

Challenging the Current understanding around HIV/AIDS

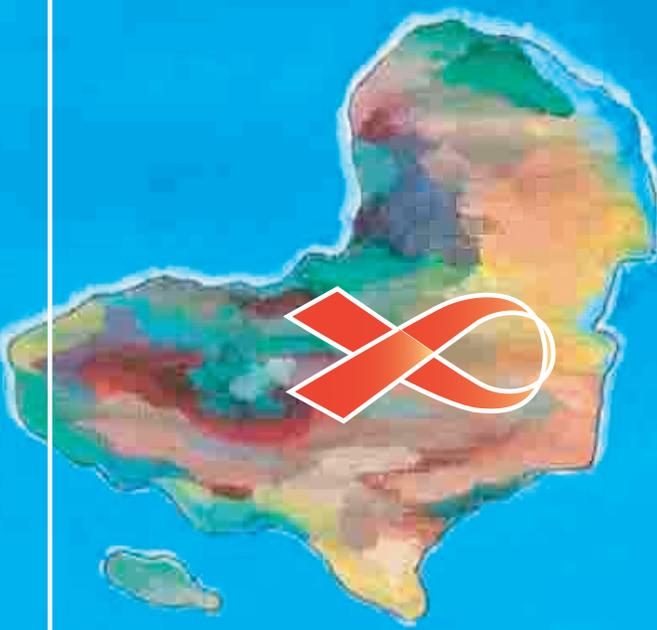
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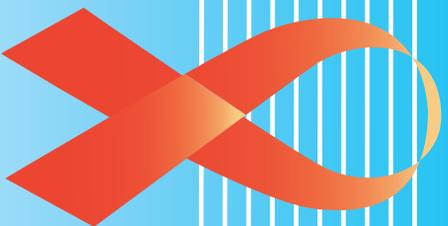
Challenging

**THE CURRENT UNDERSTANDING
AROUND HIV AND AIDS**



An African Christian Perspective

Churches United Against HIV and AIDS
In Eastern and Southern Africa.
CUAHA



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CUAHA

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Dedictaion

Dr Martti Lindqvist wrote two articles in this book.
He died in April, 2004 in Dar-es-Salam after a CUAHA
Meeting in which the idea of this book cry stalized.

CUAHA family dedicates this book

To the memory of Dr Lindqvist.

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Foreword

HIV and AIDS has been the focus of an intense debate since the virus was first discovered. Many traditions and cultures were unprepared to tackle the taboo issues of sexuality and death. Those infected or affected by HIV and AIDS were stigmatised. Feelings of shame and guilt were left unchallenged and discrimination was commonplace. The result is/was a culture of denial.

Churches have a vitally important role to play. Christ's Church can reach out to, impact upon, and nurture so many people. It has as its basic ethos our Lord's commandment to love. That love is not constrained by cultural differences, moral blinkers, or by tribal, nationalistic or racial barriers and enmity. Christ's message should be the churches' message. Christ established the Church to be an ethical example and teacher. God himself was born in human form, He showed a commitment to face our human challenges alongside us. In Christ He cured the sick, spread hope, offered consolation. The Gospel commands that we, as churches and as individuals carry on that work. Christ, by his example, also required of us that we do his work in an inclusive, welcoming and caring way. He was not interested in an individual's condition or status. Nor should we be. The focus of truly active Christian outreach ought to be to those marginalised as a result of stigmatisation or discrimination.

Many Christian churches have signally failed to respond effectively to the whole question of HIV and AIDS.

Theological differences have become blocks to working together. Churches have even failed to acknowledge the existence of HIV and AIDS within their own congregations, let alone in the community as a whole. Churches United in the Struggle Against HIV and AIDS in Southern and East Africa (CUAHA) was formed in response to this seeming inability or indifference.

The initiative to create CUAHA came from a number of African churches from 12 countries and from Finland. Within Africa, CUAHA partners are made up of 25 Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal and Orthodox churches and organisations. They are from Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Each member church and organisation is committed to learning, sharing and contributing to the pool of experience and resources based on its own experiences, knowledge and ability.

