

Mainstreaming, Women Roles And Challenges For Church Growth In Africa

Bwire John

St. Paul's University

Abstract

This study examines ways that can offer solutions to challenges facing women participation in the growth of the church in Africa. The study has explored dimensions of church growth: numerical, organic, maturational and incarnational. Numerically women seem more than men and yet balance growth is lacking in terms of roles women play in the church. The study discusses some impediments or challenges such as cultural practices and beliefs, poor education, leadership, ecclesiastical positions on women and lack of general empowerment among others. This study analyses challenges facing the role of women highlighting contextual examples in Africa but with references to other continents. The paper offers viable solutions and recommendations which aims at mainstreaming women roles towards attaining balanced church growth through gender inclusivity, proper Biblical interpretation and practice. Hypothetically, holistic church growth is not just about numbers, women roles and challenges needs to be mainstreamed, planned and determination made on how to include all in church activities.

Key words are: Mainstreaming, Women, Ordination, Church Growth, Recasting

Introductory

Worldwide the church of Christ has been growing and is seen to be growing because numbers have been increasing, people getting saved; buildings have been constructed for worship and church businesses (Marjorie 1980, Dubose, 1990). However, this form of growth has not been evenly with regard to gender inclusion according to (Belew, 1971). A lot has been written about women's role, reasons for their challenges, based on the Bible, social constructions, gendered roles, nature of ministry which favors men (Bwire, 2016, Kanyoro, 1996, Gill 1990, Hyun, 2016). Equal participation of both men and women is still inadequate especially in African context.

Globally there is increasing pressure and realization for gender inclusivity in every sphere of life by governments, Non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions especially those affiliated to Christianity. According to Gill (1990) the situation is different in Muslim Countries like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia among others. In Africa, the struggle has been to include women in church matters as seen from works written by (Ango, 2016, Bwire, 2016, Rutoro, 2016) whose investigations are from Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe respectively. Africa as a continent has its unique challenges, context and opportunities for church growth compared with America and Europe according to (Belew, 1971, Sheerattan, 2010, Mbiti, 1975).

Section one examines relevant literature on women in the church and the issues, theologies that emanate thereof. Section two explores gaps and challenges for women roles in the church, section three discusses findings and section four provides suggestion to deal with women challenges in church growth. The following literature highlights on the struggle of women in the church in general.

Literature Review

Cunningham (2000) has observed that women have less proactive roles in the church. This inhibits on overall growth and development of the church if a section of the populace is inactive.

Gill (1990) writing from the Presbyterian tradition, argues that there is need to provide a platform to bring both women and men in the ministry, articulate women's experiences, and share knowledge through publications. Gill cited issues such as patriarchal society, family structures, marriage and dowry, employment, education, politics, as impediments for women participation. Gill (1990) suggested ways through which women could be empowered in the ministry such as, women fellowship to unite women in prayer and women training. By this time, in the 1990s they fought for only 25% inclusion of women in the synod. Only 20 out of 50 theologically trained women were ordained but even these faced opposition in their placements (Gill 190:45).

Scholars view from the Bible gives positive image of women in the church. Jewett (1980), argued that woman, as a man's equal should share with him in all aspects of the church's life and mission, full access to privileges and responsibilities of the Christian ministry. Women like everyone else can play both priestly roles: sacramental, pastoral and other church services. Instead, they are given roles like singing in choir, serving priests with food, heading Sunday school and women departments. The arguments against women ordained ministry are inadequate: that the nature of women is weak, the nature of ministry is for men alone, and that the masculinity of God is male. These are issues that have been proved wrong in history, for instance, Jewett (1980:57-108), Ruether (1983), Ruether (1998), argues that there is enough evidence both in scripture and history that women occupied leadership offices.

She unveils reasons as why women were dominated and gives solutions towards them. They blame women low status on patriarchalization of God and Christ, sexism and other roots of domination. Ruether views redemptive history in women struggles and experiences. Grady (2006), has observed 10 lies the church tells women to keep them in spiritual bondage. These lies portray how the bible has been abused such as: God created women as inferior beings and women are not equipped to assume leadership roles in the church. From the biblical point of view, this is incorrect because Jesus believed that women could lead in (Luke, 8:1-3), Acts 2:17. Texts like 1 Timothy, 2:12, that "Women must not teach or preach to men in a church setting, need interpretation of what the writer was contextually addressing.

