

JUSTICE NOT SILENCE

CHURCHES FACING SEXUAL AND
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

EDITORS

Ezra Chitando
Sophia Chirongoma

EFSA |

INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL &
INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

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Series Editor

Renier Koegelenberg

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Justice Not Silence: Churches facing sexual and gender-based violence

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EFS A

INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL & INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa (EFS A)

The EFS A Institute, founded in 1990, is an independent ecumenical institute that functions as a division of the non-profitable "Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust" (CDDC). Trustees include Dr Welile Mazamisa, Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Dr André van Niekerk, Prof. Russel Botman and Dr Renier Koegelenberg. It consists of a unique network of participating institutions: representatives of the Faculties of Theology and the Departments of Religious Studies of the Universities in the Western Cape are represented on the Board and Executive of the EFS A Institute.

Generally speaking, the EFS A Institute attempts to promote consensus between different sectors, interest groups and stakeholders on the challenges and problems facing our society. It strives to play a facilitating role by providing a platform for public debate, even of controversial issues.

Both in its structure and function there is a dialectic tension between an academic (research-based) approach and the need to address specific needs of the church and other religious communities. This tension is embedded in the main issues facing the churches in our society. In a general sense the EFS A Institute tries to focus public attention (and the attention of the church or academic institutions) on specific problems in society.

Currently, the focus is on the following priorities.

Firstly, the *development role of the church* and other religious communities: the eradication of poverty in South Africa; the role of religious networks in community development, in social and welfare services; and the development of community and youth leadership.

Secondly, the *healing and reconciliatory role of the church* and other religious communities: this includes a project on the role of women in the healing of our violent society; the mobilisation of the church and religious communities against crime and violence; and the breaking down of stereotypes (racism) in our society.

Thirdly, the *formation of values in the strengthening of a moral society by the church* and other religious communities: the promotion of moral values such as honesty; support for the weak; respect for life and human rights.

Fourthly, the *development of youth and community leadership*: special courses for the development of leadership skills among our youth have been developed and are presented to support the building of a new society.

It is also significant that the EFS A Institute acts as Secretariat to the National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD), which is a Principal Recipient of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in South Africa. It is also a partner of Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa (JHHESA – a USAID funded programme). It currently serves as the national secretariat of the religious sector – for the South African National Aids Council (SANAC).

These priorities cannot be separated from one another, since many of the complex social issues are interrelated.

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FOREWORD

The editors of this volume highlight the fact that although the Church often stands up for other public issues such as human rights, democratic political rights, economic justice, etc., sexual and gender-based violence do not receive the attention they deserve. There are no theological or cultural arguments that can justify such a position. Sexual and gender-based violence are a scourge that defies our Christian understanding of human dignity – and challenges the Church in all its formations to respond. Although most of the case studies are from Zimbabwe, they challenge us regardless of which country we are living in – or the tradition of our specific denomination.

In the context of Southern Africa, where the HIV and AIDS burden is among the highest in the world, sexual and gender-based violence are a major contributor to the spread of the disease. This will only change if the Church challenges this practice as part of its educational and public work – in theological institutions, in congregations, but also in its pastoral work within families.

Renier Koegelenberg

INTRODUCTION

Justice Not Silence

Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has emerged as one of the most demanding theological challenges of our time. Its contribution to the spread of HIV necessitates urgent action by churches. Defying nationality, social class and geographical location, SGBV is widespread. Zimbabwean militias rape women supporters of the opposition party to punish them for being “sell-outs” and to convert them to the “revolutionary path/party.” In the Democratic Republic of Congo a woman has a bayonet pushed through her vagina. In Nigeria, a woman is saved from death through stoning on the basis of a legal technicality as a version of sharia law had been invoked to punish her. In Ethiopia a young girl is ambushed and sexually assaulted while coming home from school. In Kenya a school teacher forces himself on a schoolgirl, while in Malawi a husband beats his wife for “bad cooking.” In South Africa a young man kicks his girlfriend for receiving “a suspicious call” on her mobile phone. The examples could be multiplied, but the motivation tends to be the same: men expressing their power, control and dominance over women. Across the region many women have lamented, “let me not die before my time” (IRC 2012). Although some women do commit acts of violence (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008:7-8), by far more men than women are the perpetrators of SGBV.

