

SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF HIV/AIDS: UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIORAL DRIVERS

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Abstract

The disease HIV/AIDS is a global monster engulfing both human and material resources. The actual causes of this dreaded disease is not yet known to man, neither have science and technology discovered its cure. This study is an expository research which looked at the level of sexual in promiscuity, sexual morality and homosexuality in the society. It concluded that HIV/AIDS is the divine punishment for man's immoral behaviour. Though there are cases of exemption. Like Jesus said in the case of the man born blind that 'neither this man nor his parents sinned...' This study explored the relationship between HIV/AIDS epidemic as a divine consequence for human actions and concluded that the scourge is the direct consequence for man's action, and has a serious psychological effect on the infected party. Hence obedience to divine laws and principles is the only way to overcome the menace.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, Divine Punishment, Divine Commandment, Sexual immorality

INTRODUCTION

The scourge of the disease, Human Immuno Deficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) has become the greatest health challenges facing man all-round the globe. Between June 8th to 11th 2011, the world leaders including the President of Nigeria convened in New York, United Nations headquarters, USA to find solutions to this problem. The origin/cause and permanent cure for HIV/AIDS are not yet known to man in all his science and technological research. The retroviral drugs so far discovered haven't been able to go a long way in meeting the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS. This is because the drugs are so costly that the ordinary man in the street cannot afford it. Even when the government has procured and subsidized the price of the drugs, still fear of stigmatization and discrimination have prevented many from accessing the drugs. Because of the stigmatization associated with the disease in Nigeria today, it has continued to spread like wild fire and is daily consuming many, especially the youths.

THE CONSEQUENCE IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is no precise Hebrew word for sin; the Greek word, Harmatia, means to miss the mark. Both the Old and New Testament used variety of words to describe what sin is. In the Old Testament, the word sin means a rebellion against God, a breach of an agreement; a disloyalty or disobedience. Sin is a failure of the inferior (man) to fulfil his obligations (Genesis 31:36; 42:22) or the host to fulfil his duty of hospitality (Genesis

20:9). By divine arrangement, sin or iniquity ought not to exist but man's disobedience trampled on this grace. The consequence of sin is guilt which often is described as too heavy for the sinner to carry (Genesis 4:13, Is. 1:4; Psalm 38:5). Sin is like a rust which eats into a metal vessel (Eze. 24:6). The sin of Judah is engraved on his heart like an inscription on a stone (Jer. 17:1). Literally, sin is an offence against God or religious or moral law. It is the act of breaking a religious or moral law. Also, it is an action that people strongly disapprove of (Hornby, 2005). All these metaphors attempt to express the damage of sin to a sinner. Sin is not only a liability before Yahweh but also a corruption of the person. This liability is also a responsibility which remains until it is removed. Sin signifies a straying away - to miss the mark or the road. The sinner leaves the path that leads to his destination and is lost. His life is aimless and he will surely perish. Sin is the consequence of the wrong use of freedom given to man by God. Hosea (8:4) refers to sin as a breach of covenant and a sin against the law of Yahweh. It is an insult which arouses the anger of God. The sinner hates Yahweh (Ex. 20: 5; Deut. 5:9). Sin is often referred to as a folly and the sinner is a fool. In the Old Testament, a self-made fool is not treated with sympathy. For instance any woman caught in the act of committing adultery is stoned to death. Sin is also a trouble, an affliction and sorrow that affects not only the sinner but also the whole community. Hence, a sinner is psychologically a trouble maker - one who deliberately releases a harmful influence not only for himself but for his neighbour as well (Nnoruga 2006). Sin has both psychological and historical origin. In the Old Testament, the psychological origin is the lack of the knowledge of God (Hos. 2:8, 4:1). This lack of knowledge is refusal to know or accept God, to recognize His reality. There is no suspicion of any compulsion or neurosis but a deliberate act and indeed a breakdown of society. The historical origin of sin is recorded in Genesis chapter 3. The act of disobedience on the part of the first man Adam, is the avenue through which sin entered the world and the punishment thereof is being shared by all mankind. Man is tempted by agents or powers outside him (the devil). Though he has the power within him to resist but yielded because he wanted something which is not his. By this first sin, the good relationship between (God) Yahweh and the sons of man are destroyed. Man can repent, he can receive forgiveness and a renewal of covenant with Yahweh but there is no hope of return to paradise unless Yahweh restores man to His original bliss. In the New Testament the background of sin is seen in the Old Testament, but new elements are added to the concept. It divides sin into three parts namely: sin as a single act; sin as a state or condition and sin as a power. By this presentation the New Testament does not diminish the Biblical idea of the malice of sin, rather it emphasizes the magnitude of sin and the truly divine character of the saving deed of Jesus Christ - who is presented as the conqueror of sin. This makes Him a friend and an associate of sinners whom He calls to repentance. By his association Jesus does not condone sin. He states the malice of sin and made real to man the divine mercy of God and the disposition to forgive (Geoffrey Champman, 1968). The New Testament makes it clear that sin comes from the heart and only that defiles a man. Sin is the wandering away of the son from the father's house (Lk. 15:18-21). The story of the prodigal son represents New Testament idea of sin and sinners. The sinner only needs to ask for forgiveness and he will be welcome to the father's house. There is joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous ones. The Johannine writings give a more explicit

