

## Chapter Sixteen

# Gender and Power in African Christianity: African Instituted Churches and Pentecostal Churches

Philomena Njeri Mwaura

### INTRODUCTION

Scholars of African Christianity have acknowledged the tremendous growth of the church in Africa in the twentieth century. Elizabeth Isichei observes that despite Christian presence in Africa in the first five centuries A.D. and again in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through Catholic Portuguese traders, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century that any sizeable conversions were made.<sup>561</sup> Even then in the nineteenth century, it is only in places like Buganda and the Creole community in Sierra Leone, that a handful of people became converts. This was the work of pioneer Christian missionaries from Europe representing various churches and missionary organizations.

Male and female missionaries prosecuted the modern missionary movement in Africa. Female evangelists took the initiative to open up outstations and indigenous bible women took the gospel into many kraals. While this has been acknowledged, more attention has been placed on the

<sup>561</sup> Elizabeth ISICHEI: *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present* (London: SPCK, 1995), 31.

role of men in the propagation of the gospel and spread of Christianity despite the fact that women were the most ardent adherents.<sup>562</sup>

Many scholars have noted the preponderance of women in the African Church. Questions have been asked regarding women's propensity to conversion at the pioneering stage of the missionary endeavor and today. Adrian Hastings proposes some factors. First, the essential message of Christianity that advocates equality for all; "that sense of freedom, of a co-operative effort in which men and women were both strenuously engaged, was communicated to the converts."<sup>563</sup> Women were taught that they were equal, free and capable of independent responsibility. Second, missionary Christian morality tended to impinge particularly upon various specific aspects of female existence. African women experienced Christianity as empowering. It gave them a place on which to stand; from which they could challenge the male dominated sacred world and traditions. Such traditions were the killing of twins, the pursuit of alleged witches and polygamy. The missionary interest in the vulnerable women attracted the attention of the victims. Third, missionaries exaggerated the marginalization of women in indigenous patriarchal communities.

The attraction of African women to Christianity was not confined to the pioneer period. Today, women still dominate the pews in mainline churches, African Instituted Churches, Charismatic movements and Pentecostal churches. They are, however, absent from the power structures of the churches, which are male dominated. Their contribution to the growth of the church in Africa cannot be gainsaid. Elizabeth Isichei<sup>564</sup> and Bengt Sundkler emphasize that women were often the first converts and the most enthusiastic local evangelists. They even sacrificed their resources in propagating the gospel. Sundkler and Steed note that though women appear invisible, they have been the pillars of the parish and take care of the local church and its worship. The church has provided them with support systems and solidarity.<sup>565</sup> Women are animators of the church and society not only during times of crisis, even in times of stability. Whether women are educated or not, they continue to be devoted to the church.

<sup>562</sup> ISICHEI, *A History of Christianity*, p. 190; see also Adrian HASTINGS, "Were Women a Special Case?" in *African Catholicism: Essays in Discovery* (London: SCM 1989).

<sup>563</sup> HASTINGS, *African Catholicism*, p. 38.

<sup>564</sup> ISICHEI, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, p. 190.

<sup>565</sup> Bengt SUNDKLER & Christopher STEED, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 681.

A dominant male ideology has ensured that women continue being clients in the churches just as they were in shrines of traditional society. Patriarchal ideology that props up the structure of African societies, whether matrilineal or patrilineal, has influenced the perception of gender roles in society. Patriarchy has defined women as inferior, thus perpetuating marginalization and oppression of women. The resultant unequal gender relations have translated into male dominance and female subservience in church and society.

Sundkler and Steed observe the ambivalent role the church has played in being a catalyst for women's liberation and her complicity in their subordination.<sup>566</sup> The church, they note, had opened up new opportunities for women through education for girls and through roles of leadership. On the other hand "there operated in and through the churches, discriminating practices upheld by divine authority."<sup>567</sup> They attribute this to the fact that "the missions whether Catholic or Protestant originating in the nineteenth century, were largely expressions of a patriarchal society and these attitudes seemed to fit with an African society in its patriarchal and matriarchal form."<sup>568</sup>

The question too arises, apart from the explicit status and roles of women in church and society, how have they been represented in the academy? Ursula King observes that although the study of religion has undergone many changes in the last ten years, it is still deeply rooted in an androcentric framework, which women scholars continue to question and challenge.<sup>569</sup> She further notes that this androcentricism is particularly apparent in the historiography, methodology and conceptual tools of the discipline which express the marginality and invisibility of women as both subjects and objects in the study of religion. Writing about the study of religion in Africa, Isabel Phiri decries the same invisibility of women. She argues:<sup>570</sup>

"Studies on religion in Africa have predominantly centered on the role of men, both expatriate and local and have generally been silent on women's involvement. Yet it has long been recognized

<sup>566</sup> SUNDKLER & STEED, *A History of the Church*, p. 681.

<sup>567</sup> SUNDKLER & STEED, *A History of the Church*, p. 679.

<sup>568</sup> SUNDKLER & STEED, *A History of the Church*, p. 680.

<sup>569</sup> URSULA KING, "A Question of Identity: Women Scholars and the Study of Religion", in U. KING (ed.), *Religion and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 199.

<sup>570</sup> ISABEL A. PHIRI, "Doing Theology as African Women", in JOHN PARATT (ed.), *A Reader in African Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1997), 45.

that the majority of church members are women.”

She provides two reasons for this, firstly there have been more male scholars than female, and secondly, scholars have privileged male experience relative to women. The result has been an absence of theological writings on African women by African women. A glance at the study of church history displays similar oversights.

Feminist church historians have, for example, decried the invisibility of women missionaries in mission histories. In African Christian historiography, there is minimal documentation by African male and female scholars of the roles women have played, not only in presenting themselves for conversion, but also conducting evangelistic work among their own people. Jocelyn Murray rightly observes that “it is increasingly recognized that women were of fundamental importance in defining, developing and shaping the course of the modern missionary movement.”<sup>571</sup> However, older missionary accounts did not take into account the role women played. Classical texts on mission history have also failed to record anything substantial on women even though there were chapters relating mission to social service, education and creating a bourgeoisie which were areas in which the role of women was central.

Currently there are few studies by women scholars, both African and non-African, on the impact of Christianity on African women and their role in evangelism. The work of Dana Roberts,<sup>572</sup> Fiona Bowie,<sup>573</sup> Nyambura Njoroge<sup>574</sup> and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians<sup>575</sup> have contributed in the reassessment of women’s roles, not only in the modern missionary movement, but also the agency of indigenous African

<sup>571</sup> Jocelyn MURRAY, “The Role of Women in the Church Missionary Society”, (1996), 66.

<sup>572</sup> Dana L. ROBERTS (ed.), *Gospel Bearers, Gender Bearers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002).

<sup>573</sup> Fiona BOWKIE, Deborah KIRKWOOD & Shirley ARDENER (eds), *Women and Missions: Past and Present: Anthropological and Historical Perceptions* (Providence: Berghan, 1993).

<sup>574</sup> Nyambura J. NJOROGE, *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation*, Ecclesiastical Studies 2, Legon, Theological Series (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2000).

<sup>575</sup> Members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians have written several books on African Women’s Theology. One of them is a collection of papers on biographies of women founders of churches, histories of women founded churches and women organizations in a variety of churches, both mainline and African Instituted Churches. See Isabel A. PHIRI, D.B. GOVINDEN & S. NADAR (eds), *Her Stories, Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002).

women in challenging patriarchal power structures and being catalysts in the evolution of their own scale of values, identity and culture. Gender has been a factor in missionary work and hence it is imperative that a gender analysis of missionary activities be done at all levels.

Although there is plenty of literature on women in the New Religious Movements like the African Instituted Churches, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, it has been mostly by Africanist scholars. It has also focused on an analysis of gender roles, significance of women in ritual as participants, healers and charismatic leaders. Not much has been done on their contribution to the growth of the church in Africa through outreach. Daneel avers that there is need to do a “thorough analysis of AIC women missionaries—their mission strategies, theologies, interpretation and propagation of the Good News in the African context.”<sup>576</sup>

African Christian history has also been written from a male perspective that depicts women as helpers or totally absent in shaping African Christianity. Writings have been locked into an entirely androcentric perspective in treating the theme, and no attention is given to gender differences. A balanced historiography must integrate women’s perspectives and experiences. Contemporary women scholars, as we have seen, are critiquing and reshaping the concepts inherited from male scholars, but as long as their thoughts and findings are not integrated into existing scholarly discourse, women scholars will remain muted as a group. Perhaps women need to evolve their own agencies for the production of knowledge and avoid marginalization. In historical and theoretical work, there is need to employ a “hermeneutic of suspicion” concerning data so far found and recorded as their perspective usually remains one sided and androcentric.

