Third Millennium
African Single Mothers
&
Mother Widows

Ethno-Religio-Philosophical Touch

P.N. Wachege
The book draws from diverse African ethnic groups to present, examine, explain and verify the underlying African philosophy in regard to single mothers, that our African traditional societies catered for single mothers in relation to the causes of their state within the context of adherence to traditional norms of scorning family ethics, customary laws and traditional values in the African philosophy of parenthood, family life, house- hold and ancestral solidarity; that single mothers were incomplete and rather unfilled since they were traditionally not the normal mode of parenthood; that this African worldview is still conservative in our Third Millennium; now expressing some significant undermining transformations opening up more venues of living existential humanistic attitudes and liberational challenges.

It is the fascinating concern of this irresistible book to create an awareness in relation to the theme; to raise the critical consciousness of today’s more pronounced interchange of motherhood status; to married mothers dealing to single motherhood on the one hand, and single mothers actually getting married in hasty even ecclesiastical weddings on the other hand. To earnestly invite my fellow males to a painstaking yet crucial self-examination exercise of honestly and unashamedly examining how many or may be how few categories of single mothers they can identify themselves with as their primordial direct or indirect causes. To SHOUT loudly and CRY out that the issue of single motherhood STORY is the share and concern of ALL, thus dismantling communal dynamic, collective engagement and hitherto options from ALL.

Alan to be a pointer to the social-philosophical and religious lack of asserting oneself clearly and realistically into the actual identity of situation of diverse categories of contemporary single mothers, mitigating and promoting some existential analysis in this regard for further deepening and interrogating purposes with due respect to the perpetual value of motherhood in marriage and fundamental option for authentic Family exemplified by Mother Mary of Nazareth who eventually became a widowed single mother then Mother of 7 unto ALL.

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Lastly but not least, I humbly express my profound gratitude to all my respondents and all the thinkers from whose invaluable ideas and insights I enriched my book with. To all of you, GOD BLESS!
In our society has it. Wachogo uses actual data from wide-spread interviews of a whole spectrum of single mothers to unmask the fact that quite often, the woman who ends up a single mother is a victim of forces beyond her control such as trickery, rape and being widowed.

The author concludes from reliable data that the offspring of a good number of professional single mothers are not the consequent punishment for these women’s arrogance as many would like to believe. The bearing of children in these cases is a planned way for these women to prove their fecundity and fulfill one of the requirements of womanhood in the African sense.

The Church is not spared in the call for greater understanding and responsibility towards single mothers. The author challenges the Church to emulate Jesus Christ. Her founder, in giving a shepherd’s care to all his flock without discriminating against single mothers. “Our moral appraisal should credit single mothers for their virtues and counsel them for their vices. Obviously, if the former lacks elements of admiration, then we suffer from moral emasculation and if the latter is not accompanied with prudent contemplation, then we suffer from moral counterfeiting.”

To his credit, Wachogo does not just stop at the above as many scholars are known to do. He goes further into actually crowning his study by providing adequate insights into the way forward. He spells out intelligently that “a realization should be cultivated that to undermine single mothers threatening to quieten even the silent single mothers as they strive to gather in Jesus’ communities to speak and talk and share is unfortunate indeed! In fact, structures that harm genuine supportive groups and movements blocking them from authentic self-realization, human fulfillment and personal aspirations for the Christian integral liberation, ought to be discouraged as utterly oppressive, seditiously insensitive and virtually anti-Christian. It would be wrong to apply double standards resulting in condemning single mothers as home-breakers while exonerating men as homemakers.”

