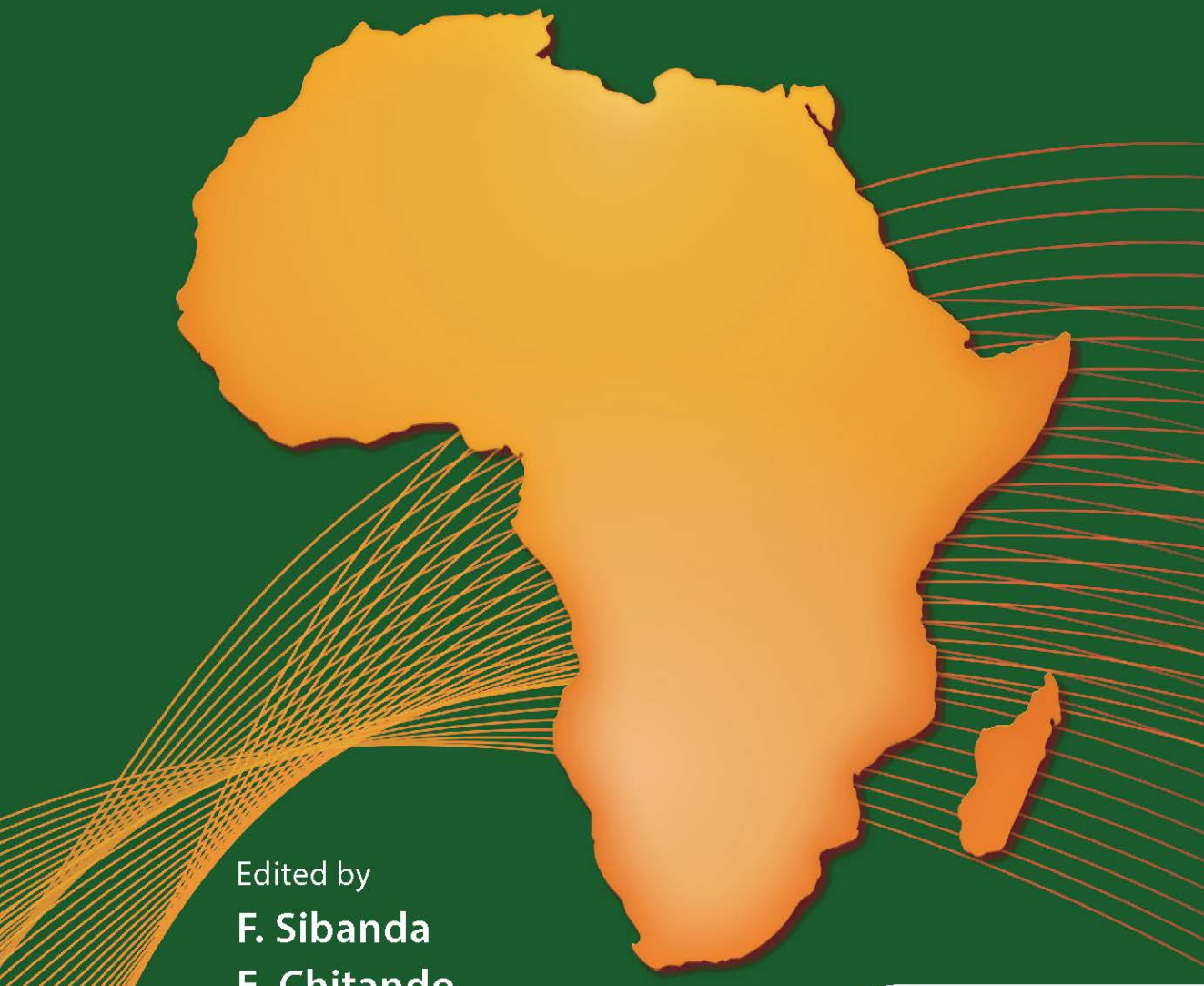
Law, Religion and Leadership in Africa
Published by AFRICAN SUN MeDIA

Law, Religion and Leadership in Africa



Edited by
F. Sibanda
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E.G. Konyana
B.P. Humbe

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

ACLARS
AFRICAN CONSORTIUM FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES

25 Gender equality in church leadership: The case of the Full Gospel Mission and selected charismatic ministries in Cameroon

Helen Namondo Linonge-Fontebo[1]

INTRODUCTION

International and national instruments addressing gender equality in Cameroon, as enshrined in the 1996 Constitution of Cameroon, outlaw discrimination and inequality of human beings.[2] Indeed, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10 obligate nations and institutions to address gender equality and inequality more generally.[3] The Constitution of Cameroon sets out basic human rights and promotes gender equality between females and males. However, a Cameroon National Gender Policy Document postulates that inequalities still prevail in politics and decision making within the government due to patriarchal sociocultural practices and religious dogmas that subordinate women.[4] The same can be said of religious institutions.

In previous writing, Magezi Elijah Baloyi and I have asserted that gender inequality in church leadership of the Full Gospel Mission Church in Cameroon is born from the misuse, misinterpretation and misrepresentation of scriptures, which must be eradicated as much as women are working hard for the propagation of the gospel and development of the church.[5] Sex-role socialization has defined women's roles in the Full Gospel Mission as those of wives and mothers, constituting a barrier for women to enter the labour market freely and contradicting the thesis of equal opportunities for all. By contrast, gender egalitarianism is visible in the Pentecostal/charismatic ministries in Cameroon which are newer than the Full Gospel Mission and have witnessed an upsurge of women in leadership positions. This chapter examines selected Pentecostal and charismatic ministries in Cameroon for their

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2 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. Law No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996, to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972 amended and supplemented by law No. 2008/001 of 14 April 2008.

