and remains that of confronting, questioning and rejecting any vision of a “god” who fails to hear the cry of the poor and the oppressed. (Maimela, S S. “Black Theology and the Quest for a God of liberation,” in *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa*, 82, 1993, 54-66.

The painful story of Howard Thurman’s grandmother, one of the African slaves in America, also comes to mind here. She was not keen to hear any text from the Pauline letters. When asked why, she responded:

“...Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul. At least three or four times a year he used as his text: ‘Slaves, be obedient to them that are your master,...as unto Christ.’ Then he would go on to show how it was God’s will that we were slaves and how, if we were good and happy slaves, God would bless us. *I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible.*” (Weems1993:34-emphasis: mine).

The above two examples belong to the category of readings by those readers who, contrary to the poster I saw at the Elminah Castle, refuse(d) to believe that God could be present in the house of slavery. They refuse to believe that there could be any life in exile (Jer21:1-10).

As can be gleaned from the above analysis, it could be argued that in their attempts to read the Bible “for better”, the oppressed peoples took upon themselves the responsibility to identify with the voice of the oppressed in the Bible, finding in the Bible, a healing sword. What in our view made their use of the Bible refreshing is that their Bible reading was informed by their *own* experiences.

Just as the Bible was used previously “for better” by these African/Black prophets, Black/African women (cf the Circle of Concerned African women Theologians(ft-Cameroon), have found in it, a book which can bring solace and hope to their lives amidst the traumas put upon them by kyriarchal / patriarchal structures. These women read the Bible in their search for what the will of God is regarding their *own* experiences (elaborate). Noteworthy is the observation that such an exercise is no easy for (African) women (cf also global women Bible readers) because theirs is a setting in which the

experiences of the powerful, still pretty much shape the way women read the Bible. The latter will become evident in the readings of the biblical texts to be engaged with in the present presentation. In such settings, where biblical interpretation basically accords with the needs of the powerful, the Bible is used also to buttress patriarchy, either in the global culture or in the African culture. Biblical texts such as Ephesians 5:21-28 and 1 Corinthians 7:5ff may be used to support the alleged unlimited powers that men as family heads have, over their wives and their bodies/sexuality (cf Masenya 2003; Moyo 2004).

It is no wonder that in these same settings, the Bible may be brought in, to support the notion that heterosexual marriage is the norm.

In the narrative, we ask how helpful the latter view is, in the context where research has shown that in the HIV/AIDS contexts of the Sub-Saharan continent, heterosexual marriage relationships have become a high risk factor. The major mode of transmission is heterosexual intercourse, with marriage being the major risk factor for any African woman to get infected. As the most common mode of the transmission of the HI-Virus, heterosexual sex accounts for 88-98% of all the infections in this part of the African continent (cf Baden).

Such a volatile situation, in which the previously marginalized groups have become even more vulnerable, invites us to read sacred texts such as Ruth 1:1-18 and Genesis 39 with a sensitivity to the plight of HIV and AIDS victims.

As we continue, informed by the above examples, to interrogate the use of the Bible in the present story, we wish to ask the following questions: Is the Bible used in the above instances to support the interests of God's kingdom or the interests of those who have power? Are Christians not many a times tempted to make God's Book their own? Are we as Christians not sometimes found guilty of wanting to own the Bible (and/ or God's salvation) and then use them to serve not God's desires but ours in the name of God? How detrimental can such moves be on the innocent Bible readers who regard such interpretations simply as God-sanctioned or Spirit-inspired? (Example: Pastor who could not preach on account of the ear rings on female ears).

### **Trapped Between Two Forms of Authority: African Women Between the Bible and Culture**

In many an African setting, the Christian Bible and the African cultures are used successfully as two effective weapons to fulfil male interests (Give an example with

Weems' similarities regarding the preferred texts (Ephesians and 1Cor7 in the differing Africana contexts).

