Chapter 10

The Sexual Abuse of African Nuns:
No Sanctuary for African Women in the Sisterhood

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ABSTRACT

Special circumstances seem to engender the practice of sexual abuse of African nuns by African priests. The priesthood is grounded in male dominance, as is the Catholic Church. Followers of the Catholic faith are trained from an early age to be obedient and unquestioning of the priest. That stance is compatible with many sub-Saharan cultures that position males at the society's apex. The role of females in such cultures is to be obedient to males. For African females, daring to become nuns is still a relatively novel decision in some communities. The decision is fraught with incentives and consequences. Among those incentives is gaining access to education. For sub-Saharan African women access to education maybe a steppingstone to becoming a nun. There is an examination of the impact of education gained through the embrace of Catholicism, joining the sisterhood of nuns, juxtaposed to the silent epidemic of sexual violence perpetrated by priests and bishops and the realization that for many African nuns the sisterhood does not provide sanctuary from priest sexual abuse.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning with Confucius, there have been many educators who commented on the need and the value of education in order to promote the development of an enlightened and harmonious society. Others who accepted the human capital position within the context of education were Plato, and Horace Mann; they asserted the link between a society's investment in education and the outcome of citizens who repay the society through artistic, literary, musical, social and political contributions. Additionally, Confucius believed, "society must support proper education because proper education develops good citizens who, in turn build and interact with a proper society" (Cooney, Cross, & Trunk, 1993, p 36).

Unlike African American females who were traditionally afforded more opportunities for an education over African American males, sub-Saharan African women in most circumstances were not afforded such educational opportunities for various cultural reasons and social prejudices (Okunuga, 2011). In the United States, the virulent forces of racism that deliberately marginalized African American men in particular and placed them on an unequal footing in the job market prevented them from economically being able to sustain a typical patriarchal existence. Those circumstances positioned African American females to assume an important role in the African American community as major financial contributors (Dabel, 2008).

Education in many nations has increasingly become a high priority within the context of globalized knowledge economy, as governments perceive such education will provide citizens with opportunities for higher incomes, and of course lead to economic competitiveness in the global sphere (Lauder et al., 2012). In developing areas of the world the goal maybe to provide universal education as such nations seek to give this generation of children better education opportunities than those given previous generations. Many nations in sub-Sahara Africa determined to make basic access to education a priority given the high rates of illiteracy, with the hope of lifting living standards in their nations. Nigeria for example became a signatory of the Millennium Development Goal (2015) to eradicate poverty by half in the year 2015 (Asaju, 2012). That action came about in the belief that an investment in human capital, as embodied in education, would decrease poverty (Asaju, 2012).

Figures on the high rate of children not receiving educational opportunities in many sub-Saharan nations are a cause for alarm. For example, UNESCO estimated 29 million primary age children were not attending school and

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