



The role of churches in the context of **violence** on marginalised groups such as LGBTI peoples

**Proceedings from the meeting of Heads of churches,
project coordinators and General Secretaries
in FOCCISA, held in Johannesburg
from 29th August to 1st September 2016**

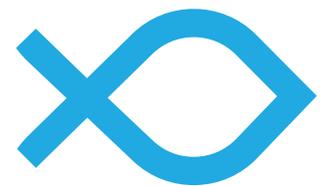


Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Article 1: <i>How should Churches relate to the present situation For marginalised groups such as LGBTI people? Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana</i>	3
Article 2: <i>Ubuntu, sacred texts and the agency of people on the margins Dr.Masiwa Ragies Gunda</i>	11
Article 3: <i>Until the lions are allowed to tell their own stories as the hunted, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunters: Addressing GBV and transforming discrimination with compassion by encountering the “othered” - Contextual reading of Matthew 15:21-28. Fulata Lusungu Moyo.</i>	21
Article 4: <i>The historical development in understandings of human sexuality, especially related to sexual minorities, in Africa and what is the actual situation right now. Lebohang Matela</i>	27
Article 5: <i>Multiple Challenges faced by LGBTI from Society Nokuthula Dhladla</i>	32

Introduction

This booklet contains the five (5) papers/articles presented at the meeting of Heads of churches, Project Coordinators and General Secretaries of FOCCISA, held in Johannesburg from 29th August to 1st September 2016. Selected texts and summaries from these articles are found in both the *Supplement* entitled *‘The role of the churches in the context of violence on marginalised groups such as LGBTI people’* and the *Facilitator’s Guide to the Supplement*.

Therefore this book is an important resource for facilitators because it contains the full articles.

The articles in this booklet are presented in the same order as found in the *Supplement* and *Facilitator’s Guide to the Supplement*.

Article 1

How should the Churches relate to the present situation for marginalised groups such as LGBTI people?

Bishop Dr. Mpumlwana Malusi
General Secretary, South African Council of Churches

I have been requested to help explore the question: “How should Churches relate to the present situation for marginalised groups such as LGBTI people?”

The concept paper for this consultation cites a statement from the February meeting, which says:

“The church in Southern Africa currently lacks the gospel of advocacy with which it can use to protect the marginalised groups of people in society. There is a need for the church to engage itself in the gospel of advocacy so as to protect every person against any forms of violence.”

This refers to the need for a more visible commitment to advocacy for justice – “gospel of advocacy”. I shall make this my starting point. “You are the salt of the earth! ...You are the light of the world!” This is the charge, the mandate that Jesus gives to his disciples; to you and me; and to the congregations, we are called to accompany in the pilgrimage of faith. This is a descriptive that defines our identity. In other words, Jesus’ message that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world suggests that we cannot and should not seek to claim the title of a disciple to the Lord, without practicing as salt and light. In the same way, that light

spreads out to expel darkness where it exists, that salt eats away at rot to preserve the corruptible sheepskin into a treated item that can serve as a decent bedside mat.

Another way of presenting this is in relation to society is to say the church is called to be prophetic. This is most commonly understood to mean “speaking truth to power” after the manner of Nathan to King David (2 Sam. 12: 1 – 13) and Elijah to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 21). For people who were in same space as Uriah and Naboth, the message of these prophets was surely a “good news of advocacy”. But being salt and being light is not necessarily always about speaking truth to power. It may well require other forms of being prophetic.

There are at least two other models of prophetic ministry: The one is the Daniel model. Daniel was by all accounts a righteous man, but he prayed a confession (Daniel 9) on behalf of Israel, owning the sinfulness of the nation. A man referred to by Angel Gabriel as “highly esteemed” (9:23), absorbed the sinfulness of his people. The church is very much part of its society and most definitely shares in full the sinfulness of society. There is a need for the church to engage the ills of society and sometimes with a good measure of humility and penitential mindset that owns up to societal sinfulness – the Daniel prophetic approach.

The second other model is that of Prophet Jeremiah’s (Jeremiah 32 7 - 15). With Judah under an extended Babylonian military siege, the economy hugely undermined by inability to husband the land for production, there was a gloom and doom air in the land. Jeremiah’s act of showing confidence in the future of the economy was the prophetic act of hope. The church should also conduct hope engendering activities and programs. All three models of prophetic ministry are necessary as a package of public ministry in the gospel of advocacy. We try to do this in the South African context through what we call “The South Africa We Pray For”.

Light expels darkness by just being light. The very presence of light destroys darkness. The question is, in what way does our very existence as a church, threaten darkness from society and social relations?

Likewise, once salt is sprinkled onto a wet sheepskin after a slaughter, it immediately gets to business challenging the bacteria that cause the rotting effect. And so should it be with an active presence of the Church of Jesus Christ in society – light that dispels darkness, salt that attacks the corrupting elements.

“The church in Southern Africa currently lacks the gospel of advocacy with which it can use to protect the marginalised groups of people in society. There is a need for the church to engage itself in the gospel of advocacy so as to protect every person against any forms of violence.”

This statement refers to what seems to be a limited capacity or even limited will or consciousness of the duty of the salt effect and the light effect in our way of being church in the region of Southern Africa. Against this reality is the debate today, of how the Churches should relate to the situation of marginalised groups such as LGBTI people. The question I was asking in February was, why we expect that the churches will now, suddenly make the

case of the LGBTI a matter of just action when in fact there is hardly any just action for any social, economic or political manifestations of darkness or rot in our region. The point was to say the paucity of church advocacy on the LGBTI community is a paucity of all and any advocacy in our region.

How is this to be addressed? Our submission is that we take a sober view of our situation, and take a deep look at how we function as a church in our countries. In the main, we have at least two types of Christian – the consumer Christian, and the pharisaic Christian. The consumer Christian is the one who is in church for what they will get out of it – health, wealth, job promotion, social acceptability, and even access to power and influence.

Then there is the pharisaic church that old missionary church – the staid traditional church whose members and leaders pride themselves of upholding all the rules and expect no surprises in its observance of church traditions – as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end!

Are there political ills in our countries, which cry out to God for intervention? Can God depend on us to stand up expend ourselves in response to these? Are there economic wrongs in our countries that are responsible for the poverty and inequality that gets Jesus to say: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me, to preach the good news to the poor...”?

Are there social conditions of life that are treated with contempt in false righteousness in our countries, as is the case with the LGBTI community and the tragic practice of abducting and killing people with the albinism condition? Most definitely yes, there are socially accommodated or even promoted prejudices, taboos, norms and conventions of what has become the way things are done around here. Many of us do not even think twice about these situations as we happily go into our worship places, clap hands and sing hosannas.

We have said that the church is called to be salt of the earth and light of the world. In addition, to be sure that no one thinks this requirement is just for the church leaders who stand in the shoes of the Apostles, Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 paints the picture of judgement day, the burden of our discipleship:

I was marginalised and weak, and hooray! You stood up for me!

I was bullied and violently persecuted, and alas, you looked the other way!

Like the priest and the Levite in the Good Samaritan parable, you were too busy and preoccupied with the business of going to church!

As you and I seek to justify ourselves with “When did we look the other way?” The Lord says as long as you looked the other way when my children were vilified for being different from the majority, as long as you left the killing of people with albinism, and the social and physical violence against the LGBTI community, you abandoned me and looked the other way at my crucifixion!

The reality though is that most of us and our churches do not own the charge of Jesus to be salt and light to our society; nor are we committed to and nor even oriented to Jesus’ demand in Luke 9:23 - “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his

cross daily, and follow me.” We have become comfortable in the consumer and Pharisaic mode of our faith life.

How can we promote and structure our way of being a church to better reflect the purpose of Christ, that the least and most marginalised become the centre of our pastoral ministry? Without taking away from what others will be saying during this consultation, I shall look at structural mechanisms to make a difference, and then also look at theological underpinnings of effective action. Later in the programme, we are dealing with the use of sacred scriptures to justify discrimination, particularly related to LGBTI persons. We are dealing with the question of human dignity in the context of marginalisation and violence; we are dealing with how to promote equality, equity, and respect for every human being.

At the core of this discourse is the question of the dignity and equal value of all human beings. Let me begin with the structural considerations. The work of the FHJN should not be a stand-alone project, but should be integrated into the ministry of the structured ecumenical bodies. That means, instead of us being invited to a special session such as we have this week, we should, in our everyday business as Council of Christian Churches, be having this as our agenda of public ministry, with Rev Banda’s office serving as our resource unit for information and training of ministers as we prepare for a more properly sensitized body of pastors for the congregations of member churches. Then we as national Christian Councils under FOCCISA in the region, should have an annual meeting of our executives committees or boards, to review our public ministry in the SADC region, and make commitments of the things we shall act to achieve through the congregations of our member churches, and consolidate our message to SADC governments as they meet in regional summits.