In an article "Trapped Between Two 'Canons': African-South African Christian Women in the HIV/AIDS era, I have shown how African Christian women who wish to take seriously, the definitions of both the African and Christian cultures (sacred texts) about womanhood (*bosadi*), find themselves trapped between two forms of authority. The "problematic" authority of the (use) of the Bible and the problematic authority of the (use) of African proverbs. *Mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo vis-à-vis Monna ke tšhwene o ja ka matsogo a mabedi* (Proverbs 31:10-31; 1Cor 7.5ff)

The era of HIV/Aids calls us to revisit such abuse in the interpretation of the Bible in our search for affirming interpretations of the Bible.

We need to revisit the underlying mentality that seems to dictate that female (and male) human beings, can only be complete if they are attached to each other through marriage.

We need to challenge the idolisation of marriage particularly in the era of HIV and Aids.

### **De-Idolising Marriage in the HIV/Aids Contexts**

#### *A Plea (Request) for Aids by a Lover*

The strange, shocking and appalling words, "Give me Aids, my Love" formed the headlines of one of the popular South African week end newspapers in June of 2005. The words came from a 24 year old woman who infected herself with the Human-Immuno Deficiency Virus *by choice*. Mahlangu accepted the love proposal of Mathekga, a man whose positive-HIV status was fairly known to the public. Although the couple initially engaged in protected sex, "overpowered" by love, the woman decided to knowingly consign herself to death: "My love for him was so intense that I decided not to use protection anymore. I knew that I was putting my life in danger but I did not care. If I am infected by someone I love then it is okay because my love for him will keep me going."

A pretty young girl with the possibility of a great future still ahead of her, infects herself with the killer virus! This she does, unlike millions of other young African girl children, knowingly! Factors such as the high regard for marriage, poverty, illiteracy, lack of parental support contribute to the spread of the HI-virus among many African girl children. It seems to me that this craving for marriage is not only Africa's problem. No! It is a global one.

As outside observers to African cultures, we may, like the clinical psychologist whose comments the readers were allowed to hear in the story, quickly judge Mahlangu's behaviour as being unrealistic and irrational. However, if we as readers, were conversant with the crucial place which is accorded marriage in the African cultures, we would be a bit cautious before we make an attempt to pass a quick judgment on her. Although at face value, Mahlangu may give the reader of her story an impression that all was done in the name of love, if we read between the lines (cf also from the silences of the text), we may speculate that attachment to a man in marriage, was the main driving force behind the woman's fatal move.

What is mind-boggling is Mahlangu's claim that on account of her love for Mathekga, she decided not to use protection anymore! I wish to argue that finding herself in a desperate state for marriage, the young woman, at some point in the relationship, wanted to prove to the man that so committed was she to a (lasting) relationship with him, that she could even die for the sake of their relationship!

If it was marriage more than anything else that Mahlangu craved for, she got it! This is what one can call, "marriage at all costs", even at the cost of one's life! Marriage becomes an idol in such contexts.

A related story, drawing this time not on a secular text, but on a sacred text such as the book of Ruth, also throws light on how highly regarded marriage, particularly in poverty-stricken female/women's contexts. This is the story of a Phillipino girl.

### **Aspiring Matrimony with a Wealthy Man: A Phillipino Girl's Story**

This is a story in which a young poor Phillipino girl invoked the story of Ruth in the Hebrew Bible in her attempt to deal with the reality of poverty in her family.

Says the young girl: "I remember the story of Ruth. Ruth put herself forward attractively to a wealthy foreign man in hopes that he would marry her and take care of her. I hope that a wealthy man will marry me and take care of my family. God took care of Ruth and worked it out for her; God will take care of me too".

When I read this story, I was reminded about my Master of Divinity students in the Bible, HIV/Aids and African/South African Women 2005 Spring class in Atlanta,GA, USA . The notion of finding a Boaz in the form of a marriage partner seemed quite familiar in the African-American Christian settings.

In the case of the Philippine girl's story above, one wonders with Sakenveld if such an interpretation of the Ruth's story could have been the girl's construction or if she might have received such from the recruiter. She rightfully questions:

"Although the Philippines is basically a Christian culture, it seemed unlikely to me that the girl had thought of that connection herself. Perhaps the recruiter had proposed it, or perhaps someone in her own family. Perhaps it had been spreading like a grapevine across the villages of the region, with its source no longer identifiable. I do not know whether the girl finally accepted the recruiter's invitation. I do know that poverty in which women and girls suffer among the economically destitute has led tens and even hundreds of thousands of young girls into forced prostitution world-wide (2003; cf also Dube's article on the globalization, African women and the girl child in the time of HIV/Aids; also Masenya's on the Optimism of Africa and Israel in the time of Aids, 2005).