The CUAHA network shares experience, innovative ideas, effective strategies, and physical material. It makes more effective use of limited resources by increasing co-operation. Particularly CUAHA reaches out to those at risk. The workload and consequent emotional and physical drain on those involved in the fight against HIV and AIDS and its consequences are also issues with which CUAHA is actively involved. Help is offered in empowerment and capacity building inside and among member groups.

CUAHA has the aim of making the fight against HIV and AIDS a component in the mission of every church in

Africa. One way it hopes to bring this about is to engender a spirit of South-South co-operation in addition to South-North co-operation. The CUAHA network was made possible by the development cooperation funding for non-governmental organizations, provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland

Africa is alive with hope. Societal norms throughout the continent are redolent with the vitality which inspires. It inspires both individuals and communities to work the impossible – to create miracles. Such inspiration works even when seemingly insurmountable problems are faced. This is the nuanced message of the second stanza of CUAHA’s motto.

The first stanza of CUAHA’s motto can be viewed as a European way of looking at life. It enunciates the truism that, by working together, hope is renewed. Optimism is regained even when thought dead.

A big “Thank you” to everyone who has been involved in writing this book. It has been the result of much hard work and positive collaboration. I offer a special acknowledgement to those who have put in hours of work in creating articles and putting into words what we think and what we want to happen.

Several articles herein were written by Dr. Martti Lindqvist. To him I owe a special acknowledgement and it is to him that CUAHA family dedicates this book. Dr. Lindqvist died in April 2004 in Dar es Sala’am a few days after the CUAHA meeting. A few, short days before Martti

passed to eternal life, he led all of us gathered in Dar es Sala'am in this insightful prayer:

My God! Here I am this morning.

You created me in Your own image and, therefore, I exist.

At times I wish You would look at me. At other times I am afraid of You doing so.

Many times I have tried to make myself better in order to be accepted by You.

I have thought that You cannot tolerate me because I have felt that I am too big, too small, too ugly, too bad, too childish, too secular, too pious, too angry, and too full of self-pity.

At other times, perhaps, too clever, too self-conscious, too self-assured.

Today I want to stop all pretension.

I do not want to continue to play games and hide from You.

My God, I want to be true, both for You and for myself – here and now – changing nothing, hiding nothing, pretending nothing.

God, You created me to be the person whom I am.

I am not ashamed to be the human being whom You created.

I do not want to hide Your creation within me.

I am here.

You are here.

Your name means You are who You are so, therefore, am I.

Bless me that I am alive.

Amen.

Birgitta Rantakari

Chairperson CUAHA steering committee

PREFACE

The Church has been accused to remain silent for too long about the painful and difficult questions concerning HIV and AIDS such as stigmatisation and discrimination of people living with HIV and AIDS, questions of sin, guilt, shame and suffering and various issues of human rights. This book is CUAHA's first attempt to respond to these queries. In the component of Theology and Ethics we have worked for more than two years elaborating these issues from the point of view both of theological understanding and of ethical approach, which are now presented in this book. We have also dealt with the question on how to encourage Churches not only to bring awareness on HIV and AIDS and but also participating in AIDS treatment and counselling. Besides the component of Theology and Ethics CUAHA is also working in five other areas, which are shortly presented here:

Caring Ministry includes diaconia, social services and pastoral care. The aim is to strengthen the churches to carry out their social responsibilities and empower them as healing communities. Education and Training is achieving to improve knowledge and skills of clergy and professional church workers as well as lay people to deal with issues on HIV and AIDS. Through Communication and Network CUAHA is improving information, sharing and communication among its partners in collaboration with other coexisting networks engaged with the issues of HIV and AIDS. Advocacy is supporting the achievement of full human rights of people living with HIV and AIDS,

particularly of those most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded. This happens through improvement of awareness based on true and adequate information. We also emphasize Arts and Culture to be an integrated element in CUAHA's activities.

Coming from different Churches and Denominations we have aimed to find a common agenda in spite of our different doctrinal, historical and cultural backgrounds and traditions. The content of the book has been thoroughly discussed and elaborated in our group discussions. However all the writers are individually fully responsible for their own articles.

The members of the Theology and Ethics group participating in the preparation of this book were:

Rev. Dr. Veikko Munyika, Namibia (Lutheran), Chairman.

