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A Correction of Pastoral Care that Overlooks the Most Vulnerable

by Dr. Nontando Hadebe
Lecturer, St. Augustine College
Johannesburg, South Africa[1]

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[1] Hadebe earned her ThD from St. Augustine College, Johannesburg, South Africa, and her ThM and BT from the University of KwaZulu/Natal, South Africa. She was Fulbright Scholar in residence at Emmanuel College, Boston, MA, and an International Fellow at the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkley, CA. She is a member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and the Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion and Society in Africa's Women's Caucus comprosed of catholic women theologians in Africa. She has written several articles and book chapters, including "Commodification, Decolonisation and Theological Education in Africa: Renewed Challenges for African Theologians," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017); "The Cry of the Earth Is the Cry of Women: Ecofeminisms in Critical Dialogue with Laudato Si," *Grace and Truth* 42, no. 2 (2017); "Moving in Circles. A Sankofa-Kairos Theology of Inclusivity and Accountability Rooted in Trinitarian Theology as a Resource for Restoring the Liberation Legacy of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 2 (2016); "Not in Our Name without Us: The Intervention of Catholic Women Speak at the Synod of Bishops on the Family: A Case Study of a Global Resistance Movement by Catholic Women," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016); "Whose Life Matters? Violence Against Lesbians and the Politis of Life in the Church," in *Visions and Vocations*, The Catholic Women Speak Network, ed. Tina Beattie and D. Culberston (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018); "Toward an Ubuntu Trinitarian Prophetic Theology: A Social Critique of Blindness to the Other," in *Living With(Out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church and the Migration of Peoples*, ed. Agnes Brazal and Maria Theresa Davila (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016; 260 pp.); "HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa Gender Inequality and Human Rights: A Prophetic Trinitarian Anthropology," chapter 19, in *Dignity, Freedom and Grace: Christian Perspective on HIV, AIDS and Human Rights*, ed. Gilliam Paterson and Callie Long (Geneva: WCC, 2016; 168 pp.). See www.StAugustine.ac.za and noehadebe@gmail.com.

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Introduction

Despite the integration of social justice principles that prioritize the liberation of vulnerable groups in the mission of both Catholic and Protestant churches, there seem to be inconsistencies in the application of these ideals to the pastoral care of groups that have a history of marginalization within these churches. The experiences of these groups are associated with taboo subjects that further alienate them resulting in a lack of access to pastoral care in some cases. In Southern Africa these challenges are compounded by the intersection of culture and colonialism. Two case studies of the experiences of the most vulnerable from this region will be discussed: namely, HIV and AIDS; and the sexual minorities, particularly of lesbians. It will be argued that their experiences of exclusion from pastoral care presents a disjuncture between the ideals of social justice and the practice of pastoral care, and that disjuncture imposes an ethical imperative for the correction of pastoral care that overlooks the most vulnerable.

The social and political policies that make for starving children, battered women, and the evils of rising fascism remain in place as people learn through prayer to find the tranquility to live with corrupt political and social structures instead of channeling their distress and anger and anxiety into energy for constructive change (Jantzen 1994, p. 201).

The social teachings of both Catholic and Protestant churches would argue against the above statement because their mission is to confront unjust social systems that oppress the most vulnerable groups in society. Catholic social teaching for example includes several principles such as a preferential option for the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity and justice as foundational to the mission of the Catholic Church in the world. In his encyclical on the environment entitled *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reiterated these principles in his argument

that the exploitation of the environment cannot be separated from the exploitation of the poor:

> Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*. (LS 49 [italics mine])

Similarly, the World Council of Churches defines one of its goals as "service by serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation."[2] Hence the inclusion of social justice into the mission of churches should be evident in the practice of pastoral care that engages in the struggle for justice for all vulnerable groups.

However, the practice of pastoral care in western Christianity, which has been "exported" to the rest of the world, has primarily been individual centered and acontextual. This form of pastoral care is critiqued as one that is detached from its own stated-mission context and supportive of the status quo. Marginalized groups have not been passive and have challenged the theological basis of this model of pastoral care through liberation theologies that integrate their experiences of oppression from systemic injustice. In addressing their lived experiences, marginalized groups have had to confront taboo subjects such as domestic violence, gender inequality, rape, sexuality, abuse of power, masculinities, sex work, sexual minorities, and sexual diversity.

