

**THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
NATAL COASTAL DISTRICT**



**On 14 March 2012 the Natal Coastal District Ministers' seminar focused on
Human Sexuality.**

The following is a paper presented by Rev Phezile Koekoe

HUMAN SEXUALITY FROM THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

14 March 2012

This paper seeks to explore how we can rediscover the theology of human Sexuality from the South African Context as the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This paper calls for theological and Pastoral response that will demonstrate how the Methodist church of Southern Africa could influence our communities to transform the current sexual moral decay in our societies.

The point of departure in dealing with the theme of Human Sexuality it is to acknowledge the fact that our churches have sometimes unintentionally condoned the sexual immoral decay in our societies by its silence about sexuality or by its negative theological approaches they have thought about sexuality. Sexual sin has been stigmatized above all other sins in our societies and communities.

Human Sexuality is a broad concept that includes aspects of the physical, psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual makeup of an individual. It is not limited to the physical or biological reproductive elements and behaviour, but encompasses the manner in which individuals use their own roles, relationships, values, customs, and gender.

I was reluctant when the Bishop asked me to come and talk in the seminar I didn't know his intention, but I came because as the African child I was thought to respect the elders so I came. As an African child who was raised in a traditional conservative homestead, whereby as the child such

topics I cannot raise them with the elders, it's a taboo to talk about sexuality with elders, that's the discipline that shaped me as I grew up.

When we talk about Human sexuality we need to note the context which we talking about, this means we should value the context because we don't talk about sexuality in the vacuum but we talking about Human sexuality from South African context which means the context informs our behaviour and shape our understanding of human sexuality.

When we clearly define the context in which we talk Human Sexuality, we will not talk out of context, African context is diverse community but has some common values that makes us to be a unique continent: John Mbiti suggest that these values include the following African Cultural Values includes: **(i) Sense of community life;** A popular African proverb comes to mind here to express the African sense of community. It

says: "Go the way that many people go; if you go alone, you will have reason to lament"¹. The African idea of security and its value depends on personal identification with and within the community. **(ii) Sense of good human relations;** Living among an African people as a concept which is defined as "...a way of life emphatically centred upon human interests and values; a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, and by consideration and compassion for human beings" **(iii) Sense of the sacredness of life;** The Africans prize life above every other thing. life is supreme - is expressive of the African regard for life. Any form of materialism which ultimately leads to the destruction of life is alien and destructive of the African culture and concept of human life and should therefore be avoided **(iv) Sense of hospitality;** The African sense of hospitality is one of the African values that is still quite alive. In traditional African culture, whenever there is food to be taken, everyone present is invited to participate even if the food was prepared for far less number of people without anticipating the arrival of visitors. It would be a height of incredible bad manners for one to eat anything however small, without sharing it with anyone else present, or at least expressing the intention to do so. **(vii) Sense of respect for authority and the elders;** Africans

generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that his grey hairs have earned him right to courtesy and politeness". Though it is natural for the African to respect, an elder, this respect in some cases, can be relative to what "we can find" and admire in an elder. It is true that respect for elder's starts within one's immediate family.

As we address this topic we must know that these values inform our community, it is simply because of these African values, which are not contradictory with the gospel values of Christ. As the church it is our Christian calling to uphold the standard of these gospel values and African values because we are a church in Africa not in Europe, so the way we express our faith is shaped by our backgrounds.

When as the church we see the decline of the sexual moral values in our context we cant just keep quite and pretend as if everything goes well, when its not.

Japhet Ndlovu in the book called "One Body volume One" comments in his chapter "Sexuality and HIV AIDS STIGMA", he says we are created in the image and likeness of God, sexuality is part of the creation of human nature. God created us as sexual human beings in all our differences and this sexuality is to be celebrated, enjoyed and treated responsible. So the church needs to talk positively about sexuality and bring out good stories and lessons about sexuality. The church in dealing with sexuality it needs to respond vocally, with the attitude of Jesus who crossed the boundaries of prejudice and fear and reached out and addressed issues in the society which were taboo, touching lepers, associating with those accused of adultery, associating with those who had no good historical sexually background women at the well, Jesus broke down the barriers and challenged the customs that alienate and embodies his convictions about the inclusive meaning of the reign of God.

The silence that is happening about sexuality in our church, contributes in the moral decline in our communities, we cannot buy umbrellas when it is raining, you buy umbrella before it rains, therefore you cannot address

issues of sexuality when young teenagers are pregnant, when you see the high rate of children out of wedlock, when you see instability in marriages, when you see the rapid spread of Sexually transmitted disease. We need to be proactive and prepare before things get worse, by being open enough to address these issues, if it goes to a push the traditional boundaries should be crossed now to break the silence because, the absence of open communication about sexuality implicates to various challenges in our communities. The church needs to address the Ethics of sexuality, God created us to enjoy sexual relationships and in treasuring this gift, there are values that are to be attached such as respect, responsibility, caring, forgiving, loving and equality, these values need to be thought in pulpit, small groups bible studies, manyano's, cell groups in all spheres of the church to help us to embody these values. To break the silence in the church it won't be an easy thing because there are barriers like cultural, social, and political so those in leadership are afraid that the breaking of the silence will cause crisis or conflict within the life of the church. throughout the history of the church it is evident that to address some challenges within the life of the church, it is costly there should be crisis or conflict, because we learn through the eyes of church history that Martin Luther when he wanted to address the challenges of Catholic church there was reformation which broke the church and some were killed and some were tortured but at the end reformation of the church was reformed and it brought life and healing in the communities, it is costly to break that silence as it will leave other church members wounded and also will uproot other social, cultural barriers that sexuality is not a subject to be publicly discussed.

Sources :

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4. John Mbiti. 1992. African Religions and Philosophy. Heinemann Educational Books