Rev. Riitta Aaltonen, Finland, Tanzania (Lutheran),
Co-chairperson,

Archmandrite Johannes Eko, Kenya (Orthodox),

Rev. Dr. James Kombo, Kenya (Anglican),

Dr. Martti Linqvist, Finland (Lutheran),

Bishop Walter Obare, Kenya (Lutheran),

Rev. Charles Karekezi, Rwanda (Pentecostal),

Father Makarios Ngugi, Kenya (Orthodox),

Rev. George Mwita, Tanzania (Pentecostal),

Mr. Tomi Järvinen, Finland, Kenya (Pentecostal),

Rev. Jape Heath, South Africa (Anglican) and

Mr. John Maina, Kenya (Lutheran) as a secretary.

We hope that this book could be widely used in different Churches and Denominations among the clergy and also by the students in various Theological institutions and seminars. Our prayer is that God will use this book as a tool when we are together struggling against HIV and AIDS especially in Eastern and Southern Africa.

On behalf of the Editing committee

Rev. Riitta Aaltonen

Co-Chair of the Theology and Ethnic Component

INTRODUCTION

Contributions included in this volume are aiming to respond to the criticism, questions and queries directed at the church and her theologians doing too little in the war against HIV and AIDS. They confront the reader with hard facts that God co-exists with evil. In spite of the human experience of evil, God remains in charge, purposeful and benevolent.

In his article entitled *God's Mastery and Mystery in Creation and History*, Dr. Martti Lindqvist is at pains, explaining the disturbing ambiguity of God's co-existence with evil. Why does God allow evil such as natural disasters, and now HIV and AIDS to exist? "There is no way to avoid this kind of ambiguity. What we experience is but a "grim picture", as if "in the broken mirror", at least for now.

In the mind of Dr. Lindqvist, human experience, however ambiguous, means that we still have life, the ultimate gift of God to his creation. It is "a miracle" that life continues in the midst of hardship, pain and death. We may have threatening experiences, but, let us pray, work and hope that despite our experiences of evil and death, life will continue on earth even when we ourselves have departed. Suffering is thus part and parcel of life. This is what is implied in the incarnation, powerlessness, vulnerability, crucifixion, even death. "Life", says Lindquist "is shared in its joys and sorrows". Human life is "a continuous process of incarnation". We live in "times of crisis" where we might be forced to painfully give up things dearest to us, even life itself. The existence of evil is

not a sign of God's absence. Humans must "bend" to the fact that God remains a purposeful God and benevolent, even in the context of HIV and AIDS. Humans are not alone in the crises. They are part of a greater story "of giving and receiving, dying and renewing, struggle and harmony" which does not exclude God, "I Am who I Am".

In his article entitled: *God, Theodicy and HIV and AIDS: The Mystery of God and Pain and Suffering in Human Experience*, Dr. James Kombo, tackles the paradoxical co-existence of evil and God, hope and despair. They "do not have to be mutually exclusive". These experiences can serve as a fertile soil for patience, progress and faith. For Kombo, "pain is and God is." God Himself as Trinity, the incarnated and the Spirit experiences pain, suffering, even death with us.

Dr. Kombo presents three traditional reasons why evil exists: humans enjoy freedom of choice, the reality of sin and spiritual agents like demons. Dr. Kombo finally turns to the question of evil in the context of HIV and AIDS. God is present within the reality he created, even if pain, suffering and death caused by HIV and AIDS is part of it. As such, human existence cannot be understood apart from the existence of God. HIV and AIDS remains a mystery which causes untold pain, suffering and death. However, in the mind of Dr. Kombo, the mystery into meaningfulness only in the context of the incarnated Christ, in Trinity and in the Spirit of God. This means that we must refuse to be something less than a united community focusing not on pain, suffering and loss but on our knowing that: (i) in Christ, God is a participant in our pain, suffering and loss; (ii) we should actively participate

in tackling issues of pain, suffering and loss; caused by HIV and AIDS; and that (iii) pain, suffering and death caused by HIV and AIDS form part and parcel of our journey to the cross with God accompanying and seeing us through.