### **Ruth's Attempt To Fit In**

8. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and me.

9. ...the LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband"...10. They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

11. But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me,

even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, 13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me."(NRSV).

Naomi's deep desire for her daughters-in-law to remarry is clearly captured in the above episode. Being conversant with the workings of the systems in her day, Ruth knew that the security of young women basically lay with their husbands. It is no wonder that she whole-heartedly exhorted her daughter-in-law to go each to their *beth em* (vis-à-vis the common *beth av*) in order to seek *security (menukah)* in the form of a man/husband.

Although Orpah ultimately listened to the words of her mother-in-law, Ruth chose to show allegiance of the time that one would have expected a young woman to show to a

man (cf the Hebrew word *davaq* in 1:14, a verb that is used in the matrimonial context of a man and a woman in Genesis2:18):

16....“Do not press me to leave you or turn back from following you!  
Where you go I will go;  
Where you lodge I will lodge  
Your people shall be my people,  
And your God my God  
17. Where you die, I will die-  
There will I be buried  
May the Lord do thus and so to me,  
And more as well  
If even death parts me from you.

Various instances in the Book of Ruth throw light on the conviction that Ruth, her daughter-in-law, could find security only through marriage :

- 1) Her excitement in 2:20 after learning of Ruth’s first encounter with Boaz, whom she also quickly revealed to be the *goel*, next of kin.
- 2) Her problematic advice to Ruth to wash herself and visit this same man at the threshing floor in the night. She was advised to wait until the man had finished eating and drinking and then go, uncover his feet and lie down.

What is equally surprising to a modern day reader of this painful story, is that the daughter-in-law not only failed to question such a dangerous advice. On arrival, contrary to her mother-in-law’s advice to wait until she was told what to do, Ruth proposed marriage to Boaz: “I am Ruth your servant, spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.” (3:10).

As the story ends, the reader knows that Ruth ultimately got her mother-in-law (and herself?) wanted, even at all costs, that is, marriage.

Our sensitivity to the plight of the infected and affected, should motivate us to read the above story with caution. Parents should be wary of being so overwhelmed by poverty to the extent of encouraging their girl children to use their bodies as objects for prostitution. The churches need to reinvent the theology that will enable humanity (both male and female) to affirm their inherent dignity. The latter is in no way attached to a person’s connectedness to the other in marriage. As a matter of fact, the latter, becomes even more enhanced by our connectedness to Jesus Christ. This is the kind of theology that affirms with Paul that whatever gain each of us had had (including spousal

relationships), such has been counted as nil /worthless on account of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus our Lord (Phil3:7-8).

Perhaps the time of HIV/Aids, has come to challenge the church, to take seriously, James' words that faith cannot be alive without works. The latter will include among others, actively taking care of the needs of those around us, who on account of such, could be found to be the most vulnerable.

Ruth's, is not the only story in which women's attempts to fit into patriarchal structures are portrayed. Another similar story is that of Tamar in Genes39. We now turn to the latter in the following paragraphs:

### **Tamar's Desire to be a Good Wife:**

In Genesis 38, the reader is confronted by a widow with the name Tamar. On account of Tamar's compulsion to succumb to the pressures upon (single) women by the expectation of a patriarchal society she temporarily changes her status from that of a widow, to that of a whore or prostitute.

Tamar found herself in a situation where Onan, the younger brother to her deceased husband, refused to be a surrogate father according to the culture of the time. Realizing that even the father-in-law's promise of a younger son was not to happen, and determined to perform her role as a wife and a mother, she decided to pose as a prostitute. Tamar, like Ruth got what she wanted. She was ultimately impregnated by Judah, her father-in-law, in order to perpetuate the line of her deceased husband (compare this with the practice of widow inheritance and/or levirate marriage in the African cultural contexts).

