

Mupangwa, Terence

Contemporary perspectives on women leadership in religion : A case of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

In:

Manyonganise, Molly ; Gunda, Masiwa Ragies ; Naicker, Linda ; Kügler, Joachim (Eds.), Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Africa : Essays in Honour of Ezra Chitando, Bamberg : University of Bamberg Press, p. 233-251. 2025. DOI: 10.20378/irb-105140

Bookpart - Published Version

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-106047

Date of Publication: 23.01.2025

Legal Notice:

This work is protected by copyright and/or the indication of a licence. You are free to use this work in any way permitted by the copyright and/or the licence that applies to your usage. For other uses, you must obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).

This document is made available under the **Creative Commons License CC BY**.



This licence information is available online:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

12 Contemporary perspectives on women leadership in religion

A case of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

Terence Mupangwa

Abstract

The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ) was established in 1915. Women are the majority members in the AFMZ and yet they occupy periphery positions especially in leadership. Through interviews with male pastors, female pastors, deacons, and elders, two elderly women and focus group discussions with committee members of four departments within the church, this paper highlights the perspectives on women of the AFMZ. Even though AFMZ has been in Zimbabwe for more than a century and women are the majority, AFMZ is still lagging in promoting equality between men and women especially in leadership. The picture that is painted may be an indication of the church's perspectives on women. The study intends to highlight the perspectives of the church on women especially on whether they should be in leadership or not. Using African Women's Theology to analyze the findings, it was observed from the interviews and the focus group discussions that there are mixed views on women among the members of the AFMZ. Most members are of the view that women are more hardworking, committed, faithful, more prayerful, and more transparent than men and therefore should be given more opportunities in leadership for better governance within the church. However, a few members still hold beliefs that women are weak, and they need a man in their lives for them to succeed in life.

Keywords: Apostolic Faith Mission, church, governance, leadership, religion, women

Introduction and background

Researchers in religion and gender in Africa have shown significant interest in Pentecostal forms of Christianity (Kalu, 2008). This interest could be linked to the perception that Pentecostalism possesses a unique ability to effect social change, particularly in the realm of gender dynamics (Kalu,

2008). Women are the majority members in the AFMZ and yet they occupy peripheral positions especially in leadership. The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe is still lagging in promoting equality between men and women especially in leadership (Kwaramba and Dreyer, 2019). The impression which is created may be a pointer of the church's standpoint on women. It is against this backdrop that this study intends to highlight the perspectives of the church on women especially on whether they should be in leadership or not.

The history of AFMZ

The Apostolic Faith Mission is one of the biggest Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe and it is said that it is the one that introduced Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe (Ndhlovu, 2018; Chivasa, 2017). Women comprise the greater percentage of AFMZ's membership. They teach Sunday school, clean the church premises, engage in fundraising, and singing in the praise and worship team whilst men occupy the decision-making positions (Kwaramba & Dreyer, 2019). Women in AFMZ are often barred by the church's Constitution to be in decision making except if they are pastors. However, even as pastors, women in AFMZ have never been accorded the opportunity to be an overseer or president. These positions have been a domain for male pastors only which female pastors could not enter since the church's establishment in 1915 (Kwaramba & Dreyer, 2019; Madziyire & Risinamhodzi, 2015).

The governmental policy on women

Since gaining independence in 1980 the Zimbabwean government has made great strides in terms of policy to ensure gender parity in socio-economic and political spheres. The Zimbabwean government has been a signatory of both regional and international gender equality policies. This is because the world over, women have been under-represented in decision making processes and in situations where they are included, they are usually relegated to marginal positions (Maphosa et al., 2015; Dziva & Dube, 2014).