Rosalind Hackett also argues that women’s “attitudes behavior and so on are too frequently studied or ignored as peripheral invisible and non-interactional in the face of universal male dominance.”<sup>577</sup> Gender is an important organizing category in the religious movements in Africa. It is integral to any informed understanding and analysis of African’s New Religious Movements and their way of structuring the world.

This chapter explores how the planting and growth of Christianity in Africa has been facilitated by female agency. It attempts to portray women as protagonists and key actors in the evolution, development and growth of

<sup>576</sup> M.L. DANEEL, “AIC Women as Bearers of the Good News”, in *Missionalia*, 28, 213 (November 2000), 312.

<sup>577</sup> Rosalind I.J. HACKETT, “Women and New Religious Movements in Africa”, in KING, *Religion and Gender*, p. 260.

Christianity in Africa in various ways. It adopts a historical perspective focusing mainly on African Instituted Churches (AICs), particularly those of the spirit type and the more recent Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. It is argued in this chapter that, despite its apparent contradictions, the church in Africa has created an enlarged space for women and contributed to their emancipation from oppressive cultural practices and their culturally ascribed gender roles. The chapter begins by defining the phenomenon of African Instituted Churches, Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches; followed by a mapping out of their prevalence in Africa before discussing their spectrum of operations and participation available to women there in.

## I. AFRICAN INSTITUTED CHURCHES:

### A SURVEY

Ever since Christianity became established in the African soil there has been a variety of indigenous responses ranging from the development of prophetic movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the recent emergence of Neo-Pentecostal Christianity towards the end of the twentieth century. The variety of responses is viewed by scholars as a manifestation of religious independency and innovation in Africa. It is an attempt by Africans to forge new identities for themselves experimenting with and breaking down traditions. They provide an “interface for the encounter of African and Western ideas and a forum for social and religious change.”<sup>578</sup> In theological terms they are regarded as processes of inculturation of Christianity in the African context. They have retained an African ethos and their theology has a distinctive African flavor.

These African responses to Christianity have been described variously as African Initiatives in Christianity, African Indigenous / Initiated / Instituted and Independent Churches. They can simply be defined as autonomous church groups with an all African leadership and an all African membership.<sup>579</sup> Some of them arose initially as breakaways from former mission churches. Others have arisen spontaneously around a charismatic or prophetic personality, who often draws upon the beliefs and

<sup>578</sup> Rosalind J. HACKETT (ed.), *New Religious Movements in Nigeria* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 1.

<sup>579</sup> Martin E. WEST, “People of the Spirit: Charismatic Movements among African Independent Churches”, in *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa* (7 June 1974).

practices of a number of Christian groups. They are what Dickinson describes as manifestations of:<sup>580</sup>

“... a Christianity consistent with their own unique historical experience, rooted more self-consciously in their own culture and contributing to a richer world-wide interpretation of the Gospel.”

These movements/churches as we shall see, have been labeled variously depending on their origin, historical period and theology as; prophetic, Ethiopian / Spiritual / Zionist / Aladura / Prophet healing / Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal. Some churches, for example Ethiopian, are not found in some countries such as Ghana. At the outset, it is necessary to emphasize the sheer complexity of the subject under discussion. The topic under discussion is complex, not just in terms of regional, ethnic and cultural differences, but also in terms of numbers and the varieties of Christian expressions. Indeed, some scholars like Aylward Shorter<sup>581</sup> prefer to use the term “new religious movements” to describe the varieties of Christian religious expressions in Africa. For the purpose of this study it is imperative to attempt from a historical perspective a typology of the different Christian expressions in Africa before we assess the roles and place of women in them.

These matters have been dealt with in various parts of this book, and a chapter is devoted to the AICs because of their significance in the African religious landscape. As argued earlier, by the end of the First World War and the middle 1920s, Ethiopianism yielded to prophet-founded religious movements in several parts of Africa. They also emerged as a response to the lethargy of western mission Christianity, revivalism and particularly over African experience of the Holy Spirit. Others trace their origin to a charismatic figure, prophet-healer or prophetess-healer who underwent a resurrection experience coming back with a new message of repentance, of renunciation of witchcraft, and belief in the God of the Bible. Ogbu Kalu describes these churches and movements as “increasingly creative in their pneumatic emphasis, in the use of the Bible, innovative gender ideology, African religion and culture.”<sup>582</sup> These churches changed the face of Christianity in Africa by their enlarging of religious space for women. To use an example from Zimbabwe, Mai Chaza, a former Methodist, started

<sup>580</sup> R.D.N. DICKINSON, *To set at Liberty the Oppressed* (Geneva: WCC 1975), 50.

<sup>581</sup> Aylward SHORTER, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines 2001).

<sup>582</sup> Ogbu U. KALU, *Power, Poverty and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity, 1960-1996* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 105.

the Guta La Jehova in 1955. It was a prophet-healing church emphasizing divine healing and witchcraft eradication. Its significance included the fact that it was started by a woman. These churches reclaimed the pneumatic and charismatic experience that was suppressed by mainline Christianity and which resonated well with African spirituality. They emphasized healing, use of African symbolism, music, musical instruments and leadership patterns.

Since this chapter will use much data from the East African region, it should be useful to provide a backdrop on the emergence and vertical expansion of the Roho. In East Africa, AICs are more numerous in Kenya than in Tanzania. Spirit churches emerged in the 1930s. They were influenced by various revival movements at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly around the time of the First World War. In about 1912, the Roho (Spirit) movement emerged among adherents of the Anglican Church. It started as a popular charismatic movement among young people. Its most known founders are Alfayo Odongo Mango (1884-1934) and his nephew Lawi Obonyo (1911-1934). Mango had undergone ecstatic experiences characterized by seeing visions and speaking in tongues. He and others were murdered in 1934 over his revivalist activities and disputes over land with the neighboring ethnic group of Wang'a. The revival that had started in Nyanza province of western Kenya continued, and several Roho churches among the Luo trace their origin to the revival spearheaded by Alfayo Odongo Manyo.

In 1927, another wave of revival emerged among the Abaluhya also of western Kenya, but this time among the adherents of Friends African Mission in Kaimosi, and later in 1942 among the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada in Nyangori Mission. This resulted in the formation of spiritual AICs, when those who experienced revival were expelled from the mission churches and schools. In central Kenya the "Arathi" (prophets) among the Gikuyu experienced the Holy Spirit in 1926 and this culminated in the formation of a host of "Akorino" (people who roar) churches emphasizing, prophetic experiences, healing, speaking in tongues and confessions of sin and preservation of certain traditional cultural practices like polygamy, ritual uncleanness observance and female circumcision. Examples of the Abaluhya churches are the Africa Israel Church Nineveh of Zakayo Paul Kivuli (1942); Holy Spirit Church of East Africa; and Africa Church of the Holy Spirit. These churches have undergone further splintering since then. Other similar churches have been founded by charismatic personalities since the 1950s. Such churches include Jerusalem Church of Christ, founded in 1985 by Mary Sinaida; Dorcas Akatsa, in Kawangware Nairobi; and Nabii Christian Church of Kenya, started by Petro Mavia in 1981 in



Kibera. In Kenya AICs—both the Africa/nationalist (Ethiopian) and Spiritual (Roho) types—form about 25% of the Christian population. There are over 800 AICs in Kenya most of them unregistered by the government. The spirit churches in Uganda and Tanzania are mainly Kenyan ones.

All these churches and movements tried to make Christianity more African and relevant to the people. They represent religious innovation that has produced a Christianity consonant with people's spiritual social and other needs. Men and women are protagonists in the creation of this type of Christianity. It has been suggested by recent scholars that spiritual/Zionist/Aladura/Prophet-healing churches have been losing members to the newer type of Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches mushrooming all over Africa. They have also been demonized by the latter churches due to their rootedness in Africa religion and culture.<sup>583</sup> However, it should be noted that the spiritual AICs appeal to an older generation clientele and are therefore still relevant. Others have charismatized in order to sustain the appeal to the youth and be sensitive to the changes in the religious landscape in Africa. More information on these churches and their theology is provided in the relevant chapters of this book.

