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Gender dynamics in church leadership: A case study of the Presbyterian Church and Full Gospel Mission in Cameroon

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The biblical creation of woman in which she was taken from man's rib is one of the passages that are misinterpreted to solidify the subjection and oppression of women with the two Cameroonian Churches, Presbyterian and Full Gospel Mission (FGM). This implies that the complementarity that existed in pre-colonial leadership was eroded as a result. This article will use the qualitative approach to unmask and analyse the practices of gender inequality within the Presbyterian and FGM of Cameroon and the challenges that they are facing with gender equality issues between males and females. The sampling of 22 participants was used to formulate how the findings that will target to unveil the coordination, managerial and financial positions within these two churches are elected or chosen. The stereotypes that are involved in the elections of people who must hold these offices will be explained, discussed and analysed and even exposed in order to seek ways to avoid the manipulations of biblical texts in justifying the exclusion of females from leading church leading positions. This article argues that the misuse of misinterpretation or misrepresentation of scriptures cannot be condoned to justify the marginalisation of women from leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) and the FGM. As much as women are working hard for the church, they should also be allowed to continue growing the church even from the managerial or leadership positions.

Contribution: To work towards gender imbalances in the African context are not only unmasked and exposed, but some meaningful suggestions are made as to how this inhuman practice can be eliminated or even destroyed completely, with a case example of the two churches mentioned, the PCC and FGM in Cameroon.

Keywords: Cameroon; gender dynamics; Full Gospel Mission; leadership roles; Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.

Introduction

The preamble of the Cameroon constitution of 18 January 1996 sets out basic human rights and promotes equality between males and females and provides in Article 65 that 'the preamble [which captures international instruments Cameroon has ratified] is part and parcel of the constitution'. Yet inequalities still prevail in politics and decision making within the government, including religious institutions (Cameroon National Gender Policy Document 2011–2020 n.d.). Within the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), a patriarchal influence has marginalised women from the period of the Basel Mission from which the PCC took over from in 1957. Apart from marginalising women in the Mission, PCC like Full Gospel Mission (FGM), used Western notions of narrowly domesticating women's space from participating in leadership. Even though PCC leadership was shared between the ordained ministers and lay people, for key positions of moderator, clerk of synod and secretary of presbytery only ordained male ministers were preferred (Lang 2016). In that way, gender inequality was preserved within the PCC leadership because women were not ordained as yet. Sex role socialisation defined women's roles in FGM as those of wives and mothers, which constituted a barrier to women's ability to enter the labour market freely and contradicted the thesis of equal opportunities for all. However, the women of FGM have used the Women's Department in their church to improve the condition of women citing Chapter 31 of the Book of Proverbs that describes the virtuous woman as 'one who uses her hands, head and talent to do great exploits for her family' (Akoko 2008; Goodridge et al. 2004).

The church[1] in Cameroon was not spared from the influence of patriarchy and biblical misinterpretations that promoted the subordination of one gender by the other. The perpetration of gender inequality is evidenced among other circles within the two Cameroonian churches, *viz*: PCC and FGM, especially on leadership positions. Without undermining the influence of other factors like patriarchy, the abuse, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of some passages from the Bible played a role to entrench gender inequalities. For example, the myth of creation of man and women from man's rib is still used to subject women within Cameroonian churches like PCC and FGM.

This paper examines the gender dynamics in leadership in the PCC and the FGM as well as how effective the decisions made by women would be in the church and its development. In addressing the above objectives, the concept of gender, Jo Rolland empowerment theory and the Harvard analytical framework was employed. This paper will further attempt to critically assess the current state of affairs with regard to gender inequality in those churches while also suggesting the balance that must be supported within the PCC and FGM within the church leadership.