In 2013 the Zimbabwean government adopted a new Constitution in which gender equality is underscored and upheld replacing the Lancaster

House Constitution which failed to meet all women's needs and lacked conceptual clarity on the rights of women (Dziva, 2018). Zanzi (2013) proffers that the Lancaster House Constitution's provisions were retrogressive with regards to best practices in gender equality allowing discrimination in areas where personal law was applicable. It did not provide constitutional protection leading to women not having access to land, education, health, and participation in socio-economic and political development. The 2013 constitution is widely acknowledged because of its commitment to gender equality. It upholds equal treatment of men and women in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. This constitution is against anything that infringes upon the rights of women and girls. The Zimbabwean Constitution mandates the state to promote gender equality. Under section 17(1) equal representation of men and women in institutions and agencies of the government is stipulated. It also makes provision for women to constitute half membership of all commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any act of parliament (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013:20). The government has already begun to take steps towards fulfilling clauses that deal with issues of gender balance in the Constitution (Dziva, 2018). By 2017 the Zimbabwe Human right Commission had a gender balanced commission, whilst the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the Zimbabwe Gender Commission were being head by women. However, in terms of the cabinet, despite the Constitution that upheld the fifty percent inclusion of women in 2013, the then president, Robert Mugabe, only included three women out of 26 members in the cabinet which was way below the fifty- fifty percent inclusion (Dziva, 2018). The current Mnangagwa cabinet in 2018 increased women to six (Herald, 8 September 2018). This is a slight improvement, but it is still way below the expectations of the Constitution.

Through the Ministry of Women, Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development, the government came up with the National Gender policy (NGP) (2013-2017) which replaced the first one which was drafted in 2004. The ministry came up with a new NGP to cater for new and emerging development priorities both at regional and global level and because there has been a tremendous change in the political landscape of Zimbabwe. In this document the vision of the government is to create an environment in which men and women are equals. Its objective is to eliminate all gender disparities in life and development (NGP, 2013).

Regionally, Zimbabwe signed the SADC Protocol on gender and development (Zinyemba, 2013). This protocol emphasizes upholding affirmative action and removing all barriers to meaningful participation of women in all spheres of life including leadership. The SADC calls for a 50 percent participation of women.

The Zimbabwean government should be applauded for making efforts to put gender equality into practice and living the talk of the inclusion of women in decision making. Since there has been a lot of change and advocacy for equal treatment of women, this paper seeks to address whether the efforts of the Zimbabwean government have made an impact on the way the church views women with special focus on the perspectives of the members of the AFMZ.

African world view on women

There is debate among scholars on whether Shona culture was or is accommodative and life affirming to women. Scholars such as Muringa & Makaudze (2014) and Machingura & Nyakuhwa (2015) contend that African culture is life affirming. According to them, in the original African setting, women were highly regarded and could become anything they wanted to be in life. They were not domesticated as is the situation nowadays where women are not public figures and are expected to do only reproductive work such as bearing and nurturing children, which is unpaid. These scholars argue that before colonialism there were no barriers for women. For them the original African culture did not oppress women. Muringa & Makaudze (2014) strongly believe that what Africans are experiencing now as culture is not true African culture but is a culture that was imposed on them by Europeans. There is a possibility that the Shona people are no longer acquainted with their original culture because of the colonization which they experienced for almost a century. One can therefore strongly argue that the oppression of women by men reflects the colonizer's culture (Muringa & Makaudze, 2014). In the Shona culture, a woman as an aunt, mother or grandmother was highly regarded. Women could take up roles that are considered manly roles these days and men could also cook and do other household chores especially at functions such as funerals. Roles were flexible and not fixed as they are now. Furthermore, a woman was considered as a full human being and not a lesser one. The emphasis was more on the humanity of a person than gender or

sex. For example, in the Shona culture a girl is called 'mwanasikana', a boy 'mwanakomana'. 'Mwana' means child 'sikana' means girl and 'komana' means boy. So, the emphasis is that he or she is a child and the sex come after. A woman is called 'munhukadzi' and a man 'munhurume'. 'Munhu' means human being. Emphasis is on one's humanness and sex are secondary (Muringa & Makaudze, 2014). Steady (2015:27) in her book *Women and leadership in West Africa: Mothering the nation and humanizing the state* concurs with Makaudze & Muringa (2014) that Europeans imposed their oppressive culture on Africans and that women held leadership in African culture before the coming of the colonizers.

