

YOUR Weekender MAGAZINE

Mankind's oldest sin

Therapists say adultery among working women is on the increase

By CHEGE wa GACHAMBA

A pastor had to flee for dear life recently, after he was caught in bed with the wife of a follower of his church.

Caught red-handed, the cleric fled into a maize plantation with an angry mob hot on his heels baying for his blood.

The mob was led by the woman's husband, who had been out of town but returned unexpectedly — only to be tipped by his neighbours about his wife and the man of cassock having locked themselves in the house for "evening prayers."

The irate husband broke the door to his house, and on finding the pastor naked in the bedroom, set on him with kicks and blows before the man of God took to his heels.

The Thursday, September 26, 1996 incident brings to light yet another case of one of mankind's oldest sins — adultery.

Defined by the Collins Concise Dictionary as voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man or woman and a partner other than the legal spouse — adultery is, even in this era of Aids, a daily happening.

And it's not just Prince Charles with Camilla Parker Bowles, or "Princess" Diana with James Hewitt; many married people continue to cheat on their partners, and, according to some therapists, adultery among women seems to be on the increase.

They attribute this to changing sex roles as women have asserted their right to sexuality and sexual pleasure, and perhaps because, with equal employment, more women are in the work force now, and have more access to men.

A recent study by Kenyan researchers published in the *Kenyan Journal of Medical Practice*, discovered high levels of promiscuity and transmission of Aids from women to men.

The researchers found a correlation between HIV transmission and a history of multiple sex partners among a group of women spouses, something not as pronounced in male spouses studied. Contrary to the previously held view, the study portrayed women as being deadlier transmitters of Aids than men.

A recent *Newsweek* poll says women in their 20s are more likely to stray into affairs than the men. However, available data says that on average, about 50 per cent of men have at one time or other had a fling with a female colleague, a neighbour or a hooker; while the percentage drops down to between 30 and 40 for women.

According to local marriage

counselors there seems to be more cases of men being unfaithful to their spouses than women.

Counselors interviewed said there were more women raising the issue of extra-marital affairs than there were men.

"Men mainly come when things have come to a head. When the wives have already left and gone away. They apparently seem to expect the counselor to help recall the wife," who most likely left after feeling the marriage was not getting anywhere, says Fr Tony D'Souza, priest in charge of Nairobi's Holy Family Basilica.

Marriage counselors at Nairobi's Amani Training and Counseling Centre say, statistics over the last three months, show the same pattern of more women complaining about their husbands having affairs than men.

"Most complainants come as individuals, not as husband and wife team. They are usually suspicious about their partners being unfaithful," says D'Souza.

The man, who often acts as a marriage counselor for even spouses outside his flock, says husbands usually refuse to accompany their wives, but "there's greater hope of salvaging a marriage when both come for counsel. There are higher chances of remedy, sustaining a marriage and nourishment of love when spouses openly admit failure."

Although the above dictionary definition of adultery has held sway for centuries, there is a growing school of thought that nowadays defines the vice beyond the physical dimensions.

The argument is one that adultery is not just sex of the genitals. It is a sin of the mind and heart, as much as, or even more than, the body.

Talking of this wider dimension of adultery, D'Souza says that, while the sixth commandment prohibits adultery, Jesus Christ warns that lusting for a woman — even without committing actual sex — is a sin.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28).

This perhaps brings to mind a German court's judgment on a customs agent, who was last July fined 500 marks (about \$17,000) for (as the accused put it), just looking at a woman.

"All I did was look at the woman. I am sorry, she took this as sexual harassment", pleaded the 26-year-old agent.



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COURIER

Adultery is even in this era of Aids, a daily happening. Who can point a finger at who?

But the complainant, a 34-year-old woman, had told the Cologne court that, "he was undressing me with his eyes. I knew right away he wanted something from me." And apparently, the judge seems to have assumed the offense was committed — in the mind, not physically.

Early this year, a New York man sued his wife for divorce, alleging that her racy computer messages to a man she had never actually met amounted to adultery. The judge did not think the same, but this new understanding of adultery, is being advocated for by some marriage counselors, newspaper advice columnists and prostitutes — that sometimes, adultery is not just about sex.

D'Souza says "the concept of

marriage revolves around one saying — you are the number one in my life. It involves the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual intimacy of the body, mind, heart and soul. When you share these with others, then it's betrayal. It's adultery."

Husband and wife are supposed to be the best of friends, and are supposed to help each other grow into wholeness and holiness of life together, he says quoting his church's popular saying that: A family that prays together stays together.

In fact Frank S. Pittman, author of books on infidelity and family therapy says, sometimes "affairs are conducted primarily on the telephone rather than in bed." He says

the essence of an affair is in establishing a secret intimacy with someone — a secret that necessarily, must be defended with dishonesty. "Infidelity, isn't about whom you lie with, but whom you lie to," he writes.

Another psychologist argues that, in an era when we are even talking of rape within marriage, today's woman feels men do not own their women's bodies. So the commodity exchanged in romance is not sex, but intimacy. Today the deepest betrayal is not of the flesh but of the heart.

But why do people go astray?

The erring spouse could be seeking something, better sex, the feeling of being attractive and desirable, or the kind of respect and

admiration that wives may find hard to give their husbands.

Others start affairs because they are angry with their spouses and want to revenge, even with total strangers; or lose control after taking one too many.

"A key element in all this is lack of communication between the spouses, while the perceived better enjoyment is often illusionary," says Elecah-Mwangi of Amani.

The social set up at times "encourages" adultery. Some wives nowadays dress like they are out to hook — what with those minis, high slits and all. That sets in motion psychological adultery, and it won't take much prompting or

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