

Toward a feminist ecclesiology of memory and hope in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic

by Yvonne Janine Manske



Assignment presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Divinity at the University of Stellenbosch

Supervisor: Dr. Robert Vosloo

December 2006

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Abstract

HIV/AIDS has a great impact on lives of all South Africans – but especially on women. HIV/AIDS also presents the greatest threat and danger to the ones living in poverty and without sufficient education and independence in relationships –that mostly includes South African women. In a first chapter I will discuss the connection between poverty and HIV/AIDS as well as between HIV/AIDS and the status of women in South Africa. In a second chapter I want to discuss a feminist ecclesiology of memory and hope and how it is presented by the catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson. In a third chapter I want to use the feminist ecclesiology of memory and hope to link it with the context of South Africa. In that last part I want to give a framework of the effect that a feminist ecclesiology of memory and hope could have on the South African society.

Abstrak

HIV/VIGS het 'n groot impak op die lewe van alle Suid-Afrikaners - veral op die lewens van vroue. HIV/VIGS is ook een van die grootste bedreigings en gevare vir mense wat in armoede leef en geen toegang het tot voldoende onderrig en onafhanklikheid in verhoudings nie. Vroue word weereens die meeste geïmpakkeer. In die eerste hoofstuk sal ek hierdie verhouding tussen armoede en HIV/VIGS bespreek sowel as tussen HIV/AIDS en die status van vroue in Suid-Afrika. In die tweede hoofstuk wil ek die boek aangaande 'n feministiese ekklesiologie deur die katolieke feministiese teoloog Elizabeth A. Johnson bespreek. In die derde hoofstuk wil ek hierdie feministiese ekklesiologie van herinnering en hoop gebruik en dit toepas op die konteks van Suid-Afrika. In die laaste hoofstuk wil ek 'n raamwerk oor die effek wat hierdie feministiese ekklesiologie van herinnering en hoop op die Suid-Afrikaanse gemeenskap kan hê, weergee.

1 Corinthians 12: ¹² *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*
¹³ *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

Galatians 3: ²⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Preface.....	1
Chapter 1.: HIV/AIDS and gender relations.....	3
1.1. The pandemic character of HIV/AIDS: Facts and possible causes.....	3
1.2. Just gender relations	6
1.3. Women and violence in South Africa	8
1.4. An unholy alliance: gender inequality and poverty in South Africa.....	9
1.5. The metaphors of HIV/AIDS	10
1.6. An exploration of the virgin myth in South Africa	11
1.7. Stigma: A challenge to the church	13
Chapter 2: A theology of memory and hope.....	16
2.1. Elizabeth A. Johnson: A short biographical sketch.....	17
2.2. The communion of memory and hope in the Feminist Theological Reading of Elizabeth A. Johnson.....	18
2.3. The communion of saints: The symbol and the metaphor	19
2.4. Strategies for a “new” history	21
2.5. Friends of God and prophets?	22
2.6. Memory and Identity	23
2.6.1. Recovering Lost Memory: Hagar.....	24
2.6.2. The ‘thousand faces’ of Mary of Nazareth.....	25
2.6.3. Rectifying the Distorted Story: Mary Magdalene	28
2.6.4. Phoebe of Cenchrae – A female Christian leader	31
2.6.5. Reassessing Value: The Virgin Martyrs.....	32
2.7. Unity in hope.....	33
Chapter 3: A theology of memory and hope for South African women	34
3.1. A theology of interrelatedness.....	35
3.2. Toward an inclusive Christology	36
3.3. Memory and Identity: The Story-telling method	38
3.4. Hope in remembrance	40
3.5. The role of lament for hope in remembrance.....	41
Epilogue.....	44
Bibliography	46

“I only found out when I came across his medication. I was devastated. Fifteen years of marriage and two wonderful children and I never suspected that he was leading a double life. What a fool I have been! I thought we were a pretty good family. We go to church, we pay our taxes, and we work hard. Now my life is shattered. I waited for a year. I was too afraid to go for a test. Last week I heard the worst. I am positive. My children are still so young. What will happen to them? I wonder where God is in all this. But I know that only he can give me the courage to pick up the pieces of my life.” Judy (aged 38 years)¹

Preface

A responsible behaviour toward HIV/AIDS is very important for the church to show the loving embrace of Christ to all its members. Furthermore, the church has to change its behaviour towards woman in general and HIV-infected women in particular.

The purpose of this study will be to interpret Elizabeth Johnson’s book *“Friends of God and Prophet - A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints”* against the background of the situation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa. Other material will also be used to give some impression of the South-African/African situation of women in the light of the danger of HIV/AIDS, as well as to give an overview about the gender-relations which make them (with their children) the most vulnerable group to HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This study wants to focus on the value of a feminist ecclesiology of memory and hope in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Elizabeth A. Johnson’s notion of church as a communion of saints will be investigated in this context. In the process, I want to focus on the importance of gender equality and an inclusive ecclesiology that would serve the church as a whole, as well as the broader society.

A word about my social location: Coming from Germany I am a middle-class woman who is doing a Master thesis. I am in South Africa for one year. I have hardly seen any other country than Germany. While HIV/AIDS is also an important topic in Germany, like many other countries today, it is a cruel fact that South Africa is the country with the highest HIV/AIDS rate in the world, followed by its neighbour, Namibia. As a whole, the Sub-Saharan region is affected with the problem of HIV/AIDS more than all other regions

¹ Women, p. 1.

in the world. Accordingly, questions arise like ‘why is it like that?’ and ‘what are the main issues that let this pandemic develop and grow more than anywhere else in the world?’ Obviously, there exist certain reasons that, on the one hand make it so easy for the pandemic to grow here and on the other hand make it so difficult to fight this pandemic.

Questions like that made me interested in knowing the factors that led, and unfortunately still lead, to that pandemic and that build the actual setting for it. In general it is, in my opinion, necessary to be aware of the issues about the pandemic to avoid often made mistakes, like stigmatizing the HIV-victims or avoiding them because infection can happen more easily than one might think and for more or different reasons than one might take into consideration. For me personally, it is crucial to know as many facts and to collect as much knowledge as possible about this sensitive topic, because firstly, I chose to live here for one year and I want to know and be informed about the biggest and most urgent problems that affect the country I live in. Secondly, in the time of globalization there is no one that is not affected by an epidemic of this extent. And that is also very true for the churches in our day: We can’t oversee and what is more, we are not allowed to close our eyes before this big issue facing humanity. Because the saying is true that the body of Christ, and so the church, is HIV positive.²

It is also a fact that an increasing number of infected people in South Africa are women and girls.³ And as I am a woman I am questioning myself ‘why is it like that?’ and ‘what makes women more affected by this pandemic?’ According to these questions, my thesis should take these into consideration and, if possible, try to give answers to these questions. These are my personal interests.

Additionally, throughout my studies in Germany I have been interested in feminist theology. But I never really reached the point where I can spend some time struggling with that topic.

Now that I am here in Stellenbosch I want to use the opportunity to have a closer look at some feminist theologies. Elizabeth A. Johnson, a feminist theologian from Northern America, and Prof. Denise M. Ackermann, to mention just two, are the theologians from that field who I will have a closer look at.

² JTSA 125, p.44; see also ‘Grant Me Justice!’, p. 40: “If we are truly one, we are the church with HIV and AIDS.

³ Almost 60% of the infected people in Sub-Saharan Africa are women and girls today.

Chapter 1: HIV/AIDS and gender relations

In this chapter, which will serve as an introduction to the whole discussion, I want to focus on women and their social status in South Africa, as well as on how that status makes them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS in particular. The *status quo* which I am writing from is that women are disadvantaged in gender relations in social life as well as in the church.

1.1. The pandemic character of HIV/AIDS: Facts and possible causes

Never in the history of pandemics has one seen such a persistent increase in the number of people infected over such a prolonged period of time. Epidemics usually have been characterised by sharp rises in infection rates, followed by similarly sharp declines once appropriate management measures are taken. HIV/AIDS defies this ‘law of epidemics’ since its inception, partly, because of its long incubation period.

Susan Sontag who is one of America’s best known writers states that epidemics are usually thought of as plagues. She is an American essayist, short story writer, and novelist; a leading commentator on modern culture whose innovative essays on such diverse subjects as pornographic literature, fascist aesthetics, photography, AIDS, and revolution gained much attention. Sontag also wrote screenplays and directed films. She had a great impact on experimental art in the 1960s and 1970s, and she introduced many new stimulating ideas to American culture. She lived from 1933-2004.⁴ Epidemics that are thought of as plagues are mostly understood as inflicted, not just endured. Considering illness as a punishment is the oldest idea of what causes illness.⁵ Plagues are habitually regarded as judgements on society, and the metaphoric heightening of HIV/AIDS in such a judgement also accustoms people to the inevitability of global spread. This is the traditional view of sexually transmitted diseases; it is described as punishments not just of individuals but of a group.⁶

Nowhere is the catastrophic impact of HIV/AIDS more apparent than in the region of Southern Africa. South Africa has, in numbers, the highest rate of infection in the world.

⁴ See <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/sontag.htm>.

⁵ Metaphor, p. 131.

⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

More than five million South Africans are currently HIV positive. One should ask: what happens – economically and socially – to societies in which this occurs?

Furthermore, more than half of the over 17 million affected people all over the world are Africans. In 2005, 39.4 million persons live with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and 25.4 million (64% of them) reside in sub-Saharan Africa, as are more than three quarters (77%) of all women living with HIV.⁷ In Africa, the disease is mainly transmitted through heterosexual sex; whereas, in the developed world, contaminated needles of intravenous drug abusers and homosexual male sex are also major contributors to its persistent spread.⁸

Every year UNAIDS⁹ releases new data on the extent of the epidemic across the world.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, more women are infected with HIV than men, with 13 women living with HIV for every 10 infected men and the gap continues to grow. Throughout the region, women are being infected with HIV at an earlier age than men. The differences in infection levels between women and men are most pronounced among young people (aged 15–24 years). In this age group, there are 36 women living with HIV for every 10 men. The widespread prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, the practice of transfusion, and the poor state of hygiene and nutrition in Africa may all be facilitating factors in the transmission of HIV in this region. In 2000, the World Health Organization estimated that 25% of the units of blood transfused in Africa were not tested for HIV, and that 5–10% of HIV infections in Africa were transmitted via blood.

Poor economic conditions (leading to the use of dirty needles in healthcare clinics) and lack of sex education contribute to high rates of infection. In some African countries, 25% or more of the working adult population is HIV-positive.

In South Africa, President Thabo Mbeki has in the past questioned the connection between HIV and AIDS, hinting instead at the possibility of factors such as undernourishment being one of the causes of the disease. While South Africa has created preventative programs and research initiatives to address its HIV problem, critics charge that the South African government has been slow to create antiretroviral programs and take other effective medical steps to stop the epidemic. UNAIDS estimates that in 2005 there

⁷ Ethics and AIDS in Africa, introduction; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS_pandemic.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 1996: United Nations sets up the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS); Introduction of the viral load test, a yardstick of disease progression.

were 5.5 million people in South Africa living with HIV — 12.4% of the population. This was an increase of 200,000 people since 2003.¹⁰

Possible answers that could be given to the questions mentioned above are as follows:

Firstly, HIV/AIDS is sustained and fed by a shortcoming of education in general and about the pandemic and its reasons in particular.¹¹ Of course, a main reason why the problem harms South Africa to this extent is poverty. The unfair and unjust distribution of all property and possession in South Africa is a fact that multiplies problems in different areas of life.