The author, who happens also to be an educator for many years in the University of Nairobi, challenges the single mothers recommending strongly to them that they be educated and emancipated themselves from the shackles of schoolgirlishness. Single mothers, as far as possible, should grab the opportunity to be more educated and schooled. Access to viable information, understanding, wisdom and informed insight living more so in our Third Millennium is critical. The obligation and duty to each

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Intellectual ignorance and misinformation exploitation, sophistry and dirty maneuvering by foreigners and demonizing manipulations locally which undermine single mothers’ integrity, Godliness, self-esteem through education or pedagogy is not a must. One couldn’t agree more with the author’s affirmation that “as a matter of fact, ignorance is both oppressive and exploitative as well as demoralizing thereby being detrimental to families and homes. Mind you, crass ignorance is basically responsible for a considerable number of single mothers remaining unm when they should express themselves fighting for their inalienable rights and inherent duties and obligations.”

Something else I would like to bring to the attention of the reader is that this scholar points out convincingly clear that single motherhood itself is not a crime nor an evil. “Let it be enthusiastically propagated that single motherhood per se is not a case of a housewife nor in some cases a consequence of sin. For the SOLIDARITY of our human family and, indeed, the FAMILY OF GOD, it is indispensable that we strive actively to understand and appreciate single mothers’ worries, needs, problems, anxieties, yearning for mutual support, loneliness, solitude, plight, aspirations, concerns, desire for actualization of potentialities, fears, interpersonal relationships, ideas and their diverse and diverging categories imbued with specific peculiarities.”

Besides rigorous field research, Wachogo’s arguments are backed by library research on works of scholars such as the late Hannah Kimmel, John Wall and late Steven O. Ojok who have studied African cultures from religious and philosophical perspectives. The philosophical way in which the author concludes his reader-friendly systematic and comprehensive book is a feat. “Perhaps a seeming impossible pastoral questions already contain their own answers while some answers are indeed with underlying questions. It is up to us to discern and investigate deeply. In my opinion, this is the potential pastoral infrastructure and ethical tension we have to keep grappling with wrestling with! I believe once more that motherhood, single or married, is a value which should be surely acknowledged, fostered, and its imperative also that single mothers should be maintained and supported. It is imperative also that single mothers should not just be tolerated. They in their invaluable status as MOTHERS deserve due respect, encouragement, support, development enhancement, active participation in appropriate ecclesiastical ministries and fundamental human worth.” These are very important points to ponder.
A tone full of understanding and tremendous empathy is one of the creative strengths of Third Millennium African Single Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethno-Religious-Philosophical Touch. Wachage combines all his talents as the eldest son in a family of twelve (four sons and eight daughters), a full-time don for 13 years at the University of Nairobi, a Roman Catholic Priest in the Archdiocese of Nairobi for 25 years, a philosopher, a theologian, a Shitokan/Japanese Karate Black Belt, a counselor, a writer with six scholarly books to his credit, and a social activist in his own right thoroughly acquainted with contemporary single motherhood phenomenon to put forward a case for the Third Millennium society to re-examine its attitudes towards single mothers.

This most fascinating and highly pedagogical book, in many ways, is an eye-opener and a didactic tool. If the role of research is to assist human beings make the world a better place, Wachage's book contributes immensely to this ideal. The invaluable book poses a challenge to us all, what can we do to ameliorate the trials of single mothers?

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FOREWORD ONE

In the human society, social arrangements and patterns of interactions between individuals are based on relationships. Social status and social identity, which are of crucial importance, are founded on one's relative importance to others. For example, in the African society, a respectable man is expected to have a wife or more whereby polygyny prevails and own children. Similarly, a respectable woman is supposed to be married and be a mother too. If one does not fall into these two categories, then, one is expected to be either a daughter or son to someone. In other words, if one is not married, one is either alone or bachelor. Theoretically, these are only social expectations; however, the reality in our societies is quite different.

Third Millennium African Single Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethno-Religious-Philosophical Touch is a new book, with very new lenses about singleness among females in the African society. In this book, P. F. Wachage, typically to his styles penetrates yet another sensitive topic, which most scholars and authors woud rather “bury their heads in the sand” like the proverbial ostrich, than broach the subject of the socially “maladjusted.”

