



EXAMINATION OF BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR SINGLE MOTHERS ON THEIR SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Abstract:

The study was about an Assessment of the Challenges facing Single Mothers on their Spiritual Growth in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The objective was to establish the biblical and theological foundations for single mothers on their spiritual growth in the Seventh Dy Adventist Church. The Marxist Theory of Feminism was used. The study was conducted in Kisii County which is in Western Kenya. The target population in the study included 5 Churches within the Nyanchwa Station, South Kenya Conference. The researcher employed a census sampling method from the 5 churches with a sample population of 105 participants. The main instruments of data collection for the study were questionnaires, focused group discussions, and oral interviews. The study established the biblical and theological foundations for single mothers by referencing single mothers in the Bible. The study recommended that all aspects of inclusivity, acceptance and being welcome need to be accorded to all Christians, regardless of their marital status; The Church in Africa could borrow a leaf from the Church in the West in practicing the doctrine and social teaching of the church, about accepting members as they come; and Pastoral Councils and Christians in leadership need to be on the front line in practicing inclusiveness and acceptance of every Christian.

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1. Introduction

The mid-twentieth century saw an increase in single-parent families which greatly attributed to the demise of a spouse. Alawode (2000) has asserted that single-parent families result from the separation of various kinds from, divorce, having children out of wedlock or the death of one spouse. Kotwal & Prabhakar (2009) in psycho-social challenges of single mothers and the effectiveness of targeted intervention asserts that in the established societies of the Western world single mothers face serious problems. These range from financial challenges and caregiver constraints, having low levels on matters of self-esteem and misery, high-level psychological distress as well as lack of support in terms of social life when comparing them to other women in the same economic level who live but live along with their spouses.

Azman & Noraida (2015) denote the negative effects of single motherhood as stigma, discrimination, low self-esteem fear and failure, vulnerable personalities, guilt and financial constraints. These mothers suffer from the guilt of mistakes arising from their past life and in some cases evils that lead to their present status which is not easily deleted from their consciences. The situation becomes even worse when the single mother is jobless or when has a job that is not paying well (Brown, 2009). Spiritually, single mothers feel judged. They feel as if everyone is condemning them for their status. This is evident from the fact that the church has no elaborate plans for their welfare and upkeep (Macionis, 1997). This is what has necessitated this research study.

The role of a single mother can be different from that of a married mother. Some single mothers often have highly stressful lives, and one way mothers deal with negative situations is by using their religious beliefs and practices as coping mechanisms (Sullivan 2008). Single parents and coupled parents face different types of stress when it comes to parenting. When a child is sick and needs to be cared for at home, married parents have more flexibility because there are two people to share the responsibilities, while single parents are the sole caregivers and usually the only ones bringing income into the household, so staying home with a sick child is not always an option (Amato, 2000).

Brodsky (1999) argues that spirituality gives a leeway for some mothers to be part of supportive associations with other people through churches where their membership is. Pearce and Axinn (1998) find individual's social relationships are drastically affected by the extent to which they internalize their religion. Having supportive social relationships within their religious faith would possibly be an asset to single mothers. Sullivan (2008) states that 7 out of 10 American adults find purpose and meaning in life because of their religious faith.

According to Sorenson, Grindstaff, & Turner (1995) having a child within marriage is considered an expectation or social norm in most religious communities, and mothers who are married before having a child may face less stress than non-married mothers.

Religion gives parents certain roles and encourages them to raise their children in a certain way (Pearce and Axinn, 2007). As a result, parent-child relationships may be moulded by religious teachings through private and public practices. Through these practices, mothers may be able to “socialize their children to believe and practice in ways similar to their own” (Pearce 2007). The purpose of this research is to look at the differences between married mothers and non-married mothers concerning religiosity. If there are differences present, this thesis examined them to see if it is the marital status or other contributing factors that have an impact on religiosity measures.

In the United States of America for instance, almost a quarter of children under the age of 18 live with one parent and no other adults (23%), more than three times the share of children around the world who do so (7%). Anderson, (1994) in his study “Single-parent family strength: A phenomenological study” found out that the number of single-parent families was in an increasing trend in the two decades. For instance, in Canada, there has been a notable increase in the number of lone-parent families with children from 1.64 million in 2018 to 1.56 million in 2010 (Duffin, 2019).

In India, single-parents are mainly women (widows). Wilcox (2003) in a study, indicated that women whose spouse died in recent times had a more depressed mood, their social functioning was poor in nature, their mental and physical wellness was also lower when they were compared to those women whose spouses died a year(s) ago. Singaporean for instance, single-parent families “are not specifically targeted by government policy” (Wee, 2007). Public discourse for a long time has highlighted that such family forms should be discouraged as they do not conform to the ideal family type which is supposedly best for children’s development (Wong et al., 2004).