Many people fail to exegete why Paul said these words, a woman should view her husband as the priest of the home, Ephesians 5:23-28 - women are more easily deceived than men, Gen 3, women can't be fulfilled or spiritually effective without a husband and children, true fulfillment is Christ, John 17:3, Luke 14:26, women shouldn't work outside the home, 1 Timothy 5:14. All these are lies and Sheeran (2010) has advocated for men as partners with women because they are all created in God's image.

Substantial work has been done on church growth. Dubose (1978), Pailmer (1976), Belew (1971) have discussed how churches grow emphasizing on theological, doctrinal and strategic aspects. Stetzer (2010) has concentrated on church planting through evangelism, and how new churches survive. He however, links church growth with leadership gifts and skills. Mead (1993) has analyzed the ways churches grow. He claims that holistic growth is more than numbers. He argues; it must include: numerical, maturational, organic, and incarnational. McGavran (1988) observed some effective evangelism methods such as biblical soundness, spiritual renewal, ideological and theological concerns.

He suggests that the church ministry should be done by both the clergy and laity to attain holistic growth. Most women are part of the laity hence should be given a chance as part of the segment of the society.

McGravran and Wagner (1990) have ably outlined how we can understand church growth focusing on sociological foundations, special kinds of church growth such as the role of the masses, classes, people movements and goal setting. His context of study is from Asia and America.

Literature Gaps

There are glaring gaps in the field of mainstreaming the role of women in holistic church growth in Africa: exposing obstacles for women roles in ministry is inadequate and laying strategies to overcome those obstacles and to include all believers for holistic church growth is wanting. There is not much deliberate emphasis on inclusion of women in growing churches either through leadership or training. In the world and particularly in Africa, church growth as an aspect of development is done by men according to Bwire, 2016 and Semanya 2016). For example Men are the priests who occupy most church leadership positions, make decision while women sit to listen and obey. Like in the Anglican Church, most lay readers and evangelists in Kenya are women with no training serving under highly trained men clergy (Mwaniki, 2016). This is the problem that this work attempts to address.

Statement of the Problem

Lack of inclusion and mainstreaming of women in church roles is a worrying trend in the church. Very few are also ordained in the ministry, thus affecting holistic growth in terms of maturity in faith, exercising that faith in the society and increase in numbers of believers with knowledge of the word of God. Challenges that women face are but not limited to cultural beliefs and practices, biological or theological strings, lack of education and training. Men and women should be seen as equal partners in the ministry. Inclusion of women is important because they are part and parcel of God's calling and their participation needs mainstreaming or reforecasting. They have a role to play and should not be marginalized. Church led and initiated by men pastors and priests is lopsided and incomplete. It is the women who nurture the future believers, the children at family level and even in Sunday school and yet they are not theological adequately equipped. That means the future church or Sunday school children are feeding on truth that is not theologically refined leading to slow growth holistically.

Objectives

To discuss dimensions of church growth.

To examine obstacles or challenges against women roles in church growth

To explore ways in mainstreaming women roles in church growth.

Findings and implications of the study

Methodologically, the discussions of this study not only sourced information from written literature but also from interviews and interactions with relevant respondents in the field. The findings forms profound analysis with social scientific implications giving way to relevant suggestions on inclusivity of women in entire church growth and development.

Dimensions of holistic church growth and implications on women

Scholars in the literature review point out to four main dimensions of church growth. Mead (1993:13) identifies these particular dimensions as follows:

Numerical

This is indicated by growth in numbers through Sunday attendance, size of budget, and numbers of activities. In one of my former parishes, Nambobotoo in 2004, we calculated numbers by subtracting deaths, transfers and dropouts from births, transfers and converts.

In communities where women are not counted, the numbers might not be holistic because of missing female figures. It was noted in the study that conversion of women into the church in patriarchal communities is difficult if the husband has not permitted his wife to go to church or saved. (Mwaniki, 2016) has made similar observations in the Anglican church of Kenya while (Ango, 2016) has same findings in African instituted church in Nigeria. The discrimination of women participation affects church growth due to cultural reasons, single mothers, divorcees and widows are not also considered as full members of the church because a full member is a communicant.