These issues are further compounded in the Southern African context by culture and colonialism. The two case studies regarding HIV/AIDS and violence against sexual minorities (particularly lesbians) illustrate how their experiences of taboo and exclusion from pastoral care impose an ethical imperative for the correction of pastoral care that moves toward a more inclusive care, especially of the most vulnerable.

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[2] World Council of Churches "brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific. There are now 348 member churches." See www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us.

The rest of the article will discuss these issues in an overview of how the liberation theologies try to address the challenges for the correction of overlooking the most vulnerable toward that of a pastoral care model that includes the most vulnerable.

A. Liberation Theologies: Voices of Vulnerable and Marginalized

Liberation theologies have been extensively discussed. The focus of this section is on the common features of and some examples of diversity in liberation theologies as background for an analysis of pastoral care. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991) defines the common features as follows:

> In a broad sense, the term *liberation theology* refers to any theological movement that criticizes a specific form of oppression and views liberation as integral to the theological task. Feminist theologies, African American theologies and certain Asian theologies are major types of liberation theology (1991, p. 62).

Liberation theologies emerge from experiences of oppressed groups in relation to systemic injustices that pursue material and spiritual liberation. They challenge the universal claims and acontextual nature of western theologies. Though not monolithic, each of the varied liberation theologies reflect the particular experiences of oppressed groups. In their multiplicity they share similar methodology and commitments. Three examples of liberation theologies will be discussed namely: Latin American, feminist, and African.

1. Latin American Liberation Theologies

Latin American liberation theologies challenged the middle-class bias and exclusion of the poor in western theologies. Gutiérrez explains the differences between these two theologies as follows:

> In Latin America and Caribbean, the challenge comes not in the first instance from the non-believer, but from the 'non persons', those who are recognised as people by the existing social order; the poor, the exploited, those systematically and legally deprived of their status as human beings, those who barely realise that it is to be a human being. The 'non-person' questions not so much our religious universe but above all our economic, social, political and cultural order, calling for a transformation of the very foundations of a dehumaninising society. (2007, p. 28)

The unjust economic and political systems that oppress the poor as well as the theologies that ignore the plight of the poor are confronted in Latin American liberation theologies. Pastoral care in this context

responds to the immediate needs of the poor and actively engages in the struggle for social justice.

2. Feminist/Womanist Liberation Theologies

Similarly feminist theologians challenge androcentrism, sexism, and patriarchy in church and society that perpetuates and justifies the marginalization of women. Rosemary Ruether defines feminist theology as follows:

> Feminist theology takes feminist critique and reconstruction of gender paradigms into the theological realm. They question patterns of theology that justify male dominance and female subordination such as exclusive male language for God, the view that males are more like God than females, that only males can represent God as leaders in church and society, or that women are created by God to be subordinate to males and thus sin by rejecting this subordination (2002, p. 3).

African American and Hispanic women theologians have added their distinctive voices to feminist theologies. Both have rejected the term feminism and named their theologies "womanist" and "*mujerista*" respectively. African American womanist theology integrated race and class in their gender analysis as a response to the racism of white Christian feminists and the sexism of black male theologies. Thomas defines womanist theology as "a critical reflection upon black women's place in the world that God has created and takes seriously black women's experience as human beings who are made in the image of God" (2004, p. 38). Similarly, Hispanic women's *mujerista* theology established their particular experiences of oppression as a minority group in the USA. *Mujerista* theology challenges "oppressive structures that refuse to allow us to be full members of society while preserving our distinctiveness as Hispanic women" (Isasi-Diaz, 1994, p. 88).

Outside the USA, Latin American, Asian, and African women added their unique experiences to feminist theology. Elina Vuola from Latin America describes the praxis of *vida cotidiana* that is "everyday life" in public and private as one of the key contributions to Latin American feminist theologies and also forms a critique to liberation theology's "'ideological slipping' which left out sexist and machista elements in society, church and theology" (2002, p. 148). Vuola contends that at the center of Latin American feminist liberation theology is "life, human integrity, justice and liberation of

all women" (2002, p. 148). Like their African counterparts, Asian women theologies focus on culture.