Tamar's, is a story of the plight of a man-less and son-less woman who made an attempt to rectify her "problematic" situation, albeit in an illegitimate way. Her attempt was ironically, though understandably, made successful by her temporary switch from her "widowhood" status to that of "whore". Hers is a story of a woman's struggle to fit into legitimate patriarchal institutions, at all costs.

Some scholars argue that Tamar's move was motivated by her intention to call Judah to responsibility (Fewell & Gunn 1993:88-89; Amos 2004:15; Bird 1999:102). According to Fewell and Gunn, Tamar exploits this move successfully because she, instead of her father-in-law, is the one who eventually controls her father-in-law's sexuality (1993:89). Tamar's move makes sense in the light of the precarious situation of widows at the time. It is therefore understandable that those who are committed to justice as it is to

be exercised on marginalised women and girl children may be quick to applaud Tamar's move to call her irresponsible father-in-law to responsibility. But, given the harsh reality of the senseless deaths caused by AIDS in our very midst, would we want to support such action? Irrespective of the desperateness out of which such action could have originated? I think not.

Tamar's story is a story of many African women (and girl children) who are still confronted with African institutions such as polygyny, levirate marriage, and what one could call, a "multiple-sex partner" monogamy. By the latter, I am referring to a monogamous marriage setting in which a man, not a woman, though known to be legitimately married to one woman, is culturally permitted to have other sexual partners outside of marriage. How may such texts be re-read and re-heard in the time of Aids? Could we use the Bible "for better" in the face of the enemy of our time? In the following section, we address the latter question.

### **The Bible: The Hope for the Affected and Infected**

The poet of yesterday explained AIDS as follows: Am I doing something? An important question we ask as we come to the conclusion of this story is: What is each of us doing regarding our use of the Bible in our HIV/Aids contexts? How do those of us who have been given power to interpret the Bible to others interpret it? Is the interpretive act informed by our `commitment to God and the interests of God's kingdom?

Although this has not become foregrounded in the present story up to this point, it is noteworthy that the present presentation is based on the observation of the significance which the Christian Bible has played continues to play as an important spiritual resource in the lives of African Christians.

From the above analysis, it has hopefully become clear that the Bible has been (even as it continues to be) used either "for better" or "for worse" in our differing interpretive contexts.

As people who are in one way or another connected to the Bible, either as individual Christians, as Bible translators, teachers, professors, clergy persons, counsellors and so forth, and informed by the analysis of the use of the Bible as reflected in the preceding sections, how may use the Bible "for better" in our HIV/Aids contexts?

The following suggestions might be helpful as we consider ways in which we can continue engaging the Bible effectively with the text of HIV/Aids:

1) Being very conscious about the dynamics of the context of the interpreter. Ours is the context of HIV and Aids, the context in which the power dynamics (politics, economics, religion, etc) are sometimes played out on how we approach and handle the Word of God

2) Taking this context seriously in our Bible translation processes, hermeneutics/interpretation, counselling sessions, et cetera.

3) Affirmation of the dignity of all people as human beings created in the image of God (Gn1:26-28): Says Paul: "In Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free and there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." All human beings, irrespective of their HIV/Aids status, class, gender, race, age, are made one by their faith in Christ.

Informed by the main thread around which the present story revolved, we could take the above analysis further to argue that in Christ, there is neither married nor single, all are affirmed by their belief in the message of the cross, this message which is folly to those who are perishing, but to us, who are being saved, whether HIV-positive or not, married or single, the power of God, unto salvation (1Cor1:18). What matters most therefore is an individual's faith and commitment to Christ more than any other factor which might shape our lives. With such a view, we might be enabled even to challenge our beloved cultures and ideologies when these are found wanting by the standards of God's will for our lives.

We might also be encouraged to lift those passages that foreground the need for celibate lives (1Cor7:25-39) in order to affirm those who choose to spend their lives outside of marriage. As we do this, we might be enabled to challenge the view that regards marriage as an idol.

## **Conclusion**

In the service of humanity,

For better, for worse,

Through calm and storms,

In sorrows, in joy,

For division and unity,

Servicing humanity.

For enslavement and freedom,  
Conquering and repossessing,  
Oppressing and liberating,  
For death, for life,  
Serving Africana woman humanity,  
The Christian Bible.

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