Since the 1970s there have been new developments in African Christianity. Charismatic revivals from within the mainline churches soon fed into Pentecostal forms as young Christians emerged from the mainline churches and formed current day charismatic ministries and churches. These churches all over Africa have their roots in the para-church evangelical associations. These are “non-denominational prayer groups, fellowships, gospel musical teams and individuals whose evangelistic aim is to shore up the mission of existing churches in gospel witness and Christian nurture.”<sup>584</sup> These churches gained prominence in the 1990s. Their emergence and proliferation is attributed to a reaction to the bureaucratization of the mainline churches and their subsequent lethargy. They are also linked to the legitimacy, economic and social-political crisis in Africa since the 1980s.

The churches are Pentecostal in character and have been influenced by developments in international Pentecostalism, particularly from North

<sup>583</sup> See Gerrie TER HAAR, “Standing up for Jesus: A Survey of New Developments in Christianity in Ghana”, in *Exchange*, 23 (1994), 221-240, 223; Ogbu U. KALU, “Estranged Bedfellows: The Demonization of the Aladura in African Pentecostal Rhetoric” in *Missionalia* 28 (2000), 121.

<sup>584</sup> Kwabena ASAMOAH-GYADU, “Renewal within Christianity: A Historical and Theological Study of some current developments within Ghanaian Pentecostalism”, (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2000), 33.

America. These churches, which are known differently in Africa (for instance, African Pentecostals, Charismatic, Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Churches [NPCs]), exhibit varieties of emphasis. The older ones espouse a holiness ethic while the younger ones emphasize prosperity. They adopt a faith-gospel focused on this worldly blessings and a deliverance theology which though built on “African traditional conceptions is expressed strongly in terms of modern western charismatic thinking.”<sup>585</sup>

Like other Pentecostal churches, NPCs identify with the central act of conversion in which the individual consecrates his or her life to Christ, atones for past sins and becomes “born again” or “saved”.<sup>586</sup> Like older AICs, they are for most part initiated by Africans for Africans. They share a similar worldview with the spiritual AICs in their concern for a theology of deliverance, and according to Kalu, “both lie on the same side of the typology of Christian forms”<sup>587</sup> and both draw from the same issues raised in primal religion.

Since the 1990s, the NPCs have become the fastest growing churches in Africa. Writing about Ghanaian Christianity, Asamoah-Gyadu observes that in terms of religious and theological influence Neo-Pentecostalism at the moment represents the most poignant, powerful and viable evidence of renewal and influence.<sup>588</sup> They have challenged the historic churches and older AICs to reinvent themselves to become more relevant and in tune with the spiritual needs of their flocks. The growth of NPCs is most dramatic in Ghana and Nigeria, where new churches abound in every neighborhood and are planted everyday. Many of them have acquired an international profile and have established branches all over Africa, Europe and North America.

In western, eastern, southern and central Africa, a similar phenomenon has been observed. Such churches in Nigeria and Ghana include: Deeper Life Bible Church, 1982; Redeemed Christian Church of God; Church of God Mission International, 1972; Winners Chapel International, 1981; Central Gospel Church International. Lighthouse Church International,

<sup>585</sup> Paul GIFFORD, *African Christianity: In Public Role* (London: Hurst & Co., 1998), 320.

<sup>586</sup> Ruth MARSHALL, “‘God is not a Democrat’: Pentecostalism and Democratization in Nigeria”, in P. GIFFORD (ed.), *The Christian Churches and the Democratization Process in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 244.

<sup>587</sup> KALU, *Power, Poverty and Prayer*, p. 105.

<sup>588</sup> Kwabena ASAMOAH-GYADU, “‘Fireballs in our Midst’: West Africa’s Burgeoning Charismatic Churches and the Pastoral Role of Women”, in *Mission Studies*, XV,1 (1998), 19-20.

Liberia, too, has its share, for example: Transcontinental Evangelical Association Church, in 1989; and Bethel World Outreach, 1986. In Kenya, the most prominent church is Jesus Is Alive Ministries, founded by Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, 1993; Maximum Miracle Center of pastor Pius Muiru, 1994; and Chrisco Fellowship Church, 1985. In Zimbabwe one of the largest denominations is the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God (ZAOGA), 1980, which has its roots in South African Pentecostalism. In South Africa, Neo-Pentecostal Churches exist, but are not as prominent as in West and East Africa. Charismatic churches are numerous too in Malawi and Zambia, and many of them have been founded by women and young people.<sup>589</sup>

Regardless of where they are found in Africa, these churches have certain distinguishing characteristics, for example, prominent roles for women and youth, appropriation of American prosperity Gospel in the 1990s, and riveting to holiness and intercessory traditions in the 1990s. They are also noted for their aggressive use of media technologies. More details on these churches are found in the relevant chapters of this book. We shall now turn to the place and role of women in these churches.

## II. SPIRIT-FILLED WOMEN

### AS AGENTS OF RELIGIOUS INNOVATION

We have already noted that women are proportionately more highly represented in all types of churches compared to men. This has been attributed to various reasons, including opportunities for leadership, entrance into a caring support network outside formal structures of society and the possibility for personal advancement. AICs are said particularly to provide women with the chance to recover their traditional status and positions that had been undermined by the teachings of mission churches. In traditional religions, women functioned as mediums, diviners, prophetesses, medicine persons, herbalists and priestesses. In West Africa, they even owned deities, cults and shrines.<sup>590</sup> Deities were even classified as males and females. These traditional roles thus became a resource for women founders of churches to draw from.

<sup>589</sup> Isabel A. PHIRI, "African Women in Mission: Two case studies from Malawi", in *Missionalia*, 28 (2000), 267; 293.

<sup>590</sup> Protus KEMDIRIM, "Towards Inclusiveness for Women in the African Churches", in *Mission Studies*, XII, 1, 2, 3 (1995), 1-8.

Western Christianity, whose tradition, mainline Christianity in African adopted, provided women with no leadership roles in their church structures. African Christians were able to find legitimacy for their inclusion in leadership in the mission churches from the Bible, which depicts women like Deborah, Miriam, Prisca and Lydia playing prominent roles. Missionaries often overlooked these sections of the Bible, and possibly considered them irrelevant to their missionary situations. These passages were, however, meaningful to the African converts—for missionaries had often criticized and condemned the African forms of religious expression in which women had a part to play. Scholars suggest that many women started and others were attracted to the AICs, because here they were able to reclaim the functions of customary institutions that were weakened by cultural change. Barrett remarks:<sup>591</sup>

“The missionary assault on the family complex caused women to act, for they felt the issues at state for more keenly than men. With more to lose, they vehemently defended their traditional institutions and way of life. Then, as the influence of the scriptures spread the emphasis changed to the contrast between the mission’s rigidity and the New Testament’s vision of freedom of women in Christ. Through the religious influence they exercised in the home, women spread the growing disaffection they felt concerning this discrepancy.”

Women within Christian churches also found out that they were not permitted to hold positions in the ministry, nor in the executive structures of the churches. Women in polygamous unions experienced rejection when their husbands accepted mission baptism. Women thus joined AICs to seek religious legitimization for their rejection.

AICs are also regarded as sites for women’s liberation. They have provided women with a forum where they find liberation from the ever present fears of witchcraft and other forces that undermine their well being. Writing about the Legio Maria of Kenya, Marie Perin-Jassay asserts that women find liberation from:<sup>592</sup>

“The duties and tensions of the home, from the domination of men

<sup>591</sup> David B. BARETT, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 147.

<sup>592</sup> Marie-Perrin JASSY, *Women in African Independent Churches* (Geneva: Risk Books, 1971), 3.

over women, from the burdens of traditional customs and innumerable taboos, from the threat of death and disease of their children. Liberation in faith from everything that oppressed them, until a source of power stronger than the traditional sources, ancestors, spirits and magicians, was offered them: Christianity, in which all human beings regardless of age or sex could reach God.”

Women in these churches find relief for their physiological and psychological symptoms which are often linked with dissatisfaction at home. Elsewhere in Africa, AICs, have healing homes and even hospitals that deal with women’s specific problems like infertility, maternity care and their roles as wives and mothers.