Secondly, it also has consequences on gender relations. The gender inequality in South Africa, and vulnerability of women, also has a worsening effect on women's victimhood of HIV/AIDS. As long as there is gender inequality and poverty, there will be violence in South Africa. That is a fact for South Africa as well as for every other country. It is a fact that violence will always first reload towards the weaker and more vulnerable persons in a society: mostly women and children.

Thirdly, the role of global politics, especially the exploitation, discrimination and imperialism by first world countries towards sub-Saharan Africa, plays a major role in answering why South Africa in particular is affected by HIV/AIDS to such a large extent.¹² Another fact that has negative effects on the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic is that poor people, who do not have the good fortune to get education easily (or sometimes not at all), are often illiterate. Once again, women are also the group that has the least education, for reasons like: 'There is no use of a girl getting education because what she will do in her future is to be a housewife and a mother'. If that is her role, so why send her to school and waste money and in the meantime lose help in the household?¹³ Sadly, that attitude towards gender was also sustained and built by the church. Tertullian and Augustine are only two examples in church history that strengthened andocentric thought in Christianity.¹⁴

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS_pandemic.

¹¹ As an example see the chapter in this mini-thesis "An exploration of the virgin myth in South Africa".

¹² Ethics and AIDS in Africa, Introduction.

¹³ Surprisingly, also in a developed country like Germany there is a very well known thinking about women still present: the k-k-k-thinking (the three k's) about women; what means: Kinder-Küche-Kirche, what means translated that women are competent in the field of children, kitchen and the church. That makes me think about, if a thinking like that is still vivid in a developed country, how much more must prejudices like that be alive in poorer less developed country?

¹⁴ Tertullian is famous for his view of woman as the temptress: "Do you not realize that you are each an Eve? The curse of God on this sex of yours lives on even in our times. Guilty, you must bear its hardship. You are the devil's gateway; you desecrated the fatal tree; you first betrayed the law of God; you softened up with your cajoling words the one against whom the devil could not prevail by force. All too easily you destroyed

Denial and poor leadership are only two more reasons that are specific mistakes of the church that pushed the spread of the disease. For a long period of time HIV/AIDS has been seen by many people as a result of sin. Accordingly, people who are HIV-positive often did not dare and still do not dare to talk about their problems to church leaders and church members. They do not ask the church for help because of their reasonable fear of being declined. Furthermore, many Christians and church leaders still have problems speaking openly about sexuality. But this is necessary if we want to speak about HIV/AIDS and its prevention. The ability of the church and its members to talk about sexuality is also not to be underestimated if we want to help youth to develop a responsible sexual behaviour.

1.2. Just gender relations

A sad fact and experience of women still present in our day is that they are often belittled. To go into detail, a common experience of women around the world is that they are identified with children. All around the world, women are still confined to children, kitchen and church. Women are also subjected to verbal abuse, where the language is often of the crudest kind. Such language reflects deep ideological disregard and oppression, in which women are considered inferior. One can see this by the example that gay men are often belittled by being called “women” or being identified with women. Only the fact that such identification is considered as an insult attests to the low status of women in many cultures.¹⁵

Women of working classes and from the so-called third world are without doubt oppressed. They carry a double work role, both in and out of the home, under the most unfavourable conditions – low payment, no child care and inadequate transportation are the norm. Additionally, liberal reforms may have the effect of taking away traditional protections without providing new ones.¹⁶

In my opinion, the most crucial factor why women in South Africa are more often the victims of HIV/AIDS is because they are more vulnerable, due to gender inequality. The

the image of God, Adam. You are the one who deserved death, and yet it was the Son of God who had to die.” Concerning Augustine there are dozens of statements in his writings that make andocentrism out to be the very nature of things. See Consider Jesus, p. 101.

¹⁵ Justice, p. 23.

¹⁶ Ibid.

dependency of women on their husbands is a contributing factor that makes them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.¹⁷ So a big task for society and the church must be the empowerment of women that they can take control of their own lives in a world with HIV/AIDS instead of being dependent. One way of empowerment will be unfolded in the next chapter when I am going to discuss Elizabeth A. Johnson's feminist understanding of the communion of saints.

In the conference of the United Nations in Beijing in 1995 it was stated and found true that women's concerns are still not given priority in most countries. Accordingly, women are facing discrimination in both subtle and obvious ways. Women do not share equally in the outcomes of production. And women constitute 70% of the people living in poverty. The fact is that women and men are still living in an unequal world. Women are mostly excluded in the political decision-making process. Results are mentioned above, but it should also be mentioned in its ethical context that women's rights and those of their children are violated. They also, as a consequence, do not have the same access to education and to health care, a fact that makes a horrible contribution to the vulnerability of women in being infected with HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

Furthermore, violence is directed against women in the home, in the public, as well as in war; including rape as an instrument of control. Women are dehumanized into sex objects by the media in a consumer culture and degradation directly affects the well-being of poor women in particular.

An outcome of these facts is that women's issues are global and universal. They are basically issues of humanity hence women's access to power and their equal participation in all spheres of society are factors of fundamental importance to achieve social justice, world peace as well as the development of the economy in harmony with the environment. As a result, the empowerment of women would not only confront sexism but also racism, classism, ageism, heterosexism, colonialism and supremacy over the earth.¹⁸

These ethical insights are the basis to be faithful and to understand religious beliefs, morals and rituals. Here we need to ask: If they do not liberate, for what reason are we having them in church; how true can they really be? Furthermore, if God is revealed in creation and Scripture as the life-giving source for all and everything, if God cares for us

¹⁷ Even though it should be mentioned here that dependency has not only negative connotations. In fact relationships consist of mutual dependency. But in the case of my argument it is the unwilling dependency (of economic nature) of women to men as a one-sided issue that makes them more vulnerable of abuse than men.

¹⁸ See Friends, p. 37.

and everything in the world, then Christian teaching and Christian deeds must serve that care to be obedient to God. That is the task of every Christian and the Church. The sad truth is that it is different also, and maybe especially, in church – at least proclaiming of gender inequality is an old tradition in churches. In many churches it is still the norm that gender injustice is announced publicly, and what is more, it is accepted. Everything with gender injustice starts with the language of God. In most churches a limited variety of metaphors for God are still used: In some congregations maybe only one is known because only one is proclaimed: God as the Father. But that is of course a very sad outcome facing the multitude of God's beings. And what is more: Such a limitation cuts back on the mystery of God. But that topic will be discussed in detail later on.

1.3. Women and violence in South Africa

South African women are living in one of the most violent countries in the world and they are, accordingly, disproportionately likely to be victims of violence. Thus, South Africa is one of the world's most deadly environments for women. Statistics tell that in post-apartheid South Africa women are more likely to be murdered and raped than anywhere else in the world. Their assailants are men of their own racial group. They are men South African women have intimate contact with in their every-day life.

Of course, violence takes place all across the barriers, but victims of a special case of violence, namely rape, are mostly concentrated among poor and disadvantaged women in South Africa. Hence, poor women in this country are more vulnerable to rape than those from more privileged classes, because they don't have private transport, they need to walk long distances and live in areas plagued by crime, gangsterism, overcrowding and poverty. They are also often required to leave and return home in the dark.¹⁹

What I want to show with these facts is that HIV/AIDS in South Africa is a gendered pandemic that is made worse by poverty, in which women's bodies are at the centre of the crisis. As such it requires a theological ethical response that is prepared to wrestle with the nature of gender inequity in our traditions and in our practices.

Firstly, HIV/AIDS presents a gendered pandemic, because the fact that women have an inferior status to men in society nurtures the spread of the pandemic. The problem is not

¹⁹ See Women, p. 4-5.

only about the questionable status of women in South African society but it is more specifically about the disordered nature of relationships between women and men (as the narrative of Judy at the beginning of this thesis shows).²⁰ The second reason for the pandemic character of HIV/AIDS is the global economic injustice that causes poverty.²¹ Thirdly, the reason why the virus is allowed to spread so rapidly is the attitude of denial and stigmatization. What that means for society and specifically for the church will be looked at in more detail in the last part of this chapter.

1.4. An unholy alliance: gender inequality and poverty in South Africa

As mentioned above, HIV/AIDS in South Africa has everything to do with gender relations and conditions of poverty. Understanding the relationship between gender inequality and poverty should be at the heart of all HIV/AIDS programmes and especially in the church. Gender inequality and the slow speed at which poverty is being tackled in South Africa are definitively the main problems that block effective HIV/AIDS prevention.

Furthermore, rural women who have little or no education at all and who live in traditional patriarchal relationships have limited access to information about HIV/AIDS, about how to protect themselves against being infected. They lack the skills and the power that are needed to discuss safer sex with their husbands or partners. However, like in the story told by Judy, simply being married presents a major risk to become infected with HIV/AIDS, because they have little control over abstinence or condom use in their home and they have no control over other sexual activities of their husbands.²² What is more, the epidemic affects men and women in different ways in different intensities. Responses to HIV/AIDS that focus on changing the behaviour of people do not always work for women. In fact they may, for above discussed reasons, place women at greater risk of HIV infection. Most women and girls do not knowingly take risks of being infected with HIV. They are vulnerable to HIV infection largely due to the behaviour of others. Women may

²⁰ What role the church can play at that place will be shown at a later part in this thesis.

²¹ Ironically, African countries are paying much more for repayments to developed countries than they are spending on health and education in their own country. See also the remark by the President “Health for the poor is a fundamental human right” by Thabo Mbeki, ANC Today 2-8 March 2001.

²² See Women, p. 8-9.

be forced into having sex through peer pressure, by sexually-experienced older men, or because they have no alternative means of earning an income.

1.5. The metaphors of HIV/AIDS

According to Susan Sontag these facts are even worsened by the reality that HIV/AIDS is labelled as death, as horror, as punishment, as crime and as shame. Language used in the media often forms and encourages inaccurate images about the pandemic, particularly among those who are not properly informed.²³

These metaphors apply to the way particularly feared diseases are imagined as an alien ‘other’, as enemies are in modern war; and the move to the demonization of the illness by the attribution of fault to the patient, no matter if patients are thought of as victims. Victims suggest innocence. And innocence, by the inevitable logic that governs all relational terms, suggests guilt.²⁴ But, of course, the sick must not be treated as guilty.²⁵

Military metaphors began more and more to infuse all aspects of the description of the medical situation since the invader was not seen as the illness but as the micro organism. The metaphor survives in public health education, where disease is regularly described as invading the society, and the efforts to reduce mortality from a given disease are called fight, struggle and war.²⁶ Military metaphors became popular early in the last century, during campaigns in World War I to educate people about syphilis and after the War about tuberculosis.²⁷ Furthermore, abuse of military metaphors may be inevitable in a capitalist society, a society that increasingly restricts the scope and credibility of appeals to ethical principle, in which it is thought foolish not to subject one’s actions to the calculus of self-interest and profitability. War-making is one of the few activities that is not supposed to be seen ‘realistically’. War is being defined as an emergency in which no sacrifice is excessive.²⁸ With that logic we can discover the vicious circle that makes a victim of someone who is also seen as guilty, because in this way of thinking he or she would have had the possibility to provide the disease.