Therefore the numbers of women serving in leadership roles in the church is fewer than that of men. It was found out that in most Anglican churches, single women and the divorced must attain an age of over 60years to be allowed to be communicants hence get into full membership (Bwire, 2016). Men in the same status are free apart from polygamists.

Organic

This is the growth of the congregation as a functioning community, able to maintain itself as a living organism, an institution that can engage the other institution of society. Organic growth is about the task of building community through structures, processes, interaction between frustration and hope. However, it was noted in the study that women find some of the church structures as obstacles for meaningful interactions due to many inhibiting rules and regulations against them. For instance, some roles like church elders, chairmen's of committees are meant for men. Women get lower roles in status of estate or group leaders and treasurers. It is difficult to change the organic life of a congregation because most of the telecast and individual ministries are owned by men whose charisma is to dominate and run them as businesses. Cultural beliefs against women might demean and devalue women to an extent of pulling out of any church roles and leadership positions. In the Anglican church of Busibi Parish in Nambale Diocese, the priest used cultural images and myths that portrayed women as lazy and men's property, so women kept off church matters.

The church in the major cities in Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe is not different either. The Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican churches have not given over 10% of their congregations to women priests. Most female priests work under senior male priest (Rutoro,2016, Ango,2016).

Maturation

This is the growth in stature and maturity of each member, growth in faith and in the ability to nurture and be nurtured. The faith of a believer must be shaped right from Sunday School to adult Sunday services. In Limuru, St. Paul's University Chapel, Sunday school has been left to women who have little exposure to formal theological training. Theologically trained men despise Sunday school teaching. This implies that churches are not equipping the youth for holistic growth because their faith is not grounded enough. The attitude of giving less trained women to teach youths and Sunday school has to change if congregations have to grow in order to apply their faith prudently in emerging circumstances. For holistic growth women roles must be mainstreamed or given emphasis through seminars and workshop training, if theological training is not forthcoming. There are situations that demand woman to woman sensitization and teaching, but if women are not engaged and equipped there will be a gap in growth. A case in point is that of Dorine Otieno (Mama Tom):

I started teaching Sunday school in the late 70s. I taught all my children here and their age mates (about 45 years old) and I am still teaching. I am old. I retired from St. Paul's many years ago. I have attended some seminars but not training in teaching Sunday school. I use the skills God gave me. Occasionally we get some theologians attached here for a season. But when they go, we do it the way we know better.

Dorine's case is among many in our churches, and most of us were taught in Sunday school by a woman who had no skills or training in teaching Sunday school. In Nambale Anglican church, there are over 400 lay readers and evangelists, 90% of the lay readers are women who were never trained at all. These are the women who run churches practically on the daily basis. The male priests mostly visit different congregations on Sundays and leave after the service. The Bishops and moderators visit these churches once in a year or not. We would sing particular songs all Sundays and perhaps cram memory verses. Our teachers had mastered particular bible stories like Jesus walked on the water, Noah and the flood, Samson and Delilah among others. These were the main popular topics that molded our Sunday school faith or theology. Some stories were inaccurate hence when we grew up we started to realize the gaps in the Sunday school faith.

Incarnational

This growth in the ability to take the meanings and values of the faith story and make them real in the world and society outside the congregation. The congregation grows in its ability to explain to the community what the faith is all about because the church is the image of the society, however if that image sidelines women, then the society will do the same.

Incarnational growth is also about the output of the church to the community, as already said, women who are the majority can have a drastic impact if trained in the ministry. From the findings in the three above dimensions, churches are not growing evenly and holistically, this is because teachers in Sunday school where a person's faith is developed are themselves not equipped to teach sound faith. Therefore, the following section examines obstacles on women roles in the church in Africa faces.

Women challenges in church growth in Africa

The following are some of those obstacles/challenges in Africa: cultural beliefs and practices, interpretation of God's gender, rites of passage, lack of education, leadership, training and ordination among others. They are unique to Africa because most of them are contextual in nature though similar to other continents in some ways.