Wachage approaches the subject of single motherhood with erudition, caution, humour and balance. One can tell right from the first few pages that this book has been written by “an understanding friend of single mothers and widows.” Here one would expect judgmentalism, especially bearing in mind that the author is a deeply enroached personality in theology and philosophy and Roman Catholic priest. Instead, the reader is treated to critical objective invaluable reflections on single motherhood and widow mothers.

The author poses challenging questions to the reader; to single mothers, to men, to married mothers and to Christians on and about single mothers. For example, “what does it mean to be a single woman and a mother at this?” Does single motherhood mean the same if one is a single mother through rape, incest, widowhood or individual choice?” Among other multiple questions challenging the Church is posed through the following questions, “Are there scriptural prophetic proof-texts and biblical proof-texts that justify alienation of single mothers in the Christian ministry?” Is it not verifiable from the Scriptures that single mothers are consequential agents in the economy of salvation?

Has it ever occurred to us that Mother Mary of Nazareth was actually a single mother?” Further, Wachage frankly addresses the male-readers
by asking them, “which category or categories of single mothers are you directly or indirectly responsible for and what are you doing about it?”

This book will stimulate your mind (the reader) to think critically about single mothers. Wachge, through his in-depth research, has personally identified the precedents that believable attributes of single mothers and widow mothers in today’s African societies. Women become single mothers or widow mothers for different reasons as the book points out. But in the Third Millennium, is the society ready to change its attitude towards single mothers as mistaking and incompetent beings? Are single mothers themselves ready to regard themselves with dignity without appearing rebellious and over-sensitive in their social setting? What about the economic welfare of single mothers? Who will take responsibility over their children’s education, clothing, food etc? Few, if any, African states have functional welfare schemes where those who do not have enough can access supplements. How can this apparent gap be filled for single mothers, for we surely know “two are better than one” especially when it comes to economic sustenance?

Those of us who watched Jerry MacMillan’s novel-film, “Waiting to Exhale” must have identified with the sweet-bitterness on singlehood. The film depicts characters of single women who are “educated, smart, attractive and ALONE...” That’s the situation of many single mothers today... and for many unable to function because there is no partner on “our side” holding our breath until we find someone to hold our hand. Waiting to exhale... but the question one sees throughout Wachge addresses throughout this beautiful book, isn’t there more to life than this, for single mothers and mother widows? Hello! Who, out there, is ready to take up this challenge, remember God loves ALL His children, irrespective of our social status? The Bible strongly defends singleness. It is not just tolerated. It is “advocated.” For example, Apostle Paul says:

I should like everyone to be like me, but everybody has his own particular gifts from God, one a gift for one thing and another with a gift for the opposite. There is something I want to add for the sake of widows and those who are not married: It is a good thing for them to stay as they are, like me, but if they cannot control the sexual urges, they should get married since it is better to be married than to be tortured. (1 Corinthians 7:7-9)

In Chapter 8 of this book, moreover, Wachge provides a lengthy creative discussion on Mother Mary of Nazareth as the perfect role model and inspiration unto today’s single mothers — a vital breakthrough in this regard deserving serious open-minded persons.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Wachge provides the reader with over thirty categories of single mothers and twenty-five causes of single motherhood respectively. Throughout these two Chapters, one realises satisfactorily that single motherhood is not homogeneous. The commonality between women falling into this mode is that they all have children (mothers) and are not attached to a man (singlehood). Thus the detailed profound analysis shows that, in Africa today, causes of singleness range from widowedness, personal separation and divorce, male/female irresponsibility over procreation, individual choice, rape and Christ’s radical discipleship to mention but a few (see Chapter 3 for an exhaustive purses). Consequently, single mothers and widow mothers range from the rich and famous, educated and smart to street junkies and prostitutes. As one proceeds reading, one will not fail to realise that every single mother has own baggage of needs and deserts depending on one’s level of social-economic relativity.