How can we achieve that? It seems to me, that our Christian Councils are a good starting point, which is why it is good to have planned to have a core representation of leaders of councils beyond the general secretaries.

If I were to draw a flow chart of our business model I would say the church exists first at the congregational level, which is also where the LGBTI person will go to church and feel the negative vibes that come from the misapplication of sacred texts. It is also there that there is potential for a safe and protective space in the loving community of Christ, were it better prepared to be such a haven. This depends on how we help develop pastoral and fellowship understandings with the local churches.

How do we get to that point? There is no shortcut, but let me finish the flowchart and then look at how we are struggling in this direction in South Africa.

From congregation, you go to the circuit, archdeaconry, the region, the district and the diocese, whatever language the church uses for its larger geographic units. Here you have a dean, a district leadership, superintendent, archdeacon, up to a bishop. How are we harnessing the interest and attention of this level of leadership for the salt and light ministry to which we are called on an ecumenical basis? This is not easy at all!

Next is the level of heads of churches in the country. A number of our churches are structured to include several SADC countries under the same leadership. The practice of making our

FOCCISA level consultations a regular feature at the level of general secretaries and executive committees or but it would be even better to include at least two representatives of national heads of churches in the annual FOCCISA regional consultation.

At national level, our councils of churches are not necessarily structured in the same way, but we hold the view that if the council of churches were a company, the churches through their leaders, would be the shareholders. No shareholders turn a blind eye to the performance of their investments. The question is what moral investments do the shareholders want to see in your country? What are the areas of best returns in the name of Christ who says I have come to proclaim liberty to the oppressed?

Shareholders are a body that meets in AGM to vote on the direction of the company and its directors who are trusted to steer things in the desired direction. This group shareholder mindset should obtain at all levels – nationally the heads of churches together; regional and all the way down to locally, with a common commitment to being church as salt and light on a place basis, rather than single congregation on a parochial basis.

Let me share how we are trying to do this in South Africa. We are in the process of structuring for public ministry even as we are also developing the content of our ecumenical ministry. We say in our strategy document, that “our goal is that of a just, peaceful, reconciled, equitable and sustainable society; which we propose to contribute towards, through focused prayer and informed action – hence the SEE-JUDGE-ACT model of informing ourselves, applying our faith lenses and determining courses of action that will yield the best results for the most people, most effectively and efficiently.”

To get there we need a theory of change, and one part of our theory of change, beginning with the goal in mind and then identifying the ‘why’ and ‘how’ a major complex change process shall take place under certain presumed or caused conditions. It begins with the goal in mind and works backward to what must be done in what conditions in order for the set goals to be realized.

Here is an example of the SACC theory of change:

Activity: Member churches resolve to commit consistently to the ecumenical formation through the SACC: Heads of churches in NCLF; general secretaries in the Ecumenical Church Executives Forum; treasurers in Ecumenical Treasurers Forum; SACC Women’s Forum; SACC Youth Forum, SACC Men’s Forum & Ecumenical Ministers Association).

Output: A Structured opportunity for churches to coordinate for coherence, their prayer, and action for the values of God’s Kingdom in South Africa.

Outcome: Prayerful togetherness in the social analysis – reading “the signs of the times”, prayerful togetherness in action, from heads of churches, through synods and in congregational programming for the common good.

Impact: A visible and agile body of Christian witness and healing ministry for RSA; a living symbol of hope in witness to Him who said: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; because He

has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed! (Luke 4:18-19). For: "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly!" (John 10:10).

Likewise, another example:

Activity: The national SACC works with provincial councils for a national public witness of the ecumenical movement, with provincial and local relevance and impact.

Output: There will be countrywide coherence in the ecumenical voice and ministry, with provincial structures extending the reach of the national campaign for *The South Africa We Pray4*, to localities and districts.

Outcome: A provincially anchored national campaign, whose reach enables congregations of member churches to give it effectiveness and ease of collaboration with non-member churches and other faith traditions prevalent in our communities.

Impact: A better-organized program of ministry with effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation. As St Paul implores us in Philippians 2:2, "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

Note that the focus of these first two pieces of the theory of change, are structural pieces because we believe you need a well-structured container system for effective public ministry with visible impact. In this case, our work must touch all aspects of the church:

The heads of churches are the elected leaders who must be in the National Church Leaders Forum. The general secretaries of member churches must be in the Ecumenical Church Executives Forum. These are the people that run the churches and are responsible for consolidating synod agendas. If our issues are not in front of them they will never reach the church congregations. The treasurers of member churches must be in the Ecumenical Treasurers Forum for the same reasons, that they understand why the Council needs financial support.

Then we have the women, the youth, and the men's guilds or association. These are the foot soldiers of the churches but also where the LGBTI persons will have the most intimate experiences, whether positive or negative. Investing in these structures as the ecumenical movement gets to where life is lived. Finally, we talk of an Ecumenical Ministers Association. Here we look to have a range of capacity building programs:

- Organised spiritual retreats for inter-traditional fellowship
- Rhythm of provincial & national theological seminars on critical themes for pastoral and the ecumenical mission.
- Linked information systems for notices, projects & lessons learned

When we began the ministry for HIV/AIDS, we realized that we had to invest in the pastors on the ground so that they can minister to their churches. This is what we need to do for all critical ministries that must have a positive impact on people in our congregations.

Now for the content issues: We recommend a SEE-JUDGE –ACT model. What is that? The SEE is research, to seek to know enough about all there is to know in order to plan your action intelligently. Focusing on the LGBTI situation:

What social and public policy environment do we have? What are the myths that society holds and where do these come from? What happens to people who are known to be in the LGBTI community? In what circumstances are people molested, and in what circumstances are they safe? Here may be many questions to answer for a very good picture of the situation for a situational analysis.

Then, knowing what we now know, we do the JUDGE, that is, applying our theological lenses to say, what does the love of Christ require of us in regard t what we know to be the case? What does the message of Paul to Timothy mean to us when he says:

“Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

There are many different interpretations of sacred texts. This why it is necessary to invest in pastors so that the JUDGE can be informed by sound theology. Even if a person thought it is sinful to be an LGBTI person as many do argue, there is yet the message of Jesus in John 8: 7-11, for the person to throw the first stone if they are without sin in their own life.

This takes us to the domain of biblical interpretation and the application of scripture and Kingdom values for ethical behaviour, and in some cases, the doctrinal domain. It is partly for this reason that in our view, the initial focus should be more about creating the ecumenical infrastructure for joint public ministration. In that environment, it is easier to engage on the different doctrinal positions without rancour.

As we look at the theological sphere for to JUDGE, which informs the ACT, we need to recognize, as our SEE will clearly indicate, that most of our churches are quite far from readiness to minister to the LGBTI community, as lovingly as Jesus may expect of us. There are many who would contest very strongly why the LGBTI should not be considered for any special pastoral consideration.

A respectful and loving engagement should be conducted, and that those who so think should not be held contemptuously just because the accommodative position appears “politically correct”. Even if the “politically correct” think that those who are not yet persuaded of the justness of the pastoral cause of the LGBTI community are wrong and their position a weak one, let them be reminded of the admonition of St Paul in Romans 15:1. "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves". On these things, we do have to be loving towards one another and not be dismissive.

All is ultimately summed up in the essential message of Jesus Christ: Love God with all you are and all you have, and love the other person as you love yourself. The ultimate message of the gospel is nothing but that – even to the point of laying down your life in defence of those who are maligned, misunderstood and ostracized. If the church believes this is a pastoral cause, please take it up vigorously and structure for it, because it is the right thing to do. If the church is not persuaded that this is a just pastoral cause, the church is nevertheless still required to love and to care – prevent the violence and ostracism, if only because whoever is violated, whether you like them or not, deserve your loving support and protection. God’s love for us in Christ is not pre-conditional, as St Paul says of this:

“For one will scarcely die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5: 7-8).

Jesus says it all: “Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13) Amen!

Article 2

Ubuntu, sacred texts and the agency of people on the margins.

Dr.Mawiiwa Regis Gunda

Introduction

From the turn of the last decade of the 20th century, when the Women Empowerment Movement took center stage in Africa fighting for the equality of women and men in all spheres of life, another movement was being born on the continent, the Gay Rights Movement, which was fighting for the recognition of the humanity of Intersex, Transgender, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual persons in our communities. While both women and LGBTI persons had participated in the wider war of liberation in various communities on the continent, a few years after independence was won, it became clear that they were not fully represented in the new found independence. (*A good example is in Zimbabwe. Women cadres fought the struggle while putting on trousers. The national monument, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, represents the woman putting on a dress. It was time women returned to their traditional roles!*) Their fight, therefore, was from their perspective a continuation of the fight and that largely remains their focus. Greater strides have been made in achieving the goals of the Women Empowerment Movement (seen in the rise of women to very senior political, economic, religious and social positions), some Churches in the region, however, remain resistant to full equality between men and women in ministry. The same cannot be said of LGBTI persons because, for them, very little strides have been made.