Culture

There is no single fully accepted definition of the culture. According to Gibbs (1981), culture refers to the way of thinking and behaviour shared by a substantial grouping which gives them identity in relation to others. It consists of the beliefs and practices of a community that have been transmitted from generation to generation.

All people are affected/influenced by their cultures, thus some cultural traits are collectively manifested. Culture is learned through socialization i.e. as one grows up in a certain socio-cultural environment. Culture embraces everything which contributes to the survival of human beings – both materials things and non-material interests. Examples include Dance, Music Diets, Politics, Economics, Ethics Aesthetics and Metaphysics among others. Culture is dynamic, it keeps changing, it affects the way women and men relate to each other and to their environment. Cultural beliefs also affects gender roles and the question of power not only in the society but also in the church.

50% of the people interviewed in this study agree that many societies give a long list of differences between women and men, but none of these are inborn or natural. They are based on the specific society's definition of what it is to be a man or a woman.

A survey in this study in the methodist church in Kenya, Episcopal church in Uganda and Presbyterian church in Ghana shows that women participate in choir, Sunday school teaching and cleaning the church.

These roles are seen as appropriate for them from the cultural perspective and therefore, it is society that equips individuals with the patterns of behaviour they display even in the church.

Women are discriminated because of biological issues of gender and gender differences, distinguished between the masculine and feminine. Communities identify feminine/masculine characteristics and socialize their children to conform to these depending on their sex. Thus the content of masculine/feminine distinction is culturally determined and differs from one culture to another, hence it is highly variable.

Interpretations of the gender of God in Africa and in the church

In Africa belief in God is widespread and all the people have a notion of God as the supreme being and as the centre of religion in African communities. Belief in God is taken for granted, thus Africans do not question the existence of God.

The Supreme Being is the originator and sustainer of all things and Africans have used various images to describe God, Thus images are referred to as anthropomorphism and some of these have been used as if they portray the actual nature of God. This is especially true for the parental images of God, that have been used to describe God, hence there are African communities who view God as a Father, while others view God as a Mother.

Others visualize God as a couple and as gender free. Let us consider the parental images of God as father and mother below as observed by several scholars, (Mbiti, 1975, Cunningham,2000, Sheerattan 2010).

a) God as a father: Many African communities especially those that are patriarchally organized visualize God as a father. God is a father in terms of his position as a creator and provider of all human needs. For example, the Bemba refers to God as the universal father of human beings and human beings are his children, for the Baganda God is not only a father of human beings but also the father of the lesser divinities. The fatherhood of God is expressed in the names given to God, prayers and proverbs, while the image of motherhood is not popular.

b) God as Mother; Communities especially those that are matriarchally organized speak of God as a mother. God is therefore referred to as the great mother and spoken of in feminine pronouns such as 'She' and 'Her'. The image of mother carries with it the idea of cherishing and nursing. Mothers love their young and they adore them, the examples of communities that visualize God as mother is the Ovambo, for them God is a mother of the people. According to the Igbo, Ala the earth mother goddess is depicted as the giver of fertility in family, fields and animals.

By implication, the image of God as a father is more prevalent than God as a mother. Conceptualizing God as a male has impacted negatively on the status of women in society. To a large extent, this has meant that women are viewed of as not sharing the image of God. Further, since God visualized as male, it has meant that only the male can represent God in religious practices. This verse has often been misinterpreted to imply that only the male is made in the image and likeness of God.

Rites of Passage

Rites or ritual refers to the accepted order or procedures of performing customary/religious observances. There are three types of rituals. They are sub-divided according to the functions they perform for the believing community. Cox (1998) identifies three types of rituals as follows:-

Life cycle rituals

These are age-linked rituals that mark the passage of a person's one stage of life to another. These stages are: - typically, birth, initiation, marriage, children sealed marriages and death. In some communities a marriage was regarded as complete when a baby was born, thus, birth also completed the integration of the woman into her husband's clan. Parents acquire a new higher status in society, that is, that of parenthood. In the past the more children a couple had, the greater their privileges and prestige in the community. Due to the reasons mentioned above, one elder in the Anglican church in Samia society of Busia County in an interview said that:

women who were not able to have children for one reason or another were not accorded much respect. This is mainly because, the importance of a woman in marriage largely depended on her ability to bear children. Thus a barren woman was/is a sign of bad luck for she kills the lineage/family tree and denies the family all the values attached to children.

