



# Marginalisation and Exclusion of Women from the Church Governance Structures: Experience in Black South African Churches

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## Abstract

The marginalisation and, in extreme cases, the exclusion of women from the church governance structures, it has been observed, may be attributed to many stereotypes - perceptive, traditional, religious, to mention but a few. In the literature reviewed in this study, numerous studies support this assertion about the marginalisation of women from church leadership. Of the numerous attributable factors, revealed in the literature, are the biblical, traditional and other androcentric stereotypes. Scholars note that, the obstacles that retard women's development within the church structures, are almost, always attributable to gender than any other reason. Indeed, entrenched gender inequality has been cited as the main factor contributing to their marginalisation and ultimately their exclusion. This has not only barred them from advancing in the church's leadership hierarchy, but prevented them from exercising their spiritual gifts. Notwithstanding the richness of African church history, scholars lament, there still exists an opportunity and need for the contribution of women within mission churches, which has been left out. In this article, the authors are of the view that, male supremacy must be confronted head on, if patriarchy is to be mitigated - not only within church structures, but across all social formations.

**Keywords:** Marginalisation, governance, hierarchy, patriarchy, gender.

## Introduction

The history of the Christian church, since its inception, has denied women, their rightful place. This is notwithstanding, the critical reading of scriptural text, that reveals multitudes of women, who played a significant role in church history, but remain unacknowledged. The liberative and leadership role played by these women, Dar-Ethiopia (2017) argues, remains obscured and continues to be inaccessible, because of the deep-rooted male-centred construal of the biblical text, which reduces the role played by women – whether this, they did in collaboration with men or by themselves.

For centuries, theologians and other biblical scholars, resisted admitting that women had played a pivotal role in church leadership, even when the biblical text was glaring of their participation. Nicolaides (2016) asserts that:



Since its inception, the religious role of women in Churches has been a hotly contested issue. Seeking to arrive at consensus on what exactly the role of women should be in the church, countless church synods and councils, as well as noted theologians, have been, and still remain at odds on this contentious issue. Whether in mainstream Orthodoxy, the Roman Catholic or any of the other Christian denominations, the issue is still a proverbial 'hot potato'.

Whether this was due to the fact that, these scholars were largely men, is a matter which raises questions in this debate. Scholars are divided on this issue, with some acknowledging the classlessness taught in the Gospel, while others insist on relegating women to the back of church life – always expected to follow and not take leadership despite the fact that the early church had women deaconesses (Nicolaidis, 2005). For change to be realised, there would need to be a transformation of attitude in the perceptions about women, and an honest review of the current patriarchal church culture (Dar-Ethiopia, 2017).

Trible (1989:280) in Kobo (2016) describes this as the '...institutionalisation of male dominance over women in home and society at large'. Whilst some improvement must be acknowledged, the overall picture, Heuser, Körner and Rosenfeld (2004) contend, still depicts women's leadership in South African churches as subordinate to that of men. Although women, they assert, are frequently ordained to the ministry and the episcopate, most of the key positions of authority are still held by males.

Notwithstanding the fact that, women are the majority of the membership of the churches, church structures, and the biggest consumers of religion, services and theologies appear to be mainly shaped by male perceptions and aspirations across churches. This is despite the fact that African Indigenous Churches, in particular, purport to serve mainly, the formerly disenfranchised segments of the society, which include Africans and women (Heuser, Körner & Rosenfeld, 2004). In this article, which is drawn from studies on gendered leadership and the exclusion of women from church governance structures in South Africa, the authors lay bare, the systematic manner in which women were, and continue to be marginalised and excluded from church governance structures.

## **Discussion**

Whilst the studies were undertaken in specific church contexts in South Africa, the authors considered it imperative that the broader social, ecclesiastical, political, economic and cultural contexts, against which the marginalisation of women in church leadership, be understood. To cover every aspect of the context in greater detail, was, however, beyond the scope of the studies. Although the researchers adopted a mixed methods approach, the approach was also synthetic in nature, in that, the appropriate and relevant work of various scholars and practitioners, was ascertained, assembled and analysed to shed insight and arrive at informed conclusions. What follows, is the authors' attempt, to give a rudimentary picture of the complexity of the backdrop, careful not to oversimplify its nature, by merely stating the immediate study setting. In many respects, the context within which the churches in South Africa operate, are characterised by internal and external factors, which make the churches to be in a continuous struggle mode. The church leaders, past and present, have been at pains, trying to deal with these challenges, trying hard to relate the gospel to the social, practical, cultural, political and ecclesiastical issues, that confront the congregants (Nwadiolor & Nweke, 2013). The African Indigenous Churches in South Africa, in particular, are a product of a struggle for liberation from missionary control. This, Okolo (2013:91) asserted, when he wrote that:

The African wants to reassert himself as the master and main controller of his world. Consequently, the struggle to eliminate those conditions which oppress him and make him slavishly subjected to others in his economic,



social, political and religious life continues. This is why freedom is a prime value for him as well as the theme of his everyday language.