On the other hand, there are some scholars such as Biri (2016), Dodo (2014) as well as Biri & Mutambwa (2013) who strongly argue that African culture is oppressive and marginalizes women. For Biri the functioning and activities of the church are being influenced by African culture. She argues that the oppressive treatment of women in society is a true reflection of African culture. According to Biri & Mutambwa (2013), in their article *Socio-cultural dynamics and education for development in Zimbabwe: Navigating the discourse of exclusion and marginalization*, (2013:27), in African culture a woman cannot do anything on her own, instead she needs a man by her side for her to perform outstandingly. Dodo (2014) in his article *Traditional Leadership Systems and Gender Recognition: Zimbabwe*, argues that Africans have a perception that women are weak and are ceremonially unclean due to the menstrual cycle they experience every month. According to Makaudze (2016:73) "men label women negatively and close doors for women who want to emancipate themselves in life" among the Shona people. These scholars seem not to be taking into cognizance the fact that the colonizers indeed disrupted and distorted African culture. Whilst the arguments of the scholars mentioned in this paper hold some truths one cannot ignore the interaction that has taken place between African and the Western cultures and the influence, they had on each other.

AFMZ is a Pentecostal church which believes in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ whose mission statement in the gospel of Luke was to liberate the oppressed and bring deliverance to humanity. The mission statement of Jesus on the liberation of humanity eradicated all cultural practices that were not life affirming. This paper intends to bring out contemporary perspectives of religious people regarding women and leadership.

Theoretical grounding

The theoretical grounding of this study is African Women's Theology. African Women's Theology examines contemporary perceptions on women in religion using African women's experiences as a lens. The researcher is examining perceptions of African members of AFMZ in Zimbabwe. Experiences of women are not generic around the globe. It is therefore imperative that we employ a uniquely African lens. African Women's Theology is propounded by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, popularly known as the Circle. The Circle is a group of African female theologian scholars who advocate for the equality for both men and women. Examples of such female theologians are Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Isabel Asapawo Phiri, Teresa Hinga, Sarojini Nadar and Musimbi Kanyoro just to mention a few. This a theology that emerged out of the need to liberate women from oppressive constructions both in society and church. It seeks to liberate women from all forms of oppression associated with patriarchy. Phiri argues that "the construction of womanhood by patriarchy is one of the central issues for feminist theologians globally and particularly in Africa because it has influenced the way women are treated and perceived and the roles that women can play in African church and society. Patriarchy has defined women as inferior to men thereby perpetuating the oppression of women by religion and culture" (Phiri, 1997:11). African Women's Theology challenges cultural practices that are not life affirming to women. Regarding women and culture, Musimbi Kanyoro contends that women in Africa are guardians of culture and for a long time they have defended certain cultural practices that are life denying to women (Kanyoro, 2001:159). African Women's Theology gives women a voice as they seek to liberate themselves. Oduyoye (1995:3) proffers that "Over time, African women had to learn to know their oppressors but had held their peace, because "when your hand is in someone's mouth, you do not hit that person on the head". African women understand that men were oppressing them, but the conditions did not allow them to question the status quo. African Women's Theology acknowledges the view that women are alive and should speak about their own experiences. According to these theologians, women have been spoken of by men as if they are dead. They advocate for men and women to complement each other. According to African women theologians, if men are working alone especially in leadership, they are like a one-winged bird (Oduyoye, 2001). For a bird to fly properly it requires two wings therefor the inclusion of women will result in the bird, which is the church, having both wings.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study which utilized interviews and focus group discussions as tools of data collection. The interviews were conducted with 10 male pastors, 10 female pastors, two former presidents (highest leader) of the church, three elderly women, two men serving as elders within the church and two deacons. The focus group discussions were conducted with the Boy's Fellowship, Girls' Fellowship, Sister's Union Committee, Ladies Committee members and one of the Assembly's main church boards ('Dare raana baba). Each focus group consisted of 8 participants. Semi structured interview questions were administered. The 62 participants were all purposively sampled.

Findings and discussion

In the following sections I will discuss women's commitment, organizational skills, faithfulness, love, and spiritual strength as key findings of this study.

Commitment

During both the interviews and focus group discussions it was observed that most members of the AFMZ view women as people who are more dedicated to God's work when compared to men. M1 who is a pastor had the following to say about the dedication of women to church activities:

They are always present to execute duties they are expected to fulfill. If they are cell group leaders, they are always present as the leaders unlike men who are always absent. Men usually lead remotely. Unlike men, women sacrifice their personal commitments to full fill church commitments.