Milicent Ajiambo could not be ordained for two simple reasons: she never had children of her own and when the church asked her husband to free her for ministry he said, "take her and never bring her back in my house again, she only fills my toilet for nothing, barren...no children".

There are also social regulations where an expectant mother or a widow, who has just lost her husband, was not allowed to freely mix with anyone regardless of whether she is a believer or a priestess, thus, some communities confined her to the homestead. She was encouraged to avoid funeral gatherings among others yet as a priest, she was supposed to be the one ministering.

Impact of Rituals surrounding pregnancy and birth

Confinement

Confinement of the mother was both positive and negative. For example when pregnancy was advanced, the mother to be, was not strong enough to venture far away from the homestead, she therefore, had to stay at home or nearby so that she could be monitored. This meant that when she was ready to deliver the baby, help was available and all the equipment she needed was within reach. After birth, mother and child were also confined for a number of days, depending on the community and the sex of the child. This confinement was also positive as it gives the mother and child time to rest and heal from the pangs of birth, but this has been interpreted as a challenge for women compared to men who need no maternity leave from their church work.

By virtue of marriage, a man attained a higher status and was regarded differently than he was before, he was no longer a warrior but an adult man who had his own home and freedom. For women, the situation was a little different, marriage itself was not enough to enable her attain a high status and freedom even to serve in the church. Another problem is that right from time a woman enters a marriage, she is expected to be second to her husband, in other words, African marriages are formed in the principle of inequality. Thus, part of the instruction a woman gets upon marriage is that she has to recognize her husband as head and senior, who has to be obeyed all the time.

As a church minister, I have met men who would not allow their wives to go for pastoral work because either they have visitors at home or the man just need her presence at home. A woman's status in marriage can be evaluated to a great extent by the degree of independence she enjoys in social relations.

Education

One of the factors influencing women's role and participation is formal education. Participation in formal education is important because it equips individuals with the knowledge they require to effectively participate in various professions. In many African countries, women have the same right to education as men, but in reality, this same right has not been achieved by women due to the following reasons (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

In some families/communities, parents still undervalue the formal education of the girl child (Bwire,2016). They argue that girls do not need this education since their most important societal roles are wifehood and motherhood which can be performed without formal education. In such instances, the girl is prepared for her societal roles and married off at an early age.

Another problem is poverty especially when parents have a problem with school fees, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from schools first. They can either be married off or sent to work as unskilled laborers in order to support the boys' education, this means boys are more valued than girls and for serious affairs like the church, then boys would be preferred.

The school system has also played a role in directing women's aspirations towards certain professions that conform to existing gender role definitions. Examples include secretarial duties, nursing, teaching and home science among others. Hence, girls may avoid religion oriented professions since they are not considered as appropriate for women.

When one lacks adequate formal education, then they can only perform certain roles and not others. For example, they will find out that their participation is limited to those roles where higher education is not required.

Thus, they may clean, cook, do the laundry, sing, teach children, visit the sick and the bereaved but all professional ministries will not be available to them. Therefore, even if they were called to be ministry, the lack of adequate education is a barrier to them.

Biological obstacles:

Women's Assumed Impurity

Mbiti (1975) asserts that in many African societies, the potency of menstruation still looms. Therefore, there are many taboos limiting women's activities during their menses and at least forty days after the birth of a child. Thus, in many communities, menstruating women may not cook ritual meals, they may not even go for worship in some African Independent Churches (AICs) and Muslim women will not enter the mosque during such times. It is believed that menstrual blood has power to annul all prayer and renders all ritual ineffective.

Likewise, she should not go near holy places such as altars where sacrifices are offered, even in Old Testament, she could not enter the temple. For Example, in my interaction with Dr. Arudo of Kenyatta university who has a personal encounter with the Nomiya Luo Church (an AIC), he confirms that it restricts women during their menses as follows:- woman in her menses may not attend worship service or take up leadership in the church because the altar is a holy place and is not supposed to be stepped on, by people who are likely to be unclean.