The struggle has been more intense for women, as is acknowledged in the Ethiopian Episcopal Church's Declaration of Faith, that:

We acknowledge that all humanity is created in the image of the triune God – male and female, white and black, rich and poor. We recognise the historical, social tendencies which have denigrated women, black people, and the poor, and we reject these as contrary to that vision of the dignity and worth with which the human person was endowed by God at creation, and which was wonderfully restored in Jesus Christ (EECSA, 1999).

The inequalities, which characterise the context, and how the church should respond thereto, are a reality which can no longer be ignored in any church leadership discourse in South Africa. For the church to be seen as relevant and gender-sensitive, the restorative justice, which is the dream of the previously marginalised, must always feature on the church's agenda (Bowers-du Toit & Nkomo, 2014). Experience reveals that, the exclusion of women has both biblical as well as cultural origins. From a biblical perspective, women marginalisation and exclusion have been justified based on such scriptures as 1 Tim 2:11–12, wherein it is stated that, 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence'. Such scriptures have become a biblical defence to justify the prevention of women from contributing freely to the church operation, notwithstanding the veneration of the Virgin Mary by the Catholics, and the importance of the role that she played as a vessel through which God became man.

The Bible also contains numerous other references to women being inferior or subservient to men, which have been exploited by men throughout the ages, to the disadvantage of women who seek to play an active and meaningful role in church leadership and governance. Apart from scriptures such as 1 Timothy 2: 11-12, cited above, the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14: 34 seems to reiterate this assertion when he wrote, 'Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak...'. General societal stereotyping has also resulted in women being disqualified from consideration for high-level positions in the church hierarchy. Bachelor (2008) refers to the gift of inclusivity, 'and he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, pastors and teachers' (Eph. 4:11). He, however, highlights the fact that women still face barriers whenever they aspire to ascending the church leadership hierarchy. These barriers must be investigated and mitigated, regardless of their origin and bases. Whilst Endendijik (2013:1) understands gender stereotype to be a cognitive aspect of one's views about the characteristics and roles which a given group of people, say men or women, should play. This is not necessarily a true reflection of the reality about the group, but a fixed view, engulfed in the mind of the stereotyping person. Louw (2009:99), however, hypothesises that:

Hierarchy is underpinned by four interlocking justifications, namely biological (that male physical strength is part of the intended natural law); cultural (that families and societies are naturally based on aggression, domination, procreation, spouse and children protection); economic (that property, production and distribution of goods are the natural domain of men); and religious (that male superiority, dominance and privilege are part of the received religious revelation).

Gender, in view of the foregoing, Louw (2009) argues, is associated with the socially constructed differences between men and women. These dictate people's attitudes towards men and women, respectively, and the different opportunities that each group is afforded in life. Louw (2009), argues that, men are superior to women in many ways – which, in his opinion, is a reflection of a naturally accepted hierarchical order. As one of the pillars of this apparent male superiority is religion, it follows that, in most churches, women and men are not



seen as equal. This is often misconstrued to suggest that, this is how God sees and perceives men and women. Where such discriminatory attitudes prevail, it is common for women not to be given opportunities to participate in church governance structures. Women's exclusion is often justified on the basis that they have family commitments, they are not sufficiently experienced in leadership matters, they are not assertive enough, and the Bible does not provide for their becoming decision-makers or leaders in the church. Whilst the first woman was only ordained in 1997 at the Ethiopian Episcopal Church – an African Indigenous Church, the ordination of women is not even an agenda item in some churches (Perera & Mcllveen, 2014; Mtuze, 2018).