Concurring with MP1, FP who is a female pastor also highlighted that women are more committed and dedicated to accomplishing church assignments. She said:

Most females usually are committed to the projects that the assembly will be running. For example, if we have agreed to buy a stand female pastors make an effort to make sure that all the resources are channeled towards the buying of the stand. This is unlike some

male pastors who can divert the funds towards buying a pastor's car which will only benefit him unlike a stand which will benefit the whole church.

During a focus group discussion with the Girls' Fellowship, this perspective was also registered, that women are more committed to God's work. This is what they said:

We once had a female pastor at this assembly and now we have a male pastor. It is unfortunate that she had to leave because the church board did not want a woman to be their leader. But to tell the truth what we achieved when we had that female pastor is way more than now when we have a male pastor. The female pastor made sure that whatever the church would have agreed upon will be achieved. As for now you cannot really tell whether we are going forward or backward.

D1 who is both an administrator and deacon at his assembly noted that:

Using my experience as the administrator at our assembly women are more reliable, more focused and goal oriented than men. When given financial tasks women unite and they achieve the target quicker than men. Therefore, women should be given the opportunity to be leaders.

One reason why women are more committed to doing church activities is that they often have more time to devote to religious practices. Many African societies are still patriarchal, and women are often expected to prioritize their domestic duties over other activities. However, church activities provide women with an opportunity to engage in activities outside of their domestic roles, which can be empowering. Importantly Kanyoro (2012) states, "The church is a safe space for women to gather and engage in activities that are meaningful to them."

The commitment of women in the church sometimes is not recognized because most of the time they are made to be spectators of the activities taking place in the church. Chitando (2010) stated and rightly so that patriarchy puts women down in the church. Patriarchy makes women invisible in the church. It accords men the privilege of being leaders in all aspects of life. Importantly Mupangwa (2021) also argues that most Pentecostal churches, AFMZ included, because of the influence of patriarchy, have male bloated leadership structures even though women are the majority. Because women are not included in leadership, their commitment to church activities is obscured.

Women are said to be more committed to church. This however does not overshadow that women are underrepresented in leadership roles. Some Western feminists who outrightly dismiss women working together with men fail to appreciate that men and women complement each other. Both men and women are important, and they exist for a purpose on earth, therefore there is need for men and women to work together. That is the reason why Chitando (2007b) calls for the rise of a new man in this new era who accommodates and has empathy for women. Such a man is willing to work side by side with women. Chitando (2007b) agrees with African feminist theologians who acknowledges that masculinities are fluid and can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Chitando (2007a) who hails the efforts of the Pentecostal churches such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), in trying to replace hegemonic masculinities, which oppresses women with accommodative masculinities that are liberative to women.

Another reason why women are more committed in doing church activities is that they often find solace and comfort in their faith. According to African Women's Theology, the experiences of African women are unique and often marginalized (Oduyoye, 2001). Therefore, women may turn to their faith to find comfort and support in difficult times. As Oduyoye (1995), explains, "African women often turn to God as a source of strength and hope in the face of adversity."

Furthermore, and significantly, women often tackle their church activities as a community, and they take collective action as they lead activities such as organizing fundraising events and leading prayer groups. Through these activities, women form strong bonds with other women in their communities, which is empowering. As Phiri (2011) notes, "women are often the backbone of the church community. They work tirelessly to ensure that the needs of the community are met".

Organization

Women in the AFMZ are also said to be more organized than men. Female pastors especially are said to have a clearly defined goal and steps towards achieving that goal. D6 who is deacon a member of the church board narrated how female pastors are more organized than men and male pastors during meetings:

Men usually make an issue out of a very simple matter resulting in a lot of arguments. This leads to a meeting that was supposed to only last an hour to take almost a day. A simple issue is augmented and discussed for hours leading to the meetings being too long. We have never held meetings that are less than 5 hours since I became a member of the board.