This presentation serves as a discussion paper for this forum to engage with a concept that has been lauded as a critical indigenous philosophy about humanity and the world, Ubuntu; and the critical and indispensable manual for the Christian faith, the Bible accompanied by a consideration of the role and function of those that are on the margins in our society, the LGBTI persons. What is Ubuntu? Is there something within the concept of Ubuntu that makes this a useful resource in the quest to understand the position and role of those on the margins in our society? What is the Bible? Is there anything in the Bible that can serve as a resource for understanding the position and role of those on the margins in our society? These are some of the questions that I hope to elaborate on during this presentation in a way that we can, together, grapple with these two critical components of our decision making. Before

embarking on this critical discussion, I will, however, begin by highlighting the background to this forum.

Background

The Southern African region is a region with great and glorious stories to tell, as well as sad and sordid tales to re-tell. The glorious stories of our great Kingdoms of the past, of the great and fearless ancestors who resisted the gun-wielding coloniser with their bare hands and spears, and the bravery of young women and men who left their schools to go and fight for the liberation of their people from the yoke of colonial oppression. These glorious stories are, however, accompanied by some sad and sordid tales such as the humiliation of being made outsiders in our own lands, the humiliation of an elderly man being called “boy” (Vengeyi 2012) by a young white boy, the sordid narratives of indigenous liberator-turned-oppressor in independent African states, the rabid resistance to women empowerment in the 1990s (which continues in some circles to date) and now the de-humanisation of the LGBTI persons born and raised in this region and most of whom have never known any other place on earth other than this region. The Church has been found on both sides – the glorious and the sordid!

I want to salute the Church in this region for its involvement in the glorious narratives of this region, for the Church and its schools became the cradle for the birthing of the liberation movements in this region. In taking this stance, particularly symbolized by the World Council of Churches’ Program to Combat Racism, the formation of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, the gathering of the Kairos Theologians in South Africa (Chitando and Mapuranga 2008), the Church re-claimed its position as the “salt and light of the world.” The importance of “salt and light” lying in the transformative qualities that these substances possess, the Church became a transforming agent for this region. I call this a reclamation because it was a function and character of the Church that the Church inherits from none other than Jesus Christ, our Lord, and Saviour but which character and function the Church has allowed to be domesticated by empire at several points in the history of humanity post-Easter (Rieger 2007). We can also claim our rightful position as the new centre of Christianity, we could once again become the “salt and light” of this world. There is so much growth and vibrancy in churches in this part of the world, however, what has been lacking is platforms to discuss issues of our own accord, which is what we are doing now from the words of Bishop Matonga last night.

We are gathered here today discussing, as we have been since morning, the position of our brothers and sisters who have been crying to be brought inside the family of God, but to whom the majority who are inside have consistently said there is no more room inside hence they have remained on the margins. However, they retain the hope that the few who are inside and who see that there is room for them to come and take their place alongside those already inside will eventually succeed as happened with slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and women. It is no coincidence that the LGBTI individuals came to light in this region in the 1990s because they saw an opportunity for themselves in the rise of the Women Empowerment Movement of the same period, which benefitted immensely from the successes and publicity of the Beijing convention of 1995 (Gunda 2010). As Chitando (2016)

has observed, in spite of our experiences of multiple deprivations in this region and the tremendous effort we put in fighting for freedom, we have also consistently excluded and even promoted the deprivations we considered dehumanising for ourselves to be adequate and good for the LGBTI persons, some of whom played a sterling role in the liberation of men, and women of this region.

While, we have judged all other persons on the totality of their humanity we, however, have consistently judged the LGBTI persons ONLY on the aspect of their sexuality. We have decided to throw away all the other contributions that these brothers and sisters and those in-between have made, by entirely investing our focus on their sexuality. Where states and churches have prided themselves as “rainbow communities” owing to their supposed celebration of diversity of the people, even in this celebrated diversity no room has been found for those whose diversity is within the realm of sexuality. These individuals have mostly been disowned and labelled “foreign-influenced” persons who cannot be accommodated in our community of the “morally pure.” We have also found our other many problems such as poverty, lack of clean water, high unemployment rates as justifications for delaying talking about and with those enduring the cold and heat of life outside the family of God (Chitando 2016). In the meantime, those on the margins continue to cry and beg to be accommodated.

In taking positions on the subject of sexual diversity, two key instruments have been invoked, that is, African culture represented in this region by the indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu and the sacred text of the Bible. In the following sections, I focus on these instruments, first by presenting the dominant view of these and then to problematize the same for further discussion and engagement.

Re-thinking and Re-presenting the Concept of Ubuntu

The concept of *Ubuntu* is highly celebrated in this region, especially, because of the way it was credited with facilitating the successful execution of the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa by Desmond Tutu. The term *Ubuntu* comes from a group of sub-Saharan languages known as Bantu (Battle 2009: 2). It is a term used to describe the quality or essence of being a person amongst many sub-Saharan tribes of the Bantu language family (OnyebuchiEze 2008: 107). *Hunhu/Ubuntu* also says something about the character and conduct of a person (Samkange and Samkange 1980: 38). *Ubuntu* is described as a philosophy that places an imperative on the importance of group or communal existence as opposed to the West’s emphasis on individualism and individual human rights. In *Ubuntu*, everything is done to put the interests of the community ahead of the interests of the individual (Mangena). In short, Ubuntu is understood as a philosophy that proclaims the primacy of the community over the individual, and to further elaborate on this, some phrases and idioms have been used such as:

- ❖ in the Nguni/Ndebele phrase, *umuntungumuntungabantu* (a person is a person through other persons)
- ❖ in the Xhosa proverb, *ungamntungabanyeabantu*, (a person is made a person by other persons)

- ❖ in the Shona phrase, *munhuunoitwamunhunevamwevanhu* (a person is made a person by other persons)

Through these phrases, it is suggested that *Ubuntu* is about the group/community more than it is about the self (Mangena). In line with this understanding, we are led to see Ubuntu referring to the quality of being human as well as the ideology that governs intra-community relations hence the idea of Ubuntu as African humaneness and African humanism in which;

- ❖ African humaneness would then entail that the qualities of selflessness and commitment to one's group or community are more important than the selfish celebration of individual achievements and dispositions.
- ❖ While African humanism, on the other hand, would then refer to an ideology, outlook or thought system that values peaceful co-existence and the valorisation of the community (Mangena).

When it comes to the morality of the community, the community is the source, author, and custodian of moral standards, and personhood is defined in terms of conformity to these established moral standards whose objective is to have a person who is communo-centric rather than one who is individualistic (Mangena 2012:11). Understood this way, Ubuntu can be an instrument that can condone the exclusion of those deemed non-compliant with community values.

Unfortunately, as has happened with most African inventions of the post-colonial era, things have been defined and understood in a dualism of Africa versus the West, that sometimes, we have not engaged the totality of our ideas in our quest to outdo the West. While this is the dominant presentation of Ubuntu in the region, there have been others who have expressed reservations to certain degrees, among the most important counter-perspectives being the observation of OnyebuchiEze; who observes:

- ❖ Ubuntu is projected to us in a rather hegemonic format, by way of an appeal to a unanimous past through which we may begin to understand the socio-cultural imaginary of the "African" people before the violence of colonialism; an imagination that must be rehabilitated in that percussive sense for its actual appeal for the contemporary African society (2010:93).

This observation is key in that it allows us to critically engage with the concept of Ubuntu, especially when it is largely used to romanticize pre-colonial Africa by making some wanton and unfounded suggestions such as the one below:

- ❖ Most homes in the West have durawalls or high fences to maximise the privacy of the owner and so a stranger cannot just walk in and be accommodated. This is quite understandable because in Western societies, the individual is conceived of as the centre of human existence and so there is need to respect his or her rights to privacy. In the West, the idea of a stranger walking into a private space is called trespassing and one can be prosecuted for this act. And yet in African traditional thought in general, and in the Shona/Ndebele society in particular, the idea of trespassing is not conceptualised in that way (Mangena).

Even though Ubuntu has been used by many to entrench and sustain the exclusion of those on

the margins, especially the LGBTI persons because their sexuality has been labelled anti-community, some, like Chitando, are convinced that Ubuntu can still be an instrument of inclusion of all, an instrument that has always acknowledged diversity, hence, he writes:

- ❖ One of the most useful concepts to promote openness and acceptance has been that of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a Pan African concept which suggests that one's humanity is incomplete without acknowledging the humanity of the other/next person (Chitando 2016).
- ❖ Thus, as an aspect of African traditional philosophy, *Hunhu/Ubuntu* prides in the idea that the benefits and burdens of the community must be shared in such a way that no one is prejudiced (Mangena).