²³ See Engaging Stigma, p. 6.

²⁴ See Metaphor, p. 97.

²⁵ See also: Vosloo, p. 3.

²⁶ See Sontag, p. 95.

²⁷ Sontag, p. 95.

²⁸ Sontag, p. 96/97.

In contrast to syphilis and cancer, which provide prototypes for most of the images and metaphors attached to HIV/AIDS, the very definition of HIV/AIDS requires the presence of other illnesses, so-called opportunistic infections. But though not in that sense a single disease, HIV/AIDS lends itself to being regarded as one – in part because, unlike cancer and syphilis, it is thought to have a single cause.

HIV/AIDS has a dual metaphoric genealogy. On the one hand it is described as an invasion (like cancer) and on the other hand as a pollution (like syphilis). But even though HIV/AIDS is described as an invasion like cancer, the military metaphors used to describe HIV/AIDS have a somewhat different focus from those used to describe cancer. When the metaphor is used for cancer it is about an invasion inside the body (the organs are overrun by a mutated cell). In the case of HIV/AIDS the enemy is what causes the disease, an infectious agent that comes from the outside.

The metaphoric trappings have real consequences: they hinder people from seeking treatment early enough, or from making a greater effort to get competent treatment. The metaphors and myths of HIV/AIDS kill. For instance, they make people irrationally fearful of effective measures for fighting against the disease.²⁹ In comparison to the military metaphor Susan Sontag makes use of, the symbol Elizabeth A. Johnson presents is the symbol of the ‘Communion of Saints’. Johnson’s thesis is that this symbol carries a liberating impulse that can disrupt present injustices and prejudices. Johnson’s symbol is an “icon” that has the power of bringing people with and without HIV/AIDS together at the one table of the Eucharist, which can fight these military metaphors embedded in the minds of the people. Instead of killing people, the symbol of the ‘Communion of Saints’ liberates and sets free for new life.

1.6. An exploration of the virgin myth in South Africa

To give a brief outline about the background of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa I want to give one example of misuse of the most vulnerable group in South African society, namely women, and more specifically, young girls, and in the extreme cases even

²⁹ Ibid., p. 99-100.

babies. To give this brief outline I will use the survey of the so-called virgin myth phenomenon of Jocelyn Newmarch published in an EFSA reader.³⁰

In South Africa the term virgin myth refers to the supposedly widespread belief that sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS. Numerous studies have been achieved which report high levels of belief in this myth in South Africa.³¹ A 2001 survey of 498 employees at Daimler Chrysler in East London found that 18% indicated that they believed in this myth. 32% of respondents in a 1999 participatory research study indicated that they also believed in the virgin myth. Others had not heard of it, but felt that the myth was plausible.³²

These facts are alarming and they make clear that better education in South Africa is necessary. This fact is, of course, also connected to the piece of information that education in South Africa is not available for everybody. The shortcoming of education in South Africa is a big issue that nourishes the pandemic in general and gives one answer to the question why South Africa is hit by the pandemic to such a large extent.

The question of the origin of this myth is not an easy one to answer. In fact, nobody can answer this question, although traditional healers have been blamed for its existence. It has been argued that the myth fits in with ideas of illness causation and healing. Accordingly, illness is seen as a state of ritual, magical and physical dirtiness.³³ In that sense, sex is seen as a process of ritual cleansing in certain contexts. Newmarch states “in that context it is entirely possible that the virgin myth, in a slightly different form, may have been around for some time and certainly predates the HIV epidemic.”³⁴ An important hint is given by Newmarch when she mentions that virgin the myth is a cross-cultural one and far from being unique to South African society.³⁵

One question would be the following: How does the HIV/AIDS pandemic correlate with the issue of rape in general and child rape in specific? Concerning that issue it cannot be neglected to mention that it is common knowledge that most HIV-infected people in South Africa are unaware of their status. Even if they suspect they are HIV positive, human psychology is of such a kind that they may well prefer not to be tested for the virus instead of having an insurance of being infected with HIV. Due to antenatal testing by clinics, women are far more likely than men to know their status. However, it remains possible that men who suspect that they are infected, but do not know for sure, or who do

³⁰ Rape, p. 103-130.

³¹ Ibid., p. 104.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

³⁵ Ibid.

not wish to contract the virus, may put their beliefs in the virgin myth into practice as insurance against the virus.³⁶

The symbol of the 'Communion of Saints' that consists of all believers that share equally in the Eucharist is a practice of memory (memory of all the named and unnamed that lived in the presence of and were affected by the Holy Spirit) and hope (hope of an equal sharing between all human beings and acceptance of all people by one another in the presence of God) that has the capability of empowering women as leaders in communities and women as a whole to help to fight the misuse of women such as in the case with the 'virgin myth'.

1.7. Stigma: A challenge to the church

There are countless stories in South Africa where people living with HIV/AIDS are too often seen as having behaved wrongly and shamefully, as being morally at fault and thus deserving nothing else but punishment, or as 'infectious' and therefore to be avoided. For example, one prejudice is that they are having sex with different partners or behaving in a morally incorrect way. But as I have already discussed, abstaining from sex until marriage and being faithful only works if both partners follow the same principles. So these values not always work for women like discussed above.

In this section I want to reflect on what could constitute an appropriate response on the part of the church as the community of believers to the stigma of HIV/AIDS infected women in order to clarify and strengthen their roles in combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Before I will start to attempt an answer, I want to mention that our actions are concrete manifestations of who we are and what we believe. Thus my theological responses reflect a great interest in the embodied actions of the church. Furthermore, ahead of starting to answer the stated question, it needs to be stated that praxis, of course, requires a theory that is relevant and that will be nurtured by actions. I will put an emphasis on theological praxis that comes from the concern that we as Christians should be doers of the Word and not just hearers. Accordingly, to be doer of the Word also means to be involved into active life-giving change in the world and at the place we live in.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

In agreement with Denise Ackermann my theological point of departure is that theology should be done in service of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God brings hope in terms of good news to people in their concrete living situations. Furthermore, it speaks of justice, love and peace, righteousness as well as wholeness of the body³⁷. The praxis of Jesus discloses the transforming vision of what it would mean to us if the fullness of God's presence were to be known on earth. Jesus calls us to a radical activity of love, to a way of being in the world that is able to deepen relationships and to extend community. This challenge to live by mutuality, however, is a gospel imperative.

What we believe and how we act and react embody our efforts to meet the problems that inevitably arise when we are challenged by the values of the Kingdom of God in our particular historical contexts. Moreover, those who confess the Christian faith are called to be God's agents of healing for this world. This means that the Kingdom of God, as embodied in Jesus Christ, demands the deeds of justice, love, freedom, peace, righteousness and wholeness. The logical consequence is that inactivity is no choice for people of faith and there is no place for stigma in the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth.³⁸

Having clarified this I want to suggest a short, general definition of stigma: Stigma is a term that marks and excludes a person as being tainted or alien, of less value than others, blameworthy or to be feared as undesirably different. Accordingly, it leads to the rejection and exclusion of people of grounds for which they mostly bear no responsibility. Stigma flourishes on silence, denial, feeling of guilt and fear. It is not only the case that denial sacrifices the truth; it also robs communities of the ability to deal effectively with the virus. Furthermore, the feelings of guilt and fear feed silence, and rob those affected and infected of their ability to engage with the virus in ways that nurture instead of leading to hopelessness and loneliness. Stigma is also experienced in religious communities. Infected women fear their churches, because they expect to be judged by them.³⁹

Stigma is also contradictory with the characteristics of the church: the Church is supposed to be one and should not be divided into people that are sick and those who are healthy, or into those who live with HIV/AIDS and those who do not.

Ephesians 4: ³ *...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call,*

³⁷ See 1 Corinthians 12:12.

³⁸ See Engaging Stigma, p.1-5.

³⁹ See the stories in: Engaging Stigma, p. 1.

⁵*one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

In accordance with this passage the third article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed states that we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. God gives unity through His eschatological saving act in Christ. Despite changing contexts or members of the church, the unity of the church should not be changed. Unity is the essence of the being of the church. The church is one because of its source, the unity of God in the trinity. The church is also one because of its founder, Jesus Christ, who reconciled all people to God, restoring the unity of all human beings into one body.

Sadly, the church cooperates in perpetuating stigma by adding force to social stigmas that are clothed in dubious moral judgements, such as pronouncing judgement on those who live with HIV/AIDS. But I believe that God's Spirit draws the church to renewal in order to conform to what God desires for the church as a community of memory and hope. We can nurture that by actively practicing mutual relationships that are loving and just. We help in bringing this about by actively shaping moral communities that foster the moral capacities of their members by e.g. story-telling to get to know each other better and by involvement in the works of justice.

As mentioned above, Christians are supposed to live out the values of the Kingdom of God. This implies direct confrontation of the sinful nature of stigma and then finding hope in our Scriptures and our traditions – which includes the memory of certain women who are later mentioned in this thesis – for communicating God's grace, mercy and compassion in our actions in our concrete context. Such a theological praxis could be effective and could contribute to combating HIV/AIDS.

Providing stigma can only be sinful, because it prevents the proper functioning of the church as the Body of Christ.⁴⁰ All parts of that Body receive gifts from the Holy Spirit. The Body consists of many different members, but all are indispensable, and “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose...giving the greater honour to the inferior member”⁴¹. Paul then continues this description of the Body of Christ with words of concern: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it”⁴² and “Let all things be done for building

⁴⁰ See 1 Corinthians 12:12.

⁴¹ See 1 Corinthians 12:18.24.

⁴² Ibid.: v. 26.

up”⁴³. The fact that God gives all of us the means to accomplish the task of “building up” the Body of Christ is our hope for the church. Accordingly, stigmatizing members of the Body of Christ and rendering their gifts as unacceptable cripples the Body of Christ. Equipped with our gifts, we should celebrate our God-given diversity to protect the weak rather than to harm, care for the sick rather than to destroy and live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

This argument will also be sustained by the feminist theological reading of Elizabeth A. Johnson. Her symbol of the ‘Communion of Saints’ focuses furthermore on the wholeness and unity of all believers in celebrating the Eucharist together.⁴⁵

Chapter 2: A theology of memory and hope

In light of the remarks in the previous chapter, this chapter engages with a perspective on the symbol of the communion of the saints that searches for a liberating and nourishing outcome for the empowering of women in their struggle for their own freedom and their own dignity, inspiring the community of faith to grow as a living community of memory and hope, and promoting the transformation of church and society in accord with God’s compassionate justice and care.⁴⁶

The symbol Elizabeth A. Johnson makes use of is the neglected symbol of the ‘Communion of Saints’. Johnson’s thesis is that this symbol carries a liberating impulse that can disrupt present injustices. Furthermore, the goal of that reading is to interpret the symbol in such a way that it will serve the practical and spiritual well-being of all women, releasing redemptive possibilities of life. This book aims at the liberation of women as valued human beings in their own right and, not incidentally, the emancipation of men as well.⁴⁷

⁴³ See 1 Corinthians 14:26.