FP1 who one of the former concurred with D6 and said:

Meetings of an assembly being chaired by a male pastor take longer hours than of those of assemblies being chaired by a female pastor. Meetings at a church being led by a male pastor usually take at least five or more hours. In some instances, the meetings may start around six o'clock in the evening and they end in the early hours of the following day and usually debating on simple matters. Male pastors always want to be seen as the best and above all others, so they spent a lot of time arguing. However, those being led by women the longest time that they can take is two hours and in those two hours they accomplish their objectives.

This was also confirmed by the two elders who attend church at assemblies being led by female pastors.

Women focus on the matter at hand and how to achieve it. They implement the ideas that would have been brought forward whilst men focus on arguing. On top of that men do not even put into practice whatever they suggest.

In the context of the African church, the observation that women are more organized when carrying out church tasks than men, can be seen as a reflection of the roles and responsibilities that women have traditionally held in African society. Mupangwa (2021) observed that women are so organized because historically they have been responsible for the care and management of the home, including organizing and planning family activities. This role has translated into the church, where women are often tasked with organizing and planning church events and activities.

Women's organizational skills and attention to detail are essential in ensuring that church activities run smoothly and efficiently. However, despite them being so organized women in the AFMZ are still not playing any leading role in the decision-making processes of the church. In a way women in the AFMZ are experiencing a form of religious oppression. Significantly, Oduyoye (1992) aptly elucidates that there is need for all people to be "concerned with the liberation of women from oppression in all its forms, including economic, political, and religious oppression."

However, it is important to note that the observation that women are more organized than men in the context of the Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe should not be used to reinforce gender stereotypes or limit women's roles and responsibilities within the church. Importantly, Chitando (2007b) argues that stereotyping allows one to presume that separate is equal. To justify specific roles and activities appropriate to men and to distinguish them from other specific roles and activities appropriate to women is subtle sexual discrimination. Such a perspective allows one to deny that the roles and activities of one sex are superior to that of the other while at the same time not allowing persons to choose their roles and activities. The church should aim to seek ways that challenge and dismantle patriarchal structures that limit women's participation and leadership in the church.

This section has demonstrated that women have very good organizational skills. This is evidenced by the way in which they prioritize family, community, the nation, and the church. Promoting patriarchal thinking only serves to promote male hegemony and marginalize women. Considering this, it is imperative that women be involved in the decision-making processes of the church.

Faithfulness

In the AFMZ women are perceived as being more faithful when compared to men. MP8 a male pastor said the following about the faithfulness of women:

Women are more 'cleaner'. By this I mean that, they do not cheat and are less likely to be corrupt as men. This is the reason why most male pastors want women to be administrators of their assemblies and be responsible for the church's finances. Usually, women do not steal church funds or divert funds for other purposes unlike men. Hence, I recommend that women be in leadership.

During a focus group discussion with a committee of the Women's Department, a lament about the unfaithfulness of male leadership was recorded:

We wish if women were also involved in leadership, transparency over money issues would be better. We have been contributing money towards the construction of the Rufaro conference, but

nothing has really taken place. We still have a temporary shelter 100 years after its establishment in Zimbabwe. By now the leadership should have built a conference center, with proper accommodation, ablution blocks and a proper water and sewer system, but that is not the case. The lady's department is more transparent in their use of money. When they called for finances for the generator, and truck for the national office, we saw what our monies was used for. They bought the generator and the truck.

One of the female pastors also supported the view that women are faithful especially when it comes to the use of finances: FP 4 had this to say:

As a woman, I am not comfortable with diverting finances to something which is not the reason it was raised for, but our male colleagues do not hesitate to do so. If their personal needs are not being met, they can use the money which was meant to roof a church to meet that need they have. As for me I am prepared to suffer and meet the goal we all have as a church.

The youths also through the Boy's Fellowship committee registered the view that women are faithful: Below is their view about women:

Most women who are pastors we believe were truly called to be pastors. As for some male pastors you can really tell that they were not called at all. They do not hesitate to steal monies from the church coffers. For a woman it is difficult to do that. Generally, women are faithful.

One reason why women are more faithful than men in church is that they are often socialized to prioritize religious practices. In many African societies, women are responsible for instilling religious values in their children, and they are expected to set an example of faithfulness. Oduyoye (1995) explains, "Women are often seen as the guardians of religious traditions and values in African societies".