In Sub-Saharan African countries, the pattern of single motherhood seems to be in a growing trend as well. This is clear from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DSH, 1990-2015) data as it is indicated in some Sub-Saharan African states on the living standards of the children. The percentage of children who live in families with mothers only differ according to the state. For instance, Nigeria stands at (10.1%), Uganda’s rate stands at (16.9%), and Tanzania’s rate stands at (17.3%) while Zambia stands at (17.8%). These states are viewed as the ones that have the lowest percentages of small kids living with moms only. However, higher percentages of children living with moms alone are found in states such as South Africa which stands at (34.4%), Namibia which stands at (27.3%) and Zimbabwe which stands at (26.3%) (Dlamini, 2006).

Overall, single life is a complex issue that is real in most parts of African countries. In the African setting, single motherhood is “viewed more of a curse than being a blessing.” “Single motherhood is more often viewed as bad luck, curse or even witchery especially when one passes the age that is perceived as marriageable.” (Nyoroh, 2004). Single motherhood as seen today was unheard of during pre-colonial and even during the colonial period of the Ibo religious tradition. A woman could not live or stay alone without the possibility of being a prostitute. There were only two options, she would either live with her parents or stay with her husband; nothing more or less. Pregnancy before marriage or out of marriage

was a thing that was condemned and scorned by society. Songs were even created by different social set-up purposely to mock such occurrences.

The global SDA church while recognizing the presence of divorce, responds to it by suggesting that divine grace is the only remedy for the financial constraints of divorce. The church only responds to divorce and remarriage but misses on how to handle single mothers who by and large form part of their congregations. It is notable to say that only 29% of all wage-earning Kenyans are women. The highest percentage of women work in the less earning Agricultural sector, which is represented by 70%. To remain relevant in the church and society, some of these women resort to retrogressive actions like abortion. In Kenya, nearly 20,000 women and girls abort every year (Daily Nation, 2014). Single motherhood, particularly its causes and consequences, has not received considerable attention in Kenya. The challenges facing single mothers in Kenya are daunting, with high levels of unemployment and extreme poverty, placing them in precarious positions. Children living in such a context require high supervision as the environment is fraught with extraordinary dangers stemming from, poor sanitation, accidents, violence, drugs and alcohol abuse (Ngunjiri, 2019).

South Kenya Conference in which Nyanchwa station is a part has a department of ADRA (Adventist Development Relief Agency) which takes care of the needs of single mothers within her region. The department seems to be overwhelmed because the number of single mothers seems to increase due to high HIV and AIDS, poverty and stress-associated diseases. In the Station, the single mothers suffer from neglect, depression, low self-esteem, financial constraints, discrimination, stigmatization and loneliness. This makes them suffer both spiritually socially and even economically. It's on this basis that the study seeks to assess the economic challenges facing single mother in Nyanchwa station, Kenya.

2. Statement of the Problem

The SDA Church has a women ministry department to deal with issues affecting women. The formation of the Department of Women Ministries in S.D.A Church was intended to uphold, to be there for encouragement, and also to challenge the Seventh-day Adventist women as they walk daily as the Lord's disciples and also as the members of Jesus' Church in the world. The sole mandate of the women ministries in S.D.A church is; in its wider view, similar to the body of Christ - that of exalting Jesus Christ in the church and also in the whole universe as well.

The department is also charged with the identification and supporting of single mothers within their churches economically to help them grow spiritually. Previous studies focused only on the impact of financial strains on the psychological well-being and mental health of single mothers (Alamgir, Naheed & Luby, 2010; Aranda & Lincoln, 2011; Chou & Chi, 2001; Thanakwang, 2010). However, there is a gap in the previous studies as there is no study that has examined the challenges faced by single mothers on their spiritual growth in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. It is on this ground that the

researcher seeks to study the biblical and theological foundations for single mothers on their spiritual growth in the seventh-day Adventist church in Nyanchwa Station.

2.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the biblical and theological foundations for single mothers on their spiritual growth in the seventh-day Adventist church.

2.2 Objectives of the Study

The specific objective of the study was to establish the Biblical and Theological Foundations for single mothers on their spiritual growth in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

2.3 Research Questions

What are the Biblical and Theological foundations for single mothers on their spiritual growth in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

3. Literature Review

3.1 The Biblical and Theological foundations for single mothers in the SDA Church on their spiritual growth.

The great women of the bible like Dorcas and Naom (Holy Bible, NKJV) were single mothers. Though they met untold challenges, they never gave up but contributed immensely to the course of God. The two and many others are just but examples of successful single mothers. If the church created opportunities for such a group of people, great work will be realized.