To sum up this section, I am proposing that Ubuntu expresses the fact that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others, in such a way that the individual and community are conceived of as intrinsically and inseparably related. The one is in the many but the many are in the one; the individual is in a community and the community is in individuals. This way, the humanity of the community lies and is dependent on the humanity of the individuals. If the humanity of the individual is emasculated, the humanity of the community is emasculated! This understanding of Ubuntu makes it closely related to the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith as bequeathed to us by our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Sacred Texts as Sites of Struggle for Re-conceptualising the World

The Bible belongs among the very few select texts in the World that are classified as “sacred texts” or “scripture”. These texts and their importance is particularly emphasized in the three Abrahamic faiths, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In these three faiths, sacred texts are considered the be-all for believers, these are timeless writings that originate with God. These writings are not ordinary writings hence there is a belief that when approached properly and correctly, these writings will answer all questions put to them. My focus, here, is especially on the Christian Bible but most of my observations could as well be applied to the other sacred texts of other faiths. Through an interpretation of sacred texts, believers develop their worldview – how the world works, the relationship between humanity and other beings of the universe and critically the intra-relationship within the human race itself. This explains why most Christians are quick to invoke the Bible each time LGBTI persons are mentioned as members of the community at large and the community of faith in particular. How have we come to be “people of the Bible”?

While African exposure to the Hebrew Bible happened even before the time of Jesus Christ, it is true that this exposure occurred in North Africa and was largely limited to that region. Most of Sub-Saharan Africa was exposed first not to the Hebrew Bible but rather to the Christian Bible through the agency of Imperial Europe and Western missionaries. Our Christianity is therefore intrinsically connected to colonialism and all its vagaries and the quest for independence and the joys and sorrows of such aspirations. Our Christianity is essentially “Bible-based Christianity” (Gunda 2014) with the Bible being “the book; read in times of joys and in times of sorrows” (Togarasei 2008:73); in most cases the only piece of literature that one finds in many homes. The Bible was mediated to us as the Holy Book, one

that saw everything that we did in our lives. Through this Book, we were informed that God spoke to us. We believed and we became “people of the Bible”, people who are quick to seek authentication from the Bible. While initially, the Bible was read to us, through the agency of missionaries and their indigenous collaborators, the Bible was translated into indigenous languages, thereby making it accessible to more people. The success of the translation project was aided by the success of the Mission schools that were set up by missionaries (Gunda 2009:79).

The shift from having the Bible read for them to indigenous people reading the Bible for themselves brought to the fore the nature of the Bible as a “site of struggle.” In articulating the values of the Contextual Bible Study method, Gerald West (2013) says;

- ❖ the CBS works with ‘struggle’ as a key socio-theological concept because ‘struggle’ is a key characteristic of reality. In that regard, the CBS takes sides with the God of life against the idols of death. For CBS the primary ‘terrain’ of struggle is the ideological and theological; CBS recognises that the Bible is itself contested, including biblical ‘voices’ or theologies that bring life and biblical ‘voices’ or theologies that bring death. Therefore, CBS ‘wrestles’ with the biblical text to bring forth life.

During the colonial-evangelization onslaught and before the colonized-converted could read the Bible for themselves, the Bible was presented as a single unified document with a single unified voice on all matters, hence all who heard the text read were obliged to obey and follow its instructions. During this period, one could not refer to the Bible as a site of struggle, for there was no such struggle because the Bible was being read by one for the other, from the single perspective of the one reading.

This consistent Bible did not last long because as soon as indigenous converts had learnt how to read English and as soon as it was translated into local languages, in the spirit of European Protestantism, it became clear to some of the readers that the Bible possessed many voices. Not only did they begin to struggle with the text to speak to their situation of being emasculated in their own homes, they also began to struggle with the readings that seemingly suggested that it was ok for them to be so emasculated while they also encountered texts that suggested that it was not God’s plan for any human being to be so emasculated.

Since the 1990s, the same scenario that characterised the colonial-evangelization context re-appeared in most communities in Southern Africa, with most Christians *reading the Bible for* people on the margins sexually, the LGBTI persons (As we have heard from earlier presentations, the Bible was used mainly as a tool to emasculate, dehumanise and disempower those on the margins). While these readings gained momentum in the 1990s, they remain the major voice on the subject and it was so vicious at first that those on the margins reacted in the same way that most Africans reacted towards the Western missionaries once they had fully appreciated how the Bible was being used to emasculate them: the ones emasculated reacted by disowning and removing themselves from submitting to this text! The text was labelled “empire text, developed and deployed for the benefit of only those that serve the empire while depriving those on the margins of empire!” (Rieger 2007).

Contestation becomes a reality once those being pushed outside resolve to put their own questions to the text and to wear their own reading glasses because it is only then that it becomes apparent to them and others that it is not necessarily the text that is pushing them outside, but the prejudice of the dominant readers (Gunda 2009). At no point must we ever resolve to engage the text in a struggle for understanding, and we should even be more suspicious when those in charge of empire are informing us how we should read the Bible and who we should accept in the house of God, for then the house of God will become house of Empire. We are aware that there were white missionaries who were deported by white colonial governments because they refused to accept empire-championed interpretations of the gospel.

- ❖ Bishop Donal Lamont is one such celebrated missionary, who in his 1976 open letter to the government of Ian Smith, wrote: “Far from your policies, defending Christianity and western civilisation, as you claim, they mock the law of Christ and make communism attractive to the African people.” That same year, he was sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment with hard labour because he had permitted nuns in his diocese to tend to wounded guerrillas and because he had also advised them, for their own safety and for the good reputation of the Catholic Church, not to report the presence of the guerrillas to the authorities... He was held under house arrest before he was deported” (Brian Maye 2011).

We have now come to the point where the LGBTI persons that have been confined outside because the Bible has been read for them, have now started questioning the ways of reading and the motivations behind those who are inside, who continue to refuse them their humanity and who refuse to see the image of God that is in them. Whereas they once ran away from the Church in search of alternative accommodations, they are clear that they belong within the family of God and have and continue to come back to ask for their own space in the House of God. Through their readings, we are reminded of our own past of deprivation and rejection, when because of our skin colour we were considered not human enough.

Two lines of argument have emerged in this contestation over and in Scripture:

- ❖ First, that sexual minorities are an aberration of the created world that God intended for heterosexuality hence God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. Through the use of the so-called “bullet texts” (Genesis 19, Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Timothy 1 and Jude), it has been suggested that homosexuality was so wicked that God punished the people of Sodom so severely and that if any society were to accept sexual minorities it would put them on the path to destruction.
- ❖ Second, that sexual minority are a wonderful part of God’s creation, that God created males and females and others who are neither male nor female. This diversity is not an aberration but a divinely ordained difference. Through the use of some texts (Genesis 1, Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 12-13), it has been argued that diversity is inherent in God’s creation yet we are all united by the Image of God in all individuals. The hermeneutic of love and abundant life have been central to this alternative reading that seeks to “enlarge the tent of the House of God” (Isa.54:2) to accommodate all those that have been excluded so far.

Herein lies the ‘struggle’ for which our communities are invited to engage in. We are aware that the largest threat to this struggle is the politicisation of the LGBTI people in our communities. However, we are called to the mission by Christ and we must engage with LGBTI persons through the lenses of Christ’s own dealings with those that were on the margins, the outcasts of Jesus’ time. As I stand here, I humble myself and suggest that there are ways in which a struggle with Scripture can lead us into a happier House of God where all children of God will find a place to abide because the Lord already in all of us (1 Cor.12:9). Below, I will highlight areas that could make Ubuntu and Sacred Texts resources for re-appraising the people on the margins.

Ubuntu and Sacred Texts: Resources for Re-appraising People on the Margins

In this section, I intend to highlight some aspects of Ubuntu and the Bible that actually challenge us to re-think our perception towards LGBTI persons in our community. While there has been an emphasis on the «communo-centric» nature of Ubuntu, I critically think that the individual is not completely annihilated by the same. Similarly, at the heart of the revolutionary Christian faith and attested both in the Old and New Testaments is the charge to «protect the vulnerable, especially, those that are victims of the machinations of empire» (Ex.12:49, 22:21-22; Lk.4:18-22). The following are points that are critical in our quest to re-engage with both Ubuntu:

- ❖ Ubuntu is the idea that no one can be healthy when the community is sick. Ubuntu says I am human only because you are human. If I undermine your humanity, I dehumanise myself (Yamamoto 1997:52).
- ❖ For Battle (2009:2), Ubuntu is the interdependence of persons for the exercise, development, and fulfilment of their potential to be both individuals and community.