Some will find loneliness their biggest problem since for singles in general, good truthful friends are in such short supply. I say this from experience, having been in a widowed single mother stain for about five years. I practically know a bit of this loneliness story. While neighbours (retros) will have some common things to talk about their “Baba so and so”, once single one has to learn to talk of “my children.” Any male company will most probably be mistaken for an “idiotic affair.” In some characteristic, those who are not allowed “direct” counselling contact with their pastors lest they allegedly “tempt” them to immorality. Such factors tend to further alienate single mothers in the society. In fact, to avoid being the centre of unnecessary acusations one is compelled to withdraw into own private regimes (their own small worlds of being home and alone). On the other hand, too many single mothers, daily survival is the greatest worry in their lives. Economic survival and company are major concerns for African single mothers in this Third Millennium. Though largely unsur, the cry of single mothers is echoed in the cry of Jesus Christ, “My God my God, why have you forsaken me?” I believe that Jesus understands the feeling of being alone and poor. I am also reminded of an old Negro spiritual which says “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, like Jesus.” Wachge, concurs with this thereby offering single mothers, both Christian and non-Christian, hope.
Chapters 4.5 and 6 provide the reader with traditional perspectives on treatment and mistreatment of single mothers. Third Millennium challenges to these and positive together with negative aspects of single motherhood. In this part of the book, the author shares his research findings drawn from at least ten ethnic groups in Kenya. The analysis shows that single mothers were treated according to the causes of the state of their singleness. Nevertheless, in most African ethnic groups, singleness was never a norm, and a variety of customs and practices were and still are prevalent in order for marriage possibilities for single women. This comes out very clearly in the book.

In Chapter 5, Wachogo notes that “while the general attitude towards single mothers in our African traditional society was that they were incomplete and unfilled, the trend today seems to be that it is understood in marriage which is incomplete and unfilled.” In his research, he noticed “a vivid shift from the shamedness and guilt of being a single mother in the Third Millennium.” He concludes that “one could, perhaps, talk in terms of Third Millennium single mothers’ family paradigm.” In spite of these noticeable shifts, the author emphasizes that “the setting of a Third Millennium normalized family is still anchored in married motherhood.” something the author verifies satisfactorily.

In Chapter 9 titled “Author’s Reflective Recommendations: Where Truth Lies,” Wachogo suggests that “if we are deeply concerned about the present and future welfare of humanity, we must inevitably treat the plight of single mothers with the seriousness it deserves.” Otherwise, he continues, “family life will be catastrophic and homes unsheltered.” In this most pedagogical part of the book an array of crucial recommendations have been made on how the society and the Church in particular should go about handling the Third Millennium single mothers. The author commendably visualizes the need for a multi-dimensional approach to single mothers, where each category of single mothers should have their special needs addressed separately and accordingly. The sin of having children out of wedlock is widely acknowledged. However, there are those, for instance rape victims, who are forced into conception as the author highlights. That is why all and sundry should follow the following instructions provided in 1 John 1:8-10, when dealing with out-of-wedlock mothers.
medicine,” and what better way to keep fit than to dance, gracefully and gracefully!

Wachunga’s sixth book, Third Millennium Single Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethico-Religio-Philosophical Touch is a book everyone will enjoy reading. It is a book that is loaded with first hand evidence material from profound field data on single mothers. When Wachunga asked me to write a preface for his current sixth book, I accepted with a lot of humility. Being a friend and colleague at the University of Nairobi, Wachunga knows that I am a non-Catholic and a widow mother of two children—having been bereaved at the age of thirty-five years i.e. five years ago. During the short span of my singleness, a lot of water has passed under the bridge and most of the issues raised in this book are absolutely true, though the author neither interviewed nor engaged me in related discussion or dialogue, to my experience as a single mother. I would therefore wish to support the author by encouraging my fellow single sisters whatever the source of your singleness be assured that singleness is from God, singleness is biblical, singleness is mostly acceptable, BUT singleness is also hard—very hard mode of motherhood and parenting.

I can only refer you fellow single sisters to 1 Corinthians 7: 32-34 where the Apostle Paul would have us know that while we are unmarried there are certain benefits that come our way. Some of us may think that there is nothing worse than being single but I can tell you for sure that there is nothing worse than being permanently tied to one with whom you are not fulfilled or humanly respected.