Jones (2008) is of the view that when God spoke to his people, he spoke to married parents and single parents without distinction. In other words, the general commands given to all parents pertain to all. Single parents are therefore not a special subcategory. The bible has given the great focus on single mothers. In the book of Genesis 21:9-14, Hagar became the first single mother mentioned in the Bible. She was emotionally abandoned, spiritually wounded, but deeply loved by God (Gen. 16:7). Hagar was left with the overwhelming responsibility of raising a child alone without the provision and protection of a father, with no water to drink and no well to draw from, death seemed imminent for the boy and his mother until God intervened (Gen. 21:18). Hagar would never have found her way to God, but God in His mercy, found His way to her.

Tabitha (Dorcas) in Acts 9:36 was a single mother who made use of her Godly gifts to help the poor and was raised back to life by Peter to continue serving and this spread the gospel wider. The Samaritan woman (John 4:27-39) was also single but became a great evangelist in Jesus ministry. She immensely contributed to the work of God despite her social status. The widow of Zeraphat is yet another example of a single mother. Elijah tested her obedience and faith and she finally received God's grace through her act of obedience (2 Kings 4:1). Rahab, the harlot (Joshua 2) became a refuge for the Israelites

spies, she had faith in the Israelites and this earned her and her family freedom. She bore Boaz (Matt. 1:2-6) who married Ruth who bore Obed, father to Jesse, David's father. The ancestral chain continues through Joseph who married Mary the mother of Jesus.

Apart from their presence among the church congregations, the single mothers need recognition as social entities among their fellow Christians. Crabb (1977) argues that value introjections may lead to self-guilt and a sense of hopelessness for single mothers. This is attributed to deep wounds as a result of the prevailing circumstances that led them to their current status of single motherhood. Brown (2009) thinks that children of these single mothers are victims. They lose protection, their identity as well as security.

3.2 Theoretical Literature

This research study was guided by the Marxist Theory of Feminism by Karl Marx (Marx & Morgan, 1877). The Proponents of Marxist Feminists theory argue that in capitalist societies, a nuclear family forms part of the larger body of capitalism and that the way it is organized, and its operations are entirely determined by the capitalist economy as its base; the point here is that the oppression of women at large primarily emanates from the arrangement of the capitalist systems rather than that of patriarchal conducts seen in men which on the other hand emphasizes on the radical feminists (Summer, 1989).

Thus according to the Marxist Feminists; the housewives in their state fulfil several and very important duties for the capitalist system: they give birth to children and bring them up for the capitalist's system freely and, together with their men, they encourage their children to obey the authorities to foster a new, and suitably obedient blood of workers is made available; better still, the housewives can render many of the domestic chores and services at low or zero cost which in turn brings down the wage levels which is much needed by the capitalist system in order pay its male workers. Again, women are seen as a form of the reserve army of labour that is employable only when the economic growth, but which assume their usual traditional housewife- mother chores in a period of economic recession (Tong, 2013).

According to Marxist feminists, women are there to render emotional support to their spouses without whom their spouses would not be able to encounter oppression and the isolation of the capitalist work environment. If there is no such emotional assistance; there is the likelihood that they would be more ready and willing to confront the capitalist system at the workplace. However, due to the family's many responsibilities the workers may be dissuaded to avoid engaging themselves in strikes and the increased need for families' cars, machines used for washing and other equipment that help in maintaining spending and profits made for the capitalist system. And lastly, the processes of family socialization operating within families facilitate both the stabilization of the capitalist systems in general and also demotivate women aspiring to have career productive, which in the end restrains women from career opportunities in their life.

Therefore, as for the Marxist feminists the issues of the processes of socialization, the issues to do with how dissatisfaction is managed, how role roles are allocated among men and women and in general, all the other hidden services that are provided by the

capitalist families economic status all factors that contribute to the continued existence of this unfair capitalist system, and which particularly is to the disadvantage of women found in the system. For this reason, the role of women in nuclear families within it would not by any means get any better via gradual changes as is the case with the Liberal Feminists nor can the conditions of women be developed by rejecting the creation of relationships with men as is viewed by the Radical Feminists. Rather, what seems to be important is the unity between men and women of working-class people which is the only one that can bring to end this capitalist system and misuse of all these women and all men everywhere (Winkler, 2010).