From these two key conceptualisations of Ubuntu, one could argue that it is in its openness to protect all persons within the community that it could become “the gift to the world” because our world is driven by philosophies that are built on discrimination of the “Other.” All members of the community, notwithstanding their diversity, are fully accommodated in the community. Their role and status in the community are not dependent on them converting to be like the majority. Diversity has always been a part and parcel of all communities. However, I am not suggesting that there are no expectations or obligations for those that are members of the community because they are there. There are expectations and obligations not to harm other members of the community and to assist in every way possible members of the community. These expectations do not seek to eradicate the diversities that exist among community members.

Coming to the Bible and following on earlier observations that the Bible must be taken as a «site of struggle», it is important to consider how we approach the Bible, especially being aware that some of our readings may cause death and harm while others may give life, comfort and security to some people. I consider the following points to be critical for our engagement with the Bible:

- ❖ That in the Old Testament, God's Israelite project is to create a society that is governed by the principles of justice, righteousness, equality, and equity. In this society, all would be welcome and would be catered for (the image of Eden, the Abrahamic nation (Gen.18), the Promise to the Exodus party, the Occupation and Settlement in the Promised Land and the reigns of Judges are all interwoven into this project of God). The prophetic theology of the Old Testament is also falling into this consistent strand of thought that God is making Israel a «pilot project for just human society».
- ❖ The great inaugural statement by Jesus in Luke 4 follows this consistent strand of thought, proclaiming the «good news», which would offer hope, comfort, and security to those who were at the mercy of the Roman Empire. Are we surprised, then, that from its inception Christianity started off by becoming a refuge to those that were outcasts of their time and of their empire?

I am aware that this consistent strand has been threatened, challenged and over time been subordinated to empire strands that are also fairly represented in the Bible, especially, in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. The project of God towards a just society is disrupted when, instead of the other nations coming to copy the good thing in Israel, it was Israel who opted to be co-opted into Empire (Gen.18:18-19;1 Sam.8:5). Clearly, the Bible demands that we choose either to follow the first strand, which focuses on justice and righteousness or the reading that legitimizes injustice in society.

These observations provide for us the most solid platform from which to engage with our faith and with our perceptions, not only of those on the margins like the IT

LGB persons but also of those on the center, who mostly belong with and for empire. In this regard, I propose here the adoption of «the hermeneutical option for life», which challenges every reading we undertake on its impact on life. Every reading that threatens or can be used to threaten life cannot be part of the «good news of and in Christ!»

Concluding Observations

For millennia now, there has always been contestation in society regarding the persons that stood on the margins of society. Theories and philosophies were developed in order to keep those on the margins where they were, while alternative theories and philosophies were also developed to bring those on the margins inside. From recent history, this reminds us of the situation of people of African descent both on the continent and abroad, who suffered so much because of their skin colour; we are also reminded of females from across the world, who also suffered innumerable numbers of deprivations simply because they were female; the list goes.

However, what has been heartening is that at each stage, even when it seemed impossible because those inside had built fortifications and arsenals to keep others outside, they were still defeated because they were fighting against a life-giving force. We are, like those before us, at the crossroads where critical decisions must be made; are we going to opt for safety first and downplay what is in our faces or are we going to stand up for all life that possesses the image of God and join the life-giving force that cannot be stopped by empire?

Ubuntu and the Bible provide us with the basis to engage with LGBTI persons in our communities because they both value all individuals because in their personhood lies our own personhood. The individual diversities that exist among us cannot be the basis upon which we decide to deny the personhood of the other. Perhaps, brothers and sisters, Ubuntu is what Paul is speaking about in the texts 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Romans 12:5, Ubuntu is about a body that celebrates the diversity of its many parts. When it comes to those on the margins, let us always consider the question; “On which side would Jesus err – exclusion or inclusion?”

Article 3

Until the lions can tell their own stories, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunters”: Addressing GBV and transforming discrimination with compassion by encountering the “othered” - Contextual reading of

Matthew 15:21-28.

Fulata Lusungu Moyo

Pregnancy and betrayal of Christian accepted norms: telling my story of discrimination

I came back to the University of Malawi as a fourth-year student even though I knew I was pregnant. The university rules clearly suspended pregnant women until after their babies were two years old. How could I tell my Christian family that I was pregnant? I was a Christian leader at university and I was not married. The father of my unborn baby was also a respected Christian leader. I feared to face my judgmental Christian community that seemed to value the outward observance of accepted norms more than living the gospel of compassion. I even considered my own death or abortion as easier options than facing discrimination and condemnation from those whose love and acceptance I desperately needed as my community.

As we discussed with my boyfriend, Solomon, it dawned on us that actually if our concern was God’s love and acceptance, then we did not need to worry: God already knew about this and had forgiven us. The sin was not the visible pregnancy but rather the actions that led to pregnancy as unmarried and irresponsible unemployed students. For the latter, we had already confessed and repented from it immediately after the climax was suffocated by remorse and conviction on that afternoon of Tuesday 2 July 1985 when it happened.

When we gathered courage and told our Christian community, one of the standard reaction was: “You are bringing shame to the body of Christ! Why didn’t you prevent pregnancy or even abort so as not to pour humiliation to the Christian community?” Sometimes, it did not matter that God in Christ accepts us just as we are. The discrimination from our brothers and sisters that took different expressions was so unbearable that at one point Solomon wondered whether being Christian was worth it. It was easier to struggle in prayer alone consumed in self-pity and feeling of unworthiness than to pretend to ‘fellowship’ alone amongst people

who treated you as if you were “othered” as if you were the sin itself. If it were not for the few Christian brothers and sisters and some members of our two families that courageously took extra steps to embrace us, our faith would have been put off by the darkness of bitterness and oppressive shame.

The discriminated against unnamed ‘Canaanite’ woman

Why is the story of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) my typical story of discrimination? First of all, like most of the biblical women, both Matthew and Mark do not name her beyond the general “othering” through their biased ethnic categorisation. Matthew’s description of the woman as Canaanite is anachronistic. The Canaanites who were the original inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon had long disappeared and instead during this period this region was occupied by Greek traders. These Greek traders were generally despised by Jews because of their unethical trade practices (cf. Joel 3:4-8; Zech 9:9-13) and therefore referred to as “Canaanites.” So Matthew uses this as a derogatory term to emphasize the contrast between “pious” religious leaders and this foreign woman. After seeming to ignore her first cry for help, Jesus uses a Jewish term of abusive discrimination for Gentiles “dogs.” In a way, Jesus’ echoing the Jewish biased stigma against this woman and her daughter as part of the Greek trading community can be understood as an expression of sexism as well as xenophobia.

In desperation for the healing of her daughter, this nameless woman decides not to show resentment for sexism and xenophobia and wisely extends Jesus’ humiliating metaphor into her Gentile context, arguing: “even the dogs (pups) get the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” (Mat. 15:27). Both Matthew and Mark do not tell us whether this daughter had a present father or not. It is important to ask the question about a missing father because in other healing stories like that of the Jairus daughter (Mat 9: 18-19, 23-26), Jesus responds to Jairus’ request for healing of his daughter by immediately following him without any echoing of any biases even if Jairus was part of the Jewish religious leaders that Jesus refers to as “blind guides...blind fools” in Mat. 23. How come he, Jesus, seems to take his desperate request seriously from the beginning? If it were the daughter’s father, not the mother in our story, Mat 15, would Jesus have respected him without echoing Jewish derogatory terms?

Contextual Retelling of the Greek woman and daughter in the context of gender discrimination and SGBV

Even though after her wise diplomatic response Jesus declares that her faith is great and therefore grants healing for her daughter, it is texts like these that affirm sexism among

Christians. If Jesus could echo the biased categorising of such a woman embedded with sexism and racism, Christians who have proved incapable of opposing and ending patriarchy (Jürgen Moltmann, 1983) succumb to the temptation of abusing sacred texts to justify their biased discrimination against women.

What is this story about?

Even though this text does not give us a glimpse into what these unethical trade practices are, would it be realistic to conclude that every Greek trader was using unethical trade practices?

If Jesus as a product of his community had believed the biased categorisation of this woman as the “other”, how did an active encounter with her help change his attitude to even declaring her as someone with great faith?

What happened when we take the courage to have an encounter with the people we are biased against?

Do we have women, girls, and men that we have categorised as the “other”? What is it that makes them different from us? What role does fear and lack of understanding play in such categorisation (the otherings)?

In our community, how do we treat those we do categorise as the “other”?

What would happen if we found out that close members of our family or friends we really care about were behaving the same way or belong to the same group with those we have “othered”? How can we help our church community to create safe spaces for transformative encounters with those we fear as the “other”?