Another reason why women are more faithful than men in church is that they often find a sense of community and belonging in religious spaces. African feminist theology emphasizes the importance of communal values and the role of women in building and sustaining communities. Women often take on leadership roles in church communities, such as organizing prayer groups and providing pastoral care to members. Phiri (2011) notes and rightly so that, "Women are often the driving force behind church communities, providing support and care to members in times of need."

The role of religion is to provide a sense of hope and empowerment for marginalized groups, including women. Women who face discrimination and marginalization in their daily lives may turn to religion as a source of strength and resilience if faithfulness is experienced in churches. As Kanyoro (2011) aptly states, "religion can be a powerful tool for empowering women and helping them to overcome the challenges they face." Religion is empowering to the whole church, men and women alike, through the faithfulness of women (Kanyoro, 2012).

Women are often socialized to prioritize religious practices, find a sense of community and belonging in religious spaces, and turn to religion as a source of empowerment and hope. By recognizing the unique experiences of African women and their contributions to the Christian faith through their faithfulness, we can better understand the role of women in the church and work towards greater gender equality. The call for faithfulness, however, should be to both men and women. Chitando and Biri (2013) postulate that men are urged to be faithful in all areas of life, even as God is faithful to God's people.

Love

The statement that women are more loving than men in the church is a common observation in many African churches. This was also expressed by the members of the AFMZ about their female members. One of the male pastors MP7 said the following during an interview:

Women are usually driven by love when they do things. That is the reason why they are more committed to accomplishing whatever they set out to do. It is unlike men who are mostly driven by their ego and would want to prove certain people wrong.

The youth also supported the fact that women are more loving, and they express their love all the time.

The pastor's wife usually is the one that holds the church through her love. If mai Mufundisi (the pastor's wife) does not have love, usually there is no stability in the church. Those women are powerful, and their power is expressed in the love they provide to the church. It is unfortunate she is not the leader of the church, but she plays a very critical role.

Generally, women are associated with loving even in family set ups. A mother's love is well celebrated in many communities. According to Oduyoye (1996), "African Women's Theology is rooted in their experiences of love, caring, and nurturing, which they bring to their families, communities, and the church." This emphasis on love, caring, and nurturing is often associated with women in the African church, and is sometimes used to suggest that women are more loving spiritually than men. In the context of the African church, the observation that women are more loving spiritually than men can be seen as a reflection of the roles and responsibilities that women have traditionally held in African society. Women have historically been responsible for the care and nurturing of their families and communities, and this role has translated into the African church, where women often take on pastoral and caregiving roles without being formally recognized.

Women's experiences of love and caring are often different from men's, and their insights and perspectives can enrich the church's understanding of what it means to love spiritually. In the era of HIV & AIDS and COVID-19, research has shown that women are the ones who are always taking care of the sick. It can only be love that drives them to tackle such a task. In the case of COVID-19, the disease is infectious but despite that, women looked after the sick. The call to love should be extended to men as well because the emergence of epidemics and pandemics allows churches like AFMZ to revise its gender relations in the church. Love may help men to practice liberating masculinities that may help transform social relations (Chitando, 2007a).

Churches that are loving, open, warm, and welcoming serve as a vital resource in a world facing numerous challenges that impact people emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually. When a person is shown love, given the freedom to openly share their stories, and find solace from their struggles, they tend to thrive and become more effective members of society. Women in the AFMZ if given a chance to lead, having these characteristics, can impact the nation positively. Even though the church is sometimes regarded as an unsafe place due to the factors associated with patriarchal oppression, the women in the AFMZ portray that the church can still be a safe haven for many. Though Chitando (2007a) analysing issues around HIV & AIDS observed that in some instances, the church suffers from failure to love and that it is an insensitive and judgmental institution it can also be argued that there is a remnant of people in the

church who have got love and are sensitive and not judgmental. The work and dedication of women in these churches is testament to that.

