



Jesus and the Stigmatized: Reading the Gospel of John in a Context of HIV/AIDS Related Stigmatization in Tanzania

Elia Shabani Mligo

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Biblical scholars often read the Bible with their own interpretive interests in mind, without associating the Bible with the concerns of laypeople. This largely undermines the contributions laypeople can offer from reading the Bible in their own contexts and from their own life experiences. Moreover, such exclusively scholarly reading conceals the role of biblical texts in dealing with current social problems, such as HIV/AIDS-related stigmatization. Hence, the lack of lay participation in the process of Bible reading makes the Bible less visible in various common life situations. In this volume Elia Shabani Mligo draws on his fieldwork among people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Tanzania, selects stigmatization as his perspective, and chooses participant-centered contextual Bible study as his method to argue that the reading of texts from the Gospel of John by PLWHA (given their lived experiences of stigmatization) empowers them to reject stigmatization as unjust. Mligo's study shows that Christian PLWHA reject stigmatization because it does not comply with the attitude of Jesus toward stigmatized groups in his own time. The theology emerging from the readings by stigmatized PLWHA, through their evaluation of Jesus' attitudes and acts toward stigmatized people in the texts, challenges churches in their obligatory mission as disciples of Jesus. Churches are challenged to reconsider healing, hospitality and caring, prophetic voices against stigmatization, and the way they teach about HIV and AIDS in relation to sexuality. Churches must revisit their practices toward stigmatized groups and listen to their voices. Mligo argues that participant-centered Bible-study methods similar to the one used in this book (whereby stigmatized people are the primary interlocutors in the process) can be useful tools in listening to the voices of stigmatized groups.

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