Lorber (2010:15), indicates that gender, while denoting a particular social status, is a legal designation and an inherent part of someone's identity. He adds that gender division and the norms and expectations associated with being a man or a woman permeate the economy and society as a whole – evidenced in state-run and private institutions, the legal system, cultural and religious groups, and the family. Whether or not people agree, economic, social, religious and other groups, are characterized by a 'gender-based social order'. How progressive and liberal these groups are when it comes to achieving a fair gender balance, inevitably impacts their perceived efficacy.

The prevalence of gender stereotyping, particularly the dominance of men over women, in many areas of life, is witnessed in Njoroge's (2009:4) statement, that:

Historically, gender roles (the socially constructed roles of women and men) have been ordered hierarchically, with men exercising power and control over women. Male dominance and female subordination have both ideological and material bases. Patriarchy has been entrenched in social, religious and cultural forms, institutionalized in the law and political structures embedded in local and global economies. It has been ingrained in formal ideologies and in public discourse.

Clearly, excessive dominance and control over others are destructive forces which do not align with God's creation, nor His vision of humanity. Gender inequality stands in opposition to God's work, particularly in making the church a messenger of His word. The foregoing is in sharp contradiction with Dwane's detractors who narrowly argued that, God had assigned the role of leadership to men, and that the ordination of women to the priesthood or the episcopate of the church, would be a movement against God's revelation (Mtuze, 2018). What is concerning is that discrimination against women in the church has at times appeared to be the result of deliberate tampering with history. De Connick (2011:147) laments that, the obliteration of the authentic memories about outstanding women in the early church, and its deliberate substitution with misleading and demeaning narratives must be frowned upon.

The shaming, vilification and marginalisation of women in the early days of Christianity are among the most dishonourable acts ever committed in the history of Christianity. This is evident in the portrayal marriage as a hierarchy, with husbands on the throne and wives at the footstool, and the Scripture is used to justify this view in the Ephesians 5:22, that, "Wives, submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord". De Connick (2011:147), however, concedes that, it is not easy to understand these narratives, because of the large-scale concealment of their stories, underplaying of their contributions and even the erasing of the text that talks to their stories. De Connick (2011:147) also cautions that, even the little information that can be retrieved about stories of women, should not be taken at face value, since these were authored by men. The unreliability of the stories stems from the fact that, at that time, male figures in the church had a vested interest in protecting their own positions of power. They were not prepared to share their status with women and would resort to relegating women to a lowlier status, if need be, to entrench their authority.

Many arguments, ostensibly supported by the Scriptures, have been advanced by the church in an attempt to convince people of men's superiority over women. One argument is that if Jesus had believed that women could baptise, there would be no problem, in His eyes, for His



mother to baptise Him. Regarding the debates about whether women should be ordained as priests, the church has often argued that Jesus had opted for males and no women, for His disciples. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul had insisted that women accept that they were not allowed to teach and had to be silent (MacDonald, 2010:76). It has been practiced since the days of the early church, to use the Biblical text as a basis for the marginalisation of, and cowering women into subordination, excluding them from church governance structures.

Remedios (2016:8) observed that, there are references in the New Testament, to women acting in the capacities of followers, mothers and also leaders, making an enormous contribution to the development of Christian theology and praxis. Such involvement gave women a sense of identity, both personally and within the Christian community. One must accept that the church is not a homogeneous entity. Consequently, there is a broad range of opinions about gender and equality in the church and whether there is overt discrimination against women, which has hampered their spiritual and professional growth. While the issue of gender inequality in the workplace has been given increasing attention in recent years all over the world, many churches are still resistant to the equality narrative (Pierce & Groothuis, 2004:13).

Men and women are, admittedly, different. However, this does not justify men somehow enjoying a perpetual prerogative to positions of authority and leadership in God's house. Bhasera (1994:4) indicates that it is important to understand that, because women are different from men, does not make them lesser beings. He says that while the different genders have specific roles in society, human dignity must be upheld and promoted for both men and women. He also maintains that a lack of respect for women impedes human development in a broader societal context. The authors agree with Klein (2004:49) when she says: 'In my view, women's place in the church is today more a male problem than mine'. She goes on to ask a very pertinent question, 'Why are men not devoting their theology to the ethical issues that are raised by gender discrimination?' (Klein, 2004). In a Christian context, men will not know the fullness of the Gospel while they continue to practice the 'sin model' arising from the Fall. 'But perhaps in our generation, we may have an opportunity to take a large step back in the right direction' (Wright 2005:12).