The AFMZ is encouraged to be a warm life-giving church especially in this current world full of uncertainties. In the words of Chitando (2007a) “love erases the artificial separation between ‘us’ and ‘them.’” My arguments are not meant to suggest that the church has not been engaging in acts of love. However, it can and must do better because there is a great need for the church to be contextually relevant. Even though the role of showing love and care is normally associated with women, men must also demonstrate love in the community together with women. I concur with Dube (2000) who argues that the church must take into cognisance Jesus’s “answer to a group of his male disciples who were arguing who is great, was to bring a child to them and command them to welcome/care for a child, a role that is normally associated with women. Yet one cannot over-emphasize the importance of getting men involved in giving quality care...”

Women’s commitment to and demonstration of love enables them to accomplish great exploits such as the buying of a truck and generator as indicated in the narration above by the members of the youth. As Chitando (2007a) aptly puts it, love pushes people into putting ideas into reality.

Spiritual strength

Most of the participants also highlighted that women in the AFMZ are more prayerful as compared to their male counterparts hence making them spiritually strong. MP5 showed his appreciation of the fact that women pray more by saying:

Women meet more for prayer than men. They have their own prayer meetings as women, and they also join those organized for the whole church. At the end of the day, you would find out that they have more time to pray than men, which works to their advantage.

FP 4 who is a female pastor also said:

Women are more prayerful. They pray more for their ministries more than men. It starts when you are still training as student pastors at Living Waters Bible College. Most of the time, you would

find female student pastors praying in the chapel. It was very rare to find the male students.

The youth also expressed the same view during focus group discussions. They expressed their opinion by saying:

Women should be stronger than men emotionally and spiritually. God said that I will make you a helper. A person who needs help is weak. A helper should be stronger than the one who needs help. If a man dies a woman can continue without a man to look after the family. If a woman in a marriage dies everything falls apart and a man remarries as soon as possible because he cannot manage on his own. Therefore, women are stronger than men.

Women experience struggles and challenges in society and church such as marginalization and poverty just to mention a few. This is likely the reason for their frequent engagement in prayer. According to Dube, (2000) "African women's experiences of religion have been shaped by patriarchal cultural and religious norms that have marginalized them." Despite these challenges, women have played a significant role in the spiritual life of the church. It should be appreciated that spirituality is an integral part of women's lives and that women often use their faith as a source of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Women's perspectives on spirituality are often different from men's, and their experiences and insights can enrich the church's understanding of spirituality. Women, drawing on their resourcefulness and agency, often turn to God for guidance in nearly all aspects of life, which underscores their strong inclination towards prayer.

Women may not match the physical strength that men have but they have this aspect of spirituality which men can learn from if they are included in leadership and decision making. Mupangwa (2021) in her doctoral thesis strongly argued for celebrating the differences that may be observed between men and women. By doing so, both men and women find common ground in complementing each other. Even though women are said to be more prayerful, it does not nullify the fact that they need men in their lives and that church and society would function better if men and women lived in an egalitarian way.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that all people, men included, hold such positive perspectives about women. From the foregoing discussion, one might conclude that the perspectives advanced by Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe about women are characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence. This is so, in the sense that even though they know women possess such good and strong characteristics they are still in the periphery when it comes to decision making. As Chitando (2007b) aptly states, even though the views being emphasized by Zimbabwean Pentecostalism are remarkable, they continue to be inclined towards placing men above women. Their views contain a lot of promise to breaking new ground as there is recognition of the powerful characteristics that women possess which they can use as equal partners in the church leadership in pursuit of gender justice. Since masculinities are not frozen as Chitando (2007b) rightly states, men in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe can change the narrative of the history of the church by putting the positive perspectives highlighted in this paper into practice. Change in the leadership structure can be experienced if liberating masculinities are employed in the AFMZ. The findings of this study are evidence that women should not operate in the shadow of men. They should be recognized as worthy agents. Women should never function behind the scenes, I strongly, contend that they should come to the fore and work side by side with men in decision-making and all other leadership roles in the church.