Kowk Pui-Lan and Musimbi Kanyoro emphasize the centrality of culture in both contexts. Pui-Lan states that,

> Culture has become a site of struggle as people who have experienced colonialism, slavery, or exploitation and genocide reclaim their cultural identity and their sense of who they are after a long history of oppression. Women in these marginalized communities have to negotiate their cultural identities in multiple and complex ways taking into consideration gender, class, race and other differences. Feminist theology must pay attention to diversity of culture and social contexts. (2002, p. 23)

3. African Liberation Theologies

Not only is culture central in Asian women's theologies as a source of oppression and liberation, but culture is similarly central in African women theologians as explained by Kanyoro,

> All questions regarding the welfare and status of women in Africa are explained within the framework of culture e.g. women cannot inherit land or own property because it is no culturally 'right' whether the subject is politics, economics, religion or social issues, none of these are safe from the sharp eyes of culture. (2002, p. 23)

The central role of culture and liberation found in African theologies are responses to multiple challenges from western theologies including the vilification of African cultures; racism, colonialism, and apartheid; post-independence oppression; gender as already discussed; and emerging Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, Intersex, and queer (LGTBIQ) theological discourses. African theologies are diverse and not monolithic.

The emergence of African theology has been characterized by two different emphases on inculturation and liberation. Simon Maimela describes the differences between inculturation and black theologies as follows,

> Inculturation is characterized by an attempt to marry Christianity with the African worldview so that Christianity could speak with an African idiom and accent, and the liberation approach developed in the 1970s gave birth to black theology in South Africa which emphasized struggle for socio-economic and political liberation from white racial domination. (1991, p. 2)

These two streams represent the context of the development of African theologies as protest movements for the liberation of Africans

from colonialism and apartheid. However, many scholars argue against the dichotomy between culture and liberation seeing these two streams as complementary.

According to Bujo an inculturation theology without liberation is as deficient as a liberation theology without inculturation. He argues as follows,

> In fact, it is true that a purely culturally-centered theology is neither Christian nor African, nor simply human, it is no less true that a theology unilaterally based on social and economic issues without a cultural background goes very much against the dignity of the human person. (2003, p. 2)

4. LGTBIQ Challenges in Liberation Theologies

The emerging theological discourse on LGTBIQ presents new challenges to African theologies from groups that are experiencing oppression from culture, governments, and religion. The two dominant discourses are that LGTBIQ identities are "unAfrican" and "unChristian." The unAfrican argument is based on the belief that LGTBIQ persons did not exist in pre-colonial Africa and are a by-product of colonialism and western influences: "In this argument, precolonial African culture was unitary and strictly heterosexual, and homosexuality and gender diversity are decadent, neocolonial Western imports" (Gunda, 2017, p. 22).

Similarly the "unchristian" argument based on the interpretation of certain biblical texts that are believed to be against LGTBIQ persons: "The Sodom narrative (Gen 19), the Levitical laws on sexual purity (Lev 18 and 20) and certain Pauline texts (Rom 1, 1 Cor 6, 1 Tim 1) are read as evidence of the Bible's unequivocal opposition to homosexuality" (Gunda, 2017, p. 21).

In the Roman Catholic Church, homosexuality is described as "contrary to natural law" and "intrinsically disordered" (Catechism 2357). [3] However, there is also opposition to the violation and discrimination of LGTBIQ persons: "We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration" (Pope Francis, 2016, p. 190).

[3] Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P85.HTM.

The foregoing discussions on liberation theologies from oppressed groups provide tools and resources for comprehensive pastoral care that can adequately respond in liberating ways to the personal, social and spiritual challenges of vulnerable groups.

B. Pastoral Care, Injustice and Taboo Subjects

There are different definitions of pastoral care, three of which will be discussed. The first is from Lynch who describes pastoral care in the Catholic Tradition:

> Pastoral care has often been described as a 'cure of souls' ministry of healing in the broad sense. The term denotes a concern for the emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions within the life of the individual. (Lynch, 2005, p. 10)

This model is individual centered and describes the care activities undertaken by a priest in relation to individual parishioners.