These instructions are unfair as they imply that one is unclean by virtue of being a woman, which means all women are unclean because of a normal body function, created by God for purposes of procreation. Masinjila Masheti (1997) argues that this is a patriarchal gimmick which is meant to ensure the secondary status of women in relation to men in the society.

Societies hold beliefs about the nature and role of women, these serve a purpose in ensuring women's secondary status in relation to men in the society. These beliefs are communicated in proverbs, sayings, riddles and other oral forms of communication, they create a negative image of women and since they are modes of socialization, they paint a negative image of who women are and what they can do in the minds of the people from one generation to another.

Leadership challenges

Traditionally, each gender received adequate training that enabled them to perform the roles assigned to them and occupy their positions in the society. Thus, boys, who are destined to leadership, were trained in decision making, responsibility and obedience while girls learned wifely duties (Mbiti 1975). When it comes to the role of women and men in religion, socialization implies that men are more prepared than women in taking up leadership positions. This is because, socialization prepares them for such roles and society expects this from them. On the other hand, women are better prepared in wifely duties such as cooking, taking care of children and are ready to occupy a subordinate position in relation to men.

Theological Education and Ordination

Most Christian churches in Africa have not allowed women into theological institutions for training. This is because, in many missionary founded churches, the practice was that theological institutions and seminaries were for men. Mwaniki, (2016) gives an Anglican perspective of Nairobi Diocese from Kenya, that out of a total of 69 ordained clergy, only 9 were women by 2015. Since ordination has been reserved for men alone for a long time, women were excluded from theological education, because it was argued that they did not need this education as the churches could neither ordain them nor employ them (Bennaars, 1995).

This reality is changing now according to (Mwaniki, 2016, Bwire, 2016). A few churches such as the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Anglican and a number of Pentecostal churches now ordain women, however the number of women trained and ordained are very few. Today, theological education is no longer pegged to ordination, women roles in participation in religions is also determined by the traditions or practices of specific religious communities. In this regard, we note that Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic church has reserved priesthood for men since the very beginning, this they argue is in line with the example set by God. God sent Jesus to fulfill his mission on earth, and in turn Jesus chose twelve disciples who were all men to continue with his ministry (Kanyorao 1996).

Contemporary ecclesiastical divisions and positions on women ordination

There are many forms of church in society today. In Africa, the main classifications of church include the following:

(a) Mainline or missionary churches

There are the churches which were planted in Africa by missionaries from both Europe and America. Examples include, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches such as Lutherans, Methodists, Anglican, (SDA), Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventist, Baptists and Pentecostal churches among others.

(b) African Independent Churches (AIC)

These have emerged as a result of succession from Western founded missionary churches or from the spontaneous initiative of charismatic African leaders. AICs have distinctive African origins and are largely adapted to the needs, world view and life style of the Africans.

Examples include the Akorino churches in Central Kenya, Holy Spirit Church of East Africa, Africa Divine Church, Nabii Christian Church, Legio Maria of Africa. Some Pentecostal churches have been started by Africans but these are very similar to churches and Christian Fellowships in Europe and North America. Examples include, Deliverance church, Winners Chapel, Lighthouse church, Jesus is Alive Ministries and Chrisco Fellowship among others.

The role of women in these churches differs significantly because they do not speak with one voice based on biblical policies but on traditions. In some, women's role and participation is limited to those duties that are related to those assigned to women in the domestic sphere. Examples of such roles include: teaching children, cleaning, decorating the church, washing church linen and ushering worshipers among others.

This implies that only those who are ordained in specific churches may serve their congregation as ministers/priests or pastors and in most churches, the rite of ordination is reserved for men.

The Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches maintain ordination to priesthood as a sacrament that can be traced historically to Jesus and his apostles. The implication here is that since Jesus and his twelve apostles were men, only men should be ordained to represent Jesus.

In the Anglican and Episcopal churches, it is not until the 1970s that ordained ministry was opened to women. Besides, not every Anglican communion accepts the ordination of women, and in some, local Bishops are unwilling to ordain women to the priestly ministry.