Women thus give each other material and spiritual support, which could be interpreted as liberation. This applies to charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches as well. As earlier observed, spiritual AICs, Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches are Pentecostal in character. This characteristic, when reinforced by the pneumatic traditional context, provides women with opportunities in worship, and leadership. In the Pentecostal tradition, all Christians have the possibility of receiving the same experience and gifts of the Holy Spirit as described in the New Testament.<sup>593</sup> Women, just like men, therefore experience the Holy Spirit and are endowed with the ability to dream, see visions, prophesy, preach, teach, exorcise and even heal. There are consequently many women in older AICs, Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches working as pastors, evangelists, prophetesses and healers. Let us now examine some of these roles.

### III. WOMEN AS FOUNDERS

#### OF AFRICAN INSTITUTED CHURCHES

The founding of churches by women in Africa is the ultimate act of religious independency and self-determination. Since the establishment of Christianity in Africa there has always been an upsurge of female religious leadership particularly in the prophetic, revival movements, African Instituted Churches and Neo-Pentecostal Christianity. In these churches, women have been experiencing a measure of Christian ministerial freedom and equality hitherto denied them in the mainline churches. Not only are

<sup>593</sup> Acts of the Apostles 2:1-4; cf. 1 Corinthians 12.

they visible in ecclesial leadership as founders of churches, bishops, pastors and evangelists, but they also function as prophetesses, prayer leaders, healers and heads of church organizations and departments. They are promoting the inculturation of Christianity by interpreting the Gospel message in a new perception that is both liberating and empowering especially to their female colleagues and followers.

Not only have they managed to break cultural barriers engendered in the patriarchal culture, but they are also agents of change, for they have contributed to the evolution of a new concept of church which is more inclusive and recognizes the varied talents and insights of both men and women. The road to this process has not been smooth, but women have been able to surmount various odds in their attempt to shape new communities and new personal and collective values. It is important to point out from the outset that this preponderance of women is not found in equal measure in all Christian new religious movements in Africa. Women's involvement in the churches is prominent in churches with a pneumatic emphasis. Hence, their leadership and participation is mainly evident in the Spiritual/Zionist/Apostolic/Aladura AICs, the Charismatic/Neo-Pentecostal churches and the revival movements.

Their involvement in the Ethiopian/Nationalist/African churches seems relatively muted. As was noted earlier, these churches adopted the theology and polity of the churches they seceded from. In the nineteenth and most part of the twentieth centuries, former mission churches had no women in the ordained ministries. However, even after the mainline churches started ordaining women, some of the former Ethiopian/African churches did not modify their stand. The African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa, for example, adopted the organizational structure and some practices of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Hence ordination of women is out of the question. Their women's organization, mother's union has adopted the pattern and objectives of similar women's associations in the mainline churches like, the Woman's Guilds, Catholic Women Association and Dorcas Society of the Seventh day Adventists. Women's power in these associations can, however, not be underestimated. Through them, women are deeply involved in evangelism, providing social and spiritual support to each other as well as organizing family life and fund raising for the church. Women's need for status and opportunities for initiatives are provided in these associations. This chapter will therefore confine itself to the spiritual AICs and Charismatic/Neo-Pentecostal churches.

It is not possible to give exact figures on the number of AICs and Charismatic churches in Africa founded by women. Barrett, in his 1968 study, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*<sup>594</sup> suggests several hundred out of six thousand Christian movements. In a geographically focused study in the town of Calabar, south-eastern Nigeria, Rosalind Hackett identifies six AICs founded by women out of 248 known religious institutions. All over Africa even the recent Neo-Pentecostal churches and ministries count among them hundreds of women founders not to mention adherents. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate women's agency in the development of Christianity in Africa.

Women founders of religious movements are not a recent phenomenon in Africa. One of the most famous among African founders and prophetesses was Kimpa Vita, later baptized Dona Beatrice, who in 1704 founded the Antonian movement in the Kongo. She was reportedly a woman of noble birth and a leader of a traditional ritual society known as Marinda before she emerged as a Christian prophetess. Like many African prophetesses after her, she had ecstatic experiences. She claimed to have died and resurrected and also alleged that she was the reincarnation of St. Anthony.

Kimpa Vita claimed to have been commissioned to preach, teach and proclaim the coming judgment. She proclaimed an anti-colonial contextualized Gospel and held that a messiah would come to restore the Kongo kingdom to its former glory. Her "attempt to organize an African church with black saints and an indigenous hierarchy presented a challenge to the hegemony of the Portuguese Roman Catholic Church."<sup>595</sup> She is considered an innovator, for she called for cultural nationalism, political unity and self-determination at a crucial time of political and social unrest. She challenged the ideology of white supremacy that was a crucial tool for colonization by calling for removal of white portraits. Kimpa Vita's message appealed to the people because of her synthesis and reinterpretation of Kongo and Catholic beliefs and practices. Her attack against Portuguese hegemony led to her being accused of propagating heresy, and she was burnt at the stake in 1706. She became a national heroine and martyr. Kimpa Vita is today regarded as a prototype of the widespread African modern phenomenon of prophecy.

Grace Tani and Marie Lalou are well known founders of churches in West Africa. They were both prominent prophetesses, healers and leaders in the Harrist movement. Tani founded the Church of the Twelve Apostles

<sup>594</sup> BARETT, *Schism and Renewal*, p. 148.

<sup>595</sup> A. ANDERSON, *African Reformation* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002), 48.

in 1918, together with Kwesi John Nackabah, who became the administrative and public leader. This dual arrangement was a convenient method used by several AICs to overcome traditional male resistance to women's leadership. Tani was a traditional priestess before she had an extraordinary encounter with Harris in Ghana. Her church emphasized healing through faith in God and through the use of sanctified water.<sup>596</sup>

Mary Lalou, on the other hand, founded the Deima Church. She too experienced dreams before her conversion and was instructed to preach a message of peace and healing. She performed healings using holy water and urged people to abandon witchcraft. She had also been instructed to abandon conjugal relations and the persistence of her husband led to his death and that of his brother who inherited her. She was accused of witchcraft and had to flee to her natal home. Mary Lalou was childless. Her successor, princess Geniss, whom she had nominated, was succeeded by an unapproved spiritual successor, Ble Nahi, also a childless woman.

Both Marie Lalou and Ble Nahi shared similar characteristics. They were social misfits of a type, since both were childless and were accused of harming or killing their husbands. Both women transformed and legitimized their socially unacceptable circumstances through spiritual means. They claimed status and were valued as ideal spiritual mothers who had renounced their roles as traditional mothers for the good of the community. This was unprecedented in traditional context. Mary Lalou and Grace Tani imbibed Harris' message of radical social transformation particularly in terms of existing gender ideology. Some of the changes that he instituted concerned societal attitudes towards menstruating women. Harris urged the abandoning of practices of secluding women and even discouraged expensive and elaborate funeral practices. The mourning period for widows was also shortened and women were no longer expected to shave their heads or mourn for a whole year.<sup>597</sup> This address of cultural practices that oppressed women was also evident in the Lumpa church of Alice Leshina.

Alice Leshina Mulenga Lubusha, popularly known as "Prophetess Leshina", was born in the early 1920s in Chinsali District of Zambia.<sup>598</sup> In

<sup>596</sup> Inus DANEEL, *The Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987), 46. See also James AMANZA, *African Christianity in Botswana* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1998), 62-65.

<sup>597</sup> Sheila S. WALKER, "Women in the Harrist Movement", in Benetta JULES-RESETTE (ed.), *The New Religions of Africa* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1979), 87-115, 96.

<sup>598</sup> Kampamba MULENGA, *Blood in their Hands* (Lusaka: Zambia Educational Publishing House, 1998).



1954 she founded the Lumpa Church during politically turbulent times and it grew to be one of the most successful churches in Zambia. Like Dona Beatrice and other prophetesses before her, she underwent a death and resurrection experience after a period of illness, and came back with a message of repentance, destruction of witchcraft and healing. She is renowned for her witchcraft eradication activities and evolving an indigenous theology especially in worship and liturgy. Her church was attractive to women due to its enforcement of monogamy, denouncement of widow inheritance and other practices that were inimical to women's well being. Lenshina governed the church like a Bemba chief, and this elicited hostility from the local traditional chiefs who felt their positions threatened by her overwhelming authority.