In his reference to a passage from the Corinthians, Gorman (2004:264) puts it very aptly, that:

Within this exegetical morass, one very important aspect of the text, about which all interpreters should be able to agree, is often overlooked: Paul assumes without hesitation or discussion that women, like men, may pray and prophesy – speak both to God and for God in the gathered church (11:4–5). No matter what else we may conclude, we must stress that in this respect, men and women are equal in Christ.

The sections that follow will examine how the number of women who do make it to management or leadership positions in the church has been declining, how gender is sometimes an uncomfortable or contentious topic in the Bible, and the status of women in the Judeo-Christian and African traditions.

Fiorenza (1988) in Sparrow (2007) criticises this male-centred stereotype that men are superior to women, and as such, women must always subject themselves to the authority of men. For this stereotype, he also blames religion, attitudes and tradition, which he claims, have been major obstacles to women's advancement to leadership positions. In an article which examines the traditional stereotypes on the exclusion of women, Kobo (2016) premised her article, '*Umfazi akangeni ebuhlanti emzini...*', on the stereotypical attitudes which sometimes find their origin from a sophisticated interplay of cultural beliefs and practices, which have been successfully used to exclude black women from benefits, sites and practices which men have reserved for themselves, like, *ebuhlanti* (kraal), *esuthwini* (initiation school); in turn, locating women in culturally designated and womanised sites, reserved for women, like, *eziko/egoqweni* (kitchen and household), *ekuzaleni nasekubekiseni abantwana* (child



birth and rearing), in an androcentric arrangement. With the foregoing background, Lebaka-Ketshabile (1995:48), as cited in Kobo (2016), argues that, women bring, '...their whole being to the throne of theology. They bring with them their gender which is not fragile but strong, their nationality, their culture, and their socio-economic conditions; they want theology to address their whole being'.

Kobo's (2016) contention in the foregoing passage, echos earlier sentiments, voiced by Magwaza (2004:141), in her conversations with the women of the Shembe church, another African Indigenous Church, wherein she cited overlapping cultural and church roles, the ambivalence of women about the church and the seeming unconditional acceptance of the leading role of men as God-given. It is unfortunate that, notwithstanding that women are cognisant of their church's favouring of men over women, for leadership roles, there are situations where they accept the *status quo* and are reluctant to challenge the practice.

This is, in many situations, as a result of the extension of cultural roles, into the church – '*umfazi akangeni ebuhlanti*' (a woman is not allowed into the kraal) (Kobo, 2016:1). This is notwithstanding that, women have always been the biggest consumers of religion and dominate the membership, especially in the African Indigenous Churches. In many African Indigenous Church contexts, religious practices are inextricably interwoven with cultural, traditional and indigenous practices, beliefs, values and ethnicity. Even within the church, it is the question of identity that is central to the congregants' belief. It may, unfortunately, be this internalisation and acceptance of patriarchy, that downplays the importance of women's leadership in the church. That, women are considered more spiritual than men, and a source of strength for the church establishment, despite their challenges, makes the women all the more reluctant to 'rock the boat' (Magwaza, 2004:137; Ecklund, 2006).

The question that begs, is whether women are different or even better leaders, whether there are lessons that can be drawn from how women lead and what possible barriers need to be mitigated to enable the advancement of women to leadership positions. Unbundling the gendered aspects of leadership is a complicated undertaking, that, although many studies have cited as a factor in leadership, few have examined or concluded that, it impacts leadership effectiveness. This, most scholars blame on the small numbers of women leaders, which render it difficult to use quantitative approaches in examining women's leadership success (Simms, 2008).

The arguments advanced by Magwaza (2004) and Kobo (2016), as barriers to the advancement of women into leadership roles, can be justifiably classified into three clusters, namely, *personal*, *interpersonal* and *structural* barriers. The *personal barriers* are specific to women aspiring to leadership roles and encompass their personality traits, their background and influences, socialisation and cultural influences. These became evident in Magwaza's (2004) discussions with the Shembe Church women, when one respondent objected to another, who she perceived to be suggesting that, there were women who could competently hold leadership roles in the church. Her brash retort that, 'I particularly do not appreciate people who talk like you do about the... church and do so, out of context', may be interpreted to highlight the need, not to challenge the *status quo*, and the consideration of the complex context within which the church establishment operates. This may further be characteristic of the varying levels of the internalisation of the practice among women (Magwaza, 2004:140). This contention, was earlier alluded by Gupta (1983), when she wrote that, these varying levels of internalisation, are the barriers which each woman brings to the church setting.