Methodology

Data were analysed qualitatively using content analysis to explore the behaviour and experience of women in leadership (Folta et al. 2012). The participants are both from the PCC and the FGM with a sample size of 22 male and female leaders purposively selected from a target population of 86. Seven women of different status from each denomination were selected as follows: one female area choir president, an area accountant, a congregational secretary, an elder, youth president and two deaconesses. Participants from PCC also came from different fields. This included a project manager who doubles as vice-chairperson, a station manager from PCC radio station, a chairperson, presbytery treasurer, a female pastor, congregational treasurer and an associate pastor. Eight men were interviewed from both churches, that is four men from each denomination. Those interviewed from FGM, occupied the following positions – area pastor, district pastor, assistant pastor and district youth president. From PCC, a presbytery secretary, chaplain, a pastor and a chairman were interviewed. The study used semi-structured interviews to collect data and whereas the safe space was created for participants in accordance with ethical codes of confidentiality. Participants were informed that this is voluntary participation and they have liberty to withdraw anytime without being judged if so they feel (Mason 2002:80). One of the authors attended services within the week to access the participants in FGM. Different participants were contacted individually with authorisation letter from the PCC and FGM. Authorisation was obtained through the chief of archives synod office, parish pastor PCC and the area and district pastors of FGM, respectively. This authorisation was presented to the churches administrators to obtain their consent. Data were collected using audiotapes that were later transcribed. The research was conducted for 4 weeks from 27 February 2022 to 28 March 2022. Data analysis was done by thematic coding of transcripts as suggested by Newman (2003:442). After methodological considerations, the next section will concentrate on the brief historical background to the study.

Brief historical background to this study

Gender differentiation in leadership is increasingly an important issue in the world considering that women make up a larger part of the society (Morrison & Von Glinow 1990). In the past two decades, women have made significant progress into lower and middle positions of leadership in church administration (Murithi 2000). Societal influences are embedded in the patriarchal construction of marriage and society, and the government (Akintunde 2010) restricts women in leadership. The 15th century brought a change as women in Europe played very creative roles in the promotion of religion and leadership (AAUW 2016). Women were committed to the task of the Great Commission[2] in ways that made their participation progressive for church (Lang 2016). The emergence of the Protestant faith also brought tensions within churches on female roles (Bendroth 2008). As a result, females were experienced further marginalisation from power and leadership (Johnstone 1992).

Before the coming of the European missionaries in the 18th century to Africa, there was gender division of labour. According to Parpart (1986:17), women participated as political leaders in formal and informal ways in different communities. In pre-colonial Africa, Africans had their own religion, beliefs and norms. Their traditional religion was inclusive of mutuality with regard to obligations between the material world and immaterial world of spirits (Okoro 2010). In Nigeria, traditional religion was founded in three pillars: the Supreme Being, divinities and ancestors. Much attention was based on divinities and ancestors because the Igbo[3] believed divinities and ancestors had a great interest in Igbo community. Therefore, when women were appointed to lead in the society as diviners, they did much in their power to foster the development of their community. Women's contribution in traditional African society paid no serious attention on gender issues[4] as every individual had a role to play within the family and out of the family (St. Clair 1994).

With the coming of missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries, this complementary relationship in power and authority exercised by African men and women was destroyed with the advent of colonialism (Parpart 1986). The influence of colonialism destroyed African indigenous religion and shaped and reshaped many cultures in Africa (Hodgson 1999).

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1. The church in this study will mainly be used to refer to the PCC and FGM, unless explained otherwise.

2. Great Commission refers to evangelism, conversion, teaching and spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations of the world as the scriptures require in Matthew 28:19.

3. Ibo refers to a tribe or ethnic group in Nigeria.

4. Gender issues here is used to refer to different forms of discussions or protests relating to gender inequality.

In pre-colonial Cameroon, just like the rest of Africa, women enjoyed being appointed into leadership within traditional religions regardless of being subjected to males in the household. Lang (2016) argues:

> In their priesthood capacity, females were allowed to performed rituals, to offered sacrifices and took part in many other religious activities that affected all aspects of life, from farming to hunting, from travel to courtship, and from birth to death. (pp. 279–287)

The early 18th and 19th centuries marked the coming of Western Christianity in Cameroon. Among the different missionaries who came, the Basel Mission came in 1815 and spearheaded the spread of Christianity in Cameroon. For Xiang-yu, 2012, the main purpose of Basel Mission was to educate young males to spread the gospel of peace to many parts of the world (Xiang-yu 2012). Also, the post-colonial period in Cameroon saw the establishment of Catholic, Presbyterian and the FGMs among others. The aim of the FGM was not focused on promoting gender equality but the preaching and evangelisation of the gospel (Akoko 2007). It did not matter who did the work of evangelism, male or female. The interest was in getting the work done. The colonial environment favoured men despite the religious associations and positions women held in pre-colonial Africa. As it was realised that females are not part of administration in church, the female missionaries believed that a better place for women was at home and they promoted men's domestic activities. For Atem (2011), Christianity as a civilised culture was aimed at teaching women and girls to be good Christian housewives and well-mannered in the family.