While there are now signs of progress (as seen, for example, in the increasing number of church leaders preaching against SGBV, theological institutions that address this theme and ecumenical initiatives that seek to tackle SGBV), the eloquent silence of the churches has been striking. Most churches and theological institutions have not responded to SGBV in a dynamic and liberating manner. Rather, they have tended to be consumed by “more heavenly” matters, leaving many women and some men bleeding. Instead of being prophetic and insisting on justice, churches appear to be signatories to the “covenant of violence” against women (Maluleke and Nadar 2002).

Although the media tend to focus on the use of rape as a weapon of war (for example, in the eastern DRC), there are many other forms of gender-based violence that have caused untold suffering in the sub-region. In the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), a programme of the World Council

of Churches (WCC), there has been a deliberate move to include the “sexual” dimension of gender-based violence as there has been a tendency to understate this form of violence. According to Philomena Mwaura:

Gender-based violence refers to any harm that is perpetrated against a person as a result of the gender power inequalities that exist among males and females. It is an umbrella term covering any act of violence inflicted on a person primarily because of their gender. Gender-based violence is often a display of male power which manifests itself in various forms including physical, psychological, cultural, economic and sexual (Mwaura 2009:102).

Upholding justice: churches and the necessity of responding to sexual and gender-based violence

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) has been insistent and consistent in its call for justice in the face of SGBV and HIV. The quest for justice (see, among others, Dube and Kanyoro 2004) and women’s health (Phiri and Nadar 2006) can only be achieved when SGBV and HIV have been overcome. The call by the Circle is endorsed by millions of women in Africa and throughout the world. Critical to this vision is the realisation that women are human.

Recognising the humanity of women goes beyond mere verbal articulation. It must be reflected in the churches’ practices. It must be evident in the way that churches and theological institutions approach gender issues. It must be expressed in the churches’ advocacy within the larger society. The Circle has been voicing these concerns for many years now, but the wheels of the patriarchal churches and communities turn very slowly. Informed by her interaction with the Circle, Margaret A. Farley writes:

[But] women remain blatantly excluded from leadership and decision-making roles in tribes, in civil government, and in churches, temples, and mosques. Patterns of gender discrimination are perpetuated through cultural and religious reinforcement of economic dependence and passive rather than active roles for women in both the public and the private spheres (Farley 2008:48).

Churches can respond to SGBV effectively if they set their priorities right. For example, why do male church leaders seem to have limitless energy when it comes to debates on homosexuality, but they appear frozen when it comes to confronting SGBV? Why is that many of them are eloquent when it comes to challenging colonialism, but are completely speechless when the issue of sexism comes up?

Churches and theological institutions do not have the luxury of choosing whether or not to respond to SGBV. Since the issue of justice lies at the heart of SGBV,

churches and theological institutions have an obligation to respond to it. The mission of the churches necessarily entails challenging all forces and processes that diminish health and wellbeing. By adopting the strategies suggested by the various authors in this volume, churches can contribute towards the creation of a more just and humane world.

Locating this volume

This volume is located firmly within EHAIA's vision of promoting HIV-competent churches, theological institutions and communities (Parry 2008). It carries forward the vision of the Circle of exposing injustices against women and children, as well as promoting the quest for abundant life for all. The volume seeks to contribute to the growth of a literature equipping churches and theological institutions to address violence against women and children adequately (see for example, Adams and Fortune 1998), but with a bias towards addressing African contexts.

The chapters in this volume engage with the issue of SGBV and demonstrate the need for balance when responding to the question: "Is religion dangerous?" (Ward 2006:7). Various authors highlight the extent to which religion has been deployed to justify SGBV, thereby confirming the 'dangerous' side of religion. However, they also illustrate how religion can be appropriated to challenge SGBV, thereby showing the 'liberating' potential of religion. Like earlier publications such as *Rape: Rethinking Male Responsibility* (Conradie and Clowes 2003) and *Men in the Pulpit, Women in the Pew? Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa* (Hendriks et al. 2012), this volume seeks to mobilise churches and theological institutions to concentrate on the liberating dimension of religion.

Contributors to this volume are united in the quest to overcome women's subordination (Uchem 2001), nurture redemptive masculinities (Chitando and Chirongoma 2012) and to journey with churches and theological institutions as they seek to accompany survivors of SGBV in the quest to redeem the past (Lapsley 2012). The volume seeks to empower church leaders and theological educators to see human beings behind the statistics that are cited during the annual 16 Days of Activism against SGBV. According to Donald E. Messer, "[s]tatistics are simply nameless numbers or, as the African proverb proclaims, statistics are numbers without tears" (Messer 2010:6).