In his article entitled: *Ethics of Care and Medical Practice in their Social Context*, Dr. Martti Lindqvist sees the HIV and AIDS pandemic as "a major socio-ethical challenge" and "a new form of apartheid" which affects every dimension of human life. Ways to prevent further spread of HIV include advocacy for all to have access to proper medical treatment and good medication, insistence that people living with HIV and AIDS must be treated according to their needs and that they must be respected and given hope and reasons to live. Lindqvist feels strongly that compulsion must be excluded from HIV prevention on the basis that it violates basic human rights.

Due to HIV and AIDS, there are people who are seriously and terminally ill. We can do almost nothing to intervene. But their wishes must be listened to, their symptoms must be treated to alleviate their pain and be prepared for the approaching death. Lindqvist is of the opinion that the best we can do is to alleviate the pain of the terminally ill, help them participate in life as they still possibly can, provide them with a possibility to experience joy in the context of suffering, meaningfulness, assuring them of our care for their loved ones even after they have departed. We must all respect and support the sick to keep their dignity to the last minute of their life.

In his article entitled: *Confronting Stigma and its devastating consequences*, Dr. Veikko Munyika tackles what he calls 'one of the worst obstacles to effective HIV prevention, treatment and care for people living with HIV and AIDS. He calls for the development of an HIV and AIDS liberation theology as a tool to defeat internal and external stigma, the theology of retribution which promotes stigma. Dr. Munyika advises that the best tool to confront and defeat HIV and AIDS related stigma is to engage in compassionate activities as God did in Jesus Christ, and to uphold the doctrine of unconditional acceptance. Dr. Munyika argues that compassion and acceptance heal. To stigmatize whether oneself or another is to violate human dignity and the image of God in humans. The church must therefore, engage in advocacy activities. Dr. Munyika challenges everyone who discriminates people living with HIV or AIDS to deal the unconscious beliefs on which stigma is based.

Dr. Munyika concludes by spelling out what he thinks should be the role of theologians during the HIV and AIDS era: to repent and make a commitment to join in the war against HIV and its consequences; to be informed about the pandemic; to make it an integral part of their theological activities; to fight against fear and prejudice; to retrieve biblical texts that fight against stigma and discrimination; to involve people living with HIV and AIDS in the struggle against the same and to make the church a home to all.

In his presentation entitled *HIV and AIDS and Healing*, Rev. Hannu Happonen treats the question of miracles and healing. Since the disobedience of the first human

ancestors perishability, decay and death became part and parcel of human life. Such deterioration can be attributed to various factors, including nature, sin, curse, demons, even God. He asks whether HIV and AIDS can be placed under one of the categories listed. He concludes that HIV and AIDS "developed as other things have developed in creation". What we need most in the HIV and AIDS era is compassion and love for one another. It is significant to inquire about the genesis of HIV, but most important is how to live and face the future with it.

Dr. Happonen rejects "the Lord alone is my healer-mentality" which discourages people living with HIV/AIDS from seeking medical attention. God can heal miraculously, but people must also seek other means of healing, particularly "medical". Nothing is unbiblical or evil about it. The healing ministry of the church needs to be supplemented by educating and teaching people about the importance of "healing themselves" by avoiding risky behavior and of taking an HIV test. He also advises against blaming the people living with HIV and AIDS for their lack of faith, if they are not healed miraculously. Faith is a gift. He advises readers to keep the health balance between the "already" and the "not yet" which characterizes biblical eschatology. A person may be supernaturally healed, but may still fall sick and die. A believer living with HIV and AIDS "may be supernaturally healed but may fall sick". He calls on all of us to combine praying, as if everything depends on God and working as if everything depended on us. Failing to do that is failing to respond to Christ himself.

The authors of the articles summarized above shall have achieved their objectives if they impressed on the mind of the reader that: (a) the coexistence of God and evil is a mystery. (b) the presence of evil in God's world is not a sign of the absence of God, his love or benevolence. (c) God loves everyone unconditionally and expect humans to unconditionally love, respect, care, and have compassion for one another. (d) God calls humans, not either to pray or to work, but both to pray and to work.

Rev. Dr. Veikko Munyika

Co-Chair of CUAHA Steering Committee

Co-Chair of the Theology and Ethics Component