References

- Biri, K. 2016. "Proverbs 31 Woman: Pentecostalism and 'Disempowering Femininities' and 'Oppressive Masculinities' in Zimbabwe". In J. Hunter & J. Kügler (eds), *The Bible and Violence in Africa* (BiAS 20), 223-238.
- Biri, K. & Mutambwa, J. 2013. "Socio-cultural dynamics and education for development in Zimbabwe: Navigating the discourse of exclusion and marginalization". *African Journal of Social Work* 3(1), 23-40.
- Chitando E. 2007a. *Living with hope: African churches and HIV/AIDS*, Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Chitando, E. 2007b. "A new man for a new era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, masculinities, and the HIV epidemic". *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 35(3), 112-127.
- Chitando, E., 2010. "Equipped and ready to serve? Transforming theology and religious studies in Africa". *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 38(2), 197-210.
- Chitando, E. & Mateveke, P. 2012. "Challenging patriarchy and exercising women's agency in Zimbabwean music: Analysing the careers of Chiwoniso Maraire and Olivia Charamba". *Muziki* 9(2), 41-52.
- Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013. <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/315>.
- Dube, M.W. 2000. "African Women's Theology: An Introduction." In I.A. Phiri & S. Nadar (Eds.), *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, 13-28. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications.
- Dodo O. 2013. "Traditional Leadership Systems and Gender Recognition: Zimbabwe". *Journal of Gender and Women's Studies* 1(1), 29-44.
- Dziva, C. 2018. "The 2013 Constitutional Reform and the Protection of Women's Rights in Zimbabwe". *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review* 34(2), 21-35.
- Herald, 8 September 2008. <https://www.herald.co.zw/zim-ready-for-fdi-ncube>.
- Kalu, O. 2008. *African Pentecostalism: an introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Kanyoro, M.R.A. 2001a. "Engendered Communal Theology: African Women's Contribution to Theology in the 21st century", 158-180. In N.J. Njoroge & M.W. Dube (eds), *Talitha cum! Theologies of African Women*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Kanyoro, M. 2012. "Transformative leadership: Working for gender and racial justice in the church". *The Presbyterian Outlook* 194(42), 16-18.
- Kwaramba, J. & Dreyer, Y., 2019, "Organizational leadership, women and development in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe: A practical theology perspective". *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), a5436. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5436>.

- Machingura, F. & Nyakuhwa, P. 2015. "Sexism: a hermetical interrogation of Galatians 3:28 and women in the church of Christ in Zimbabwe". *Journal of Pan African Studies* 8(2), 92-114.
- Madziyire, A & Risinamhodzi, T. 2015, *Pentecostal Dawn in Zimbabwe: The History and Tenets of AFM*. Harare: The Brand Guy & Associates.
- Makaudze, G. 2016. "Empowerment or Delusion? The Shona novel and women emancipation". *Journal of Literary Studies* 32(1), 70-83.
- Maphosa, M., Tshuma, N. & Maviza, G. 2015. "Participation of women in Zimbabwean politics and the mirage of gender equity". *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict and Social Transformation* 4(2), 127-159.
- Mupangwa T. 2021. The place of women in the leadership of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe. *Doctoral Thesis*, University of KwaZulu Natal.
- Muringa T.F. & Makaudze G. 2014. "Tradition or misconception? Contemporary Perception about working women in Midlands Province in Zimbabwe". *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 29(1), 1537-1553.
- National Gender policy 2013-2017.
<https://catalogue.safaidis.net/sites/default/files/publications/2013>.
- Oduyoye, M.A. 1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African women and patriarchy*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Oduyoye, M.A. 1992. "African Women's Theology: An Introduction." In M.J. Mananzan & J.S. Clarkson (Eds.), *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities*, 195-208. New York: Paulist Press.
- Oduyoye, M.A. 1996. "African Women's Theology: An Introduction." In A.K.M. Adam (Ed.), *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide*, 211-218. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Phiri, I. 1997. *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa women in Central Malawi*. Blantyre: CLAIM.
- Phiri, I.A. 2011. "Women, gender, and the church in Africa: Challenges and opportunities". *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 139, 56-72.
- Steady, F.C. 2015. "An investigative framework for gender Research in Africa in the new millennium". In O. Oyewumi (ed.), *Gender studies: A reader*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Zanhi, M. 2013. *Is there political will to translate it into reality?* Bulawayo: Legal Resources Foundation.
- Zinyemba, A.Z. 2013. Participation of women in management in the hospitality and financial services sectors in Zimbabwe: Strategies for meeting leadership and gender challenges. *PHD Dissertation*, University of Zimbabwe.