However, the non-Marxists do not accept this interpretation and authenticity of the Marxist about capitalism and thereby the need for an anti-capitalist revolution. This theory was suitable for the study since it addresses the roles and responsibilities of not only single mothers but also women as well as their plight in society with particular attention drawn to those who are in the church. Thus, the theory was used to summarize the perception of single mothers in the SDA church.

4. Research Methodology

This study was based on a descriptive research design. In this research, information is collected from a given sample to explain certain areas or features and characteristics of the population from which the sample was taken. It also gave an accurate portrayal of the characteristics of persons, situations or groups and the frequency with which the phenomena occur (Ondiek, 2008). This method was suitable for the current study because it sought to describe the features and characteristics of the sample such as economic, social and emotional challenges of single mothers and how it affected their spiritual growth. Studies based on the survey research account for a substantial proportion of the research done in the fields of religion and education (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The target population defines those units for which the findings of the study are meant to generalize. The population is a well-defined or set of people, services, elements or events that are being investigated (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The target population was 105 participants from 5 churches in Nyanchwa Station. The researcher employed a census sampling method. During the study, interview questions were administered to 5 pastors, 5 church elders and 5 single mothers' leaders. A focused group discussion was done on 25 single women who were illiterate. Questionnaires were administered to 65 single women who were literate.

Data were collected by the use of questionnaires, focused group discussions, and records obtained through in-depth interviews and official reports. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis was used in data analysis. Quantitative data involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies counts, and percentages were used (Frankael and Wallen, 1993) using a computer statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Qualitative data collected from a depth interview

schedule and other qualitative data were analysed in an ongoing process based on themes and sub-themes, categories and sub-categories that emerged from the study (Gay, 2004).

4.2 Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussions

4.2.1 Questionnaire Rate of Return

The study targeted 95 single mothers. The total questionnaires returned were 65 which represented a 100% return rate.

4.2.2 The biblical and theological foundation for single mothers on their spiritual growth in the Seventh Day Adventist Church

Single mothers can help reveal truths about God. Having a healthy theology of the family, especially one that is inclusive of single-parent families, has important implications for practical theology and ministry. However, a theology of the single mother is not a theology FOR single mothers. It is a theology OF the single mother. A theology of the single mother is the same theology as for every other human on the planet because theology tells us about God and God is unchanging. A theology of the single mother enlarges our view of God so that our images and understanding of God can hold both the traditional nuclear family and the non-traditional family. This comes from a biblical ethic of the family where all in society are cared for. A theology should include care for all of God's children, including single mothers.

A theology of the single mother needs to be Trinitarian, include an egalitarian understanding of gender, be shaped in the image of God, and be incarnational. A theology of the single mother will incorporate the idea of holy friendship as the basis for healthy relationships. Language is important in the discussion of single mother theology. Even in academia, the language of "broken" has been used to describe single-parent families. Between God's relationality within God's self and God's love of justice, the importance of considering how single mothers, like widows and orphans, especially need others is obvious.

Self-sufficiency is a myth. All humans need others, and those "fragile families" like single-parent families, orphans and widows, need others even more than "traditional families." Lacking the help of a second parent, they need the help of others in their churches, friends, and extended families. Beginning a theology of the single mother on the relationality of the Trinity is a reminder that relationships are vitally important for the survival and health of the single mother, and their children.

Table 9: The biblical and theological foundation for single mothers on their spiritual growth in the Seventh Day Adventist Church

Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
There was practical theology surrounding single mothers	6.9	3.4	0	48.3	41.4	4.28	.751
Biblical foundations push for traditional family structures	51.7	34.5	0	13.8	0	4.38	.728
Justice was encouraged and there was inclusion of single mothers in theological teachings.	3.4	13.8	0	43.8	39.0	3.93	.651
Faith in God impacted their daily life.	50.7	49.3	0	0	0	4.38	.775
Single mothers were excluded from leadership positions by their sins of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing.	58.6	27.6	0	10.8	3.0	3.93	.799
Lack of support by their communities of worship.	10.4	10.0	0	55.2	24.4	4.38	.561

Results from the descriptive table established that 6.9% of respondents strongly agreed, 3.4% agreed, 48.3% disagreed and 41.45 strongly disagreed that there was practical theology surrounding single mothers with a mean of 4.48 and standard deviation of .751. On Biblical foundations that push for traditional family structures, 51.7% of respondents strongly agreed, 34.5% agreed, 13.8% disagreed with a mean of 4.38 and standard deviation of .728. The statement that justice was encouraged and there was the inclusion of single mothers in theological teachings, 3.4% respondents strongly agreed, 13.8% agreed, 43.8% disagreed, 39.0% strongly disagreed with a mean of 3.93 and a standard deviation of .651.