Tying my story, my Canaanite sister and the reality of SGBV rooted in sexism

Sexism as the discrimination on the basis of gender is at the base of all the gender-based violence. While gender is about power relations that often privilege men, according to WHO (2005) gender-based violence is the act “that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women (and men), including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” Both my experience and that of the Canaanite woman in our biblical text suffered a lot of gender-based violence mainly through words as well as the general response from people we looked to for help.

When I became pregnant as referred above, there were some Christians who went to Solomon to caution him against me on at least two accounts: firstly, so as to advise him against accepting his responsibility. The church I was fellowshiping with excommunicated me but did not excommunicate him. Secondly, they argued that even if he was sure that he was responsible, he still did not need to accept responsibility because they were sure that I had

deliberately enticed him into sleeping with him. I was responsible for tempting him into falling into sin.

In each class I went into, I found written messages against me. Two examples are: “She ate the forbidden fruit and tempted an innocent man of God to eat it too!” “A virgin has conceived and will bear a child!” After I left, then Solomon started getting stigmatised more than when I was the main target.

Biblical texts were always used to justify my Christian community’s discrimination against me as a sinner. I painfully learnt that sexual ‘sins’ are considered heavier sins than others, especially if the consequences are visible through pregnancy. Just as impurity laws are mainly observed when it comes to women and not so much when men have a discharge.

When it comes to gender identity and sexual orientation, patriarchy is an intimate partner of heterosexism. When I was in Nigeria, I once dared to tell women that if I were in their shoes in a context where patriarchy is so alive expressed mainly in their exclusion from church leadership and other expressions, I would silently not join the men’s passionate battle against LGBTIQ rights. The mistake I made was that I looked at their disapproving faces. I could not continue my argument. But here are some of what I would try to say if allowed:

1. Acknowledge what I learnt through my classes of sexual ethics: it is only the owned that can be penetrated. In the Roman Empire, the noblemen pursued their sexual desire whether aroused by a beautiful woman or man. Whether the woman was noble or common, they made sure that their sexual desires were satisfied through penetrative sex. If the attractive man was of noble birth, they did not penetrate into him but if he was a commoner or a slave, they did. The principle was that you can only penetrate someone you own, so while women can be owned by men whether noble or not, noblemen cannot be owned because they were equal in status to the aroused men. (Margaret Farley, 2008).
2. Within the African context, not only is sexuality connected to reproduction but the accepted sexual ethics are those that fit in the common moral discourse. Both gay and lesbian sexuality does not fit in the natural procreative agenda, as well as in the accepted moral discourse. As such, the LGBTIQ agenda belongs to the taboo subjects even as the whole human sexuality agenda is generally taboo especially in the church.
3. The foreignness of the naming of LGBTIQ has added to the African discrediting of such as a western agenda. While such sexualities have existed in Africa, they have not been treated as sexuality separate from the general conception of human sexuality. Last year when I visited Malawi, I could not understand why even those Christian brothers and sisters that I have always known as embracing Jesus’s gospel of compassion sounded in passionate hatred when it came to what they called the

“homosexual agenda”. One of their argument about the western imposition of such an agenda was:

“As Malawians, we have gone through so much suffering including drought but neither the UN Secretary-General, BanKi-Moon nor Hilary Clinton as USA secretary of state ever bothered to come as a sign of their solidarity and support. They both came when the two gay men were imprisoned. Clearly showing that to them the rest of our struggles were not important but their commitment to forcing the LGBTIQ agenda on us was”

4. Gay and lesbian sexuality defies patriarchy. While gay men challenge gender stereotypical roles by having two men alternating roles which are ‘normally’ attributed to women, lesbians flout patriarchy by making redundant the role of men in bringing sexual satisfaction: two women satisfying each other sexually without a man. The latter then make irrelevant the Genesis 3:16b “yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you!”

Since in most cases the Christian heterosexual marriage has sinfully reduced the relationship between the husband and wife to the model of master and slave (misreading of Ephesians 5:21-33), accepting the LGBTIQ reality adds to the shaking of the fragile Christian marriage. In gay civil union, who would rule over the other? In a lesbian union, the women escape their condemnation to be ruled by the male husband as perpetual slaves of their sexual desires of him. No wonder most Christians in Africa can even justify hatred in the name of God when it comes to dealing with sexual orientation. Yet if Christian marriage was understood as rooted in mutual love and respect of two soul mates on a journey to becoming like Christ, the selfless lover, the LGBTIQ reality would not be a threat. Instead, it would be part of the enriching diversity in the mystery of human sexuality as a gift of God.

The church needs to create a space so as to listen to the stories of the discriminated against and survivors of gender-based violence. Unless they are allowed to tell their stories, the actions motivated by bias and fear will continue tearing the Christian community into painfully ugly pieces! The Ubuntu ethical wisdom affirms the need to listen to each other so as to learn from each other to break bias and live in harmony. Another African saying that is important to me is: If you want to go fast go alone if you want to go FAR go together. To go together we have to learn and ‘know’ each other so that our pilgrimage of justice and peace is rooted in the Christian principle of love and compassion. For true love is actually God in us (1 John 3:24).

Let me end by inviting the churches within FOCCISA to join the World Council of Churches on two journeys:

1. The pilgrimage of justice and peace as a rhythm of all WCC’s work until 2021. Gender justice and peace with no SGBV is core to this agenda. In 2017 the WCC’s pilgrimage focus was on Africa. What were the issues that churches in Africa focused

on within this justice and peace agenda wasn't it justice, dignity, and peace for every created being?

2. The Thursdays in the Black campaign for a world with rape and violence. This gender justice and peace campaign started within the decade of the churches in solidarity with women (1988-1998) inspired by the Mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, now commonly known as grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo who were protesting on Thursdays against the dictatorship's, injustices and use of violence. It was also inspired by the Women in Black in Israel who were also protesting against the violence of war; women in Bosnia who were demonstrating against the use of rape as a weapon of war. These global movements of dissent against violence brought to birth the Thursdays in Black global campaign. Black is used as a colour of resistance not racially as a discriminated against colour. By wearing black every Thursdays, we together declare that rape is a sin against the God who created each one of us, whatever our gender, sexuality, race, age, ability or otherwise, in God's own image as with inherent dignity and worth.

Thank you and God bless these deliberations!

Article 4

**The historical development in understandings of human sexuality,
especially related to sexual minorities, in Africa and what is the actual
situation right now
Lebohang Matela**

Introduction

Sexuality is not an easy term to define and there are different definitions given on this topic two of which will be discussed. The first definition is from the World Health Organization which defines sexuality as follows,

The term sexuality means living (experiencing, realizing or actualizing) the particular sex in practice, (Van Rooyen 1991).

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities, and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. It is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, religious and spiritual factors. (WHO)

Sexuality according to this definition is not limited to sex and sexual activities, but rather it encompasses the totality of human experience including identities, values, behaviour practices and pleasure which are influenced by social forces such as economics, politics, religious and psychological status. The connection between the private and public is very clear which means that sexuality cannot be discussed apart from social context particularly justice.

Ludwin Molina makes an observation that human sexuality plays a very important role in everyone's life regardless of whether one is young or old, man or woman, while lower animals or species are driven only by a "force" to reproduce themselves and, therefore,

partake in sexual behaviour, human beings are not sexually active just for the sake of reproduction. Rather, there are a variety of complex factors that lead people to have sexual relationships. These include cultural, political, legal, moral, theological, emotional and religious factors.

The definition of human sexuality emphasizes the holistic nature of sexuality as not limited to sex and sexual activities but rather encompasses all of life because we are both sexual and social beings.

Sexuality from African Perspective

The question that arises is how sexuality is experienced in the African context. It is common knowledge that sex and human sexuality in Africa are shrouded in myths. The mythological aspects of human sexuality in Africa are seen in the fact that it is not a subject for a frank and open discussion between parents and their children and even among elders. When discussions on sex and human sexuality are held among adults, the language used is mythological. It is intended to hide the true meaning of what is being discussed. Such mythological language is difficult to decode.

Sexuality can be understood in the African context through stories of creation, taboos, and codes of conduct. First, creation stories are found in African religions and a common feature is that human beings appear on earth in pairs as male and female, as husband and wife right from the time of creation by divine providence. In most of these myths, the husband was created first and then the wife. In other myths, however, man and woman or husband and wife appear at the same time very much like in the first biblical story of creation in Gen. 1:26. It is through these stories of creation that people tend to think of people in binary terms, man women and men because of the appearing first having more power and decision making and also normalising heterosexual relationships. Implied in this kind of relationships is the subordination and compliance of the female and even during a sexual activity where she is expected to be passive. Any sign of her fully engaged or seeming to enjoy sex would disqualify her from being a good woman/wife. Unfortunately, these views have extended to exclude other couples who do not identify as heterosexuals and letting them to seen at odds with reality that has been recited from generation to generation.