concept of sin than the other synoptic Gospels. It sees sin as lawlessness and unrighteousness (I John 3:4; 5:17). He who sins is from the devil and is a slave of sin (Jeremiah 8:34). It is the lust of flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life (I John 2:16). It is a condition induced by the evil act. The result of sin is death (I John 5:16). Jesus is the conqueror of sin, the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the whole world. For St. Paul, there is no excuse for sin. It is a deliberate act. He presents the world in which sin reigns as a place or prison without any hope being offered for escape. Sin is power (Romans 5:8). The effect of sin which is death has been overcome by the death of Christ on the cross. It is by dying with Christ that a sinner escapes. Sin can only be overcome by the reign of Christ and complete submission to Him (Romans 6:123).

THE SCOURGE OF HIV/AIDS

HIV is a viral infection caused by a brand of virus called retro-virus which attacks the body's immunity by rendering it ineffective in the fight against infectious diseases. The origin of this deadly disease though is claimed to be still not very well known to man yet man may not in absolute terms claim oblivion. Perhaps it is an ingenious way of checking the teeming world population by some cabal somewhere in the global system. Nevertheless, Chabs and Shingumi (2008) note that the first HIV problem was identified in USA in 1981, though there existed other HIV related diseases as far back as 1970s. The second form was discovered in Uganda in 1986. This was however followed by discoveries in 1983, 1984 and 1987.

The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation (The Obasanjo Reforms: HIV/AIDS Response (2007) presents the situation in Nigeria as not different from that of other countries in Africa. The problem of HIV/AIDS has led to great economic recession as well as loss of human and material resources in many countries. Millions of souls die every day as a result of HIV/AIDS and millions get infected day by day. Collaborating these facts, Okebukola (2011) notes that in the ongoing fight against the spread of the HIV/AIDS, African mothers and babies constitute an endangered breed. A statement released at the end of the meeting of world leaders at the United Nations Headquarters in New York between June 8 to 11 2011 identified yet again sub-Saharan Africa as the most ravaged region owing to poverty that has become a major hindrance to effective and sustained medical treatment. Ever since the discovery of HIV in 1981, Africa has remained the focus of international discussion for two reasons: the spread of the disease among the human population in the continent and the contested perception of Africa as the original birthplace of the virus. At the UN meeting, Secretary General Ban Kimoon explained the agony that HIV/AIDS has caused to many families and nations. It pains us to see a baby contracts HIV in the developed world, that pain is felt just as much when a baby contracts HIV in the developing world. African mothers, Asian mothers, Latin American mothers all feel the same love for their children, as mothers elsewhere. They deserve the same options for treatment (Okebukola, 2011).

Within Africa and elsewhere, HIV is widely regarded as a major illness that accounts for the deaths of a large number of mothers, children and the men are not left out too. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) cites a UN report which indicates that a child is born with HIV nearly every minute, almost all of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. It reports that in 2009 alone, approximately 370,000 babies were tainted at

birth with HIV and most of them were from Africa. HIV is still spreading fast, mother to child transmission is still unacceptably high and AIDS related maternal deaths are still rising despite the Millennium Development Goals aims to put an end to the spread of the HIV/AIDS by 2015. The statistics on HIV/AIDS is uninviting across the world; 30 million people are reported to have lost their lives through AIDS and 16 million children have been turned into orphans, still about 33 million people are known to be living with HIV and for every new day about 7,00 people are being infected. A report issued by the European Commission in 2009 stated that one in every three people who were infected with HIV were unaware that they were carrying the virus. This is seen to account for a rapid rise in the rate of infections.

THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

HIV is found in human fluids and thrive in warm, moist environments in the body, such as the genital areas, mouth and throat. It is mainly transmitted when fluids from infected persons enter the body of another person. This happens in the following ways: a. during sexual intercourse (either anal, oral or vaginal)

b. During blood transfusion

c. When using unsterilised piercing instruments like needles/syringes, razor blades, scissors for circumcision and other skin piercing instruments

d. From an infected mother to the baby during pregnancy, child birth or after birth through breast feeding.

With the identified mode of spread of HIV/AIDS Gordon and Klouda (1988) and Ojebode (2007) noted that the following individuals or groups are at much high risk :

i. Homosexuals

ii. People with several/multiple sex partners

iii. Prostitutes

iv. Patients patronizing quack health personnel

v. Children born or breast fed by infected mothers vi. Those patronizing unhygienic barbing salons vii. People needing blood transfusion

viii. Some careless health personnel working with AIDS patients or blood infected with HIV.