3 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development Goals. Online at: https://sdgs.un.org

4 Republic of Cameroon. Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Famille: MINPROFF), National Gender Policy Document 2011-2020.

5 Linonge-Fontebo HN and Baloyi EM. 2023. "Gender dynamics in church leadership: The case of Full Gospel Mission and Presbyterian church in Cameroon", *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79(3):a8271

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

views on women in church leadership and argues that there has been an evolution in female leadership in Full Gospel Mission and other charismatic churches in Cameroon. The Full Gospel Mission, the Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry International, the City Church and the World Mission International were used as units of analysis.[6]

The emergence of the Pentecostal movement in Africa's religious terrain opened a new era of opportunity for the incorporation of women into active ministry.[7] Pentecostalism has teachings which can be used as a framework to challenge the status quo of patriarchy, and it broke the barriers that were in place in the mainline and missionary, such as the Catholic, Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Cameroon. The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon has evolved beyond the other mission-based churches, since it now considers women for ordination. Nevertheless, there are still some socio-cultural, theological and philosophical factors which affect the way the ordained women minister performs their roles. The criteria for church leadership in the Pentecostal/charismatic churches is Holy Ghost empowerment, miracles and ability to preach with power rather than ecclesiastical endorsement. Religion scholars across Africa have reported an ever-increasing number of women who are founders and co-founders of Pentecostal churches as bishops, evangelist and pastors.[8] The phenomenon of women taking leadership is becoming increasingly evident, recognised and spreading across the African continent.

While the older Pentecostal churches like the Full Gospel Mission (established 1961) in the 1970s and 1980s were male-dominated, the 1990s ushered in the phenomenon of women leaders within the Pentecostal movement.[9] Looking at these examples, there have been arguments which suggest that women who became prominent did so not on their own merit but were found to be married to founders of churches,

6 The Full Gospel Mission is both Pentecostal and charismatic like the other charismatic churches. However, it is one of the earliest Pentecostal and mission-based churches, in contrast to the mainline churches founded 64 years ago by a German missionary, and it is established all over Cameroon and internationally. The other charismatic churches cited in this work are new Pentecostal movements, ranging from two to twenty-two years in existence, and are mostly churches struggling to grow, with only one of two other branches within or outside of the country. Even so, these churches are more egalitarian in church leadership than the Full Gospel Mission, which still has leadership positions women cannot occupy, even in the twenth-first century.

7 Odey EA and Onah GA. 2020. "Pentecostalism and women leadership: paradigm for gender re-construction in Nigeria", *International Journal of Pedagogy, Innovation and New Technologies* 7(1):76-83.

8 See Okure T. 2003." Invitation to African women's hermeneutical concerns", *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 19(2):71-95; Parsitau DS. 2018. "Soft tongue, powerful voice, huge influence: The dynamics of gender, soft power and political influence in faith and evangelistic ministries in Kenya", in Afolayan A, Yacob-Haliso O and Falola T (eds) *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 159-180; Olademo O. 2012. "Healing and women healers in Yoruba religion and African Christianity", *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 2(1):53-54.

9 Mapuranga T. 2013. "Bargaining with patriarchy? Women Pentecostal leaders in Zimbabwe", *Fieldwork in Religion* 8(1):74-91.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

thus leveraging on their husbands' platform.[10] Such arguments buttress the view that in most of the charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches, the head pastor's wife was usually the first to be ordained before other women. Other Pentecostal churches, much like the Full Gospel Mission, see women less qualified to hold pastoral positions.

By contrast, the charismatic ministries train and ordain women preachers for service. Full Gospel Mission has over a thousand congregations with less than 15 per cent of leadership positions occupied by women. It is frustrating to note that Full Gospel Mission women are allowed to preach the gospel but are not fully ordained as pastors and elders. Also noteworthy is the fact that women's programmes at Full Gospel Mission, invite other female pastors as guest speakers from other charismatic ministries to preach in their local assemblies. Thus, the Full Gospel Mission allows women to preach, when it is limited to other women. Otherwise, it is generally believed that women are traditionally assigned unequal status of inferiority with direct and biblical support from God.[11] Men have continuously used the Bible to justify their discrimination against women; yet women lead women's groups successfully and sometimes their leadership skills are better than men. Both men and women have the same capacity to hold positions of authority, but one sex is given more privilege than the other. It is believed that if we live in subjection to Christ, the difference in the sexes will be abolished, since as Paul puts it "in Christ, there is no male or female".[12] The mystery of creation of man from the earth and women from the ribs of man accounts for the theological and gender inequalities in leadership positions in most churches globally, including Cameroon. However, men and women's decision-making roles in churches have experienced evolution over time.