The reasons why some churches do not ordain women are as follows:-

The long held traditions of the churches such as the Roman Catholic Church

In the New Testament there is little evidence that Jesus considered any women for priesthood because the apostles ordained by Christ were all men. These are not valid reasons as a closer look at Jesus' Ministry reveals many women who shared in Jesus' ministry. For example, Mary Magdalene was an apostle sent after Jesus' death to inform other followers of Jesus, that his tomb was empty and that Jesus had resurrected.

It is also argued that in some churches only men may celebrate sacraments such as the Eucharist as the priest acts as Christ and he has to be a male. Romans 8:29 however, teaches that all baptized persons are called to conform their lives to the image of Christ, in addition women theologians such as (Ruether, 1998, Sheerattan 2010) have argued that the roles of ordained ministers are neither too many nor too difficult for women to perform.

Thus given the right training and opportunity, women can serve as ministers, this has already been demonstrated by the role of women in those churches that already ordain women. The church continues to lose the talents and gifts of women who are called to priesthood by denying women ordination.

Summary and recommendation

Dealing with challenges facing women and to mainstream their roles.

The foregoing discussion has been on women and implications on church growth dimensions. Challenges against women participation in church growth has been explored and this section offers possible pragmatic suggestions that can help address these challenges and raise or include women as a way to mainstream their roles.

Women empowerment

Empowerment of women means enabling women to respect and value themselves. This implies, enabling them to feel justified and able to demand their rights through training, further education and sensitization. Empowering women therefore, entails ensuring that women are treated justly through correcting cultural stereotypes and negative attitudes towards women calling and ability. The road towards empowerment starts from individual women affirming their value and learning the various ways they might live out their lives and control their destiny. The power that women need is not from outside but from within them. It is this power that will enable them to seek, demand and take that which is justly theirs (Sheerattan, 2010).

Deal with discrimination and oppression of women

It has been noted in this study that despite women's diverse social, economic, religious and political backgrounds, by belonging to the female gender, women constitute an oppressed social group. Therefore, they suffer violence in various spheres – namely cultural, economic, social, religious, among others. Discrimination is one of the mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position in relation to men in society.

To eradicate all forms of cultural discrimination the church as the foundation of faith and equity and the government which has law enforcement agencies should provide a legal framework for dealing with traditional structures and systems that perpetuate inequality even in the church. The sexual offences Act 2006 is one such legal framework. This may involve appropriating laws that can address rape inequality both in the society and by extension in the church.

Christianity should address the negative attitudes towards women by men, towards the liberation of women and the restoration of their dignity as human beings according to Jesus model in the search for the solution to the problem of abuse of women (cf. John 8:3ff, John 4:7ff). Proper biblical interpretation and exegesis by the church can reduce negative images and church structures about women, where men lead and others follow through planned theological training of both men and women.

Employ Jesus' Attitude towards Women

When it comes to roles and responsibilities, the Bible is the normative. The New Testament records that Jesus chose twelve disciples all men and charged them with the responsibility of spreading the gospel. Jesus had to choose these twelve men because there had to be continuity between the Old covenant and the New covenant that he represented.

These were not the only disciples that Jesus had nor did they exercise all final authority in the church (Lk. 10:1ff), (Clifford, 2001), but Jesus' mission is to liberate all the oppressed, women included (Lk. 4:18 ff). Jesus devoted his life and ministry to restoring individuals – female and male to full personhood. Below are some examples, (John 4:7 – 42) Jesus and the Samaritan woman, (John 8:1 – 11) the woman caught in adultery. These examples demonstrate Jesus' positive attitude towards women regardless of his cultural background (Stinton, 2004).

Proactive church leadership strategies

The church as an institution must have a deliberate plan in its structures and her vision and mission to include all, at all levels of its activities: children, youth, women and men. Proactive leadership is inclusive of all, in participation, in systems, structures, education, exposure, and sensitization can lead to challenging of oppressive structures and systems of leadership in the church where Gods power is invoked.

Conclusion

The foregoing has clearly pointed out that women still lack equal and focused role in the church. There are several obstacles as noted in the discussions. This means that without one gender included in the church activities, growth is not complete. In order to mainstream women in holistic church development, these obstacles must be alleviated to enable equal participation of men and women in the church. This is possible by exercising Jesus' model of liberating all and accepting all despites cultural constraints. Jesus therefore did away with cultural and racial prejudice, gender segregation and classism in a bid to perform his ministry to human beings. Women can trust Jesus as he upheld the full humanity of womanhood.