The title is influenced by the volume *Justice Not Greed* (Brubaker and Mshana 2010), which calls for the transformation of the global financial system in order to promote justice. We contend that churches have not always sought justice in the wake of SGBV. Instead, most have been silent. Therefore, we call upon churches to seek justice and to speak out and act against SGBV.

The Chapters

Section A

Chapters in Section A outline the challenge of SGBV. They highlight various contexts of vulnerability to SGBV and draw attention to the need for churches to prioritise responding to SGBV. In Chapter 1 Nyambura Njoroge provides the background to the volume. She explores the way churches have dealt with women, children and people with disability. Adopting a prophetic stance, she charges that churches have been characterised by a 'deafening silence' in relation to SGBV. Worse still, many male church leaders and administrators at theological institutions actively seek to silence those who try to expose SGBV. The girl child has been particularly vulnerable to SGBV. In Chapter 2 Beatrice Okyere-Manu tackles the theme of the girl child in the context of SGBV in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. She explores the challenges faced by churches and proposes strategies that could enhance their capacity. Many house helps endure SGBV at the hands of some male members of the household. In Chapter 3 Obvious Vengeyi discusses this phenomenon from a social justice perspective. Inspired by the prophet Amos, he challenges churches to do more to address the situation of house helps. Elizabeth Vengeyi critiques SGBV in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 Viola Ingwani details the reality of SGBV in a specific ethnic community. She examines SGBV among the Shangaan people in Southern Zimbabwe.

Section B

Chapters in Section B describe the occurrence of SGBV in churches. They challenge the assumption that SGBV occurs "out there."

African Initiated Churches (AICs) represent one strand of African Christianity that has enjoyed considerable scholarly attention. However, studies on the impact of AIC ideologies on the rights of women and children have been limited. For example, the patriarchal preoccupation with faith healing has led to the deaths of many children in Zimbabwe (Maguranyanga 2011). In Chapter 6 Richard Maposa and Fortune Sibanda examine the rights of women in the African Apostolic Church of Paul Mwazha. However, it would be unfair for one conclude that only AICs face the challenge of SGBV. Established "mainline" churches are equally struggling to attain gender justice. In Chapter 7 Godfrey Museka, Morrin Phiri and Manasa M. Madondo highlight the quest for gender justice in the Catholic Church. Sibanda and Maposa draw attention to the challenges that women face in the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe in Chapter 8.

Pentecostalism represents the fastest growing strand of African Christianity. However, it has a divided legacy in relation to SGBV. In Chapter 9 Molly Manyonganise focuses on how the United Family International Church, one of the most significant Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, seeks to address GBV. In Chapter 10 Kudzai Biri examines the approach adopted by the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) in the face of SGBV.

Section C

Chapters in Section C build on the foregoing sections and seek to provide strategies to empower churches to face SGBV more effectively. Churches' women's organisations have tended to promote patriarchal values in the name of upholding "old-time religion." In Chapter 11 Charles Chindomu and Eunica E. Matizanhuka illustrate how the Anglican Mothers' Union (Diocese of Manicaland, Zimbabwe) has utilised the Tamar Campaign to address SGBV. In Chapter 12 Lovemore Togarasei shows how a liberating hermeneutic can be applied to a specific New Testament concept (headship) to promote gender justice. The value of effective pastoral care and counselling to survivors of SGBV is highlighted by Indileni Hilikiluah in Chapter 13, while in Chapter 14 Tapiwa P. Mapuranga recommends the retrieval of positive cultural values to address SGBV. Njoroge questions the stereotype of women as powerless and passive victims by highlighting various initiatives that women have undertaken to challenge SGBV in Chapter 15. In Chapter 16 Pauline Njiru Wanjiru and Ezra Chitando illustrate how the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) methodology has enabled men to participate in the struggle against SGBV.

The essays in this volume challenge churches and theological institutions to become agents of social transformation in the wake of SGBV. If African theologians have said, "Elmina never again" (Muller 2012) with special reference to the enslavement of Africans, today we are challenged to say "Sexual and gender-based violence never again."

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