It is worth noting that although there was gender differentiation in leadership in these churches, there was complementarity in pre-colonial African societies reflected in African traditional religious cultures in which priesthood and some leadership positions were shared between men and women. Women played significant roles in mythology, proverbs and prayers – there were women priestesses, mediums, seers, ritual elders and rain makers. However, the arrival of Christianity–a male dominated religion—introduced a new concept of priesthood rooted in gender inequality and the oppression of women in church leadership in Africa. Despite the existence of constitutional and national policy commitments and UN Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10, which obligate nations and institutions to address gender equality and inequality, the organizations of the Full Gospel Mission and selected charismatic ministries in Cameroon are still gender discriminatory, ignoring the fact that men

10 Sande N. 2017. "Faith and equality: rethinking women in leadership positions in Pentecostalism" *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 23(1):50-62.

11 Ani CKC. 2013. "Redefining the concept of women empowerment: The vision and quest for equality and partnership in the post 2015 development era", Special Gender and Development Publication. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

12 Bible, Galatians 3:28.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

and women are created with equal dignity and represent God's purpose on earth. Although charismatic ministries practice more egalitarianism than the Full Gospel Mission, as revealed in the interview data underlying the research for this chapter, even women permitted to be elders and pastors in these ministries attested to the discrimination that they face from male colleagues and some Christians.

Against this backdrop, this chapter examines gender equality in church leadership in the Full Gospel Mission and selected charismatic ministries in Cameroon on the issue of women in leadership. The chapter further questions why women are excluded from senior leadership positions. The research is qualitative, using in-depth interviews and the gender equality frameworks of Jo Rowlands, as its method of analysis.[13] Jo Rowlands's empowerment framework interrogates power relation in the society from four perspectives, namely—power within, power without, power over and power to. The gender stereotypes involved in the election of men and women into leadership positions are expose explained, discussed and analysed in order to seek ways to avoid the manipulations of biblical texts to justify the exclusion of women from decision-making positions.

ASSESSING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH: A GENDER EQUALITY FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Despite the rise of female leadership in various social milieus, women in many Pentecostal churches and charismatic ministries still face structural barriers that have prevented them from being successful as they pursue or maintain leadership roles within the church.[14] Charles Handy, a prominent management theorist, first observed that there were theological strongholds against women that prevented them from attaining a leadership role within the church.[15] Even in modern-day churches, women are still prevented from pursuing religious career aspirations under the banner that the Bible prohibited women from holding leadership positions. Despite the pervasiveness of the problem, very little has been written on gender equality and church leadership in the context of Cameroon. This chapter fills the gap with an analysis of women's leadership, and barriers thereto, in the Full Gospel Mission and selected three charismatic ministries in Cameroon.

13 Oxaal Z and Baden S. 1997. "Gender and empowerment, definitions, approaches and implications for policy – briefing prepared for Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)". BRIDGE (development – gender), Report No. 40. Brighton: Institute of Developed Studies Brighton, 1.

14 Davis NL. 2019. *Women in Ministry: How Conflict Between God's Purpose and Church Doctrine Impact the Efficacy of Female Church Leaders*. Doctoral Diss, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Conflict Resolution StudiesNova Southeastern University.

15 Handy C. 1989. *Understanding Organisations*. Fourth Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

Interview data underlying this chapter was analysed qualitatively using content analysis to explore the behaviour and experience of women in church leadership,[16] along with a gender equality framework that supports feminist documentation of women's voices.[17] The participants were from the Full Gospel Mission, the Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry International, the City Church and the World Mission International, with a sample size of sixteen male and female leaders purposively selected from four churches. Eight women of different status from each denomination were selected—four female pastors who moved from other denominations and four deaconesses in the Full Gospel Mission. Eight men were interviewed from the four churches, two men from each denomination. The research participants were purposively recruited from the four denominations based on how long they had been in leadership, their expert knowledge in decision making.[18] A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data, and an attempt was made to create a safe space to treat participants with respect and all information obtained was regarded as confidential. Participants were also assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.[19]

I attended weekly services to access the participants in churches. Different participants were contacted individually with authorisation letters from the Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry International, City Church and World Mission International. Authorization was obtained through the overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry International, the City Church and World Mission, as well as the Full Gospel Mission respectively. This authorisation was presented to the churches administrators to obtain their consent. Data was collected using audiotapes that were later transcribed. The research was conducted over four weeks from the 11 May to 5 of June 2024. Each church provided four adults to be interviewed. Each person was interviewed individually. Participants were asked a series of questions ranging from their lived experiences working with other women in church to whether they believed women should serve as leaders within the church. Data analysis entailed thematic coding of full transcripts of all the interviews.[20] The interview data was then analyzed using a gender equality framework.

From a methodological framework perspective, gender is a social construct that is related to, but not bound by, biological sex. Gender denotes the social prescriptions associated with biological sex, covering all aspects of lived experienced, including ones' roles, behaviour, appearance, cognition and emotion.[21] Gender refers to the

16 Atkinson P, Coffey A and Delamont S. 2001. "A debate about our canon", Qualitative Research 1(1):5-21.

17 Bryman A. 2008. *Social Research Methods*. Third Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

18 Babbie ER. 2013. *The Practice of Social Research.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

19 Mason J. 2002. *Qualitative researching*. Second Edition. London: Sage.

20 Newman WL. 2003. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sixth Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

21 Anyidohoo NA. 2020. "Women, gender and development in Africa", in Yacob-Haliso O and Falola T (eds) *The Palgrave MacMillan Handbook of African Women's Studies*. London:

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. In most societies, men and women differ in the activities they undertake, in access and control of resources and in participation in decision making.[22] The differences between men and women are socially constructed, changeable over time and have wide variations within and between cultures. Gender is a socio-economic and political variable with which to analyse roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities of people; it considers both men and women. Gender refers to roles sex refers to the biological state of being male or female and women refers to adult females.[23]

Three schools of thought resonate in conceptualising gender. Firstly, evolutionary theory argues that gender is a social behaviour which produces differences in heterosexual practices between men and women.[24] Secondly, social role theory holds that gender is a fixed and static variable where one is either feminine or masculine.[25] Finally, social constructivist theory belief gender is a socially determined construct describing the characteristics, behaviour and roles deemed appropriate and expected of men and women, and boys and girls, in the society.[26] Gender is not a homogeneous category; it is internally differentiated and elaborated by class, race, ethnicity, age, culture and other hierarchical social relations which organise a society's institutions and practices.