The Bible indicates that women were not only associates with the apostles, but also underlining that women were supporting Jesus' ministry. The partnership of the women is not limited to providing financial support. The story of Jesus' passion makes it clear that the support of the women was embodied in a deeper fidelity. If inequality cultures, beliefs and practices towards women are dynamic, why is the church taking a behind seat instead of leading?

References

- Ango,S.P.(2016). *Inclusive leadership in african instituted churches in Nigeria*, in in Keumju, J. Hyun & D.C. Chemorion (eds). *theQuest for Gender equity in Leadershp*. Oregon, WPF&STOCK
- Belew.M. mendell. 1971. *Churches and how they grow*. Nashville Tennessee, Broadman Press.
- Bennaars G. A. 1995 (ed). *Gender and Education*’, In *Basic Education Forum vol. 6* Nairobi, BERC
- Bwire,J.P.(2016). Practicing Biblical equity in Africa, in Keumju, J. Hyun & D.C. Chemorion (eds). *theQuest for Gender equity in Leadershp*. Oregon, WPF&STOCK
- Clifford A. M. 2001. *Introducing Feminist Theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books
- Dubose F. M. (1978) *how churches grow in an urban world*. Nashville Tennessee, Broadman Press.
- Gill Kenneth, 1990. *Count us equal: the ministry of women in the church of south India*. Bangalore, India, ATTWI
- Grady, J. Lee. 2006.*10 lies the church tells women. How to the bible has been misused to keep women in spiritual bondage*. Florida Charism House
- Kanyoro M. R. A. (1996). *God calls to Ministry: An inclusive Hospitality*’, in Kanyoro M. R. A &Njoroge N. J. (eds). *Groaning in Faith.African Women in the Household of God*. Nairobi: Action Publishers.
- Malcolm, K.T. (1982). *Women at the crossroad: A path beyond feminism and traditionalism*.Illinois Intervarsity Press.
- Kenyatta, J. (1938). *FacingMountKenya.The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu*.Nairobi: Kenway Publications Limited.
- Cunningham, L. &David J. H. (2000).*Why not women? Afresh look at scripture on women in mission, ministry and leadership*.Seattle, USA, YWAM
- Mbiti, J.S. (1975).*Introduction to African Religion*.London: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.
- Mead, B. L. (1993). *More than numbers: the ways churches grow*. New York, Albany institute.
- McGavran, D.(1988). *Effective evangelism.A theological mandate*.New Jersey, Presbyterian and reformed Publishing Company.
- McGavran, D.&Wagner (1990). *Understanding church growth*. Michigan, William B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY.
- Mwaniki,L. (2016). *Biblical gender equity and women in leadership: An examination of the Anglican church of Kenya*, in Keumju, J. Hyun & D.C. Chemorion (eds). *theQuest for Gender equity in Leadershp*. Oregon, WPF&STOCK

- Marjorie, P.& Bernard (1976). *How churches grow*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bethany Fellowship.
- Jewett,P. K. (1980). *The ordination of women*. Grand rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Ruether,R. R.(1983). *Sexism and God-talk*. London. Sem Press Ltd
- Ruether,R. R.(1998). *Women and redemption: a theological history*. London, SCM Press Ltd.
- Rutoro,R.&E.R. (2016). Biblical equity practiced in the reformed tradition in Zimbabwe, in *Keumju, J. Hyun & D.C. Chemorion (eds). theQuest for Gender equity in Leadership*. Oregon, WPF&STOCK
- Sheerattan,P. et al. (2010). *Created in Gods image: from hegemony to partnership. A church manual on men as partners promoting positive masculinities*.Geneva, WCC.
- Stetzer& Bird (2010).*viral churches; helping church planters become movement makers*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass
- Semenye, L. (2016). *Women leaders in the New Testament: biblical equity reflected in the ministries of Jesus and apostle Paul in in Keumju, J. Hyun & D.C. Chemorion (eds). theQuest for Gender equity in Leadership*. Oregon, WPF&STOCK
- Stinton D. B. 2004.*Jesus of Africa, Voices of Contemporary African Christology*. Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa.