

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the role of men in responding to the HIV epidemic. Since the emergence of the epidemic in the 1980s, there has been greater focus on the vulnerability of women and children. This has had the effect of overlooking the role of men in the epidemic. Alternatively, there has been a tendency to blame men for violence against women and the spread of HIV. While it is clear that men are seriously implicated in the HIV epidemic, it has also become obvious that leaving them out of prevention, care and support programmes is counterproductive (Chitando 2007: 40). There is therefore need to ensure that men remain very much in the picture as nations, communities and institutions seek to provide effective responses to the epidemic. Departments of religious studies in African universities and educational institutions are being challenged to tackle the issue of men and HIV in a creative and determined manner. Musa W. Dube, one of the leading voices in the transformation of African theological education and religious studies in the wake of HIV, calls upon lecturers to ensure that their teaching is relevant to the struggle against the epidemic. Questioning the dictum of pursuing knowledge for its own sake, she contends that the epidemic calls for a paradigm shift. For her : The question of how our teaching can become part of the solution by helping the church and the society in general to reduce the spread of -HIV/AIDS and to provide quality care to those who are infected and affected is urgent. What is the point of our teaching if it cannot save lives and improve communities that are living under the shadow of death and hopelessness in this time of HIV/AIDS'? (Dube 2003: xii). African departments of religious studies need to take the theme of men and HIV seriously. They must conduct research, publish and teach courses that deconstruct aggressive and dangerous masculinities' that are exacerbated by religion and culture. They must address the reality that, in most instances. Men provide leadership in the homes, communities and nations. The quality of leadership demonstrated by men at these various levels has a direct bearing of the level of success attained in their response to the HIV epidemic. Scholars of religion(s) in Africa must interrogate the extent to which religion and culture have disempowered men in the era of HIV. They must proceed to suggest strategies for empowering men to ensure that

they become valuable resources in the overall response to HIV. Africa's development is tied to the quality of its women and men. While there has been greater emphasis on the vulnerability of women and children, it is clear that "we have moved into an era of widespread talk of 'men in 'troubled masculinities', and 'men at risk'"(Chant and Gutman 2001:I). The HIV epidemic has brought the theme of dangerous masculinities to the fore. Departments of religious studies in Africa are strategically placed to challenge these dangerous masculinities and facilitate their transformation to life-giving masculinities.