The belief in heterosexism also sees the purpose of sexuality as procreation versus pleasure. Paulina Makinwe et al in their paper entitled *Health sexuality in East, West, North, and Southern Africa* have noted that when it comes to matters of sexuality, most African societies insist on procreation as the primary purpose of human sexuality. One can then be forced to ask a forbidden question, “if-then matters of sexuality only pertain to procreation, why are people having sex when they are not planning to have babies? However, literature is now coming out on human sexuality in Africa beyond procreation

The role of taboo and secrecy in relation to sexuality and knowledge transmission. Human

sexuality in Africa is enshrouded with great secrecy and hedged in with taboos that carry serious consequences if broken. To talk openly about sex/orientation among people of different ages and in public is not acceptable. There are taboos that regulate words that must not be discussed in public in regard to human sexuality. The secrecy surrounding human sexuality in Africa has also been underscored by Scholastica Nganda who explains that traditionally sexual activity was performed in the house, at night when it was dark, when the animals and the children were fast asleep, preferably under some cover. The secrecy makes it difficult for parents to discuss sexual matters with their children. Studies which have been carried out in most African countries have found that both rural and urban parents, and even the professional community, feel that sexuality can only be discussed through a third party, who might be an aunt, an uncle or grandparent. This secrecy makes it even difficult for children to discuss their sexual orientation with their parents and on the other hand making it difficult for parents to accept their LGBTI children.

This secrecy is sustained by a strict code of conduct on Sex taboo of which any deviation from it is deeply detested. Institutions such as religion and marriage have been seen as having a role in regulating sexuality. One of the codes stipulates time or manner of having sex and also the person with whom one may or may not enter into a sexual relationship (Ansah, 1989: 249). When missionaries came, it is said that they came up with another code known as missionary style which dictated man on top. I am not sure if that code still applies, maybe we can discuss that. The code of who to have sex with was also influenced by heterosexism and the creation story of man and woman appearing as couple thereby already prescribing their sexual roles. It is evident therefore that sexual activity was understood as between the males and females. However, history through many authors tells us that sex between same-sex people has always happened and that homosexually is as old as human race. In many communities in Africa there are accounts of men and women who lived together and though everybody knew about it nobody felt offended by such acts. Where I grew up, there we used to have what was called “skhona” that was an elder woman in love with a younger woman and that relationship would be kept alive for many years. What kept it alive were things like love tokens, kisses etc and nobody talked the people or lovers out of that. The same relationships are documented in Greece history where adult men had relationships with young boys that relationship was called ‘Paiderastry’ meaning boy love. In the ancient military, researchers found that a separate military unit was reserved for boy love or for sexual activity for men to boost their fighting spirit. Maybe further research would be needed to indicate if these practices have stopped or they just go unnoticed. Maybe now one would be tempted to ask why LGBTI issues are beginning to raise so much anger and hatred, it maybe a good topic to explore.

Facts on sexual diversity and homosexuality

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) recently hosted a dialogue on diversity in human sexuality based on the recently published ASSAf report titled Diversity in the Human Sexuality: The purpose of the dialogue was to discuss implications of the report on policy, particularly in light of legislation on criminalizing homosexuality on the continent.

Some of the findings from the dialogue include evidence that sexuality is not a simple binary opposition of hetero/homosexual and normal/abnormal. Rather there is a range of human variation, very little of which can justifiably be termed abnormal. Further, there is substantial biological evidence for the diversity of human sexualities and for sexual orientations in particular.

Significantly, there is lack of evidence to support the idea that the way parents bring up their children, or the relationships formed between children and parents, impact on sexual orientation. While the family environment may shape other elements of sexuality and the way sexuality is expressed, and while construction of gender and sexual identities has social and cultural components, orientation is not directly correlated to family upbringing.

In addition, there is no evidence that: sexual orientation can be acquired through contact with LGBTI persons; same-sex orientation can be changed through ‘conversion’ or ‘reparative’ therapy or that LGBTI sexual orientation or transgender and intersex people recruit young people and are sexually abusive of children.

MYTHS

1. Same-sex parents harm children

FACT: No legitimate research has demonstrated that same-sex couples are any more or any less harmful to children than heterosexual couples

2. Gay men molest children at far higher rates than heterosexuals

FACT: The Child Molestation Research & Prevention Institute notes that 90% of child molesters target children in their network of family and friends, and the majority are men married to women. Most child molesters, therefore, are not gay people lingering outside schools waiting to snatch children from the playground, as much religious-right rhetoric suggests.

3. People become homosexual because they were sexually abused as children or there was a deficiency in sex-role modeling by their parents

FACT: No scientifically sound study has definitively linked sexual orientation or identity with parental role-modeling or childhood sexual abuse

4. No one is born gay.

Modern science cannot state conclusively what causes sexual orientation, but a great many studies suggest that it is the result of both biological and environmental forces, not a personal

"choice." A [2008 Swedish study of twins](#) (the world's largest twin study) published in *The Archives of Sexual Behavior* concluded that "[h]omosexual behaviour is largely shaped by genetics and random environmental factors

However, there is clear evidence that more repressive environments not only pose a health threat to LGTBI but also fuel violence. Homophobia and hate crimes continue unabated in the African continent, where gays, lesbians, and non-conforming individuals get attacked daily on the basis of their sexual identity. The LGBTI community continues to be at high risk of the twin pandemics of GBV and HIV and AIDS. High rates of HIV and AIDs amongst lesbians and bisexual women have been attributed to alarming incidences of rape and sexual violence suffered by this group. There is a shortage of targeted prevention and mitigation interventions for women who have sex with other women. Their vulnerability is brought by lack of understanding of the specific sexual practices of women who have sex with women, as well as lack of knowledge of their sexual and reproductive needs

The narrow definition of sexuality in Africa and the myths associated with LGBTI issues have many implications on sexual reproductive health and community's wellbeing. Sexual and reproductive communication are most likely to promote healthy sexual development that reduces sexual risks. Communication is the principal means for parents to transmit sexual values, belief, expectations, and knowledge to their adolescents. Cultural taboos, shame and lack of communication skills hinder communication between parents and their children. The consequences of lack of parent-child sexuality communication include adolescents engaging in risky sexual behaviors with adverse health outcomes including unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, (Ayelew, Mengistie & Semahegn, 2014). The myths surrounding LGBTI issues leads to heterosexism and homo-negativity exacerbating violence against LGBTI persons and creating barriers to their access to service delivery including healthcare.

Alternative responses from Faith Communities

a. "I AM" Ministry

Despite the prevalence of homophobic beliefs in many churches, there are some ministries promoting alternative responses to LGTBI and one of these is the "IAM" a group that has become a catalyst for recognition, acceptance, and inclusion of LGBTI. A significant aspect of their theology is the integration of spirituality with sexuality. The following are some of the recommendations they made in their report published in 2014,

- There is a need to move away from the mindset of debating “the issue of homosexuality” among religious leaders and communities to dialogue as the method of choice for engaging contentious issues such as sexual orientation within religious contexts.
- Identifying and addressing the major stumbling blocks in forming alliances between LGBTI groups and religious organizations which include: religious fundamentalism, patriarchy, exclusion of LGBTI from religious communities, literal reading and interpretation of sacred texts and beliefs that homosexuality is un-African and unchristian.
- There is a lack of locally produced material on the subject of LGTBI in an African context.

b. Stepping stones: developments that have pushed the LGBTI agenda

Some of the activities of the organization include the following:

- Giving a human face to the “issues” and develop processes that enabled real encounters between diverse people within religious contexts.
- Networking between LGBTI organizations and religious leaders in the SADC community e.g., SA, Namib, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana Malawi and other East African states.
- Relevant resources developed and workshops on diversity, dialogues and integration of sexuality with spirituality, sacred texts such as the Bible, religious communities, and institutions such as the Inclusive Church, international and regional networks, documentation of life stories of LGBTI establishment of parents, family and friends support groups
- Global advocacy on human rights
- Sustainable development goals (SDGs) that include every human being without exception – none is left behind
- The application of methodologies that have proved to be highly effective in discussing homosexuality issues including dialogue, relational approach, contextual bible studies, storytelling, collaborative approaches, trainings, and workshops

It is important to note that in recent years, as a result of a complexity of factors, the myth surrounding human sexuality in Africa is being challenged by these societal needs and developments that arise from international agendas and development goals such as MDGs and SDGs.

Consequently, African conceptions of sex and human sexuality have come under attack by rights activists. Makinwa-Adebusoye and Tiemoko have observed that myths of human sexuality in Africa and the traditional, religious, and moral perspectives and ideologies they breed are particularly suited to the needs of male-dominated agrarian societies.