The second definition is from Lartey (1997) who synthesizes a range of definitions from prominent scholars from around the world including Clinebell (USA), Wimberley (African American), and Masamba ma Mampolo (Africa) in his broad-based definition of pastoral care:

> Pastoral care consists of helping activities, participated in by people who recognise a transcendent dimension to human life, which, by the use of verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, literal or symbolic modes of communication, aim at preventing, relieving or facilitating persons coping with anxieties. Pastoral care seeks to foster people's growth as full human beings together with the development of ecologically and socio-political holistic communities in which all persons may live humane lives. (1997, pp. 30–31)

The last definition is a method used in communal pastoral care in the contexts of injustice, namely, the "See, Judge, Act" approved by Pope John XXIII in his encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra* (1961) for use in local parishes. The three-stage process starts with "Seeing" which includes a thorough analysis of the context so that the systems of injustice are named and made visible for all to understand. The second stage is "Judge" in a process of discernment through the study of scripture in relation to the information provided from the "Seeing" process. The last stage of "Act" is the practical action in response to "Seeing" and "Judging." This cycle is repeated as a way of refining and deepening the process.

The foregoing definitions and descriptions of pastoral care correspond to the three cycles in the history of pastoral care described

by Patton which are: classical, clinical, and community-contextual. The classical "universalizes understanding of human problems and expresses them in exclusively religious terms" (1993, p. 39); the clinical paradigm "interprets human problems psychologically and makes the males of the dominant culture be recognized as normative" (1993, p. 39); and the communal contextual paradigm "insists that there are multiple contexts to be taken into account. In fact, a central part of the ministry of pastoral care today is discerning the contexts most relevant for understanding a pastoral situation" (1993, p. 40).

The communal contextual paradigm has been influenced by liberation theologies including feminist and womanist theologies. In an article entitled "Three Decades of Women Writing for our Lives," Grieder, Johnson, and Leslie summarized seven areas of focus namely: 1) *Ekklesia* and its ministry, 2) marginalized people and taboo topics, 3) female experience, 4) theological education, 5) soulfulness, 6) violence, and 7) systems of care (1999, p. 23). One of the key themes from these seven areas is the "othering" of marginalized groups, including women, and the classifying their experiences under the rubric of that which is "taboo." As part of their resistance, feminist and womanist scholars have written about taboo subjects such as sexual violence; intersections between race, class and gender; adolescent girls; divorce and remarriage, sexual desire and expression; infertility; stillbirth and miscarriage and political oppression (Grieder, Johnson and Leslie, 1999, p. 32). The liberative aspect of their struggle is that "attention to margins and taboos decenters dominant paradigms, reveals differentials in the misuse of social power and thus enables prompt response where justice ministries are urgently needed" (1999, p. 29).

C. Two Case Studies from Southern Africa: HIV and AIDS and Violence Against LGTBIQ

1. Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Case Study

Southern Africa continues to the be the epicenter of HIV and AIDS with high infection rates among marginalized groups which include young women, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, and sex workers (UNAIDS, 2016). The drivers of the epidemic are gender inequality and gender-based violence which includes violence against LGTBIQ. The brutal practice of "corrective rape" of

black lesbians represents one of the most extreme acts of violence against LGTBIQ.

In this context, Christianity is implicated in the experiences of marginalization and exclusion by these two groups. HIV and AIDS were first detected in the USA in 1981 among gay communities. The relationship between HIV and gay communities led to the belief by many Christians that HIV and AIDS were a punishment from God against homosexuality. HIV and AIDS were associated with homosexuality, sexual immorality, sin, punishment, and God's judgement in dialogues and writings of many western Christians.

Similar theological responses were also common in Africa where HIV was transmitted primarily through heterosexual sex and associated with marginalized groups like commercial sex workers and the practice of multiple partners. The negative impact of judgmental theology was acknowledged in a confession made by church leaders in Africa at the *Global Consultation on the Ecumenical Response to the Challenge of HIV/AIDS* in Nairobi, Kenya (25–28 November 2001):

> As the pandemic has unfolded, it has exposed fault lines that reach to the heart of our theology, our ethics, our liturgy and our practice of ministry. Today, churches are being obliged to acknowledge that we have—however unwittingly—contributed both actively and passively to the spread of the virus…. Our tendency to exclude others, our interpretation of the scriptures and our theology of sin have all combined to promote the stigmatization, exclusion and suffering of people with HIV or AIDS. This has undermined the effectiveness of care, education and prevention efforts and inflict additional suffering on those already affected by the HIV. Given the extreme urgency of the situation, and the conviction that the churches do have a distinctive role to play in the response to the pandemic, what is needed is a rethinking of our mission, and the transformation of our structures and ways of working.[4]

The confession clearly outlined the key "fault lines" in theological responses, including judgmental attitudes and the difficulty of addressing sexual issues and stigma. Yet in that very confession, there was also a commitment by church leaders to redefine their role and mission in the context of HIV and AIDS.