The *interpersonal barriers* such as sex-role stereotyping and inter-group polarisation characterise the interaction among women aspiring to leadership roles and the dominant power groups. Gender role stereotypes about the capabilities of women, their motivations and their readiness to take up leadership roles are examples of interpersonal barriers that 'keep women in check'. These barriers result from the interplay between women and the church environments, and can occur among fellow congregants across hierarchical levels in the



church. The church hierarchy may be designed, in such a way that, it restricts the entry and advancement of women or minority groups, in the case of the founders of the Ethiopian church, who felt that they could no longer accept the treatment they were getting from missionary-led churches. These *structural barriers*, such as the recruitment, placement, evaluation and reward systems, may be formal or informal, influencing the culture of how things are done in the church (Magwaza, 2004; Kobo, 2016).

Notwithstanding the ostracisation, traces of African women asserting themselves are evident in the examination of the African women's theologies, which have their roots in the disciplines of African and Liberation theologies. Their struggle calls for theologians and church leaders to urgently find a practical response to the plight of women. Notwithstanding that women theologies are part of the broader feminist theology, there is a persistent call for both women and men to fight patriarchy and support cultural practices that promote the fullness of life for both men and women, while changing cultural practices that are hurtful to either men or women. Whilst there is a general endorsement of the African culture as an important source of identity, the African women theologians, warn African theologians, not to see the African culture as static, but rather as a dynamic way of life, that is constructed within communities. Despite that, in line with the African cultural norms, roles are assigned to both men and women, it is unfortunate that, seemingly, most African cultures still view women as lesser beings compared to men. These perceptions and stereotypes make it difficult for them to value themselves and have an appropriate relationship with themselves and God. Whilst Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016:1272) militate for culturally responsive and liberating leadership, women assert that, Black Theology should not enjoy the status of a liberation theology, unless it has as one of its priorities, the emancipation of women (Phiri, 2004:17).

Fighting gender supremacy in a church setting is, *inter alia*, made difficult by its roots in culture and the difference in how men and women are socialised. Whilst men are largely the culprits in the downplaying the importance of women, women also unwittingly contribute to the problem, through their ambivalence (Magwaza, 2004). Fiorenza (1988) in Sparrow (2007) blames the ambivalence on the androcentric notion that women are inferior, teaching, attitudes and the traditions that have historically underplayed the importance of their contribution and their ability to lead. To mitigate the male dominance, she proposes a new notion of *ekklesia gynaikon* or women church. Ndungane (1999), warned against this view, which he labelled, *clericalism* – male and female clerical cliques competing, with no prospect of changing the situation.

Fiorenza's (1988) suggestion is informed by her belief that, the mere ordination of women has no potential to change patriarchy. She proposes, instead, the undoing of the current clerical model of the church, which is patriarchal. She goes on to add that, the impact that the patriarchal model has on liturgy, roles, language and the realm of religious symbolism, has a negative effect and adversely affect women (Sparrow, 2007:132).

Among the possible solutions, is the challenging of the stereotype that men are better than women in leading congregations. There is a need for inclusive practices if the future well-being of the church is to be safeguarded. Oduyoye and Amoah, (1996) agrees with Ackermann (1991) when they assert that the phenomenon of the *Imago Dei*, is represented by the partnership of women and men, whether or not they are ordained – that, women's desire to be ordained, should not be seen as their wish to supplant men. The need for gender sensitisation and training across all the levels of the church hierarchy patriarchy and its downside. Such training should be done on a case study, role-play and interactive basis and be aimed at, among others, to break women's silence. To sustain and anchor the achievements, a gender desk would need to be established to facilitate permanency (Sparrow, 2007).

Untangling the gendered aspect of leadership success or whether or not women are better leaders, is something of a puzzle and has in many situations, divided scholars and lay people,



alike – with Hastings and Lindsay (2013) arguing for the religiousness of women, which they hold, surpasses that of men. Further exacerbating the problem, is the fact that, not enough studies have focussed on studying women's leadership as a success factor. Some scholars like Sinclair (2005) and Carver (2006), identified three levels on which successful leaders operate, namely, the rhetoric, process and policy. They assert that, all the three levels are influenced by the leader's gender, since gender is integral the leader's image. This is due to the fact that, Sinclair (2005) women's bodies provide a differentiating factor, to create a comfortable leader-follower environment and thus increase trust.