Although some women were found in some positions of authority in precolonial times, those that were not priestesses, goddesses or in leadership were subordinated and marginalised (Chiponda & Wassermann 2016). The colonial-era saw a new dawn, which caused a great loss in society through shaping and reshaping of African cultural and religious practices (Hodgson 1999). Lesser roles were accorded to women as they engaged in charity works, ministries of prayers and assisted with the baptism of women (Kim & Kim 2000).

While first-wave feminism during the 19th and 20th centuries concentrated on legal rights of women, with focus on the right to vote, the second wave touched on every area of female's life experience – including politics, work, the family and sexuality (Tong 2009). Organised activism for females was carried out during the third and fourth waves, which happened between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s. These actions opened up new dimensions for the recognition of women. However, male dominance that was also supported by culture as well as some biblical texts assisted in baring women from participating in leadership. These have been heightened in current international conventions, to allow females in the field of decision making (Stuart 2010). Women have contributed by voicing out their concerns about laws on gender equality in other forms, but with the case of religion things were different. Phiri (2000:180) argued: 'Women occupy the majority of the pews in churches but have limited access to leadership'. From the different churches like Catholic and Baptist churches, women are viewed differently with regard to holding leadership positions. The PCC has over 1000 congregations with over 30 presbyteries. Women occupy less than 25% of positions of authority in this denomination. Despite the fact that the issue of gender equality was discussed during the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in 1988, still no woman occupied at least one of the two most senior positions in the PCC, especially that of the moderator or synod clerk. This denied WCC's suggestion to have a 50/50 representation of both men and women in church administration (Nyansako-Ni-Nku 2004).

While the PCC was trying to discuss issues of equality, the FGM, on the other hand, sees women as less qualified to hold pastoral and eldership positions. Full Gospel Mission has over 1000 congregations with less than 15% of leadership positions occupied by women. It is significant to note that FGM women are allowed to preach the gospel but are not fully ordained as pastors and elders. It is generally believed that women are traditionally assigned unequal status of inferiority with direct and biblical support from God (Ani 2013). Men have continuously used the Bible to justify their discrimination of women yet women have proved to be successful leaders of women's groups. It is the authors' articulation that the subjection to Christ helps people change their perception about gender subjections as per the message of Galatians 3:38, which says: 'in Christ, there is no male or female' (Gl 3:28). Researchers like Wainaina (2015) and Tah (2016) focus more on the roles women played in the churches.

Gender equality: A conceptual framework

The words gender and sex are often used as synonyms in the society although sex and gender are separate categories. Sex refers to the biological difference between men and women with emphasis on differences in anatomy: Reproductive system, chromosomes, hormones, reproductive and other physiological components (Regitz-Zagrosek 2012). Sex differences are concerned with men and women's bodies. Based on this definition, one is either a male or a female. Although a third category has been formulated in recent times with the attempt of some persons to undergo transgender surgery in order to change their sex from male to female and vice versa (Oluwagbermi-Jacobs & Uduma 2015). Gender, on the other hand, refers to the economic, social, political, cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or 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 (Bredt, Thomas & Schalkwyk 1997:2). The gendered differences are socially constructions and are dynamic through different cultures and traditions. For Taborga and Leach (1996):

> Gender is a socio-economic and political variable with which to analyse roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities of

people. Gender refers to roles; sex refers to the biological state of being male or female; and women refers to adult females. (p. 26)

Three schools of thought resonate in conceptualising gender. Firstly, the evolutionary theory argued that gender is a social behaviour that produces differences in heterosexual practices between men and women (Guo et al. 2007). Secondly, the social theory holds that gender is so fixed where one is either female or male (Courtenay 2000) and thirdly, the social constructivist theory holds gender to be a socially determined construct describing the characteristic, behaviour and roles deemed appropriate and expected of men and women, boys and girls in the society (Rolleri 2012). Gender is not a homogenous category; it is intentionally differentiated and elaborated by class, race, ethnicity, age, culture and other hierarchical social relations that organise a society's institutions and practices.

Gender equality implies that males and females must have equal treatment and opportunities that enables them to realise their potential, dignity and respect and right. That will enable them to contribute towards economic, social, cultural and political development (UNICEF 2017). 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 the consideration that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices over against the traditional stereotyped. For UNICEF (2017:1): 'Gender equality is a matter of human rights and is considered a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development'.

Cameroon is committed towards improving women's rights across the country through the empowerment of women's ministry and the family, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), CSOs and various international and national instruments and treaties it has ratified. Unfortunately, social, economic and political inequality are still a reality for many women across the nation, especially in the rural areas. Women routinely face traditional oppression – proscribed social roles in which they are confined to domesticity and denied a voice in their families, societies and the government. Women are relegated to proscribed domestic roles in society, stripping them of their political voice and potential for leadership (Atanga 2010).