In Alice Lenshina, as Hackett observes, "we have once again the example of a woman revitalizing and reforming both indigenous and exogamous traditions and establishing a new community which provided new values and new security in the midst of social, political and religious upheavals."<sup>599</sup> It is unfortunate that she was not able to establish an authority structure inclusive of women or exclusively for women. After her imprisonment by the Kaunda government in 1964 and subsequent death in 1978, the church splintered and none of the factions are led by women.<sup>600</sup>

Mai Chaza, a Shona prophetess who founded the Guta la Jehova movement (City of Jehova), had similar death and resurrection experiences like Dona Beatrice and Alice Lenshina. Like Marie Lalou and Ble Nahi she left her husband, claiming to have had revelations to lead a celibate life, and preached healing, especially for barren women the blind and the infirm. Her fame as a healer spread and people from Zimbabwe and all over southern Africa came to her for healing. Her movement initially operated within the Methodist Church, where she was a member. However, due to the challenges it created to official authority, it became a separate organization, the Mai Chaza Church in 1955. Like Grace Tani and Dona Beatrice, she conducted herself as a traditional woman ritualist, drawing upon the methods of spirit medium and traditional healer among the Shona. She died in 1960 and was accorded messianic honors. She too did not bequeath leadership to a woman and the church split eventually falling into the hands of a Malawian man, Mapaulos, later known as Vamatenga (someone from heaven). Mai Chaza's spirit is alleged to have possessed him and the subsequently revitalized and reorganized the church.

<sup>599</sup> HACKETT, "Women and New Religious Movements", p. 263.

<sup>600</sup> MULENGA, *Blood in their Hands*, p. 90.

In Nigeria, the Aladura churches give women room to express their leadership abilities. This is especially so in the Cherubim and Seraphim churches which have produced remarkable women leaders. As in all spiritual/Zionist AICs, leadership patterns follow closely those in African traditional religion where women were ritual leaders and agents of spirits. As we noted earlier, the Sacred Eternal Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim was founded by Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon and Moses Orimolade. At the age of 15 in June 1925, Christianah is said to have fallen into a trance for several days after attending a Corpus Christ Day procession in a Roman Catholic Church. While in this state, she was taken to heaven by an angel and subjected to spiritual tests. She was taught prayers for healing and commanded to abandon traditional medicine. When she woke up from the trance she found her family had called Moses Orimolade, a renowned prayer healer, to pray for her. She had been shown this man in her trance. Captain Abiodun, as she was later known, differed with Orimolade and organized her own independent faction of the movement. She is considered as the “most prominent and energetic evangelist in the movement. She was instrumental in establishing the society throughout Yorubaland.”<sup>601</sup> She married in 1942. Despite major challenges to her authority and various legal battles, she is still regarded as the founder of the movements. In 1986 she finally won the headship of the entire Cherubim and Seraphim movement.<sup>602</sup>

In Kenya, several women have founded AICs. Gaudencia Aoko started the Legio Maria Church of Africa in 1963, together with Holy Father Melkio, Lodivicus, Simeon Ondeto. They were both Catholics. Gaudencia received a prophetic call to denounce witchcraft and sorcery after both her children had died through witchcraft. As a result of this incident, she began a religious crusade and established her own anti-witchcraft movement that ultimately broke away from the Legio. She sought assistance of Marcellinus Orongo, a prophet and preacher in Tanzania, who baptized her. She returned to Kenya, crucifix and rosary in hand, healed the sick, burnt amulets and battled against evil spirits.<sup>603</sup>

Her example inspired Luo women by introducing the possibility of freedom from the domination of their husbands and in-laws—a continued

<sup>601</sup> HACKETT, “Women and New Religious Movements”, p. 265.

<sup>602</sup> Mercy Amba ODUYOYE, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 126.

<sup>603</sup> Peter J. DIRVEN, *The Maria Legio: “The Dynamics of a Breakaway Church among the Luo in East Africa”*, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Pontifica Universitas Gregoriana, Rome, 1970), 139-156.

source of tension and frustration in Luo society. In encouraging these reforms, Aoko's movement reacted to the political structure of the Catholic Church and developed a lay clergy with married priests and priestesses. Unfortunately, Aoko was not able to establish a stable church community. Her influence waned in both Kenya and Tanzania. As Jules-Rosette argues, here we see a problem of female leadership, the inability to transform ceremonial influences into an official position of full-time leadership and to transfer that leadership to other women in subsequent generations.<sup>604</sup>

Besides these prominent women founders of AICs in Africa, there are several others who are lesser known and they too have had a remarkable influence in the development of Christianity in their regions. Mother Christinah Mokotundi Nku, a Ndebele woman from South Africa and reared in the Dutch Reformed Church, experienced visions in 1906. She eventually founded the St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission in 1933. This is one of the largest and most prominent AICs in the northern province of South Africa. She became renowned for her efficacious prayers for healing and use of holy water. She was known as the "Founder and Life President" of the church. Unfortunately, as she grew older, her grip on the church began to wane and Peter John Masango was elected Archbishop in 1970. However, while Masango retained the administrative position, Ma Nku continued to be the "spirit" of the church. Though the church had a large membership by the time Masango and Ma Nku died in 1984 and 1988 respectively, it subsequently splintered. Dr. Lydia August, Ma Nku's daughter, continued her mother's work of healing until she died in 1997. There have been at least six secessions from the church led by women.<sup>605</sup>

In Kenya, Mary Senaida Dorcas Akatsa has been drawing thousands of people to her church, Jerusalem Church of Christ in the sprawling Kawangware slums, in the outskirts of Nairobi city since 1985. She is renowned as a faith healer and her denunciation of witchcraft. Like Lenshina, Ma Nku and others before her, she too experienced visions and received gifts of prophecy and healing since she was 12 years old. She is married with two children. Her healing ideology is derived from her

<sup>604</sup> Bennetta JULES-ROSETTE, "Cultural Ambivalence and Ceremonial Leadership: The Role of Woman in Africa's New Religious Movements," in John C.B. WEBSTER & Ellen L. WEBSTER (eds), *The Church and Women in the Third World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 95.

<sup>605</sup> HACKETT, "Women and New Religious Movements", p. 266.

indigenous Luhya background. Mary retains the spiritual authority and is the patron of the church, while men have occupied legal authority.<sup>606</sup>

In the town of Calabar, in the Cross-river State, Nigeria, Rosalind Hackett identified six AICs founded and ran by women. Examples of these churches are: the Church of Christ the Good Shepherd, founded by Mrs Lucy Harret Harrison in 1946; Holy Chapel of Miracles of Mrs Theresa Effiong, 1946; The Church of God Lamentation of Jehova, of prophetess Theresa Sunday U. Inyang 1976; and Mount Olive Church of Christ 1978 of Mrs Maddie Raymond.<sup>607</sup> Like Akatsa's church, these are all spiritual AICs whose main attraction is faith-healing, which accounts for the vast majority of converts and casual associates. A characteristic feature of all of them (including the earlier ones mentioned) is their dealing with women's gender specific problems of infertility, sickness and family problems. Men also generally exercise the executive power of the churches while women retain the more spiritual roles and are often addressed as "spiritual mothers".

It is an interesting fact that these women prophetesses and healers often begin their ministry at a very young age. Dona Beatrice began at the age of 22, Lenshina at the age of 29, Aoko was 20 years old, Captain Abiodun was 15, Akatsa was 12 and Mrs Maddie Raymond of Mount Olive Church of God was barely 20 when she began having religious experiences. Some of these women married early and the arduous task of raising a family can be regarded as consistent with and even the norm of prophetic office. Others, like Mai Chaza and Marie La Lou, who operated totally within the framework of indigenous African religion, had to separate themselves from traditional conceptions of women in order to access ritual power. They therefore had to renounce all sexual relations and marriage.

#### IV. WOMEN IN CHARISMATIC/PENTECOSTAL MINISTRIES

In the more recent Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches, women play even greater leadership roles. This is due to the Pentecostal theology that provides avenues for Charismatic gifting regardless of gender. To some extent the attitudes towards women's leadership has been positive. An examination of structures of authority in these churches reveals an

<sup>606</sup> Philomena N. MWAURA, *A Theological and Cultural Analysis of Healing in Jerusalem Church of Christ and Nabii Christian Church of Kenya* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kenyatta University, 2001).