Parity between men and women, was reiterated by Sibotho (2020:2), when he cited Article 3 of the Ethiopian Episcopal Church's 'Declaration of Faith' (1999), that, the church acknowledged that God created all humanity in His image, and that, the church, recognised the historical and social tendencies to denigrated women, ... and rejects these, as contradicting the dignity and worth, which God envisioned for all humanity, and restored in His Son, Jesus Christ. He cites the distinctive contribution of women, for not only their contribution to the financial stability of the church, but for also being the fibre of spirituality in the church.

Sibotho (2020), raises the question, as to whether or not, men are perhaps jealous of the women. Alluding to women's spirituality, and in agreement with Hastings and Lindsay (2013), Sibotho (2020) cherished the prayerful nature and the role women played in engulfing church gatherings with their prayerful presence. Mtuze (2008) proclaims that, it was Dwane's interest in the ordination of women that estranged him from his conservative detractors in the Ethiopian Episcopal Church. The cause of the emancipation of women in the church, was not unique to the Ethiopian Episcopal Church, as is evident in Mbuy-Beya's (1996:175) assertion in Mtuze (2008:146), that:

The position of women in African societies is not a pretty picture. The Circle of African Theologians has already condemned the deplorable situation of women. The group has been working tirelessly so that each woman and each man might be recognized as a child of God, sharing equally in human dignity. Women do not lead this fight alone; more and more men are supporting them. Moreover, what these women are fighting for is not uniformity between themselves and men; rather, they want to be fully women in society as well as in the Church.

The argument of Dwane's detractors against the ordination of women into priesthood, Mtuze (2018) argues, was based on their narrow and possibly misguided understanding of the Scripture that, if God, in His revelation, had designated men to lead, any view or attempt to equate women to men, would be sinfully going against God's revelation. Dwane's counterargument was that, the revelation was not a fixed deposit of truths in the Bible or doctrine, but a personal encounter between the living God and human beings. He argued that, God's revelation did not cease, when the Scripture was written, but through the work of the Holy Spirit, God continues to reveal Himself and that, the understanding of the relation between Him and His people, is forever deepening. About the equality of men and women, Dwane (1989:9), asserts that:

[Man] and woman are co-creators with God. Therefore, we cannot attain the full liberty of God's children until we recognize that man and woman are equal and complementary. The struggle for women's rights is as important as the struggle for liberation from oppression. As members of God's family, we are an extension of God himself.

In order to clarify what it really means to be a man or a woman, it is necessary to consider the origins of the human race, as recorded in the Bible. Biblically speaking, however, neither is a woman seen independent of man or vice versa. In the same way that a woman was created from man, so is man born of woman. Both were created by God in His image (1 Cor. 11:11–



12). What becomes of interest, is the fact that, the same Scripture passage that proposes the subordination of women to men contains verses that dispute the view. These verses and the accompanying anomalies are important for a study on the subject of gender. 1 Corinthians 11:3–10 is, in most cases, is seen by traditionalists as the final word on the subject. The position adopted in Ephesians 1:27 that God created man (Adam) in His own image, emphasises both, human identity, on the one hand, and individual gender, on the other.

In the New International Version NIV of the Bible, some interesting, additional points are included, emanating from the original language. First, the translated word for ‘God’ takes the plural form, ‘*Elohim*’, meaning the ‘God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind’ (Num. 23:19). God is God. According to the words in the text, the ‘plural God’ created the single human being to be a complex human being, ‘*Adam*’. Following on from this, using Hebrew parallelism, the same point is repeated several times, for clarification. Furthermore, God created ‘*Adam*’ in ‘His own image’. Importantly, in Genesis 2: ‘male and female he created them.’ In one sense, the text explains that Eve is also ‘*Adam*’ and was created equally in the image and likeness of God – the *Imago Dei*.

It has become obvious, at this point, that, any effort to marginalise women from fully and equally participating in the church and society, will be met with opposition, from the members of the church and society, who believe in equality of the sexes. In his final declaration, Dwane proclaimed that, women must participate fully in pastoral and clerical responsibilities in the church – and thus, leadership. As pointed out in the Catholic Inter-regional Meeting of the Bishops of South Africa (IMBISA) in Africa Faith and Justice Network:

Women are the backbone of the church in Africa. Women recognize that Christ in His Church, symbolized by Mary his mother, gives them their full human dignity and they accept this good news with joy, precisely because society at large in many ways fails to accord them proper respect. As a result, the Church must promote the full human dignity of women. As coworkers of Christ and essential agents of evangelization, they seek their proper place in the ministry and leadership of the church. Like the laity as a whole, women need to be given better formation and be offered greater responsibility within the Christian community (IMBISA, 1996:48).

Maluleke (1995:190), agreed with Chukwuokolo (2009) when he asserted that, Christianity in Africa tends to be, ‘the story of missionaries and their activities...something which benevolent white people do to ‘backward black people’. He cites this narrow salvation history in missionary literature as a frequent problem in mission historiography. Their emphasis of the role of white missionaries whilst virtually ignoring other participants such as blacks and women can only be viewed as prejudicial.

It is necessary for Christian leaders to delve deeper into the biblical teachings, for them to have insight and draw lessons for them to deal with the present. Such learning, offers a basis to understand the progression of leadership within the Christian milieu. Luke does reveal the integral role played by women in the Bible. Of importance, for aspirant Christian leaders, regardless of their gender, is to ponder the fruits of associating themselves, with effective leaders and to learn the important lessons they are likely to get by watching and mimicking how they go about doing things in the interest of their organisations and the community.

How the scripture is analysed, based on the ideological texture, tries to explain the importance and inferences that can be made from Jesus’ encounter and discussion with Mary and Martha. It examines Jesus’ challenging of the social norms that dictate the role of women vis-à-vis that of men in God’s ministry. Here Christ uses conflicts as an underlying mechanism, to attract and develop His disciples, and to bring in women, instilling in His disciples, the need to adopt His unconventional social agenda. The analysis also examines how His ministry offers new



and better understanding of the *disruptive leadership theory* and how He challenges social stereotypes.

D'Angelo (1990) and DeSilva (2004) recommend Luke's Gospel for referencing the history of women in ministry, as it features more women in the ministry of Jesus. Luke's tendency to parallel the characters and stories of women with those of men, is particularly highlighted in the writings of D'Angelo (1990). An example of literary pairs which D'Angelo highlights, are the pronouncements made to Zachariah and Mary, written in Luke 1:13, 'Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John'. A similar pronouncement is made to Mary in Luke 1:30-31, that: 'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus'. What this pairing seeks to demonstrate how God uses men and women, working together and understanding each other, for God's purpose.

Scholer (1984) argues that, whilst women had made such an invaluable contribution to church ministry, since days immemorial, the discourse on their role, has either been understated or trivialised. Whether this was due to the fact that, these scholars were largely men, is a matter which raises questions in this debate. He laments that, the discussion is often marred by confusing the biblical concept of ministry, with the specific church traditions, about the ordination of women. This is, he asserts, notwithstanding the fact that, the New Testament says, relatively, very little about ordination. Instead, what the New Testament clearly portrays, is that, God 'gifted' all His people, in order to build up one another. All the people who have been called and gifted by God and affirmed by the Church, therefore, can exercise ministry.

This does not necessarily suggest that all people are necessarily endowed with leadership capabilities, some may be leaders and others assigned specific tasks to accomplish. What the debate misses, it would seem, is the basic and crucial essence of the holistic ministry of the Church, as articulated in the New Testament. In his epistle to the Galatians, 3:28, the Apostle Paul states it unequivocally that, all those who are baptized and clothed in Christ, whether they are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, are in Christ Jesus. They have one Teacher, and are all brothers and sisters (Matt. 23:8).

Luke, in his Gospel, is remarkably favourable towards women and offers significant narratives that bring to the fore, their voices, names, presence and happenings in the Jesus movement (Davies, 1994). Most significantly is what Luke lifts from the Jesus, Mary and Martha discourse, where Jesus dismisses the belief that the place of the woman is in the kitchen (DeSilva, 2004). Whilst He affirms women's eligibility for leadership, Martha and Mary's inclusion in this reading, speaks to a broader audience and draws the attention of the reader to the importance of leadership and ministry (Carter, 1996; DeSilva, 2004).