Gender equality is also the concept that women and men, girls and boys, have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity and for contributing to economic, social, cultural and political development.[27] Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in the home, community and society. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men and girls and boys are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups and that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes and prejudices about gender roles. Gender equality

Palgrave MacMillan.

22 Bredt W, Thomas H and Schalkwyk J. 1997. "Gender: the concept, its meaning and uses – a think piece". Stockholm: Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

23 Taborga C and Leach B. 1996. *Gender and Development Glossary*. Third Edition. Rome: Inter Press Service (IPS).

24 Guo G, Tong Y, Xie C and Lange LA. 2007. "Dopamine transporter, gender and number of partners among young adults", *European Journal of Human Genetics* 15:279-287.

25 Courtenay WH. 2000. Construction of masculinity and their influence on men's wellbeing: A theory of gender and health", *Social Science and Medicine* 50(10):1385-1401.

26 Rolleri L. 2012. *Gender-related definitions*. New York: EngenderHealth.

27 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2017. "Annual results report: gender equality". New York: UNICEF.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

is a matter of human rights and is considered a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.[28]

Gender equality therefore aligns with the views of evangelical Christian feminists who believe in the equality of opportunity for women to make full use of their gifts and abilities in church, home and society even if that entails sharing authority with or exercising authority over men.[29] This means that women should be regarded as valuable and productive members of the church. It is a fitting framework for examining gender and leadership in Cameroonian churches.

WOMEN AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN CAMEROON: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Cameroon is committed towards improving women's rights across the country through its Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family and the work of various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), and various international and national instruments and treaties it has ratified. Unfortunately, social, economic and political inequality is still a reality for many women across the nation, especially in the rural areas. Women routinely face the oppression of traditionally prescribed social roles in which they are confined to domestic and denied a voice in their families, societies and local government. There is an overwhelming prejudice on behalf of men and even women—that women are not competent to assume leadership roles in the community—including the church. Women are relegated to prescribed domestic roles in the society, a rejection that strips them of their political voice and potential for leadership.[30]

Women interviewed for the present study reflected these trends. A majority of participants in the ministries surveyed in this study are between the ages 40 and 58 years. It is evident that within this age bracket they are mature and responsible to keep their homes and jobs for the welfare of their families. Only one participant out of 16 was a widow and 15 participants were married, suggesting that marital status plays a vital role in church leadership. This corroborates the findings of Anthony Olale Otieno in Kenya and Sarbjit Kaur in India postulating that demographic factors such as marital status, age and education have a positive effect on women in church leadership and that the leader's marital status influences good transactional

28 UNICEF, Annual results report: gender equality.

29 Davis, "Women in Ministry".

30 Atanga LL. 2009. *Gender discourse and power in the Cameroonian parliament*. Bamenda and Buea: Langaa Research and Publishing, 98-118.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

and transformational leadership.[31, 32] Findings also revealed that more than 40 per cent of respondents were holders of a post-graduate degree, and within this 30 per cent were women. This ties with literature that reveals that the higher the literacy level of women and girls, the higher the involvement of women and girls in church leadership.[33] The research for this chapter uncovered a range of these related to gender and church leadership, to which we now turn.

In the sections that follow, I discuss the experience of women in church leadership in the Full Gospel Mission and selected charismatic ministries that emerged in the study. I begin with the obstacles to women in church leadership. These include concepts of leadership and church ministry. They also include notions of God's purpose for women in the church and how these are used to restrict women's leadership roles. These, in turn, generate conflicts, often biblically based, over women's presence in or absence from leadership roles in the church. The failure to resolve these conflicts reinforces differential treatment of men and women in churches. I then turn to arguments in support of women in church leadership. Increasingly, such arguments have led to City Church's acceptance of women's leadership by men and women in the church. This can lead to evolution in ideas of women's leadership in the church, along with new understandings of women's leadership in church and world that are consistent with a gender equality framework and the objectives of Cameroon's egalitarian laws and international commitments.

Obstacles to women's leadership

Concepts of leadership in church and world

This section explores women's leadership roles in the church as voiced by participants in the research study. The general overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry International had this to say: "In my former church where I served for more than 10 years, it was as if in the secular world a woman can lead but in church they come and sit".[34] In his view, the secular world seems to understand that women are better managers, administrators, ministers, head of states and prime ministers, but

31 Otieno M. 2016. "Influence of demographic factors on women's participation in political leadership in Rongo constituency, Migori County, Kenya", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 5(7):29-32; Kaur S. 2012. "A study of adjustment of high school students in relation to their achievement, sex and locality", *International Journal of Research in Education Methodology* 1(2):18-21.