The year 2011 marks 30 years since the discovery of HIV/AIDS and the world is

Still grappling with ideas on the best way to develop vaccine or enduring medication for the virus at the same time, the number of people infected increases geometrically on daily basis. From the study on the spread and mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS Fabarebo (2007) finds out that HIV/AIDS is acquired and not hereditary and most mainly through means which the Bible condemns and warns man to keep off from. The Bible condemns homosexuality and lesbianism right from the Old Testament times for which the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord is against all sorts of sexual immorality. For instance, Romans 1:24-28, the Bible says:

Therefore the Lord gave them up in the list of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie... their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another... and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. God condemns perverse and immoral sexual favour and the penalty for it has always been death (Lev. 30:13; Deut. 23:17; II Thess. 2:1). Truly sex is dangerous and should be properly channelled. The sex instinct in man is one of the most profound and powerful of all human instincts. This instinct must be properly controlled, for man to maintain his primal position among animals. Other animals feel and express this natural impulse everywhere, anytime without social and religious considerations but man's attitude to sexual feeling and sexual expression is guided by social and religious considerations. In fact, religion regards sex as a sacred act religiously guarded with taboos, which its wrong use can cause social crises as well as bringing shame to the individual. It is in view of this that Fabarebo (2007) notes that man is not only a biological being but also a spiritual/religious and social being and all his act must conform within this realm. The bible vehemently condemns the wrong use of sex and all forms of sexual immorality (promiscuity, homosexuality, bestiality or lesbianism) which is very rampant in the society today. It stresses that such things should not even be mentioned among men. Examples abound in the Old and New Testaments concerning God's attitude towards all these forms of immoral behaviour. For example Leviticus 20:15 says if a man lies with a beast, he shall die, likewise the animal. Any woman who approaches any animal to have intercourse with it... they must die. Also Romans 6:12-14, 23 and I Corinthians 6:12-20, 7:2 admonish us to keep away from all forms of sexual misconduct stressing that sex is always a danger. Titus 2:3 teaches that man should have self-restrain. Failure of man to obey this divine injunction, Deuteronomy 26:21 says Yahweh will bring on you every sickness, every plague not mentioned in the book of the law (including HIV/AIDS). In Deuteronomy 28:20-23, it says Yahweh will infect you with the plague until it has consumed you... Yahweh will strike you with consumption, fever, inflammation, burning fever, drought, blight, and mildew and according to studies reveal that some of these sickness are symptoms of HIV/AIDS. In view of all these it is obvious to give the impression that HIV/AIDS is a divine punishment for sin. On the other hand, however, there are cases where an unborn child contacts HIV/AIDS from the mother, or a breastfeeding child at the mother's breast. There are cases when an innocent housewife contacts HIV from the wayward husband and vice versa. HIV can also be contacted through blood transfusion, barbing of hair or through injection by unqualified medical practitioners with an unsterilised needles. HIV/AIDS contacted through any of these means cannot be classified as divine punishment for sin.

COMBATING HIV/AIDS THROUGH DIVINE REVELATION

The most threatening fact about HIV/AIDS is that the people with it are surviving longer and are contributing to a steady increase in the number of people living with AIDS. This trend will continue as long as the number of diagnosis exceeds the number of people dying every year. In the millennium development goals report of 2005 it was noted that because there is no cure for AIDS, prevention is the only essential alternative. The Bible teaches man many ways to sound health. Proverbs 2:4-6 tells us that the fear of God

is the key to all knowledge including how to live a sound, healthy life. Statistics show that around half of all people who become infected with HIV do so before they are 25 years ... young people - 15-25 years account for half of all new HIV infections worldwide. More than 6, 000 become infected with HIV everyday (HIV/AIDS and MDGs, 2005). This statistics reveal that many of these young people who plunge into sex do so with little or no knowledge about sex, about HIV/AIDS and how to protect themselves. That is why the Bible says that my people perish for lack of Knowledge. We need to have good knowledge of the intricacies of sex and the knowledge of HIV/AIDS as well as share it with all. Proverbs 4:13 warns us to embrace education because it is our life and we must guide it. The Bible teaches self-restrain, body mortification, faithfulness to marriage partners and total abstinence for unmarried youths (Prov. 5:23; Titus 2:13; II Cor. 6:12-20 ; Rm. 6:12-14). All these are still the only known remedy to fight and reduce the spread of the deadly disease called HIV/AIDS. Most importantly, God promises forgiveness and healing for those who will turn from these sexual misconducts (II Chr. 7:14). Also God has always been regarded as the cure to all incurable diseases. He heals where the doctors have failed. There abound evidences of those who have received divine healing from HIV/ AIDS through faith in God and prayer. Finally the Bible encourages us all to be our brothers' keeper. Every person, especially the youth are left at the mercy of the pandemic disease. This calls us all to spread the message and not the virus and to show Christian love and care to people living with HIV/AIDS.

CONCLUSION

Sex was designed by God for man to continue the work of procreation within the marital institution. It is a tool of affection for spouses. It is important to note that undisciplined sexual urge, even though natural is dangerous how much more an unnatural and perverse sex. Malinocoski (1929) maintains that sex is regarded as dangerous... that it is tabooed and ritualised, surrounded by moral and legal norms not because of any superstition of primitive man or emotional view of instinct about strangeness but for the simple reason that sex is really dangerous. From the foregoing, it is concluded that the scourge is the direct consequence for man's action, and has a serious psychological effect on the infected party. Hence obedience to divine laws and principles is the only way to overcome the menace.

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