Discussions

Findings revealed that the majority of participants in the PCC and FGM are between the ages of 30 and 50 years (FGM Cameroon 2005; Kankeur 2001; Knorr 2000; PCC 2021). 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 (Agendia 2021). The majority of participants were married, insinuating that marital status plays a vital role in church leadership (Akoko 2008; Knorr 2000; Mbuagbo

& Akoko 2019). This corroborates the findings of Otieno (2016) in Nigeria and Kaur (2012) who postulate that demographic factors such as marital status, age and education had a positive effect on women in church leadership and that the leader's marital status influenced good transactional and transformational leadership. Whereas Ortyoyande (2012) argues that demographic factors such as age, education and marital status have nothing to do with church leadership, it is not the status that does the work.

Findings also revealed that more than 50% of respondents were holders of a post-graduate degree and within this 50%, 40% were women. This corroborates literature that reveals that the higher the literacy level of females, the higher their involvement in church leadership.

Evolution in leadership: The Presbyterian Church of Cameroon and the Full Gospel Mission

The PCC has experienced remarkable growth spiritually, socially and developmentally. In terms of development, women act as project committee heads, bring in constructive developmental projects and educate the congregation on how to develop the church. This is in accordance with literature, where women in Kenya were confined to fundraising, teaching and catechism to children and participating strongly in the spiritual and liturgical life of the church (Mwaura 1997). Full Gospel Mission women, on the other hand, have grown spiritually in proclaiming the word of God, as well as ascending to key leadership positions and improving on their social life in the church. This turn is in line with Isichei's (1995) argument, which indicates that female evangelists took the initiative to open up outstation churches.

Gender dynamics in church leadership (Full Gospel Mission and Presbyterian Church in Cameroon)

The majority of participants in FGM argues that equating gender means to give equal opportunities to males and females in all spheres of life in consonance with literature (see Lorber 2018), which holds that gender inequality is a condition where both genders bared to share human rights without discrimination of the other. Men and women can equally access resources, equitable participation in relationships and freedom of violence (Rolleri 2012). Findings also corroborate UNESCO's view of gender equality that gives both females and males equal opportunities to realise their human rights, which enables them to participate equally in terms of social, economic and political development (UNESCO 2003). Although this is not yet much achieved, it is a perception that participants are raising.

Participants attested that their church constitutions promote gender equality. See the PCC constitution[5] articles 45, 72, [i, ii, iii], 73, 74 and 75 and the church book of order that talks of '…

5. Presbyterian Church in Cameroon Constitution can be read from PCC (2021) and for FGM (FGM Cameroon 2005) as listed in the reference.

HE/SHE' (PCC 2021). Section A or 1 of the constitution of FGM also states the responsibilities of men and women within the church. Section B or 2 moves beyond the local church to the district as well as the area and specifies how activities are carried out by the Christians without any gender bias (FGM Cameroon 2005). This confirms Petty et al.'s (2008) postulation.[6] Literature also affirms that priesthood in Ghana brought both men and women together. Women enjoyed high and respectable positions that women in some denominations today have not attained (Okure 2003).

Carol Gilligan who developed most of her writings in feminist jurisprudence in the 1980s notes that girls more often approached problems with an 'ethic of care' while boys more often used an 'ethic of justice'. The authors' assumptions are that men tend to place a higher value on rules, competition and reason; women tend to value relationships, nurturing and empathy. Moreover, women when responding to moral dilemmas ask how everyone can be taken care of and how relationships can be maintained, while men are more likely to ask which individual's rights are higher on the justice ladder (Juergens 1991). The social construction of gender indicates that findings did not tie with Eagly and Johnson (1990). Gender blind asserts difference between males and females do not exist in church leadership as both women and men in the Old Testament attended public gatherings together.

Women are also dynamic in church development. A case in point is a Christian elder in the Presbyterian Church Bonambuie in Northwest region of Cameroon – Na Dorothy whose leadership quality transformed her congregation spiritually and developmentally. Her enthusiasm to see Christianity move forward caused her to spearhead the construction of a church equipped with benches in her village. Her leadership skills enabled her promotion to the rank of chairperson in the congregation where she served. The legacy of Na Dorothy supports the argument of some authors that women capacitated to exhibit significant transformational rather than transactional leadership behaviour that leads to sustainable development (Druskat 1994; Komives 1991; Rosener 1990). Similarly, women and men were active in the development of their African traditional religion, where those who disobeyed were punished according to the pronouncements of the mouthpiece of the gods (Oduyoye 1995).