32 Otieno M. 2016. "Influence of demographic factors on women's participation in political leadership in Rongo constituency, Migori County, Kenya", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 5(7):29-32; Kaur S. 2012. "A study of adjustment of high school students in relation to their achievement, sex and locality", *International Journal of Research in Education Methodology* 1(2):18-21.

33 Njoni NN. 2022. *Assessment of women participation in church leadership: a case of national independent church of Africa (NICA), Kenya*. Master of Arts Thesis in Religious Studies, Kenya Methodist University.

34 Interview with Fonni Evaristus Nde by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 11 May 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

in some churches the is the contrary expectation that women should come and have a seat in the background. In his opinion, if women can lead in the secular world, then they will do it better in church because of the spirit of Christ in them.

On the other hand, a female pastor differentiated women's leadership in church and the secular world as follows, in a schematic drawn up based on her remarks: [35]

Female church leaders	Female secular leaders
Limited preaching/potential opportunities	More privileged to exercise their potentials
Obstruction to ordination especially as pastors	Easily crowned and recognised efforts
No career profile so no growth patterns and possibilities	Exhibit and enjoy profiles and growth
Their offices (prophetesses, evangelists, judges, leaders etc.) were usually unofficial and not administratively supported.	Their offices are usually official and recognised
Usually excluded from major decision-making processes	More included in major decision-making processes
Gender discrimination and injustices	Prioritise social issues: e.g., healthcare, education, poverty reduction.

The above table paints the picture of the interviewee's view of female leaders in the secular world having better opportunities in decision making and less discrimination than in the church. This was contrary to the opinion of another participant who indicated that the secular world is not all rosy because there are cultural barriers that also discriminate against women.[36]As such, a radical approach that seeks to dismantle patriarchal societies and create new, egalitarian social structures must be adopted for genuine gender equality to exist both in the church and secular world.

Jealousy among women and conflict in roles was further identified as justification for conflicts in the Full Gospel Mission and the other charismatic ministries with pastor's wives feeling challenged or jealous of the female leaders in church. Between the younger and older generation there are opposing ideas on issues such as proper dress, cosmetic use and sexual gestures. To the general overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry, "Men love self-pride. They don't believe women should talk to them. Men don't always accept their fault. They will say even my wife cannot talk to me like this."[37] This is not surprising because the patriarchal system has socialised men to always be the head and not the other way round.

Some charismatic pastors from the City Church and Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry testified that most conflict in churches stems from the interpretation of biblical passages on the on the extent to which women should keep silent and women

35 Interview with Vera Kana by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 15 May 2024.

36 Interview with Cynthia Eko by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon. 8 May 2024.

37 Interview with Fonni Evaristus Nde by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 11 May 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

exercising authority over men.[38] A pastor's wife from the Full Gospel Mission said "There is need to be mindful of the fact that men are the natural head because they were created first and from dust, while women were created from the bone of a man. If women do not acknowledge this, there is bound to be conflict on gender roles. Women should do what they are good at and like wise men. Women are better at conflict management, especially with teenagers, when young children both boys and girls have a challenge at home or in church, it is women who can handle it. Children generally do open up to their mothers because their mothers have a better approach to handle conflict than their fathers. Similarly, if women are at the fore front of decision making in churches, they will have better result than men.[39] The general overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry also saw women as nation builders because when women decide to do something for God, they do it very well, but men will say "why am I doing this what do I stand to gain?"[40] He cited the example of the cathedral their church is building which will cost about 150 million, those readily investing in this project are women from their meagre resources.

Differential treatment of women in church

The research undertaken for this chapter found that that despite the potential of their leadership roles in women both in the church and in the secular world, women are still subjected to differential treatment in the church. Most of the participants from Full Gospel Mission and some from the charismatic churches testified that "men were given more overall leadership positions sometimes irrespective of their deficiency in skills, potentials and even integrity".[41] However, some of these leaders asserted that men and women are treated the same and denied the existence of gender discrimination in their local assemblies. Their justification was based on the fact that God first created man in the generic sense, before male and female, in his image. Every human being has their position in God's presence.

When asked what their personal belief was about women serving in leadership positions a female pastor's response was "I believe women are endowed with so many skills and should be allowed to operate these skills without restrictions."[42] Other participants, both men and women, said women have qualities that male leaders do not have. For instance, it is difficult for a female leader to lust, which is typical of male leaders, who too often lack self-control. The male head pastor of one of the charismatic churches reiterated, "Truly, I always put the female leaders ahead when men have crisis in the church with regards to lust. Women are focused and stable and are not moved or derailed. You scarcely hear a scandal of women ministers but it is common with men." [43] Similarly, a female co-founder said,

38 See 1 Timothy 2:12.

39 Interview with Cynthia Eko by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 8 May 2024.

40 Interview with Fonni Evaristus Nde by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 11 May 2024.

41 Interview with Rapha Fontebo by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 10 May 2024.

42 Interview with Fora Che by H Linonge-Fontebo. Tiko, Cameroon, 11 August 2024.

43 Interview with Jo Mbellason by H. Linonge-Fontebo, Tiko, Cameroon, 11 May 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

"Female leaders have a more one-to-one touch, focused and stable, though usually more emotional." [44]

In addition, the general overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry postulated, "Women serving in leadership will make the church grow. They do not abandon easily like men. If you see women who have left Holy Ghost, they were influenced by their husbands. Women have a good disposition in ministry. Ministers of the gospel who were inspired and raised by women are very strong." [45] According to the general overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry, the churches that discriminate against women are the same churches that use women for door-to-door evangelism outside, but when they come to church, they ask them to sit in the back.[46] This suggests that women can preach out of the church and not inside, which is not the case. In the pastor's view, very few men go for evangelism, but when the women win the souls and bring to the church hall, the men Lord over them. The real church "where two or three are gathered" was started by women. Women truly foster the growth of the church as they displayed more warmth, intuition and love at individual level.