<sup>607</sup> R. HACKETT, "Women as Leaders and Participants in the Spiritual Churches", in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXI, 2 (1991), 191-208.

egalitarian structure influenced by a democratic spirit. Women have therefore been able to experience ministerial freedom not possible even in the spiritual AICs. They are not just “spiritual mothers” but have executive administrative positions as well. We agree with Asamoah-Gyadu that the emerging role of women in these charismatic ministries is indicative of their theological position, where God’s call to them is not passive but a compelling call to participate fully in Christian missions at all levels.<sup>608</sup>

Since the 1970s, ministries and churches founded by women have multiplied all over Africa. In Kenya Margaret Wangare started having religious experiences when she was in high school in Banana Hill, Kiambu District in 1974. She was a member of the student revival movement at the time. She operated as an itinerant revival evangelist before she founded her own church. Her ministry involved faith healing and the preaching of salvation and revivalism. Initially she operated in her parent’s compound but later traveled all over the country from the 1980s till today. She is now the presiding bishop of the Church of the Lord. In 1980, Wangare underwent theological education in the All Nations Bible School in Benin City, Nigeria, under the tutelage and guidance of the late Archbishop Benson Idahosa, founder of Church of God Mission International. Other recent founders of Charismatic churches and interdenominational ministries in Kenya are Margaret Wanjiru, founder, Bishop of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (1993), and Teresia Wairimu of Faith Evangelists Ministries respectively (1989). These women leaders have managed to empower fellow women that have established churches elsewhere.

Asamoah-Gyadu notes the influence and authority of Pastor Christy Doe Tetteh, founder and leader of the Solid Rock Chapel based at North Kaneshie in Accra, Ghana. She is famous for her pioneering role as the first female founder of a Charismatic church. Like Margaret Wangare of Church of the Lord, she was trained in Benson Idahosa’s All Nations Bible School in 1982. Hers is a ministry of deliverance which she interprets as part of Divine plan. Her ministry, like that of others, is legitimized by encounter with God through a conversion experience and subsequent endowment with divine power that manifests itself in the ability to heal and deliver from demonic powers.

In Nigeria, Bolaji Olayinka has commented on the increase in women-founded Charismatic/Pentecostal churches, particularly in Yorubaland since the 1970s. Dorcas Olaniyi founded the Agbala Daniel Church in 1979, after several religious experiences interpreted as signs of her call to

<sup>608</sup> ASAMOAH-GYADU, “Fireballs in our Midst”, p. 21.

ministry. She is the archbishop of her church, which has opened several branches in Nigeria and New Jersey, USA. She has a master's degree in Divinity. Another woman church founder is Stella Ajisebutu, founder/minister in charge of Water from the Rock Church (Faith Covenant Church). Though her religious experiences and activities as leader of a prayer group started while she was a university student, it was not until 1999 that she established her church under God's command.<sup>609</sup>

Analyzing the role of women leaders in the new generation churches, Olaniyi poignantly states that these women have become effective role models in the promotion of equality between men and women in church and society. They have given credence to the view that "failure to make use of women's potential represents a serious under utilization of human resources and abilities for the development of human society."<sup>610</sup> The women leaders are renowned just like those of an earlier generation for faith-healing, pastoral care that is gender specific, motherly concern for their adherents and capacity to inspire and support other women in the ministry. Many of these churches have established Bible schools for training pastors, and college enrollment comprises a sizeable number of women trainees. Their promotion of theological education is a radical departure from leadership in the spiritual AICs, which are purely based on charisma, and end up being ceremonial. In spiritual AICs like the Church of the Twelve Apostles, until the 1980s only men would acquire theological training and hence become evangelists, while women would be confined to the roles of healers and prophetesses. AICs still limit the role of women by sourcing their gender ideology from traditional society. Charismatic and Pentecostal groups have provided a larger space, though some groups still debate women sanctuary roles. Explanations for the enlarged space include the fact that many of the women are educated and operated in universities with their male counterparts. Some even acquired proficiency through Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International that admits female membership unlike the situation in America. Sodalities like Women Aglow have also equipped many. Some women trained along with their husbands and minister with them. Indeed, it is quite fashionable for couples to found and minister together. As in the case of Benson Idahosa, his wife inherited the mantle of leadership at his death.

<sup>609</sup> Bolaji Olukemi OLAYINKA, *Female Leaders of New Generation Churches as Change Agents in Yorubaland* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, 2000), 137-166.

<sup>610</sup> OLAYINKA, *Female Leadership*, p. 128.

In Malawi, Bishop Mercy Yami is another example of a founder and leader of a charismatic ministry. Born in 1950, she had her spiritual formation in the Keswick movement, which was introduced to Malawi through revival meetings, organized by the Evangelical Christian Association. She became “born again” in 1976 and was disciplined at the Assemblies of God until 1978 when she started working part time for “New Life For All,” a fellowship established to nurture new converts in the faith in Blantyre.<sup>611</sup> In 1978, during an Easter Fellowship, she rededicated her life to God and was called to become an evangelist to preach whenever she found people, on the streets, in prisons and particularly among the blind and destitute. She had to choose between evangelism and marriage and consequently left her marriage.

In 1994 she started Zodabwitsa (Miracles) ministry at Chilomoni in Blantyre, and later teamed up with pastor Lumwira to establish Blessed Hope Church. Bishop Mercy (now Yami, meaning “Jesus in me”), became the office director while pastor Lumwira was the field director. Her work involved overseeing training of pastors managing the finances and grounding new converts in the word. She differed with Pastor Lumwira, who was not comfortable with women leadership. He claimed that female leadership was contrary to biblical teaching. They parted ways in 1995 and she founded another church, “The Love of God Church”. This leadership dispute is reminiscent of that between Moses Orimolade and Captain Abiodun of Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim. Although leadership disputes in churches are not purely gender based, when they involve men and women, the Bible is used to justify women’s exclusion or relegation to the periphery.

Other churches like Vine Branch Church and Christ Life Church in Nigeria have numerous female priests.<sup>612</sup> Churches like Redeemed Christian Church of God, Winners Chapel International and Lighthouse Church have prominent roles for women as wives of pastors, evangelists, pastors and even heads of departments. Before we analyze the nature of women’s leadership roles in the AICs, we shall discuss other opportunities for participation available for women in these churches.

<sup>611</sup> PHIRI, “African Women in Mission”, p. 280.

<sup>612</sup> Dorcas A. OLUBANKE, “The History of Good Women: Association of the Christ Apostolic Church”, (Unpublished Paper, January 2002), 8.

## V. WOMEN AS HEALERS

The healing function is significant in AICs, Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal Churches and is usually the basis for their appeal. Most usually join after experiencing healing, and in fact, some Spiritual AICs function as hospitals. Culturally perceived illnesses, usually related to women's problems of infertility and childbirth, are dealt with by male and female healers. As Jules-Rosette argues, women can easily identify with AICs by using a maternal healing metaphor, for they join sometimes due to reasons associated with their nurturing roles as wives and mothers.<sup>613</sup> Among the Maranke Apostles of Zimbabwe there are several types of women healers, healer-prophets, ordained healers and midwives. As healers, they diagnose illness and even develop a reputation for their profound cures. Similarly the activities of midwives, who are charismatic healers, involve hearing mother's confessions and delivery of babies.

Paul Breidenbach notes the prominence of women as healers and patients in the Church of the Twelve Apostles. He observes:<sup>614</sup>

“The Sofo (prophetess) is the primary healing adept within the movement. They (women) seem to command both affection and respectful obedience not just because they are confirmed with the ‘a spirit to work with’, but also because of the wide range of their specialized knowledge and activity. They act as diviners of illness, in many instances they interpret the participants’ or their own dreams to effect healing; particularly all of them are expert midwives; they bear no major burden of directing the healing rituals and during the rest of the week they minister to the physical wants of the patients; throughout all this activity, they are continuously involved in giving counsel and advice.”

In most countries in Africa, due to the prevailing economic hardships and poverty, most people cannot afford the expensive medical care. Besides the prohibitive costs of drugs, most clinics are often crowded, understaffed and inefficient. These factors make life unbearable, particularly for the poor. Modern medicine has also not been able to respond to culturally perceived illnesses and this has led to many people

<sup>613</sup> JULES-ROSETTE, “Cultural Ambivalence”, p. 93.

<sup>614</sup> Paul BREIDENBACH, “The Woman on the Beach and the Man in the Bush: Leadership and Adeptness in the Twelve Apostles Movement in Ghana”, in Bennetta JULES-ROSETTE (ed.), *The New Religions of Africa* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1979), 109.



turning to traditional or charismatic healers in AICs and Neo-Pentecostal churches. These healers provide alternative medical care, spiritual healing and services equivalent to psychotherapy and group therapy; to those unable to afford the high cost of professional services.