Challenges women face in church leadership

Sustainable development and all-round development in the church cannot be achieved without the full participation of women and men (Onwunta & August 2012). Women's ascension to power in both the PCC and the FGM is often hindered by the concept of the 'glass ceiling'. Sadie (2005) argues that women are confronted with a system in which decision are made by men, creating a barrier for females to cross the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling effect is an unofficial

barrier to opportunities within church institutions preventing a particular class of people – women in particular, from advancing to higher positions. In such circumstances, the percentage of women in executive positions is gender specific as women receive little or no encouragement when found in such lay leadership positions and even as ordained ministers in the church, whereas some cultures strictly raise females according to rules and roles that exclude them from public decisions (Paxton, Kunovich & Hughes 2007).

According to Oduyoye (2004:41), religion is fundamental to women's oppression, given that women are oppressed because of the different religious ideologies concerning the scriptures. For example, Paul's writings in 1 Timothy 2:13–14 state that it is not allowed for a woman to speak in public, so men should command. Women should study in silence and are not allowed to learn or have authority over men. The actual context of Paul's time, culture and circumstances should be taken into account while interpreting this passage. Although this is not the main focus of this study, some exegetical remarks from Baloyi (2008) on Paul's exhortation can clarify some misunderstanding.

This study aligns itself with the Rolland Empowerment Framework as it shows that leadership brings transactional[7] and transformational[8] power. Transactional power relates to Jo Rowland 'power over' exercised by men in church leadership based on command, control and directive. Transactional power brings in both collective and self-interest to the congregants and to the leader himself and/or herself. Meanwhile, transformational power according to Jo Rowlands would be practised by women as they base their leadership to be interactive, collaborative and democratic with the congregants. This is based on the argument that women can socialise and communicate very well at every level. This is confirmed by Druskat's (1994) study of administrative and religious leadership with a higher prevalence of transformational than transactional leadership style. Bredt et al.'s (1997) study also ties with Jo Rowland empowerment theory, which states that we ourselves are responsible to provide the best conditions possible under which women and men alike work together to fulfil the great commission.

The unequal power relation in church and the patriarchal structure of the church depicts 'power over' and 'power to'. Both reflect Rolland's Empowerment framework. Given the fact that patriarchy perceives that women do not have power within them to determine which post to hold, and that men in FGM collectively sideline women from elder positions, the study reflects the empowerment theory of 'power within' and 'power without', respectively. The Harvard Analytical framework on ties with this study as it

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6.The postulation is that even though women's activities centre on domestic activities, gender equality is at the forefront.

7.Transactional power in this study is to command, control, directives and self-interests (top down leadership approach), which fits squarely into Jo Rowland empowerment framework of power over. This approach is often exercised by men in leadership positions.

8.Transformational power in this study means negotiation, collaboration, interactive, democratic and participatory approach (bottom-up leadership approach), which is in consonance with Jo Rowlands empowerment framework of power within – a leadership style often used by women in the congregation.

maps out the different activities as per the leadership position held by men and women in the PCC and FGM. The framework unveiled tradition or educational background influenced the positions that men and women held in both churches.

Conclusion

This study unmasked that the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of some Bible verses played a role in entrenching the gender inequalities that were still experienced in Cameroon, even among some Christian churches like PCC and FGM. It can also not be ignored that the role of African traditional patriarchy also has its part of the blame in influencing how the churches discussed operated, as far as electing or appointing people into leading positions was concerned. It can be commended though that the evolution, though at different paces within the two churches under study took place. The independence gained by the PCC in 1957 also played a positive role in slowly ensuring that women are recognised hence by 1990 some women were accepted to study theology and some today are even elected as pastors and elders, which was not allowed before. Women in FGM, on the other hand, were not accepted to study theology and their only decision-making position in the church, which is still a plus was that of lay preachers, deaconesses and church secretaries, which were given to them by appointment based on their level of spirituality and talent. All these do not, however, mean that the representation of women in leading positions measure up to that of men. This is just a small-scale achievement compared to how males are still dominating the decision making in churches. That notwithstanding, the concept of complementarity has gained ground in PCC and FGM. Even though complementarity is observed in the church between men and women, decisions within the central church are taken by men influenced by cultural practices, male dominance and peer pressure that this study recommends being revisited.

Acknowledgements

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