Other challenges to women's leadership

Apart from differential treatment, women face other challenges in leadership. Being accepted as a leader in various fora and milieus is one of the major challenges women face in church leadership. In addition to the fact that the Full Gospel Mission and some charismatic churches the justification for excluding women in leadership is based on gender stereotypes that men are automatic better leaders. Women are too emotional, cooperative and inclusive, while men are more self-confident and assertive. The participants also remarked that female leaders keep wrestling often with loneliness due to lack of support from men. They are sometimes told by strangers that they cannot sit under a female pastor and that having female pastors is wrong. That women are not to preach in open programmes contrary to the doctrine of Apostle Paul asking women to be silent in church.

Sustainable development and all-round development in the church cannot be achieved without the full participation of women and men. Women's ascension to power in both the charismatic ministries and the Full Gospel Mission is often hindered by the concept of the "glass ceiling". Writing on women in political decision making in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, political scientist Yolanda Sadie argues that women are confronted with a patriarchal system where decision-making powers are in the hands of men, creating a barrier for women to cross the "glass ceiling".[47] The "glass ceiling" effect is an unofficial barrier to opportunities within church institutions preventing a particular class of people—namely, women—from advancing to higher positions. In such

44 Interview with Rapha Fontebo by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 10 May 2024.

45 Interview with Fonni Evaristus Nde by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 11 May 2024.

46 Interview with Fonni Evaristus Nde by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 11 May 2024.

47 Sadie Y. 2005. "Women in political decision-making in SADC region", *Agenda* 19:17-31.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

circumstances the percentage of women in executive positions is gender-specific since women receive little or no encouragement when found in such lay leadership positions and even as ordained ministers in the church.

The research findings also revealed that not all cultures hinder women in decision making. Some women tend to be pushed ahead in leadership, especially in tolerant and egalitarian cultures. Whereas some cultures socialize women from birth into strict roles that exclude them from public decisions.[48] In some circumstances, the women are their own enemy, as narrated by one of the female pastors who previously served in Full Gospel Mission. She reported that she had three reasons for leaving Full Gospel Mission: The first was because she had to follow her husband to his own denomination. The second was because of the limitations Full Gospel Mission imposed on women leaders. The third was that she needed a break from the silent conflict from the pastor's wife towards her.

Another challenge was based on the fact that religion is fundamental to women's oppression, given that women are oppressed due to the different religious ideologies concerning the scriptures.[49] For example, Saint Paul's writings state that it is shameful for a woman to speak in public, so men should command.[50] Women should study in silence and are not to be allowed to learn or have authority over men. However, the critical study of Paul's writings and the historical background suggested that Paul might not necessarily have limited the status of women to that of submission. It could be that Paul wrote because of the situation at that time and having in mind the culture and tradition of that time.

Acceptance of women's leadership in churches

Biblical support for women's leadership

It is important to note that despited the Pauline writings against women's leadership, participants in the research study for this chapter also reported examples of biblical support for leadership, beginnning with the Old Testament story of Rebecca and Issac. As the general overeer pointed out, in the Bible, it was not an error that God decided to blind the eyes of Isaac and raised up the leadership in Rebecca to bring the secret of the twelve tribes of Israel. In his view, if it were not so God would have told Isaac directly, but he knew Isaac would not want to believe that the first child should serve the second in terms of seniority.

The interpretation here, in the general overseer's view is that when women hear from God, they do not question him. Angel Gabriel appeared both to Mary the mother of Jesus and Zachariah. The angel told Zechariah that his wife would

48 Paxton P, Kunovich S and Hughes M. 2007. "Gender in politics", *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:263-284.

49 Odudoye MA. 2004. *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African woman on Christianity in Africa*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis.

50 Bible, 1 Timothy 2:13-14.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

conceive but Zechariah doubted, and God blinded his eyes, however, when the same angel appeared to Mary she did not doubt but asked the question. "How shall this be?" The angel replied that the Holy Ghost would come upon her, and Mary's response was "let it be unto your servant according to your will" (Luke 1:5-38). This was intended to show the potential leadership nature of women in churches who easily believe God than men in the general overseer's voice.

All the participants, perhaps because they were all Bible scholars cited the biblical case of Mary Magdalene, who played a vital role to be the first evangelist, conveyer and missionary woman, who witnessed the resurrection and spread God's message to the world. At a time when the apostles of Jesus Christ who were holding high offices had abandoned and backslidden, Mary Magdalene broke heavenly protocol according to which a priest who had completed atonement needed to carry the blood to the Holy of the Holies and pour it there (both to Mathew 27:55-56; Mark 15) . But this woman intercepted Jesus to see her first before going to heaven to pour the blood before the father, thereby emphasizing the role and the influence women have in leadership. Apart from breaking heavenly protocol, Mary Magdalene brought revival and is the reason for the celebration of Easter. All the participants also reported that, in recent times, the concept of the Holy Ghost being poured on All Flesh "sons and daughters/servants and handmaids" men and women is being observed as prophesied by Joel (Joel 2:28-29). According to Joel both men and women were empowered to prophesy. Ephesians 2:10 also enjoins men and women as stewards with God's gifts, abilities and opportunity and using them to influence and serve others and pointing followers to Christ. The message of the "Great Commission" in Mathew 28:18-20 empowered both men and women to preach the gospel.

Instrumentalizing men's growth

Despite the obstacles to their leadership, some of the study participants mentioned that women's leadership has been instrumental to the growth of some great men of God in contemporary times. One of the Full Gospel Mission pastors reported that his spiritual mother was a woman and a prophetess.[51] She was responsible for his spiritual growth until he took the decision to become a pastor. His spiritual mother was the only one who encouraged him each time he was spiritually weak, not the men. The gift of God in the life of his spiritual mother motivated him to look for a wife who was also called to assist him in ministry.

Indeed, despite the challenges and conflicts in women's leadership, they were some women and men who accepted their leadership wholeheartedly. Some of the participants gave the response that they had never been led by a female pastor, but they still attested that women are good leaders. The general overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry, "Women's leadership role is highly accepted at all levels. The pastor of the men's group is a woman and each time she calls a meeting the men

51 Interview with Uno Che by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 11 August 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

respect the invitation and submit to whatever she asks them to do."[52] According to a female coordinator of World Mission, "The church members generally appreciate and are open to female leadership especially when they see the inspiration and gift in them. Many men as well as women submit under female leadership when they see the working of the Holy Ghost in them to transform lives. Sometimes the men who have experienced the anointing and gifting flowing from the female pastors testify that the Holy Ghost was freely given and must be freely communicated."[53]

Another woman female participant testified that female leadership is awesome, inspiring and challenging to greater heights.[54] While a male participant said, "My experience is that when a woman is leading, they have a certain motherly tongue that they use on the platform that men cannot use and it captivates the minds of the people towards the gospel."[55] To him, the same way women are approved to lead in choirs and they bring down the anointing through singing is the same way they should be allowed to handle decision making position. After the singing the music leader could be asked to give a word of exhortation to continue the flow of the presence of God than allowing a male leader to come and water down what the women already started in their singing. Similarly, a pastor's wife reported, "When I was in Kumba, God was using women in the intercessory ministry… an HIV patient got healed." [56]

Women are not always despised and under looked. It depends on the pastor leading the church, because in the Full Gospel Mission a pastor is responsible to design how the church will run with advice from the hierarchy. That is why in some churches women are allowed to preach and in others they are not. This pastor's wife reported that her husband was questioned by one of the pastors for allowing women in leadership another pastor's wife, and stated, "During monthly submission my name appeared that I preached on two Sundays. When the district supervisor saw this, he was extremely happy and encouraged other pastors to work with their wives." [57] One of the Full Gospel Mission local church pastors suggested that the Full Gospel Mission hierarchy should harmonize the usage of women in church leadership, such that all pastors would implement gender equality and no pastor would be rebuked or questioned by other pastors for using women.

Evolution toward gender equality and acceptance of women's leadership

The gradual acceptance of women in church leadership shows an evolution. In the World Mission ministry, there is a positive increase, with female pastors constituting 47 per cent and men 53 per cent of the clergy. According to the general

52 Interview with Fonni Evaristus Nde by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 11 May 2024.

53 Interview with Vera Kana by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 15 May 2024.

54 Interview with Rapha Fontebo by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon, 10 May 2024.

55 Interview with Jo Mbellason by H Linonge-Fontebo, Tiko, Cameroon. 11 May 2024.

56 Interview with Cynthia Eko by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon. 8 May 2024.

57 Interview with Cynthia Eko by H Linonge-Fontebo. Buea, Cameroon. 8 May 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

overseer of Holy Ghost Evangelical Ministry International, gender discrimination is not part of his ministry were women have a vital role to play. Both men and women can function in any office. That is why the main administrator of Holy Ghost is a woman. Likewise, in the World Mission, the main pastor in the Buea Branch is a woman who is also a co-founder and co-planter of the mother church in Cameroon. She is also the National and Conference Coordinator of Africa. Also, Full Gospel Mission practices collaborative leadership. Although it has an organised hierarchical structure of men in all the top offices, the wives of these top administrators also have a voice in the mission.

As such they coordinate the women's ministry from the national to regional and local assemblies of the nation. One of the participants reported that she was in the national executive board as head for the women and pastor's wife.[58] She was also the regional adviser for women and did many things that transformed the mind-set of women and men. The national leader of the Full Gospel Mission Sunday school ministry in Cameroon is also a woman. Both men and women are allowed to attend the Full Gospel Mission Bible school to serve as pastors. The gender discrimination only comes in when it is time to post the pastors to local churches. Only the men are posted to head churches. The female graduates of the Bible school can only use their knowledge in the assemblies where they are serving as pastors' wives and Christians.

The World Mission has experienced remarkable growth spiritually, socially and developmentally. The number of female ministers has increased to nine out of the nineteen ministers, giving a percentage of 47 per cent female ministers and 53 per cent male ministers. In terms of development, women act as project committee heads, bringing in constructive developmental projects in the church and educating the congregation on how to develop the church. Full Gospel Mission women, on the other hand, have grown spiritually in proclaiming the word of God, ascending to leadership positions and improving the social life of the church.

EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

There is a relationship between the research findings reported above and the Jo Rowlands empowerment framework earlier mentioned in this chapter has shown that leadership brings transactional and transformational power. Transactional power relates to Rowlands framework of "power over", which reflects dominance, superiority of men and the feeling that men have to make decisions for women. This theory ties with the research findings in which church leadership is based on command, control and directive of women by men. Jo Rowlands is a trainer and a consultant for cooperatives and non-governmental organisations in Britain and Latin America whose explanation on empowerment has been used effectively by several scholars, including Zoe Oxaal and Sally Baden, to demonstrate how power

58 Interview with Fora Che by H Linonge-Fontebo. Tiko, Cameroon, 11 August 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

relation subjugates women to the secondary position depriving them from taking decision on an equal pace with men. This theory also reflects French feminist Simone de Beauvoir's argument that women are seen as "others" and men "norms", projecting women as second-class beings. [59]

Transactional power brings in both collective and self-interest to the congregants and the leader himself. Meanwhile, transformational power ties with Jo Rowlands "power within" practised by women as they base their leadership to be interactive, collaborative and democratic with the congregants. This is confirmed by social psychologist Vanessa Urch Druskat's study of administrative and religious leadership with a higher prevalence of transformational than transactional leadership style.[60] Women were rated as exhibiting significantly more transformational leadership behaviour than men. These leadership styles lead to participation and development in the church.

A majority of participants in the Full Gospel Mission revealed that gender equality refers to giving equal opportunities to men and women in all spheres of life in consonance with literature that holds that gender equality is a social condition where women and men share equal rights and balance of power, status, opportunities and reward. Men and women can equally access resources, equitable participation in relationship and freedom of violence.[61] This finding also corroborates UNESCO'S view of gender equality, which gives men and women equal opportunities in realizing their full human rights and for contributing to and benefiting from economic, social, cultural and political development.[62]

On the contrary, findings of the present study did not tie with those of development pschologists Alice Eagly and Blair Johnson, whose gender-blind assertion elucidates that there is no difference between men and women in church leadership since both women and men in the Old Testament attended public gatherings together.[63] Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. Similarly, women and men were active in the development of their traditional religion, whereas those who

59 De Beauvoir S. 1952. *The Second Sex*. New York Modern Library.

60 Druskat VU. 2004. "Gender and leadership style: Transformational and Transactional Leadership in the Roman Catholic Church," *The Leadership Quarterly* 5(1):99-119.

61 Rolleri, *Gender-related definitions*.

62 United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2003. *Gender and the education for all: The leap to equality*. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4. Paris: UNESCO.

63 Eagly AH and Johnson BT. 1990. "Gender and Leadership Style: A Meta–Analysis", *Psychological Bulletin* 108(2):233-256.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

disobeyed were punished according to the pronouncements of the mouthpiece of the gods.[64]

CONCLUSION

The research underlying this chapter supports the conclusion that there has been an evolution in female leadership in Full Gospel Mission and other charismatic churches in Cameroon. The Full Gospel Mission in 1960s, men had an upper hand in leadership, while women's leadership were associated with their gender roles, however, today women are lay preachers, church administrators, national Sunday school teachers, deaconesses and hold other positions within the church, such as serving as a chruch's accountant or secretary.

The newer charismatic ministries exercise egalitarianism even more than the Full Gospel mission, which has been in existence for more than sixty years. Findings revealed the charismatic ministries having women pastors and elders in their own right. This is not to say that there is complete gender equality in the charismatic churches, which also suffer from gender inequality at all levels of leadership. Even though women are found everywhere in church leadership, the congregation plays a vital role in the selection process of its leaders, who serve in various capacities as elders, deacons and deaconesses. The relationship between the percentage of women seating at the pews and the percentage in authority is not encouraging in the Full Gospel Mission, as most positions are tied to highly constructed gender roles. Despite the differences between the Full Gospel Mission and charismatic churches, it is clear that there has been an evolution in women's leadership, although more needs to be done to close the gender gap.

Although both the Full Gospel Mission and the charismatic churches do not demonstrate complete gender equality per se, individual churches have adopted cultures based on the complementarity of men and women, whereas decisions from the central church were taken by men influenced by cultural practices, male dominance and peer pressure. This leads to the conclusion that women should be involved in top leadership and represented equally in administrative matters at the central church to represent the voice or perspective of the women.

It is believed that if we live in subjection to Christ, the difference in the sexes will be abolished and as Paul puts it "in Christ, there is no male or female".[65] In addition, failure to promote women in decision making within the church administration will undermine the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and 10 on reducing inequalities more generally. Cameroon can only experience its development plan with more women in decision making, rather than with stakeholders and religious authorities relegating women to the pews using Paul's letters as justification. The structure and content of Paul's message suggest that Paul

64 Oduyoye M. 1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. New York: Orbis Books.

65 Bible, Galatians 3:28.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

intended women to serve in the leadership of the church – he began his ministry with Priscilla and her husband Aquila. Paul saw Phoebe as a fellow servant of the Lord, affirming her as a deacon and commending her as an exemplary leader of the church. Therefore, a conducive and favourable environment to enable women reach the glass ceiling in leadership is non-negotiable.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888