⁴⁴ See Engaging Stigma, p. 6-15.

⁴⁵ The jacket art of the book ,Friends of God and Prophets. A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints’ by Dina Cormick wich illustrates the Eucharist in a different way see on page ?.

⁴⁶ See Friends, p. 141.

⁴⁷ See Friends, p. 40.

2.1. Elizabeth A. Johnson: A short biographical sketch

Elizabeth A. Johnson is Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University in New York.⁴⁸ She is the author of books including *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (Crossroads 1990), *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (Crossroads 1993), *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (Continuum 1998) and *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (Continuum 2004).

Elizabeth A. Johnson is a systematic and feminist theological scholar. In addition to her books, she has published over one hundred essays in scholarly journals, as well as chapters in edited books, encyclopaedia entries, book reviews, and articles in popular religious journals. Her work has been translated into Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Lithuanian, Polish, Korean, and Greek. Author, editor, teacher, and public lecturer in theology, Elizabeth Johnson's main areas of research focus on the theology of God, Jesus Christ, Mary and the communion of saints, science and religion, the problem of suffering, ecological ethics, and issues related to justice for women. A former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, the oldest and largest association of theologians in the world, she is currently (2006) president-elect of the American Theological Society. She is also an active member of the American Academy of Religion and the College Theology Society, and serves on the editorial boards of the journals *Theological Studies*, *Horizons: Journal of the College Theology Society*, and *Theoforum*. She loves to teach and in 1998 received the Fordham University's Teaching Award.

Deeply involved in the life of the church, she is a religious sister in the Congregation of St. Joseph, Brentwood, NY. Her public service in the church includes being a theologian on the national Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue; a consultant to the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Women in Church and Society; a theologian on the Vatican-sponsored dialogue between science and religion, and on the Vatican-sponsored study of Christ and the world religions; and a core committee member of the Common Ground Initiative started by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin to reconcile polarized groups in the church.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=6002>.

⁴⁹ http://www.fordham.edu/Academics/Programs_at_Fordham_/Theology/Faculty/Elizabeth_A_Johnson__8033.asp

2.2. The communion of memory and hope in the Feminist Theological Reading of

Elizabeth A. Johnson

In line with Johnson's approaches in the church it is crucial for churches today to maintain the promises of healing and work hard to find cures for diseases. Furthermore, sin, sorrow and injustice mark the world's wellbeing. Therefore the presence of God is also evident in and through historical events of peacemaking and liberation, such as in the Exodus.⁵⁰ In this connection the liberating deeds of God in the past are the sources for our hope in the future.⁵¹ It is a category of relationship and help⁵² where Christ is the hope of glory.⁵³ Glory is a category of participation in the holy God's redeeming beauty that draws near to share the brokenness of the world in order to heal and to set free.⁵⁴

For society to flourish it needs multiple communities that form persons whose identity is bound up in relationships.⁵⁵ Every community has its certain history. For this reason we can speak of a real community as a "community of memory". So the community is involved in events such as story-telling. Furthermore, some of these stories contain ideas about the character and attributes of a good person; some carry reminders of corporate achievements as well as shared sufferings endured in the past; some, too, painfully remember sufferings the community has inflicted on others, with the call to remedy ancient evils.⁵⁶

My investigation focuses on how the church deals and has dealt with sick, poor and oppressed women, especially in modern times because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This should be closely connected with the approach that stories of women through all the ages begin with the women in the Bible - Hagar in the Old Testament, Mary Magdalene in the New Testament and the women-martyrs of the first centuries, to mention only a few, are memories that carry the needed attitudes to inspire and energize for the good in the present and for the future.⁵⁷ Thus, by their inner dynamism, the "communities of memory and hope" tie us to the past and also turn us toward the future as communities of hope.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*

⁵¹ See *ibid.*

⁵² See *Friends*, p. 54.

⁵³ See Col 1:27.

⁵⁴ See *Friends*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ See *Friends*, p. 21/22.

⁵⁶ See *Friends*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*

In my opinion, one of the most important questions that is raised in the book of Elizabeth Johnson is: Can the attempt of a community of friends of God and prophets draw God's people into deeper friendship with the heart of divine mystery and turn them toward the praxis of justice and compassion for the world, both human beings and the world?⁵⁹ I want to follow this question through my thesis and investigate its usefulness for the church in South Africa.

It was especially the suppers of Jesus that formed a community out of unlikely associates, and common bonds appear here in the light of God's merciful approach.⁶⁰ People who sat with Jesus at one table found themselves included when they were excluded by society. They were treated as healthy when they have been seriously sick.⁶¹ That kind of treatment can only give new energy to life by inclusion!

2.3. The communion of saints: The symbol and the metaphor

The core metaphor in this whole reading is presented by 'Friends of God and Prophets' like it is used in Wisdom 7:27: "Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets."⁶² Sophia walks in the way of righteousness and wants justice: Proverbs 20 "I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice."

The Holy Wisdom, the Great Spirit of God, forges bonds of connectedness throughout the universe. The unity and underlying interrelatedness of this one world is the gift of the life-giving Spirit-Sophia who calls the community of creation into being and dwells within the world to repair the breaches that disrupt community, all the while luring into a renewed future.⁶³

"A theology of the communion of saints rooted in scripture and baptism reclaims these human persons: women from our own families and women of different races, classes and ethnic cultures;

⁵⁹ See Friends, p. 24.

⁶⁰ See Lk 7:34.

⁶¹ See Friends, p. 49.

⁶² Take into consideration the parallel to Jesus: He also makes people to friends of God. Like Sophia Jesus calls out in a loud voice in public; like Sophia he speaks in long discourses using the first person pronoun and like Sophia he invites people to come, to eat and drink; see Jesus the Wisdom, p. 284.

⁶³ Friends, p. 262.

women who bear and give birth and do the cooking and cleaning that makes life itself possible; women who ponder and pray, heal, protect, teach and guide; women who exercise their wits in a patriarchal world; marginalized and silenced women; raped and brutalized women; caring and ministering women; strong and vibrant and artistic women; sexually active women; dreaming, shouting, scared or defiant women; setting-out-not-knowing-where-they-are-going women; all holy women of the world. All are friends of God and prophets through the grace of Holy Wisdom."⁶⁴

According to this quote, the communion of saints, in general, surrounds all those who gather in worship. This is a practice of simple but subversive remembrance before the face of God. They make the symbol of the communion of saints sing again⁶⁵ in praise and lament to God and in encouragement to persons to live in solidarity with divine compassion. Being faced with death and destruction, amid marginalization and continued systematic oppression, before apathy, banality, and spiritual deafness, against all sin in human hearts, with gratitude for the lives for one another, and with radical hope in the living and faithful triune God, we remember the company of the friends of God and prophets.⁶⁶

The communion of saints is a highly inclusive symbol for it not only relates disparate cultural groups around the world at any time, but also the death with the living and also with the not yet born. All seekers of the divine who encircle the Eucharistic table are included.⁶⁷ Remembrance in hope and knowing that we are part of the great cloud of witnesses⁶⁸ turns the present community toward historical praxis that adds compassion and justice in the world that the next generation will inherit. Accordingly, we participate in the great word of redemption.⁶⁹

In the South African context this could also have a great impact on the empowerment of women, as equal partners to men in church and society.

⁶⁴ <http://www.highbeam.com/library/docFree.asp?DOCID=1G1:68148570>.

⁶⁵ Friends, p. 261.

⁶⁶ Friends, p. 261-262.

⁶⁷ See also the jacket art of the book "Friends of God and Prophets" by Dina Cormick.

⁶⁸ Friends, p. 64-68.

⁶⁹ Friends, p. 262; see Wisdom 7:27. The Wisdom of God takes the challenge to bind the community together in order to unite the world in love.

2.4. Strategies for a “new” history

Since the second and third century A.D. women have certainly been suppressed in their inclusion in Scripture in favour of the patriarchal society. But furthermore, when women are mentioned in the Bible at all how much more must have been their original contribution, since the story can just not be told without them, e.g. Mary Magdalene and other women disciples from Galilee at the resurrection. If women are not mentioned, that does not necessarily mean their absence in the story, given how marginalized persons are overlooked by a dominant group with its point of view; their presence may be established by other means, e.g. the participation of women in the Last Supper. Some interpreters read women into generic words like prophet and apostle, and understand that prescriptive commands restricting women’s behaviour actually describe what women are doing that which men find offensive, e.g., preaching in the church’s public assembly. With this strategy texts can be unlocked to release a wealth of insight into women’s initiatives.⁷⁰

Every prayer of praise and lament in the ‘women’s struggle’ for equality is meant to transform social and political structures that subordinate them.⁷¹ The result of feminist scholarship is a growing treasury of memory with which women today can connect and, finding their rootedness in a heritage of female holiness, be empowered in their struggle

⁷⁰ Friends, p. 160. For the argumentation about the value of women in the early church see also Susan Rakoczy; Rakoczy argues that women practiced the Christian ministry just as men did in the beginning until the early church started to impose the culture of male domination into the gospel. Her main argument is that, when Jesus collected his disciples, he gathered men and women. She remarks that “discipleship flowed from three interlocking experiences: repentance, belief and following Jesus (Mk 14:33)...Gender does not demand different responses” (2004: 216-7). Moreover, during the ministry of Paul, women practiced as deacons just as their male counterparts. She quotes Tetlow “who asks us to consider that the texts mean what they say: that women exercised the office of *diakonos* as men did in the earliest generations of the church” (p 207). Earlier Rakoczy referred to apostles and prophets. On the apostles she says, “a person must have accompanied Jesus during his lifetime (Acts 1:21), must have seen the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:3-9), and been commissioned by him (Gal. 1: 11-17).” Mary Magdalene is an example of such women. On prophets she says, “since the Spirit of God was poured on women and men (Acts 2:1-4, 17), women also exercised the gift of prophecy” (pp 202-5).

However, “many things began to go wrong in the early church which led to the complete exclusion of women from formal ministry based on kyriarchal theological justifications for such elimination” (p 208). The adjective *kyriarchal* is derived from *kurios*, meaning the Lord or, as she notes, the patriarch / the master. The force at play here was the culture of the first century which was patriarchal.

See also Acts 1:14: “All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers.” Biblical scholars ask who these women are. “The only logical answer is that they’re the women Luke [author of Acts] named as those present at the tomb, at the cross, at the resurrection. Reviewing the ministry of Jesus, these would logically be the same women who had followed him earlier. Then in Acts 2:1-4, “[T]hey were all in one place together...Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire....And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.”

(see <http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Jul2004/Feature2.asp#F6>).

⁷¹ Friends, p. 161.

for full human dignity in transformed communities. The subversive power of the remembrance of women who lived in the past is a tool for preparing a nourishing future for the full humanity of women and men.⁷²

2.5. Friends of God and prophets?

To be a friend of God means to be freely connected in a mutual relationship that is characterized by deep affection, joy, trust, delight, support in adversity, and simply sharing life. It is filled with knowing and letting oneself be known in an intimacy that pours into common activities. In the relationship with Sophia–God, one’s love and energy run toward the world, its persons, its other creatures, its social structures, all befriended compassion by divine compassion. To be a friend of God means to take time to savour the relationship with its delights and challenges in prayer and contemplation; caring passionately about what God cares about; clinging together even in harsh adversity. It means to allow divine presence to be the foundation of your life even if it is experienced as wrenching absence. It means living with the experience of who we are according to John 15:15 (“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”) no longer servants but friends of God.⁷³ The prophet is the one who provides hope for those who suffer. Hope is typically the expectation that something good will come from God. This condition is normally coupled with longing for that good⁷⁴ like in Isaiah 61:1-2 ‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.’ and Luke 4:18-19 ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s

⁷² Friends, p. 162.

⁷³ Truly, p. 307.

⁷⁴ Friends, p. 203.

favour.’ Prophets speak with power about injustice, thus creating possibilities of resistance and resurrection.⁷⁵

According to these texts to be a prophet is to raise your voice in criticism against injustice, because being a friend of God, your heart loves people and the world the way God loves it; your imagination can see how the world and its people flourish. To be a prophet means that if you see that your dream about how the world should be according to God’s will is hurt by the oppressive rule or exploitation of the people and the earth you are forced to speak up against those oppressors of humankind or nature. Prophets create the possibility for resistance and resurrection. However, when things get worse, being a prophet also means to comfort people who suffer with words that bring hope, because in God’s presence this pain will not last forever. Being a prophet means according to this understanding to on the one hand act socially and politically critical and on the other hand acting consolingly to those who suffer.⁷⁶

In the context of the empowerment of women and in the struggle to combat the HIV infection of women, to be a friend of God means to care passionately about the people (here: the women) that God loves and cares about. And to be a prophet in this context means to speak up against all who misuse their power for the oppression of women.

2.6. Memory and Identity

As discussed in the previous part, being a friend of God and prophet means to side with those who God loves, and to stand up for their rights, which implies caring for identities: For each single one, but also for the identity of the community. Here the idea of memory comes in: Memory is a practice that can serve to rescue lost or threatened identities. Furthermore, memory that dares to connect with pain that comes from the past is able to energize persons.⁷⁷

Memory can also bring to light new possibilities, to empower hope for a different future.⁷⁸ *Memoria passionis* means, in the way Elizabeth Johnson states it, the capacity to remember people in a way that breaks the spell of an oppressing history for the victims.

⁷⁵ See Friends, p. 41.

⁷⁶ Truly, p. 307.

⁷⁷ See Friends, p. 165.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 167.

Accordingly, it drives the church out of its passivity into active engagement against all that spoils the glory of God in the world.⁷⁹ In general, remembering the great number of female friends of God and prophets opens up possibilities for the future. So, to be a friend and prophet of God means to be a recognized follower of Christ, while having a model character for following Christians. And so being a challenge for action.⁸⁰ Narrative remembrance refuses to grant oppression legitimacy.⁸¹ These narratives undermine the sacred validation of male rule and female subordination. In resistance to patriarchy, they tell the story of victimized and marginalized persons beside whom God stands.⁸²

2.6.1. Recovering Lost Memory: Hagar⁸³

Three examples (Hagar, Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Martyrs) from the Bible and in the third case the subsequent centuries of persecution of oppressed women are unfolded by Elizabeth A. Johnson's work 'Friends of God and Prophets'. I want to retell these, because of their great importance to my topic and as an example for oppressed women that could function in the church as a form of memory and hope for oppressed women. I will firstly tell about Hagar. Furthermore, the reading of the communion of saints searches for a liberating and nourishing outcome, empowering women in their struggle for own freedom and dignity, inspiring the church and society in accord with God's compassionate justice and care.

Historical research focussing on women's lives might provide a limited, but valuable key to the avenue of connection to those who have died for that memory.

Accordingly, Johnson gives a systematic interpretation of the communion of saints by using this key, exploring three examples of women's practices of memory.

Hagar is an Egyptian slave-woman far from home.⁸⁴ She mothers Ishmael, Abraham's first child, by being pressed into service as Sarah's maid. Twice she is driven into the desert by Sarah's harsh abuse but twice she is told to come back. The first time a theophany leads her to return, so that the child with whom she is pregnant will survive. The

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 169.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 174.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ See Friends, p. 142-146.

⁸⁴ See Genesis 16:1-16; 17:18-27; 21:1-21; 25:12-18.

second time she and her son are rescued with a divine word of promise for their future. On the one hand they are blessed because of the promise of the divine voice that will multiply Hagar's offspring. On the other hand, the biblical narrative identifies Sarah's son Isaac as the only the bearer of the promise of the covenant.

From the first Christian interpretations on the story, Hagar seems to be pushed to the periphery of interest. Paul even developed an allegory that contrasted Hagar's descendants with Sarah's offspring, identifying Hagar with subjection to the law and to the flesh while Sarah corresponds to freedom and the Spirit.⁸⁵ This reinterpretation of Hagar's symbolic significance removes any logical impulse of the community to identify with her narrative. But Johnson makes us aware of the difference this result could have when it is read from the social location of poor and oppressed women. Hagar's will to survive and her oppression could create an immediate resonance among women whose lives are similarly burdened with social and economic suffering. Hagar found a way where there was no way and had to cope with a situation where it seemed that there is no way out of being dominated. So recovering the memory of her striving to survive interrupts dominant discourse. It demands that the memory of the church makes room for the female, the foreigner and the women who suffer. Recovering her memory lifts up a source of lament and resistance as well as strength and inspiration for those who remember her story.

2.6.2. The 'thousand faces' of Mary of Nazareth

Every century and culture has interpreted Mary – the mother of Jesus - in different ways. You could almost drown in the various ways that the Christian tradition has honored Mary! Consider the paintings, sculptures, icons, music, liturgies, feasts, spiritual writings, theologies and official doctrines.

We know very little about Mary of Nazareth as an actual historical person. In this she is in solidarity with the multitudes of women through the centuries, especially poor women and poor men, whose lives are not considered worth recording. We must also be respectful of her historical difference from us in time and place. She is a first-century

⁸⁵ See Galatians 4:31.

Jewish woman; she is not a 21st-century Christian women. And that difference must be respected.

The four Gospels portray her in very different ways, reflecting their very different theologies. At first glance, Mark comes across as having a negative view of Jesus' mother. She arrives with other members of the family as Jesus is preaching and they call to him. When the crowd tells Jesus his mother is asking for him, he replies, "Who is my mother and brother and sister? Those who do the will of my father are mother and brother and sister to me" (see Mark 3:31-35). And Mary remains outside. Mark does not seem to have a positive view, at that point, of Mary as a disciple. Matthew's view of Mary is rather neutral by comparison. He places her in the genealogy of the Messiah, in line with four other women who act outside the patriarchal marriage structure,⁸⁶ thereby becoming unexpectedly God's partners in a promise-and-fulfillment schema. In Matthew's Gospel, though, Mary doesn't speak, and all the focus on the birth story is around Joseph. Luke describes Mary as a woman of faith, overshadowed by the Spirit at Jesus' conception and at the beginning of the church at Pentecost. She is the first to respond to the glad tidings; to hear the Word of God and keep it. This is a pictorial example of Luke's theology of discipleship. It's a very positive view of Mary from which we have mostly gotten our tradition. Finally, John has a highly stylized portrayal of the mother of Jesus, and that's all he ever calls her. He never names her. She is pierced twice in John's Gospel, at the beginning and at the end, at Cana and at the cross. And again she is there embodying responsive discipleship to the word made flesh.

The times for Mary were tough. Her village was part of an occupied state under the heel of imperial Rome. Revolution was in the air. The atmosphere was tense. Violence and poverty prevailed. We owe a debt to Third-World women theologians who have noticed the similarities between Mary's life and the lives of so many poor women, even today. Notice how the journey to Bethlehem in order to be counted for a census accords with the displacement of so many poor people today separated from their ancestral homes because of debt and taxation.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ These "unconventional foremothers" like Johnson calls them are surprisingly not Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel; but they are: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah; to read more see: Truly; p. 222; see also: Mat 1.

⁸⁷ <http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0501.asp>.

Notice how the flight into Egypt parallels the flight of refugees in our day—women and men running with their children to escape being killed by unjust military force. Notice how Mary's experience of losing her son to death by unjust state execution compares with so many women who have had their children and grandchildren disappeared or be murdered by dictatorial regimes. Mary is a sister, a *compañera*, to the suffering lives of marginalized women in oppressive situations. It does Mary no honor to rip her out of her conflictual, dangerous historical circumstances and transform her into an icon of a peaceful middle-class life dressed in a royal blue robe.

Though Mary was poor and lowly, and a culturally insignificant woman, the powerful, living, holy God was doing great things to her. And God does this not only to her but to all the poor, bringing down the mighty from their thrones; exalting the lowly; filling the hungry with good things and sending the unrepentant rich away empty. And all of this is happening in fulfillment of the ancient promise—and in her very being. She embodies the nobodies of this world, to whom God is giving rescue. She hears the word of God and keeps it. And in this too she is, as Paul VI called her in *Marialis Cultus*, our sister in faith. We can begin to see the potential in other Gospel scenes. As we remember her and keep foremost the idea that she is a Jewish peasant woman of faith, then we can interpret the other scenes in the Gospels where Mary shows up and where we are presented with the dangerous memory of this very inconsequential woman in her own culture and historical context. With a heart full of love for God and for her neighbor, Mary of Nazareth gives us this tremendous example of walking by faith through a difficult life.⁸⁸

What would be a theologically sound, spiritually empowering and ethically challenging view of Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, for the 21st century? Elizabeth Johnson's answer has been to suggest that we remember Mary as a friend of God and prophets in the communion of saints and to let her dangerous memory inspire and encourage our own witness. We ought to relate to Mary of Nazareth as a partner in hope, in the company of all the holy women and men who have gone before us. This can help us reclaim the power of her memory for the flourishing of women, for the poor and all suffering people. It can help us to draw on the energy of her example for a deeper relationship with the living God and stronger care for the world. When the Christian community does Marian theology this way, our eyes are opened to sacred visions for a

⁸⁸ Ibid. and see also: Truly Our Sister, chapter 11.

different future. We become empowered to be voices of hope in this difficult world. Like Mary, we will be rejoicing in God our savior and announcing the justice that is to come.⁸⁹

Mary of Nazareth was a woman of Spirit. This was and still is the magnetic center of her memory. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God, Spirit-Sophia, surrounded her life. Walking by faith and not by sight⁹⁰, she composed her life as a friend of God and a prophet. Of course, the circumstances of her life –as it is the case with every other saint- can never be repeated, but the style and spirit of her responses are able to encourage the practice of discipleship also in today’s different cultural contexts.⁹¹ Her memory is a vital challenge that sparks hope in our present-days against ancient patterns of injustice that works for the empowerment and salvation of women.

In ‘Truly Our Sister’ Elizabeth A. Johnson finds particularly in the virginity of Mary a source of empowerment for women: According to that the female virginity is seen as a symbol of autonomy. She states “...that the symbol of virginity does not necessarily refer in the first instance to the absence of sexual experience... [Moreover, this symbol shows as a woman] to be one-in-yourself, free, independent, unsubordinated, unexploited...”⁹² The status of Mary as a virgin in that sense shows the strong female relatedness to the Spirit, which can be a great sign and source of empowerment for women today.

According to that the memory of Mary is a great symbol of hope for all women.

2.6.3. Rectifying the Distorted Story: Mary Magdalene⁹³

Another practice of memory is the feminist interpretation of the story of Miriam of Magdalene. What Johnson points out is that Magdalene played a crucial role at the foundation of the church. Centuries of patriarchal construal in literature, art and preaching have portrayed her primarily as a repentant sinner, most likely a prostitute that is forgiven by Jesus for sins of a sexual nature. Furthermore, the distortion shifted her story of a leading apostolic women into someone remembered mainly as a sexual transgressor. These

⁸⁹ <http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0501.asp>.

⁹⁰ Truly, p. 209.

⁹¹ Truly, p. 209.

⁹² Truly, p. 239.

⁹³ See Friends, p. 146-150.

stories changed the truth about her and made her story a deep untruth. What is more, a powerful religious leader is turned into a beautiful sinner.⁹⁴ This practice cheated women out of the memory of her discipleship, leaving them out of history on which to build resistance to ecclesial male dominance. Furthermore, it deprives the church as a whole of the prophetic power of the memory of women's leadership. Here feminist scholarship can help to give the story a different contour.

Women play an important role when Jesus dies and by the resurrection of Christ. Jesus, after his death, appeared first of all to her or to the women. Here the doubt of first century men seem to come in maybe like Rosemary Radford Ruther describes: "Would the Lord have preferred a women to us men? Women by Mosaic law are not even allowed to be witnesses. Surely the Lord would not have entrusted such a message to a women!"⁹⁵

Miriam Magdalene is one important example of a woman in a leadership role. Her memory could function as a tool to empower women also today.

⁹⁴ The following picture shows her in a way she was painted a plenitudes of times: as a beautiful woman with bare shoulders, grapping to her heart while looking into heaven with the Scripture on her lab. The picture shows the: Penitent Mary Magdalene in the 1560s in Oil on canvas, 118 x 97 cm. It is to find in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. In 1561 Titian finished a painting of Mary Magdalene for Philip II, king of Spain. It is lost but several other compositions, based on this painting, survived. Probably the best version is that in the Hermitage. The painting is signed on the rock on the left side; the picture was found at: <http://www.wga.hu/bio/t/tiziano/biograph.html>.

⁹⁵ Sexism, p. 9.



2.6.4. Phoebe of Cenchrae – A female Christian leader

Chapter 16 of the Epistle to the Romans was worth drawing for the South African artist Dina Cormick.⁹⁶ She was the one who gave the book “Friends of God and Prophets” from Elizabeth A. Johnson the jacket art showing Phoebe of Cenchrae as leader of the church while delivering bread and wine in the Eucharist. This chapter of the epistle to the Romans also deserves our careful attention and consideration. Many of the salutations given here are to women. There is no mention of a Pope, bishop, cardinal or priest. No such institution exists in Scripture. All service is centered on Christ and directed according to Christ’s will.

Phoebe was servant to the assembly in Cenchrae, yet Paul indicates that she was wealthy and shared her resources with the Lord's people. She was a patroness to many - including the apostle, whom she had probably met in Cenchrae (Acts 18:18). She gave willing and humble service in promoting assembly testimony. There is a lot in which women can be engaged, for the activities of the testimony are many and varied. The memory of Phoebe abides here in God's Word because of the diligent and faithful way in which she applied herself to the Lord's interests in this world.

Her departure from Achaia to Rome was the occasion of the writing of this letter. How thankful the Roman saints must have been that she delivered it safely. The last chapter commences with her commendation, and on the basis of this the Roman gatherings could freely receive her to the privileges and responsibilities of the Christian fellowship.⁹⁷

This mentioning of female Christian leaders by Paul has great significance to the leadership of women today. This narrative shows –like the narrative of Mary Magdalene– that women were accepted and active leaders in the beginning of Christianity. However, patriarchy and andocentrism gave women a submissive and passive role to play in community life.

The increasing ministry of women in Christianity and the memory of early Christianity and its female leaders could also have a positive impact on women living with HIV/AIDS

⁹⁶ The jacket art is placed right ahead of this paragraph. Phoebe of Cenchrae is a water media painting 20×17cm by Dina Cormick from her Heroic Women Series, in celebration of women of the Scriptures. Dina Cormick works as a free-lance artist from her studio in Durban, South Africa. Her commissioned artworks, which include wood sculptures, mosaic and ceramic panels, book illustrations and posters, can be found widely distributed throughout southern Africa.

⁹⁷ http://www.biblecentre.org/truthtestimony/1997_Vol_4/enc_romans_16.htm.

nowadays. To see women that are ministering with their gifts in congregations can be experienced as strengthening for women, especially for poor women and those who are not yet fully aware of their worth according to Christ because they are still perceiving the church as patriarchal. Accordingly, the disappearing of a patriarchal hierarchy in church would also be followed by the fading of a patriarchal system in society, such as already considered in the first chapter of this thesis demonstrate a great progress of the equal rights of women and fight their disadvantaged status in society.

2.6.5. Reassessing Value: The Virgin Martyrs⁹⁸

The refusal of marriage by the Virgin Martyrs defies the conventions of “feminine” behaviour, witnessing to a wild power of self-definition.⁹⁹ Women martyrs wanted to have a free life by choosing a relationship with God rather than with a husband.¹⁰⁰ After that decision male violence followed again, because they chose to be the protagonists in their own lives.¹⁰¹

Our era has made us more aware about the psychological and physical violence against women. However, the stories of the Virgin Martyrs show a kind of violence people have been unaware of and where it has been in its raw form.

Like Jesus, who fell in the struggle for the reign of God against religious and political authorities of his time, in our days the death of the martyrs can be seen as a consequence of an active struggle for social justice and other Christian values against oppressive powers in our days.¹⁰² The stories of women martyrs, and especially of the early Christian women martyrs, can be read and understood in such a way that the vitality of women’s self-definition can be strengthened.¹⁰³

The whole construction of theological legitimation of suffering is at stake in this feminist critique of unjust suffering known by women, by poor people, by victims of racial prejudice, by all those who feel the power of the oppressor. In coalition with the God of the

⁹⁸ See Friends, p. 151-156.

⁹⁹ See Friends, p. 153.

¹⁰⁰ See Friends, p. 155.

¹⁰¹ See also Friends, p. 152.

¹⁰² See Friends, p. 154.

¹⁰³ Also see the last paragraph about the metaphor of virginity in „The ‘thousand faces’ of Mary of Nazareth” in this thesis.

Christians, the church is rather called to resist than to justify sufferings.¹⁰⁴ In this process of telling critical narratives of struggle life is taken far away from passivity. Furthermore, it releases hope that energizes resistance and the knowledge that another way is possible. Hope that wants to affirm the assumption that another reality is possible will be discussed in the next section.

2.7. Unity in hope

The human condition is fragile and finite. Our faith and hope are centred in God; knowing that God keeps faith with human beings in death and beyond death. Sharing this hope and what it includes for eternal life, Christians may try to explain it in some way, but at the same time knowing that there are no proper clarifications that could do justice to this mystery; the community of faith repeats this hope mainly through liturgical rituals and through preaching. The community of faith hopes what it does not know but trusts in the future, like the past, which will come from God freely as a gracious gift.¹⁰⁵

The language of hope is in conclusion symbolic. In that sense to have hope in God means the general confidence in God's protection and help. Genuine hope normally grows in strength as a situation gets more desperate. For the Christian community, the narrative of Jesus Christ became the base of hope. Here hope also fluctuates between the arrival of the good in this world and the expectation of a future for the living, the dead, and the whole cosmos in the glory of God.¹⁰⁶

Disorder, injustice, suffering, meaninglessness and death – all of the religious narratives bear a vital hope only because they take all this into account. Confronting slavery, exile, and death, biblical hope draws on the tradition of what God has already done to trust that God will be faithful even and especially when all other sources of help have vanished.¹⁰⁷

The biblical language that carries hope is highly symbolic. Most of the images dream of a blessed future, like Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones reconnecting and becoming flesh again and the vision in Revelation of a new heaven and a new earth where crying is no

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁰⁵ See Friends, p. 202.

¹⁰⁶ See Friends, p. 203.

¹⁰⁷ See Friends, p. 204.

more.¹⁰⁸ These symbols depict the hope of the community about the future and show that death is not the end, because God is faithful.

Biblical texts are reticent to predict or describe what happens after death. They are drawn from the happiness on earth the point of what may be hoped, for each individual as well as for the world as a whole. But these texts are not to be taken literally, they rather operate as symbols of hope, pointing beyond them to the transcendent mystery of God and connecting the hearts of the people to this mystery. It is necessary to mention that possibly no other language can be used in the view of the unknown character of the future.¹⁰⁹ In that sense the anticipation of the future is to be seen out of the present experience of the Spirit's effects. Furthermore, Christian communities have only their living tradition and the experience of divine graciousness in the present as a foretaste for what will happen in the future.¹¹⁰

As a conclusion, this hope in unity can draw people of all ages, classes, races and both sexes together by making them realise that they are companions in hope and that they are brought together in one hope in one God.

Chapter 3: A theology of memory and hope for South African women

The topic of relationship is central for Christian ethics. Furthermore, the command of Jesus that "You must love your neighbour as yourself"¹¹¹ means little if it is not embodied in acts of love and care. However, in communities the practice of right relationships in a loving and caring sense means to practice just relationships. The idea of relationships is not limited to individual relationships, but includes relationships in groups and what is more in communities of faith. But as we also know, relationships – like that one we heard about in the story of Judy¹¹² – can be disordered and abusive.

Everybody has her/his own story. Besides claiming identity and naming the evil that happened in one's own life, narrative has a sense-making function. The act of story-telling is an act of making sense of a perplexing situation, of a suffering and chaotic world in

¹⁰⁸ Ezekiel 37:1-14; Revelation 21:1-5; see Friends, p. 204.

¹⁰⁹ See Friends, p. 205.

¹¹⁰ See Friends, p. 206.

¹¹¹ See Mark 12:31.

¹¹² See 2.6, pp. 9-10.

which people wrestle with understanding and in doing so seek to experience relief. It is a natural process of people to claim one's identity to make sense of their own situation.¹¹³ The process of hearing and engaging with these stories in church has the potential to draw members into mutual relationship. We all have stories to tell. As our stories meet, they change. As a result we become part of one another's stories. Stories are not only narratives about suffering; they are also about resistance, confirmation and hope. And that are stories such as those discussed in the previous chapter about the heroic women in Scripture that need to be heard in church. In this way the church can offer a supportive and forceful environment for storytelling in the search for meaning, especially for women to connect their own stories with stories about biblical women as portrayed by Elizabeth A. Johnson.

The search for the place and the meaning of narrative in theology takes us back to our source. The real narrative is the story of our faith: the story of the God of Israel acting to create and to redeem, culminating in the ministry, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus story-telling becomes a conversation of hearing stories of suffering and triumph and retelling the story of suffering and triumph in our communities. Furthermore, the crossing of our life stories with the story of Jesus is ultimately our hope.

By story-telling we are gaining power by defining experiences and claiming reality. In the case of HIV/AIDS this means speaking out and breaking the silence and smashing the stigma around the disease. The hearing of women-stories in the Bible as suggested by Elizabeth A. Johnson can be a catalyst to give courage to women living with HIV/AIDS to find hope and help them to affirm life.

3.1. A theology of interrelatedness

Ackermann argues that the nature of our relationships and our communities can only help us achieve "full humanity" when we realize that though we are different we still acknowledge that we are all images of God and therefore equal. Ackermann's argument in her article 'Becoming Fully Human' is that the reality of life is that we are different. Human beings cannot live in isolation but within relationships with others. In her own words it is phrased like this: "My humanity is found, shaped and nurtured in and through

¹¹³ See Women, p. 15.

the humanity of others¹¹⁴. She then asserts that it is up to us to determine the nature of our relationships and our communities. She asks how our Christian beliefs can help us to choose “full humanity”. This questions how can we live out the Gospel, for the notion of practice is at the heart of living the gospel. Hearing one another’s stories becomes one of the integral parts of a relationship. Our stories are different and when they touch one another they change and we too need to change. This opens us into wider questions of social justice. To live justly in the plurality of human beings that make up the community is “to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7), she asserts. The stories of men and women are different, but they open us to the wider questions of social justice. We can therefore embrace one another in our stories and thereby pay glory to God.

Furthermore, the communion of saints refers to the great and diverse multitude of people who are continuously connected by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit to God and one another in relationships of friendship and prophecy.¹¹⁵ Interpreting unique women in the Bible with their matchless histories within this great company locates their significance for faith in the middle of multiple relationships of mutuality formed by the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁶ Every woman who responds to the gift of the Spirit in her own live, in ways seen and unseen, belongs to and forms the communion of saints.¹¹⁷

3.2. Toward an inclusive Christology

Sadly, Christology has been one of the tools most often used in the history of Christianity to exclude and subordinate women.¹¹⁸ Jesus Christ’s maleness was underlined by suppressing his female influence which could be found and influenced by the Wisdom of God – by Sophia-God. In her article ‘Jesus, the Wisdom of God’ Johnson argues that Christians of the first century found Sophia a suitable figure with whom to identify Jesus.¹¹⁹ Both the female Sophia and the male JHWH express the one God who promises life. The tradition of the personified Wisdom was available when communities of Jewish

¹¹⁴ Fully Human, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ Truly, p. 308.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Truly, p. 306.

¹¹⁸ See the whole chapter 7 in: Consider Jesus.

¹¹⁹ Jesus, the Wisdom, p. 267.

Christians started to reflect on the saving significance and identity of Jesus Christ.¹²⁰ Furthermore, Johnson states that the crucified Christ is God's Wisdom. The crucified Christ is the one in whom Sophia becomes present and represents God's outreach in the world.¹²¹ So what does it mean for women today that one of the key origins of the doctrines of incarnation and trinity lies in the identification of Christ with a female character of God? Johnson states that if Jesus Christ is described as divine Sophia than it is neither unimaginable nor unbiblical to confess that Christ is the incarnation of God portrayed as female. Furthermore, in Jesus Christ we encounter the mystery of God who is neither male nor female, but who as a source of both and also as creator of both in the divine image can in turn be represented as either.¹²²

Moreover, God can be best expressed through a diversity of metaphors, which reveal limitations of the certain expressions. Additionally, by having and presenting a multitude of metaphors for God one is prevented of becoming dominant in Christology. By those way exclusions of certain groups –most often the marginalized ones without power and influence- are avoided. Furthermore, every single new metaphor will also lead deeper into the mystery of God.

Finally, inclusive Christological reflection which is able to make room for female imagery has the potential to contribute in theory as well as in praxis to the appreciation of the dignity of women today.¹²³ Sophia provides an alternative image of God. Thus to say that Jesus is the image of God (Col 1:15) means that he is not that image as male, but that he embodies God's passionate love for justice in and for this world. Jesus as Sophia includes all in the call to be friends and prophets of God. The combination of Jesus Christ and Sophia empowers everyone –male and female- and it works to symbolize the one God who is neither male nor female. That kind of Christology will lead toward a community of mutuality today.

In this way memory can serve as a method to build identity. This can be done with the use of the story-telling method which I will introduce in the next section.

¹²⁰ Jesus, the Wisdom, p. 276.

¹²¹ Jesus, the Wisdom, p. 278.

¹²² Jesus, the Wisdom, p. 280.

¹²³ Jesus the Wisdom, p. 289.

3.3. Memory and Identity: The Story-telling method

Memory is a practice that serves to rescue threatened or lost identity. But only a certain type of memory serves transformation: Memory that dares to connect with the pain of those who went before us acts like a visitation from the past that is able to energize persons. It interrupts the present with the dream that something other than the reality of the present is possible. This kind of memory does not turn all attention to the past but to the future by bringing more into a person's point of view. This process is able to awaken protest and resistance. Used in this way memory operates as a practical, critical and liberating force that helps to produce deep historical identity.¹²⁴

Remembering also has a dangerous aspect because of the changing and transforming force behind it.¹²⁵ The struggle for justice is sparked by a struggle of memory against forgetting.¹²⁶ The effective power of this kind of memory with its hope of a future sustains the community's efforts to live faithfully and compassionately in the world even now. But what does that mean for the church? The capacity to remember in this way creates a social force that breaks the spell of history of the victors. It propels the *ecclesia* out of passivity into active engagement against all that wrecks the glory of God in the world. The feminist work of remembering in the church is one living instance of how memory of the saints can serve as a new justice.¹²⁷

In summary, to remember and to act because of lives cherished in memory resounds as an integral part of contemporary women's spiritual journey and as a liberating paradigm for the *ecclesia* as a whole.¹²⁸

The power of narrative to effect personal identity, communal behaviour, political justice, and meaningfulness in all areas of life is on full display in the story that is central to Christian faith, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist's insistence on remembering what happened on the day Jesus died and elaborated in the Gospels, this narrative points at the arrival of the reign of God and God's words and deeds. The Christian proclamation takes place against an eschatological horizon, while in the meantime, before it is fulfilled, the story of Jesus Christ demonstrates prophetic vision, compassion, suffering and new life. The story remains the dangerous and subversive

¹²⁴ Friends, p. 165.

¹²⁵ Friends, p. 166.

¹²⁶ Friends, p. 167.

¹²⁷ Friends, p. 168.

¹²⁸ Friends, p. 170.

narrative by means of which the Christian community commits its life and enacts its hope.¹²⁹

Memory itself has a highly narrative structure. In the widest sense, every single life has the character of a story. The story mode of discourse gives human beings a way to discover how the world works and what their role is within it. Story-telling enables us to articulate order in the mystery of people's lives and to continue it in the face of the unexpected. Especially in moments of crisis, narrative gives focus to the questions that arise and empowers energy to survive and resist. The disclosing nature and transformative power of the story is grasped only through the dynamic of the narrative itself, through the interrelations between the story, the storyteller and the listeners.¹³⁰

Story-telling can function as a method for making sense of the past and the own experienced history. When a story carries a dangerous memory, it expands its existential significance to become a critical narrative at the service of human dignity.¹³¹ In that sense story-telling has practical effects in the way that people can become what they tell¹³² when they step into the story and walk around in the shoes of the acting persons in the story. Accordingly, story-telling has a self-involving aspect: By telling and listening to stories, persons locate themselves in a cultural, historical, and religious tradition and allow its insights to challenge and shape their identity as human beings.¹³³

In addition to the self-involving aspect of the method of story-telling is the performative part of a narrative. By its inner dynamic stories have the power to change the persons who hear them and lure them into certain attitudes and behaviours as part of a larger community and its tradition.

The method is about enable the word of God to stand in alliance with the flourishing and empowerment of women. Moving to place women at the center of attention this method can break through patriarchal understandings of the Bible. This corrective method seeks to remedy uses of the Bible that prohibited equal rights to women, by showing that both testaments authorize women's full participation in social and community life. This historic reconstructive method seeks to recover suppressed and

¹²⁹ Friends, p. 173.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Friends, p. 170.

¹³² Friends, p. 171.

¹³³ Friends, p. 170.

forgotten traditions about women by working from a point of view that makes their marginalization visible and their silence audible.¹³⁴

Within HIV/AIDS contexts the method of story-telling provides a space for breaking the silence, stigma and discrimination, as well as embarking on better informed prevention and care strategies.¹³⁵

3.4. Hope in remembrance

We thank thee, O God, for the saints of all ages; for those who in times of darkness kept the lamp of faith burning; for the great souls who saw visions of larger truth and dared to declare it; for the multitude of quiet and gracious souls whose presence has purified and sanctified the world; and for those known and loved by us, who have passed from this earthly fellowship into the fuller light of life with thee.¹³⁶

Profound gratitude to God for these women and men who are our honour recognizes that what makes them remarkable, both those known and unknown, stems from the power of the Spirit which has had an effect on their lives. By this method of remembrance in thankfulness they are saved from losing significance and power and kept alive in memory.¹³⁷

The dynamism of thanks that flows from remembrance presses the community at every step to do likewise; thanking God for the friends of God and prophets who form the community's heritage setting them today on a certain path. Their witness and the encouragement give serve as a vehicle for the same Spirit who inspired them to kindle the sacred fire in our own lives.¹³⁸

In modern and postmodern times, prayer through acts of remembrance and hope awakens consciousness and revitalizes the spirit. It contributes to building the church into a

¹³⁴ Truly, p. 212.

¹³⁵ <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/dube-10.html>.

¹³⁶ Anonymous, in the Oxford Book of Prayer, ed. George Appleton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 168; Friends, p. 246.

¹³⁷ Friends, p. 246-247.

¹³⁸ Friends, p. 247.

living community of memory and hope with “habits of the heart” that make the life of discipleship an attractive option. In its cultural setting, hopeful remembrance in fact is an act of resistance to banality, to debasement of persons of the earth, to hopelessness and resignation. Practiced with concern for the poor and those who suffer violence, such acts galvanize the struggle for justice and peace. Practiced with concern for the marginalization of women, they strengthen resistance for patriarchy in both church and society. Practiced with concern for the earth, they awaken bonds of kinship that promote ethical care. On all fronts, hope in remembrance functions as a source that renews the church’s expectation and turns it to political, social, and ecological responsibility.¹³⁹

3.5. The role of lament for hope in remembrance

In the face of unjust and senseless suffering, Johnson states that the church needs to lament in the face of the undeserved death of saints and martyrs. We need to shout out complaints to God’s face, wrestling with the holy name, dethroning traditional pat answers, and looking anew amid the defeated for God.

The challenge of the prayer of lament is not simply, however, to commend the victims of murderous death to heavenly blessedness, but to give their memory a place in the making of a just society and a compassionate world here and now. The prayer of lament – unreserved protest, sadness, impassionate questioning, strong cry against suffering, and tenderness for the defeated – becomes a social force confronting unjust ideologies and structures. It calls us out of passivity into active engagement against all premature death caused by human beings. Along with the prayer of praise, it shifts our responsibility in life to acts of praxis.¹⁴⁰

The remembrance of the saints at the catholic holiday ‘All Saints Day’ has the power, according to Johnson, to remember persons whose lives made a difference but who are otherwise not officially marked. This specific day becomes a day mainly for celebration of women.¹⁴¹ This day also lifts up victims of injustice crushed by historical evils, and in this way this feast is subversive. For while the murderers may have triumphed over their victims on earth, this remembrance of the suffering of those without a name affirms a

¹³⁹ Friends, p. 245.

¹⁴⁰ Friends, pp. 249-250.

¹⁴¹ Friends, p. 251.

future for the defeated, thereby writing a different kind of history from that done from the perspective of unjust victors. In this way the suffering is not erased, but noted and commended to God's care. A community that remembers their saints in this way puts itself in alliance with the oppressed even now.¹⁴²

Lament also has a role to play in the litany of names: The litany of names lists named and unnamed women, who have been beaten, raped, killed or ruined by male misogyny. After the mentioning of names in a litany the response can take the form of lament, like e.g.: "What have they done to you... What have they done to us?" Those who keep memory are summoned to resist this ongoing harm to women and girls.¹⁴³ Making these acts of remembrance in connection with today's overwhelming struggle for the human dignity of all women energizes those who pray at the deepest level possible.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, humanity's social, political and spiritual needs are both challenged and encouraged by a theology which places the values of a healed creation which is patched up again at its centre. For healing praxis to be truly restorative it has to be collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and compassion. Lament can be emerged from those who are suffering, who are oppressed and marginalized as well as from those who are privileged and in the possession of power.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, lament is one possible response to injustice. For victims, lament can present an entirely spontaneous response. For those who are responsible for the suffering of others, the process of coming to an awareness of the guilt is necessary before lament can happen. In this development, acceptance of accountability, memory, repentance, receiving, forgiveness and contributing to reparation play a major role.¹⁴⁶

Lament is a form of mourning. While lamenting is about events that happened in the past, it also has present and future dimensions. It acknowledges the brokenness of the present because of injustice. Lamenting makes a link between mourning and healing which makes new, truer relationships in the future possible. Furthermore, without lament that has its source deep in the heart of the lamenting person, there is no real healing that reconciles people to each other or persons to God. For a healthy relationship to grow, the process of lamenting and healing is of enormous importance.

¹⁴² Friends, p. 251.

¹⁴³ See Friends, p. 258.

¹⁴⁴ See Friends, p. 257.

¹⁴⁵ Lamenting Tragedy, p. 220.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Furthermore, lament comes from the depth of the human soul. Lament is risky; because of it calls into question existing structures of power. Lament is revolutionary and restless in its hope for a better future. Nobody can be instructed to lament, but it presents an important challenge to the church and society to create safe space for lamenting, because it gives expression to the human need of hope for a better future by speaking out the unbearable.¹⁴⁷

The very nature of lament is spiritual and political. Remorse, anger, the need for justice and accountability combine as we compete with God.¹⁴⁸

Traditional liturgies are not without elements of lament. The confession of sin, reading of psalms, words of judgement and praise, and communal prayers are moments which can embody lament.¹⁴⁹

Accordingly, for women and men to live in a community and in other relationships together in interrelatedness, lament and healing are very important for a truer relatedness to each other. This process will propel and confirm equality and unity of God's people. So lament and healing are and have to be included in the course of the empowerment of women. In turn the empowerment of women will, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, be able to rectify distorted, abusive, and oppressive relationships between men and women (see the narrative of Judy).

¹⁴⁷ Lamenting Tragedy, p. 221.

¹⁴⁸ Compete with God in that sense that God is the reason and part of the problem as well as the one towards lament is directed to. As an example: Hannah laments her barrenness which she calls her 'affliction' with prayer and fasting (1 Sam 1); see Lamenting Tragedy, p. 227.

¹⁴⁹ Lamenting Tragedy, p. 233.

Epilogue

The church of our days has its responsibility in the world. And that is why the church and its members are in charge to search for just and accountable relationships in community. Furthermore, only actions are able to show that someone is in the world yet not of the world. The reality of HIV/AIDS, however, brings new insight into the meaning of church from the perspective of those on the margin.¹⁵⁰

In South Africa there is much talk about abstinence, prevention and medication in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Also in the church there are various debates about safer sex, and the allowance of condoms if sex is acceptable for the church (from the Catholic perspective) at all. That means in that case the only answer would be abstinence. But, however, there is very little being said about the moral and the ethical issues raised by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.¹⁵¹ So far the church has not acted adequately. Moral norms for sexual behaviour should not exclusively focus on controlling sexual feelings and activities. Furthermore, sexuality is of such importance in human life and in relationships that on the one hand it needs to be freed and nurtured, and on the other hand channelled and controlled. As a religion based on love, Christianity should not neglect or even worse, abandon such a topic. Gender equality and moral accountability are essential to this discussion.

At this point narratives come in again; because this is the point from which the building of a moral community can start. Narratives are at the heart of our faith and they inform us about values and dispositions. Once the stories of the Bible and from traditions interact with our own stories, then moral consciousness can be nurtured. To be member of the body of Christ means to have a formed and transformed moral identity, and to keep with the faith identity of the community.

The main task of the church is, however, to nurture the moral capacities of its members, by story-telling, by involvement in the work of justice and charity, by upholding the integrity of all life, sustained by our liturgical practices.¹⁵² Accordingly, theory and praxis, such as moral truth and the way of living, should go hand in hand.

Finally, by grace failure does not have the last word in Christian life. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, the embodiment of our faith, whose life, death and resurrection we celebrate

¹⁵⁰ See *Church in the Round*, p. 122.

¹⁵¹ See *Women*, p. 20.

¹⁵² See *Women*, p. 22.

in the Eucharist. The picture here is one of solidarity in suffering as well as in hope and in memory of women who suffered and hoped before, of mutual support and of a moral community in relationship with God and one another. That picture – in my mind – could make a difference in the midst of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The gospels show us Jesus as a person who has particular concern for the suffering, the sick and the marginalized. He heals and gives new life to those who experience disease and exclusion. His teaching brings hope to those in despair. His death and resurrection hold the promise of new life for all people.

Accordingly, the caring witness of churches in these times needs compassionate and wise women and men whose actions are marked by a concern for justice and by the courage to teach about the One who showed us the way.

The symbol of the communion of saints is a highly inclusive symbol for it not only relates to desperate cultural groups, women and men, and the most socially marginalized with the powerful, all within an egalitarian community of grace, but also the living with the dead and the not yet born, all seekers of the divine, in a circle around the table around the Eucharist, the body of Christ which includes the whole earth.¹⁵³ When we remember in hope that we are part of this great cloud of witnesses it turns the living communities today toward historical praxis that adds to the measure of compassion and justice in the world, which justice the next generation will inherit,¹⁵⁴ and the next, and so forth, because we get a sense for the our interrelatedness to each other through all ages and all its people.

We are all united in the great cloud of witnesses, and so I want to close with the repetition of the **Wisdom 7:** ²⁷ *in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets.*

¹⁵³ See Friends, p. 262.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Bibliography

Ackermann, Denise M. *Engaging Stigma: An Embodied Theological Response to HIV and AIDS*. Unpublished paper [Engaging Stigma].

Ackermann, Denise M. *Deep in the flesh: Women, Bodies and HIV/AIDS, a Feminist Ethical Perspective*. Unpublished paper [Women].

Ackermann, Denise M. *Becoming Fully Human: An Ethic of Relationship in Difference and Otherness*. JSOT 102 (1998) pp 13-27 [Fully Human].

Ackermann, Denise M. *Lamenting tragedy from "the other side"*. In: Sameness and Difference: Problems and Potentials in South African Civil Society. South African Philosophical Studies, I., Washington, D. C. 2000. pp. 213-241 [Lamenting Tragedy].

Conradie, Ernst & Clowes, Lindsay (Edited by).
Rape. Rethinking Male Responseability. EFSA. South Africa 2003 [Rape].

Dube, Musa W. and Kanyoro, Musimbi.
Grant me justice! HIV/AIDS & gender readings of the Bible, Cluster Publications/Orbis Books 2004 [Grant me justice].

Richardson, Neville. *A call for care: HIV/AIDS challenges the church*, JTSA 125, July 2006, pp. 38-50 [JTSA].

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Friends of God and Prophets. A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*, Continuum/ New York 1998 [Friends].

Johnson, Elizabeth A. "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology." *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985): 261-294 [Jesus, the Wisdom].

- Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Truly Our Sister. A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*. Continuum / New York / London 2004 [Truly].
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Consider Jesus. Waves of Renewal in Christology*. Crossroad / New York 1990 [Consider Jesus].
- Lebacqz, Karen. *Foundations for a Christian Approach to Justice. Justice in an Unjust World*. Minneapolis 1987 [Justice].
- Niekerk, Anton A van & Kopelman, Loretta M. (Edited by)
Ethics & AIDS in Africa. The challenge to our thinking. South Africa 2005. [Ethics & AIDS in Africa].
- Rakoczy, Susan. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications (2004) pp. 198-254 [Susan Rakoczy].
- Russel, Letty M. *Church in the Round. Feminist Interpretation of the Church*. Louisville, Kentucky 1993 [Church in the Round].
- Rueher, Rosemary Radford.
Sexism and God-Talk. Towards a Feminist Theology. London: SCM Press LTD, 1983 [Sexism].
- Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*. London: Penguin, 1991 [Metaphor].
- Vosloo, Robert. *Body and health in the light of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Unpublished Paper [Vosloo].
- <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=6002>
[visited on: June 2006].
- http://www.fordham.edu/Academics/Programs_at_Fordham_/Theology/Faculty/Elizabeth_A_Johnson__8033.asp [visited on: June 2006].

<http://www.highbeam.com/library/docFree.asp?DOCID=1G1:68148570> [visited on: June 2006].

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0501.asp> [visited on: June 2006].

<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/sontag.htm> [visited on: 22.07.2006].

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/dube-10.html> [visited on: 22.07.2006].

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS_pandemic [visited on: 22.07. 2006].