As an outcome of a more compassionate theology, churches are currently responsible for a significant number of projects responding

[4] WCC 2001: www.wcc-coe.org.

to the humanitarian aspect of HIV such as orphan care, hospices, counselling, and education. There has been a substantial increase in theological discourse on all aspects of HIV and AIDS.

However, one of the weaknesses of focusing mostly on compassionate needs is that the root causes of HIV and AIDS have tended to be marginalized, resulting in a limited understanding of HIV and AIDS. This is illustrated in two related researches carried out in 2004 and 2005 on ministers, lay persons, women's groups, and people living with HIV and AIDS. The first by the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Action (PACSA) was entitled *Research Report: Churches and HIV/AIDS: Exploring how local churches are integrating HIV/AIDS in the life and ministries of the church and how those most directly affected experience these*, and it found that,

> Church leaders had adequate knowledge about HIV/AIDS though most of this focuses on biological facts and does not adequately take into account the social complexities surrounding the pandemic and how they impact on individuals. This factual knowledge has in many cases not led to a transformation of attitudes, and many church leaders hold judgmental opinions about the main way people become infected (63%) and why God is allowing the pandemic (70%). These attitudes tend to apportion blame to individuals for their HIV+ status, assuming that they become infected through their own promiscuity. (Gennrich et al., 2004, pp. 4–5)

There seems to be a correlation between how transmission of HIV is understood and the theological responses. If as shown in this research HIV transmission is linked to sexual behavior, particularly "promiscuity" without an understanding of the wider social factors that influence sexual behavior, then the theological response will tend to be moralistic and judgmental.

These findings were confirmed by the research done in 2005 by Kwazulu-Natal Church AIDS Network (KZNCAN) entitled *Churches and HIV/AIDS A Research on KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC)*. Researchers concluded that:

> Judgmental attitudes like the church's contextualization that *immoral lifestyles* are the root causes of HIV/AIDS repeated throughout the study. Biased attitudes towards homosexuals were evident when well over half the members of women's groups and ministers thought that homosexuals *always* transmit HIV. Hence, the church's contextualization of HIV/AIDS centers around sexual behavior. (2005, p. 33)

This conclusion is partially based on findings that 97% of ministers and 83% of women's groups agreed that leading immoral lifestyles was the foundation for the spread of HIV/AIDS, and therefore abstinence from sex before marriage was the only effective preventative measure against HIV infection (2005, p. 21).

Thus, the reduction of HIV and AIDS to immorality assumes an agency and ignores social factors such as gender inequality that compromise the capacity of women to exercise power over their sexuality as described in the following quotation from UNAIDS,

> In many places, HIV-prevention efforts do not take into account the gender and other inequalities that shape people's behaviours and limit their choices. Many HIV strategies assume an idealized world in which everyone is equal and free to make empowered choices, and can opt to abstain from sex, stay faithful to one's partner or use condoms consistently. In reality, women and girls face a range of HIV-related risk factors and vulnerabilities that men and boys do not—many of which are embedded in the social relations and economic realities of their societies. These factors are not easily dislodged or altered, but until they are, efforts to contain and reverse the AIDS epidemic are unlikely to achieve sustained success. (2004, pp. 3–4)

According to the UNAIDS 2016 report, young girls continue to constitute the most vulnerable group infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa,

> In sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls and young women accounted for 25% of new HIV infections among adults, and women accounted for 56% of new HIV infections among adults. Harmful gender norms and inequalities, insufficient access to education and sexual and reproductive health services, poverty, food insecurity and violence, are at the root of the increased HIV risk of young women and adolescent girls. (UNAIDS 2016, p. 8).[5]

There is a great need in western Christian pastoral care to understand its role of judgment that ignores the social pressure and injustices forced upon the most vulnerable; these pressures are quite beyond the ability of the vulnerable to escape.

Other marginalized groups vulnerable to HIV infection include many groups: "Key populations at increased risk of HIV infection include sex workers, people who inject drugs, transgender people, prisoners and gay men and other men who have sex with men"

[5] UNAIDS Global Aids Update, 2016. See https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/global-AIDS-update-2016_en.pdf.

(UNAIDS, 2016, p. 9). Significant underlying reasons for vulnerability are that they are "pushed to the fringes of society by stigma and the criminalization of same-sex relationships, drug use and, sex work" (UNAIDS, 2016, p. 10). Marginalization creates vulnerability to HIV infection which constitutions a violation of rights, the most basic of which is the right to life.

2. Violence Against LGTBIQ Case Study

A particularly horrid case of violence against LGTBIQ includes "corrective rape" of lesbians, of which the following describes the brutal detail.

> The partially clothed body of Eudy Simelane, former star of South Africa's acclaimed Banyana Banyana national female football squad, was found in a creek in a park in Kwa Thema, on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Simelane had been gang-raped and brutally beaten before being stabbed 25 times in the face, chest and legs. As well as being one of South Africa's best-known female footballers, Simelane was a voracious equality rights campaigner and one of the first women to live openly as a lesbian in Kwa Thema.[6]

The "corrective rape of lesbians" is a practice believed by perpetrators who are mostly heterosexual men to be a means of transforming lesbians into "real African women." "Lesbians are raped in ways intended to be punitive, or 'corrective' or 'curative,' because they undermine monolithic notions of masculinity and heterosexuality and refuse men's proposals and advances" (Swarr, 2012, p. 962). Corrective rape is driven by multiple intersecting factors including culture, religion, colonialism, and apartheid as explained in the following quotation:

> In sum, deep-rooted patriarchy, a history of state-based discrimination and violence, negligible risk of arrest or prosecution for sexual violence, and cultural and religious intolerance of homosexuality form the severe animosity towards homosexuality and other minority sexual orientations that results in widespread corrective rape. (Brown, 2012, p. 54)

In a context of the above discourses, religious judgmentalism that label LGTBIQ as "unAfrican" and "unchristian" perpetuates the

[6] Annie Kelly, "Raped and Killed for Being a Lesbian: South Africa Ignores Corrective Attacks," *The Guardian* (12 March 2009), accessed 11 October 2015. Banyana Banyana is the nickname for the South Africa national women's football team. See www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/12/eudy-simelane-corrective-rape-south-africa.

vilification and so the challenge for pastoral care is to address these systemic, deeply ingrained beliefs as part of its ministry to LGTBIQ.

In their article entitled "When Faith Does Violence, re-imagining engagement between churches and LGBTI groups on homophobia in Africa," West, Kaoma, and Van der Walt argue for the "epistemological privilege" of LGTBIQ as the interlocutors of theologies of resistance:

> Liberation theologies have made such a commitment the starting point of the doing of theology. The epistemological privileging of particular marginalized experience is what characterizes liberation theologies. (2017, p. 9)

They also propose a minimum pastoral care response to LGTBIQ that needs to be practiced by all churches irrespective of their theological views.

> By constructing theological resources that facilitate and enable a minimal pastoral response that is life-affirming and dignity-granting for queer Christians our churches will have some minimal capacity for theological change. Fortunately, Jesus reminds us in the parable of the mustard seed that the beginnings of redemptive faith need only be small (Mark 4:30-32). (West, Kaoma, and Van der Walt, 2017, p. 31)

The experiences of marginalization described in these two cases serve to highlight the necessity of a comprehensive theology and practice of pastoral care that extends to all vulnerable groups without exception. Many of the root causes of vulnerability are in unjust social, cultural, and religious practices and beliefs which need to be deconstructed and reconstructed so that pastoral care can truly be an expression of the ideals of society embedded in the mission of churches.

Conclusion

This article attempted to respond to the challenges of exclusion of the most vulnerable groups from adequate and comprehensive pastoral care, and that despite the fact that the social teachings of Catholic and Protestant churches claim to be based on a fundamental commitment to the poor, the marginalized, and the vulnerable. The disjuncture often occurs because of the surfacing of highly contested and controversial taboo themes which stigmatize and alienate marginalized groups. Yet these issues are unavoidable and provide opportunities for contextually mediated knowledge as evidenced in liberation theologies that critique, transform, and act on the basis of

the experiences of vulnerable groups merging the ideals of justice, human dignity, and common good that underlie Christianity and offer new avenues and horizons for pastoral care that is inclusive of all persons. Therefore, these issues behoove the church to try to correct its shortcomings and develop a quality of pastoral care that brings the best of the church to the most vulnerable.

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