Single mothers appreciate that marriage is beautiful but stop envying the married! Be thankful for what you’ve got. Don’t put your life on hold looking for someone to partner you. So often we singles do not see the numerous gifts that God has given us. (ie. money… and love). Your charm, grace, patience and hard work and, as Wachunga encourages, DANCING LIFE AND LAUGHTER from the heart.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Wachunga once again. I was privileged to preface his earlier book titled: Living to Die, Dying to Live: African Christian Insights for his new book and particularly for being so mindful, reflective and patient as he remarkably branches yet another phenomenon about single mothers. It is prudent to mention that very few if any African scholars merge philosophy, spirituality and social issues in scholarship to support, guide, appreciate and encourage a not-so-popular
FOREWORD TWO

Society is constantly changing. This is an indisputable fact that is born by the changing structure of the family, the political scene, religious and other social institutions. What is of concern to many is the direction and the kind of change this is.

Third Millennium African Single Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethno-Religious-Philosophical Touch explores one of these changes; the change in the smallest and one of the oldest social institutions in the world - the family. Specifically the author, P.N. Wachugo of the Catholic Archdiocese of Naivasha and the University of Naivasha respectively, looks at the growing phenomenon of today's single motherhood, its various categories, its causes, its implications and its impact on society and social institutions.

Reading this new book by the scholar-priest, is both refreshing and enlightening. Refreshing because the book looks at the issue of single motherhood in an understanding human way; and enlightening because it offers new and sharp insights into a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly more widespread in current society.

The book looks at several issues in regard to single motherhood. Not that it is a new phenomenon. In fact, the author points out early in the book that single motherhood existed even in traditional African societies where different communities had their own ways of dealing with it. What seems out of the author's research is that these communities looked for solutions to a situation that went against the norm and did not bury their heads in the sand and ignore it. Wachugo goes out of his way to show that this is one of the things that is different today; nobody seems to care about the plight of the single mothers today. Single mothers are at best left to their own devices and at worst ignored and ostracised because of their status. In fact the underlying mood is that society would like to ignore them as if they did not exist, or if they acknowledge their existence, treat them with contempt and embarrassment. Single mothers are analogically made to feel that they are serving a life sentence for sins that society refuses to forgive.

Also new are some causes and respective categories of single motherhood. This points to the fact that single motherhood is not homogeneous and therefore solutions and reactions to them should likewise be different as the author stresses. However, the author points out that
Elsewhere, single mothers are frustrated every step of the way in their lives. They are exploited, neglected, locked down upon, called names and made to feel that they are hopeless sinners whose sins they forever carry on their shoulders as it seems unchangeable, a burden to society and therefore unwanted. Married colleagues hardly want to associate or be associated with them and men find them useful as much as they grant them favours but not for life-long and meaningful relationships. The same mistreatment is noted out to them by potential employers, especially in Church institutions, who want married women for employees wherever the professionalism and work experience of single mothers.

Wachage's research and investigations also reveal that single mothers are generally caricatured as women of loose morals and even church ministers show open reluctance to give them spiritual support and guidance. Their children may be denied baptism and they themselves may be denied the chance to be godmothers. Sometimes, they are embarrassed and ridiculed in front of whole congregations. This... this from institutions that are supposed to show mercy and compassion especially to those who have erred! This becomes a major point of confusion and bitterness for single mothers who have the mistaken belief that that is where their salvation lies. Indeed, as the author points out, they feel that single mothers feel they have no moral obligation to advice the Church in reference to themselves “points at something very deep... that the Church in some areas is not a feasting context but a sheltering one; not an encouraging Church but a condemning one; not a hope giving Church but a hope-breaking and trust-erasing one; not a dialogue Church but a monological patriarchal and paternalistic one.” Yet the Church is the representative of Jesus on earth.