In this reading, Luke places Jesus' story about Martha and Mary at the end of the scene in chapter ten. The narration symbolises various facets of the earlier verses, like when He told His disciples that, 'if anyone is there, who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person... remain in the same house (v. 6-7). Martha welcomes Jesus, and he stays there; this signifies that she shares in His peace (v. 38) and she is in the presence of the kingdom of God (v. 9). Mary's desire to listen to and be taught by Jesus in (v. 39) coincides with the instruction for acceptance and rejection in verse 16 and in verses 17-20, where Jesus is teaching his disciples'. Verses 23-24 illustrate the blessing of seeing and hearing. The core of the reading is in verses 40-42. The verses teach of the conflict between Mary and Martha and how Jesus responds to the situation.

A comparison, which Kasomo (2010), draws between how women were treated in Judaism and in the African context, refutes the claim that women in Africa were reduced to being the bearers of children, domestic workers and little else. Whilst Judaism was openly discriminatory towards women, he argues, according to the African customs and belief, one of the reasons why God created women, was to perfect his art of creation, and thus improve on His work on



the man. God, as they said, wanted to correct His mistakes when He created man. In Judaism, for instance, women could not bear witness and were excluded from officiating religious rituals, which were reserved for men. Women were considered unclean and had permanently practise purification-rituals, especially at the times that signified their sexuality, like menstruation. According to the Jewish culture and religion, the birth of a girl was seen as a misfortune, whilst, that of a boy was considered a blessing. There were even compulsory prayers, such as, 'Praised be God, that he did not create me as a goy (gentile)! Praised, that he did not create me as a woman! Praised, that he did not create me as an ignorant person!' (Hauke, 1988:78).

According to the Jewish religion, teaching a girl child or woman about the Torah, was not considered obligatory, and was even seen, in part, inappropriate. It was even said that, teaching the Torah to one's daughter, was like teaching her decadence. In its extreme, women had to thank their husbands for beating them up, as this, it was believed, brought them closer to salvation. Contrary to the misguided belief about the African context, Kasomo (2010) contends, Africans believed that, men would be lost in the world and incomplete, without women. In the African context, a woman is considered the essence of being and existence. The absence of a woman in a home, was frowned upon and such a home was often an object of ridicule by the society. In an African context, whether or not, women have borne children, are still conferred the status of mothers.

According to Nangoli (1990), in a typical African context, family undertakings are done conjointly by men and women. The African traditional priesthood, to mention but a few, embraces both men and women, equally. In some African cultures, like the Ewe of Ghana, women are accorded a much higher status than men, and are priests who minister to the community. Against this backdrop, such words as 'inferior' or 'superior' are considered out of place in the African religious context. They are a representation of imported western attitudes that have infiltrated African culture. It may, therefore, in view of the foregoing assertion, be considered correct, to speak of the complementarity of the roles which the African societies, expect of men and women, to serve the greater societal good. This African worldview, complements the assertion in Luke 1:5-23, about men and women collaborating to fulfill God's purpose.

As can be deduced from the stand taken by the first bishop of the Ethiopian Episcopal Church, Bishop Siggibo Dwane, it can be concluded that, he fought for women's rights, their ordination to the priesthood and thus, their acceptance to the church's governance structures. This, Mtuze (2008) contends, he did at the expense of meeting disdain and malice from the conservative elements among the male members of his church.

## **Conclusion**

While congregations vary in the way in which women are accommodated or rather, not accommodated in church governance structures, the overall picture in South African Churches is that of male-dominated church governance structures. There is a general view that, how the church is institutionalised, renders it alien to the needs of women. The controversy surrounding the admission of women in church governance structures, their ordination and election to positions of leadership, saw opponents raising such arguments as that the Scripture enjoined the silence and submission of women and that women should not hold positions of authority in the church. Whether the ostracization is rooted on misguided biblical interpretation or church culture and tradition, it continues to be men who instigated the opposition.

The foregoing is notwithstanding that the church may have been founded by a woman, as was the case with the St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission, the largest African Indigenous Church in Southern Africa, which was founded by a woman, Christina Mokotuli Nku in the early 1930s, yet when Petros Johannes Masango took over the position of Archbishop of the church in 1970, the St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission followed the same practice of male-domination.



Even as is the case currently, all the branches of the St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission are based on a strictly modelled and rigidly applied pattern of male leadership domination. Ndungane (1999) argues that, the fundamental issue which needs to be challenged is the patriarchal clerical model of the church. The authors, in the face of the foregoing discussion, must agree with Ndungane, that, all social formations cannot not leave this to the church, but must mobilise efforts, to fight patriarchy.

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