Further, in view of the negative consequences of sexually transmitted diseases which include,

among other things, HIV and AIDS, teenage pregnancies, rape and other forms of violent sexual behaviour demand a re-thinking in the way in which the African people view sex and human sexuality. The following suggestions have been made,

- There is a need to transmit proper, accurate and scientific information to people.
- Demythologizing African concepts of sexuality will lead to health and responsible sexual behaviour. It will also lead to the empowerment of women and sexual minorities and protection of their human rights.
- For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled”.
- Comprehensive sexuality education for youth and adoption of social justice approach
- Revisiting some of the core messages of the bible used for issues related to sexuality
- Learn from actions of Jesus himself particularly his radical nature that challenged the existing norms of his time through an emphasis on justice

In conclusion much needs to be done to take these issues forward through networking locally and globally, re-reading sacred texts in the light of broader Christian and human rights themes of dignity, equality, and right to life.

Article 5

Multiple Challenges faced by LGBTI from Society **Rev Nokuthula Dhladla**

Introduction

The experiences of LGBTI persons are seldom heard or acknowledged due to the practices of discrimination and marginalisation that characterize their social and private experiences. This paper will give voice to these experiences as the first step in challenging the violation of the human dignity of LGBTI persons.

Personal challenges faced by LGBTI

As members of the marginalised group, LGBTI persons face many challenges. They are stereotyped, isolated, discriminated, rejected, stigmatised, verbally abused, murdered, bullied, vulnerable to HIV infection and subjected to 'corrective rape'. These are some of the multiple forms of violence experienced by LGBTI people that constitute a violation of their human dignity and right to a life free from violence and discrimination.

These experiences have negative psychological, spiritual and social effects on LGBTI people such as low-self-esteem, trauma, mental health, depression and limited access to health services; under-achieving or dropping-out of schools and universities; loneliness; un-integrated sexual and spiritual identity; homelessness; self-hate, anger, and suicide.

LGBTI and Families

For most people in Southern African countries, families and churches are two of the most significant spaces in which socialization and community life occur and where social attitudes and ethical responses are formed.

Families are important support structure as well as sources of identity and values that contribute to the wholeness of life such as love, compassion, and belongingness. The community and church inform the values of families and therefore many LGBTI persons are afraid of disclosing their status because of the views discussed previously. In this social climate of non-acceptance, many families resort to a range of strategies to correct their sexual orientation including seeking cures, deliverance, forcing them to marry someone of the opposite sex and in extreme cases rape by family members, particularly of lesbians. Families reject LGBTI because of fear of losing respect and status in the community and with the church.

LGBTI and Workplace

In countries like South Africa, the Bill of Rights prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender and it also includes a number of protections, relating to Labor and employment. Despite these progressive laws, there are still cases of discrimination against the LGBTI in the workplace and those who are seeking employment. LGBTI job seekers are often denied employment due to their sexual orientation or gender identity or because of so-called masculine or feminine style of dress code. In places of employment many experiences being passed over for promotion or training, regular animosity from colleagues and supervisors, name-calling, intimidation, and blackmail. Because of the Christian context of this region, there are many instances where employers or supervisors or colleagues use the bible to condemn LGBTI persons. Further, there are no policies in place in many workplaces to handle violations against LGBTI.

LGBTI and Churches

Churches are central to the faith and practice of Christians. This is the place where we gather together with other Christians in fellowship, prayer, worship, and teaching about the Christian way of life. The Bible is central to our faith and is the basis for our morals, beliefs, and practices. As we have discussed earlier, churches are divided on their interpretation of the bible on many issues including the status of LGBTI. Sadly churches like families are places where discrimination and hate occur the most for LGBTI persons.

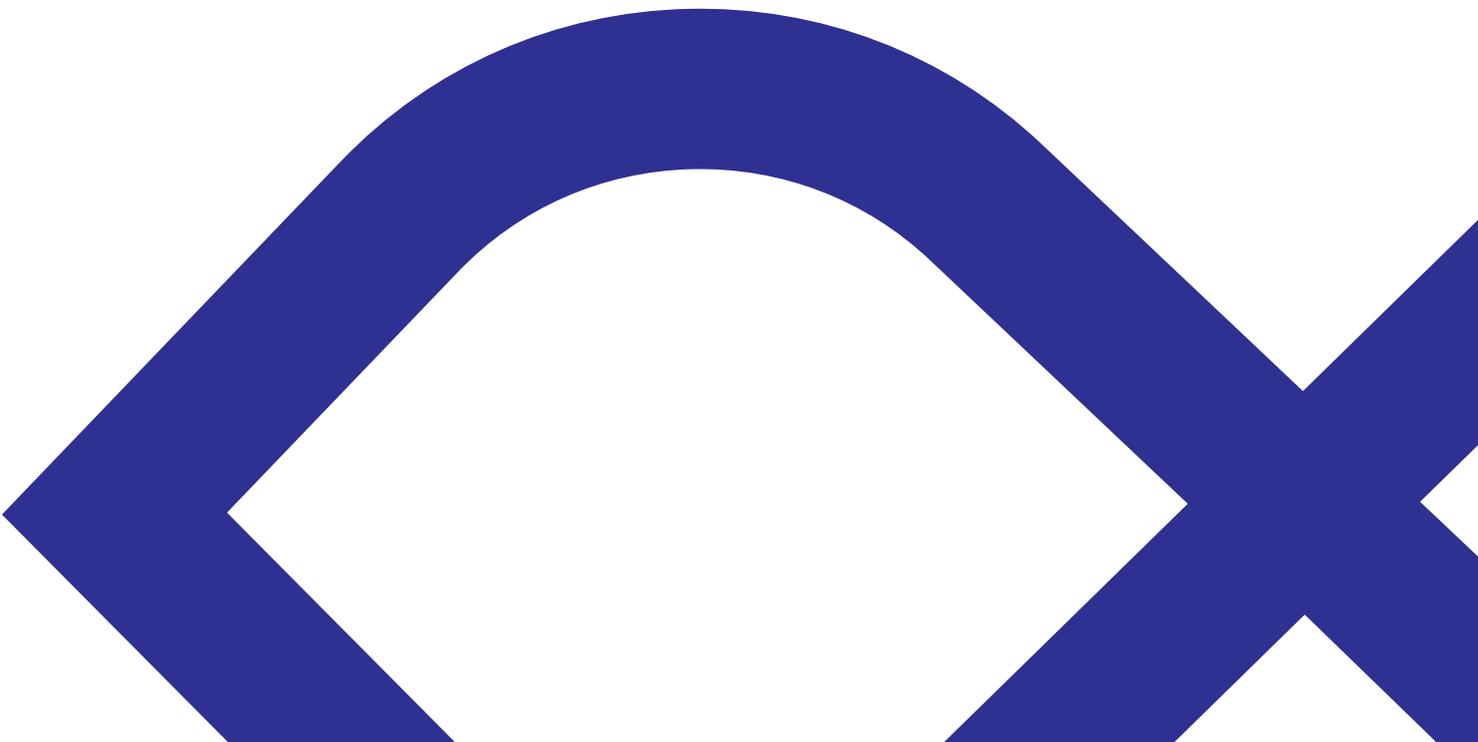
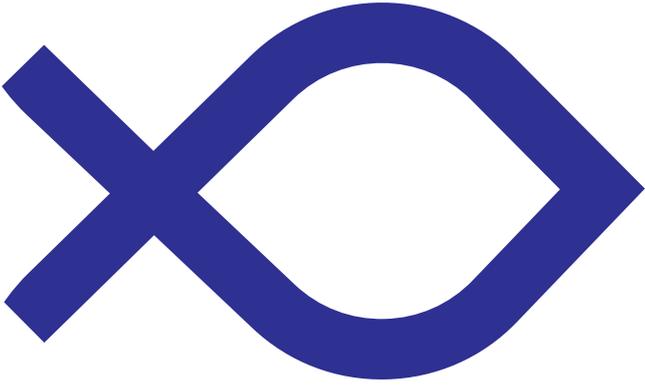
Many churches fuel and facilitate a climate of intolerance through biblical interpretations of homosexuality that promote hate and intolerance that leads to practices of discrimination, stigma, hate, violence and even murder.

LGBTI and Communities

Like churches, many LGBTI persons live in fear of harm from their communities. For example in some communities raping or killing an LGBTI person is praised and encouraged and those committing this violence are treated as heroes because of the belief that LGBTI is a choice that can be changed or disease that can be cured. Further many believe that LGBTI is 'un-African' and therefore has no place in their communities.

Conclusion

It is clear from these experiences that LGBTI persons continue to experience violations of their dignity in every social place from their homes to churches, workplaces, and educational institutions. Churches, therefore, cannot believe and preach about the human dignity of all persons and their equality before God who loves all without discrimination and at the same time justify the marginalisation and discrimination of LGBTI persons and be silent while their human dignity is violated every day in all social institutions.





“We are **one body...if one part 
suffers, every part suffers with it”
(1 Corinthians 12:26a)**