Furthermore, the healing is mediated in a loving communal context with ecstatic dancing, singing and spiritual experiences. The healers are people who share a similar worldview with the patients and they diagnose illness and treat it in a manner understandable to the people. The churches thus serve as a refuge to those who feel the need for this form of ministry. Healers like Mary Akatsa of Jerusalem Church of Christ and others in Spiritual AICs employ healing methods that take into account indigenous African causal explanations, and sometimes, remedies.

The healing metaphor in these churches, not only enables women to ascend the social ladder and gain status and recognition, but it also empowers them to fight forces of oppression. Such forces are unemployment, breakdown of family relationships, poverty, lack of resources and witchcraft. Through their claim that God's Spirit empowers them to heal, these women join God in a constant struggle against personal and communal oppression. Healing is therefore a metaphor for a spirituality of survival and a search for well being. Daneel also argues that it is in their "healing colonies that a balance between male patriarchy and female emancipation is struck. These centers are in a sense the symbols of women's liberation where reputed prophetesses are free to pay full attention to the afflictions and a wide range of domestic concerns of women."<sup>615</sup> The prophetesses' healing ministry may sometimes stride other sectors for example church leadership and management or even local political matters. He cites the example of the late Bishop Mutendi's wife, a prominent prophetess-healer in the Zimbabwe ZCC, who acted as a pastoral consultant and gave advice to ZCC chiefs and elders on local disputes. Another woman prophetess, Mai Febi was highly regarded for her fairness and dignified autonomy in relation to church leaders.<sup>616</sup> Women in the Neo-Pentecostal churches like Margaret Wanjiru and Christy Doe attain status and recognition due to their successful deliverance ministries, which also deal with among other things women's gender specific problems.

<sup>615</sup> DANEEL, "AIC Women", p. 313.

<sup>616</sup> DANEEL, "AIC Women", p. 313.

## VI. WOMEN AS EVANGELISTS

AICs, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches have organizations within them that are involved in evangelistic outreach, and this facilitates the numerical growth of the church in Africa. In southern Africa, the women's associations known as *Rwadzano* can rightly be described as missionary or evangelistic task forces.<sup>617</sup> Evangelism is engaged in through organized seminars, retreats and conferences. Neo-Pentecostal churches like Jesus Is Alive Ministries, Winners Chapel International and Lighthouse Church hold monthly ladies conferences that focus on issues concerning women and how to empower them in their spiritual lives and in their gender roles. They also have women organizations that are responsible, not only for organizing evangelistic campaigns, but also the general welfare of the churches. Like in the mainline churches, these associations are the pillars and lifelines of the AICs and Neo-Pentecostal churches.

The women do evangelism in a variety of ways including, personal witnessing to their faith in their daily activities, house to house evangelism and distribution of tracts in market places and other centers within their respective communities. Olubanke observes that the women in the Good Women Association of the Christ Apostolic Church evangelize through their gift of prophecy. Like in many other spiritual AICs, the prophetic office is dominated by women who use their prophecies to challenge male authority and give guidance to the church. Through their prophecies, new church branches have been established in zones that had not been evangelized by the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC).<sup>618</sup> Women in the CAC also engage in prison ministries.

We have already seen how Bishop Yami of Malawi established ministries to poor rural women, the blind, destitute and even prisons. Daneel also notes how in the *Rwadzano* in the ZCC in Zimbabwe women actively participate in missionary campaigns which are launched thrice a year. The women act as hosts. They "accommodate the Zionist messengers, cook their food, wash their clothes and guide them into the surrounding villages for house visitations, healing ceremonies and housing evangelistic open air services."<sup>619</sup> The evangelizing teams also build on what the women have done throughout the year through door to door evangelism and living exemplary lives. Women evangelism in these churches features in the form of compassionate ministry of service, but also through actual preaching and

<sup>617</sup> DANEEL, "AIC Women", p. 319.

<sup>618</sup> OLUBANKE, "The History of the Good Women", pp. 4-5.

<sup>619</sup> DANEEL, "AIC Women as Bearers", p. 320.

Bible study. Through their persistent word and deed ministry, the women in the ZCC Ruwadzano and other AICs and Neo-Pentecostal churches have gained for themselves the reputation of being dedicated evangelizers due to their zeal. Unfortunately like both Daneel and Olubanke observe, women do not always receive the credit for contributing in expanding the church. In societies that are predominantly patrilineal and patriarchal, the general progress and success of the church is possibly attributed to male players, even where women's contribution is internally recognized. Where women are ordained as pastors and evangelists, like in the Neo-Pentecostal churches, their roles as evangelists are more evident. However, they too surmount various difficulties despite their Charismatic endowment.

## VII. GENDER AND CLIENTELE:

### WOMEN AS PARTICIPANTS

We have already noted that AICs, Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches provide a caring support network to women and opportunities for personal development. Women, who because of their poverty and personal circumstances find themselves excluded from other self-help groups, find a place in these churches.<sup>620</sup> Not only do women receive social, spiritual, psychological and material benefits in these churches, but they also feel affirmed and their dignity upheld. Commenting on this, Hackett avers:<sup>621</sup>

“Within the intimacy of the compound church, women may become ‘known and accepted as persons’ and become ‘full citizens of the Kingdom of God’, in which they can take initiatives and responsibilities.”

This source of personal validation is especially important for women who are sick, childless, divorced or accused of witchcraft. Whereas single mothers, divorced and separated women are rarely given positions of responsibility in mainline churches, the AICs and Neo-Pentecostal churches ordain such women and give them other church responsibilities.

Here it is acknowledged that spiritual power is Charismatic and both men and women are equally channels of God's power. In spiritual AICs, for example, mobility within the church hierarchies is rarely determined by

<sup>620</sup> Janet SEALEY, *“We have the Healing Power”*: Independent Churches and Women in Urban Kenya (Cambridge: Anthropology, 1984), 2.

<sup>621</sup> HACKETT, “Women as Leaders”, pp. 203-204.

formal education but by spiritual gifts, seniority and experience. A woman may therefore have little formal education, limited economic means and low social status, and yet within the ritual context her role may be heightened or reversed.<sup>622</sup> However, in progressive AICs, where there may be women with professional skills and higher education, they could be considered in assignment to responsible positions. Churches like the Christ Apostolic Church, Celestial Church of Christ and Church of the Lord (Aladura) have highly qualified men and women in their ranks. They may not be regarded as churches of the poor like most older AICs in eastern Africa. Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches may, as already noted, provide leadership opportunities to women, but here mobility is determined by both charisma and educational achievement. Their pattern of ministry requires arduous theological training for their clientele may comprise a majority of the middle class in urban and rural areas.

Worship also provides women an opportunity for spiritual rejuvenation and escape from the drudgery of life. Here worship is participatory, and every person's needs—men, women and children—are mediated in the context of prayer, singing and dancing. This creates a sense of belonging and community. In these churches, which are like families, women are able to express themselves freely through prayer, sharing testimonies, leading the singing, ecstatic experiences like falling into a trance, prophesying, speaking in tongues and dancing. They feel that their spirituality is not repressed or devalued. Women are also able to show initiative in the area of music as composers, choir leaders and conductors. Barrett notes how women gained fame as hymn composers in the Wanga AICs in Kenya.<sup>623</sup> Mai Chaza too composed a number of hymns that were used in her church, as did Alice Lenshina.

Scholars have noted the important role AICs and Neo-Pentecostal churches play in providing entertainment and relaxation for women. Since women do not have the same social outlets like men, the church and church women associations become centers for socialization and welfare. The churches not only provide fellowship, but solidarity in terms of need. Women here, not only exchange ideas on how to run their families, but they also share and access empowering information like legal counsel, how to conduct business and even to lead a prayerful life. This is, for example, evident in Jesus Is Alive Ministries, Winners Chapel International and

<sup>622</sup> HACKETT, "Women and New Religious Movements", p. 279.

<sup>623</sup> D.B. BARRETT, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 150.