Results indicated that 50.7% strongly agreed, 49.3% agreed with the statement that faith in God impacted their daily lives. The researcher also observed that 58.6% of the respondents strongly agreed, 27.6% agreed, 10.8% disagreed, 3% strongly disagreed with the statement that single mothers were excluded from leadership positions by their sins of divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing and had a mean of 3.93 and standard deviation of .799. Results also recorded that 10.4% of respondents strongly agreed, 10.0% agreed, 55.2% disagreed, 24.4% strongly disagreed with the statement that lack of support by their communities of worship with a mean of 4.38 and standard deviation of .561.

5. Discussion of the Results

There were a good number of single parents in both the O.T and N.T Christian faith communities and actually, they were not left out of biblical counsel in the way to bring their children up (Ruth 1:8, 2 Tim 1:5, Acts 16:14-15). For example, the bible shows single parents such as Naom, Lydia, Lois, Eunice etc. God spoke to all people regardless of whether they were single parents or not. Meaning that the general commandments that

were given were intended to serve all people. Single parenthood is not in any way a special sub-category of parenting. The question is; what are the commands of God as pertains to parenting? Christian authors summarize biblical parenting duties in various ways, but most include the following: to give physical and emotional care, to give verbal instruction, to give physical discipline, to develop a model dependency on Christ that keeps growing into the likeness of Christ and also to pray for and together with your children in the family. In a single-parent family, it will not be possible to be there for your children all the time, put your energy, your skills and creativity into these duties as in a family with both parents. God plans that each parent performs his/her duty and not perform the role of two adults i.e. man and woman at the same time. What you need to do while depending on God, is to ensure the five areas are in cooperated in your parenting (Robert, 2000).

6. Summary of the Results

The lack of practical pastoral care for single-parent families is rooted in the focus of current conservative evangelical theology on the traditional, nuclear family. There is little conversation about what a theology of the family that serves all types of families could look like. A theology of the single mother could open up that conversation, and in turn, churches could begin to pastor and minister to the rising numbers of non-traditional families. Throughout scripture, there are examples of single-parent families as well as other examples of non-traditional family structures. These families are not idealized.

The multiplicity of examples and the fact that not all the families in the Bible are idealized proves that there is not just one biblical understanding of family in the Bible. Single mothers play prominent roles in the Old Testament. Tamar, Hagar, and others challenge the idea of the traditional, nuclear family in the Old Testament. There are many other examples of single motherhood within the Old Testament. The widow of Zarephath who helped Elijah was a single mother (1 Kings 17). The widow with the oil was also a single mother, who was able to save her children from slavery participating in a miracle (2 Kings 4). Naomi became a single mother of her two sons when Elimelech died (Ruth 1:3). There are other single mothers, many unnamed, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, underscoring that a plurality of family structures existed in the Old Testament.

Current theologies of the family provide a starting point from which to begin to imagine a theology of the single mother. Both complementarian theology and feminist theology shed light on what a theology of the single mother could be but from very different perspectives. Evaluating these theologies through a single-mother lens will help work towards a theology of the single mother.

7. Conclusion

Lack of fit to a theological premise, however, does not make single-parent situations less than ideal. Lack of fit to a theological premise simply challenges the assumptions and

patriarchal structure in which the theological premise is made. Single “welfare” mothers challenge patriarchal authority by not submitting to heterosexual marriage, and thus these mothers are characterized as dangerous. Dismissing an entire group of people and their situation as less than ideal does not validate one’s theology. Complementarian theology fails to provide a workable model for single mothers, and therefore must be refined at the very least. It is not the single parents that should be dismissed, but instead, the theology that attempts to dismiss them as a group of people.

There is much work to be done to continue this conversation about theology and single motherhood. For a theology of motherhood and families to be truly inclusive, they must include the realities of single mothers. While very often feminist theologians mention single mothers in passing and acknowledge that the single mother’s experience is often different from the experience of mothers in nuclear families, very few have focused exclusively on the experience of single mothers. A theology of the single mother needs to be Trinitarian, include an egalitarian understanding of gender, be shaped in the image of God, and be incarnational. A theology of the single mother will incorporate the idea of holy friendship as the basis for healthy relationships. Language is important in the discussion of single mother theology.

7.1 Recommendations of the Study

- 1) All aspects of inclusivity, acceptance and being welcome need to be accorded to all Christians, regardless of their marital status.
- 2) The Church in Africa could borrow a leaf from the Church in the West in practising the doctrine and social teaching of the church, about accepting members as they come.
- 3) Pastoral Councils and Christians in leadership need to be on the front line in practising inclusiveness and acceptance of every Christian.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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