One cannot but wonder whether “What Would Jesus Do?” were He physically in the world today and was confronted with the phenomenon, the cry and anguils of single mothers. One can get very clear indicators from His treatment of those who were ostracized in society. Rather than leaving them for the wolves, He shepherded them like the Good Shepherd He is. One need only look at His reaction to the response of interaction with such people as the Samaritan woman (Jn 4: 5-42), the woman who washed His feet and dried them with her hair (Mt 26: 6-13) and the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8: 1-11) to get an inkling of how Jesus would treat single mothers; with compassion, forgiveness and even encouragement to forget on. The question that seems to preoccupy the minds of single mothers as revealed in their responses to the author’s research... is whether the Church and its leaders who follow Jesus would show the same kind of concern for them as Jesus showed for the ostracized. After all, it is in this Church where all sing with apparent unity: “Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found. Brought here together by Christ’s love, by love we are thus bound... Forgive us now each other fault, as we forgive faults. And let us love each other well, in Christian holiness... No race nor creed can love exclude, if honoured by God’s name. Our brotherhood embraces all, whose Father is the same.” That includes single mothers and mother widows.

The author, no doubt, the eternal optimist, sees some positive aspects of single motherhood both in the women concerned and to society. These aspects are likely not only to bring some hope to the single mothers who have been made to look at themselves as worthless and sinful, but also open the eyes of the society to their contributions, and indeed, the worth of this fast growing sector of society. These aspects range from independent-mindedness to a greater sense of responsibility, more enterprise and zeal and a closeness to their children that is sometimes the envy of married mothers.

For me, the best of these aspects and one that is brought out clearly in the book is the author’s contention that single mothers, like married mothers, are co-creators with God. This parallels with the traditional and current African view that all children, including those of single mothers, are a gift from God. If one looks at these children in this view, how can one then look down on such children? How can one refuse to baptize God’s gift? How can one bestir something precious coming from God’s hand? Granted, the way they did this was not what is prescribed by God and the Church. The question therefore is, is their sin unchangeable? These are some of the questions that need answers. They are issues that need to be looked into and used to bring single mothers into the shepherdfold of Christ so that they too can continue living a life of grace in forgiveness, reconciliation and communion with the Family of God.

To me, one of the most touching features of Third Millennium African Single Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethico-Religos-Philosophical Touch is found towards the end where single mothers are given a voice, a forum in which to give their suggestions on the way forward regarding issues that affect them, their children and their lives. This section of the book, more than any other, reveals the author’s priority and pastoral concerns. The
suggestions are practical and, if implemented, would go a long way towards re-integrating single mothers into institutions that have so far cut them off. Further, Wachage makes it clear that from his research, single mothers are not asking for favours either from the Church or from other social institutions. All they want is to be treated like other human beings and be given a chance to integrate and interact with them without feeling that they are contaminating decent society. They feel that too long to paraphrase American soul singer Stevie Wonder, they have been “like a long lonely stream, running towards a dream, like a branch on a tree reaching to be free.” But they know that “there is a place in the sun where there is hope for everyone.” And before their lives are done, they would like to find that place for themselves and their children.

Another milestone in the book is Chapter Eight which offers the Blessed Virgin Mary as a role model and a Mother for single mothers as well as for all. Mother Mary has intrigued many and offered comfort to those who turn to her in their time of need. This is reflected vividly in the awe-inspiring song *Daily Daily Song to Mary* which in the second stanza shows the reverence with which she is held as it says: “She is Mighty to deliver; Call He, trust His loving. When the tempest rages round thee, She will raise thee from the troubled sea.” Wachage offers her as the perfect role model for all mothers, young or old, married or unmarried, clergy or laity.

Third Millennium African Single Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethno-Religious-Philosophical is a book that will interest anyone interested in the development of society and has family solidarity at heart. It will interest those interested in the changing face of the family in this new Millennium as well as those with pastoral concerns for single mothers and their children. I would even go all the way and say that this is a book that will interest anyone living in the contemporary society man or woman, young or old, married or unmarried, clergy or laity.

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