Africa Independent, Pentecostal Church of Africa. Hoehler-Fatton notes the liberation experienced by women in the Roho Movement in Kenya. Women are able to “from time to time reject the self-effacing posture that dominant ideology prescribes for (them). Women experience peace, reconstruct their identity as a result of the “gradual spiritual personal development grounded in a new worldview and faith.”<sup>624</sup>

The sharing of language and cultural background, particularly in the rural areas, provides a common bond and understanding. In the urban areas where so many things seem to be beyond the control of the individual, the sense of belonging created in the churches is important. In their participation, women benefit from being a part of a community, whose worship they can enjoy. This enjoyment and entertainment AICs and Pentecostal churches provide, is an important aspect in the attraction of women. In Nairobi, Accra, Lagos, Harare, Johannesburg and other areas in Africa, these churches provide services and mediate for those in the fringes of society. With regard to women, it is the prostitutes, unmarried mothers, the widowed and divorced for whom these churches in particular provide services.

## VIII. CONCLUDING EVALUATION:

### WOMEN'S ROLES AND STATUS

We have noted that several scholars hail the opportunities availed for leadership and participation availed to women in AICs, Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal churches. These churches have created structures within which women may acquire power and responsibility. But how empowering are these roles and opportunities? Have they led to women's equality with men in the management and life of the churches? Jules-Rosette argues that in the Vapostori, which is a highly patriarchal church, women do not hold administrative positions. Their roles are confined to nurturing functions and hence women attain little more than “ceremonial leadership and symbolic” roles. She further observes that ceremonial leadership may imply political subordination.<sup>625</sup>

It has also been noted that women founders of churches are not able to bequeath leadership to other women. This happened in the Mai Chaza Church, Lumpa Church of Alice Lenshina and the Legio Maria Africa of

<sup>624</sup> C. HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Spirit and Fire: History Faith and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 183.

<sup>625</sup> JULES-ROSETTE, “Cultural Ambivalence”.

Gaudencia Aoko. These attitudes should be seen in the light of wider social-cultural norms. Though women may have religious authority, inherit and acquire ascribed status in some societies in Africa, they may not become clan heads or be eligible for kingship. However, as Hackett observes having a woman founder has led in some churches to the emergence of other women in the same movement. In the Church of the Twelve Apostles, Grace Tani and John Kwasi Nackabah had a “ritual parallelism” with distinct roles for men and women. This church has two distinct services: the Friday healing service conducted by the prophetesses in the garden and the Sunday “Chapel” service, conducted by young educated men. The healing service is the central event of the week.<sup>626</sup> This church, therefore, has provided women opportunities for service.

In the Cherubim and Seraphim churches women are found in the hierarchy, like Lya Alakoso (Superintendent mother). Many of them have played major roles in the expansion of the movement by establishing several branches. For example, Madam Christianah Olatunrinle from Ondo was a great evangelist and became Lya Alakoso of the Western Conference of the Cherubim and Seraphim. Another woman was “Alanke Igbalaolu, founder and leader of the Ija-Igbo No 1 (Ibadan). More generally within the organization women may attain such high offices as mother Cherub, mother Seraph, Captain and mother-in-Israel ranks equivalent to Apostles and Senior apostles.”<sup>627</sup> These titles are, however, Charismatic titles rather than administrative.

In the Celestial Church of Christ, Crumbley observes that there are dual roles and responsibilities for men and women. Women’s roles are confined to the Charismatic domain while administrative functions are restricted to men. However, women may preach and have administrative roles among women and within women’s organizations. Space in the sanctuary is also gendered and boundaries are strictly adhered to.<sup>628</sup> This is true also in the Arathi churches in central Kenya, Maranke Apostles and the Johana Mosowe Apostles of Zimbabwe. Olubanke observes the same in the Christ Apostolic Church. In the Church of the Lord (Aladura), however, there are parallel positions for women right up to the top of the hierarchy. “Women can found and head churches and can theoretically become primate.”<sup>629</sup> This situation is not obtained in many Aladura churches.

<sup>626</sup> BREIDENBACH, “The Woman on the Beach”, pp. 107-113.

<sup>627</sup> HACKETT, “Women and New Religious Movements”, p. 269.

<sup>628</sup> Deidre Helen CRUMBLEY, “Even a Woman: Sex Roles and Mobility in an Aladura Hierarchy”, in *West African Journal of Archeology* (1985), 133-150.

<sup>629</sup> OLUBANKE, “The History of Good Women”, p. 5.

Hackett attributes this progressive attitude to the fact that the church is more exposed due to its membership in international bodies.

Although women's spiritual powers are recognized in these churches, they nevertheless experience restriction and have to contend with negative attitudes. This is the paradoxical attitude to women particularly in Spiritual AICs. Their full participation and exercise of leadership is hampered and restricted by taboos surrounding menstruation and childbirth. In the Celestial Church of Christ, Arathi, Nomiya Luo Church and Jerusalem Church of Christ, women occupy subordinate roles because ritual impurity is attributed to them. This fear of defilement of the sacred by women is demonstrated by the fact that the altar sanctuary is a male only preserve. Congregational segregation is common with separate doors for each sex.<sup>630</sup> Much attention is also paid to the way women dress in church—so that they do not distract male attention. In some churches, men may pray for both male and female supplicants, whereas women may only pray for women.

Many women leaders also face resistance from male authority. As already noted, Captain Abiodun, co-founder of the Cherubim and Seraphim faced opposition in her attempt to be recognized as the supreme head of the church. Throughout her life she had to consistently fight against male prejudice.<sup>631</sup> The Cherubim and Seraphim, just like many spiritual AICs, have fewer openings for women leaders in the hierarchy (five as opposed to nine for men).<sup>632</sup> Olubanke also observes how Mrs Pearce, an acting principal of a CAC theological college, despite her serving with dedication, was ungraciously removed from office and died shortly afterwards, dejected and frustrated. Bishop Yami of the Love of God Church had also to part ways with Pastor Lumwira due to gender based differences.

In South African Zionist churches, a distinction is also made between legal and Charismatic authority. Charismatic positions of healers and prophets are outside the hierarchy, which is administrative. This authority runs parallel to legal authority and both are usually in tension. Women mostly occupy the Charismatic authority as prophetesses and healers and do not necessarily pose a threat to male authority. Nevertheless, they have influence and power since they are regarded as channels of God's will

<sup>630</sup> CRUMBLEY, "Even a Woman".

<sup>631</sup> HACKETT, "Women and New Religious Movements", p. 27; See also J.Y.D. PEEL, *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 183.

<sup>632</sup> J.A. OMOYAJOWO, "The Role of Women in Traditional African Religions and Independent Church Movements", in *Dialogue and Alliance*, 2, 3, (1988), 201.

though the Holy Spirit. They give guidance to the church on important matters.

In the Spiritual AICs, leadership for women is also facilitated through the principle of co-dependency. Women may therefore hold positions of authority because of their husbands' positions as bishops. Where a woman may be the permanent head, a male may exist as a nominal head. This was the case in the St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission when Masango was Archbishop and Ma Nku "spiritual mother". Wives and even daughters of bishops may be ordained pastors due to positions of their husbands or fathers. Such women may exert tremendous influence, for they may have a free hand in the formation of organizations and setting up projects that benefit women. For example, the wife of Adejobi the late primate of the Church of the Lord, Aladura, was able to initiate women's prayer unions, and women's local unions and appointed the new members.<sup>633</sup>

Despite these restrictions, AICs provide women with structures within which they may acquire and exercise responsibility. Though they may be barred from accessing the higher echelons of the churches' hierarchy, they exercise power and influence through their prophetic gifts, through which they command respect and influence the church. Men may have legal authority, but women have spiritual authority that is sometimes not disputed. Nevertheless indirect authority, no matter how influential it is, cannot be equated with legal authority. There is need to bring women into the mainstream of church leadership. Very often women's prophecies have been ignored as happened with prophecies of women in the Good Women Association of CAC. Their prophecies that pastor Olutimehim should succeed Pa Latunde and not Pa Orogun went unheeded. The revelations were treated with contempt by a section of the hierarchy. The choice that was made has, since 1982, created rancor, bitterness and division.<sup>634</sup>

In the Charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal Churches women are provided with a wider range of opportunities, and without overt restrictions like in the AICs. The unstructured nature and unrestricted orientation of many of these churches and ministries allow women to take initiative. These churches and ministries, as we have seen, are prevalent in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and South Africa. In Kenya hundreds of women have since the 1980s emerged as founders of Charismatic churches, ministries and prayer fellowships.

<sup>633</sup> Harold TURNER, *The Life and faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 169.

<sup>634</sup> OLUBANKE, "The History of the Good Women", p. 4.



Lunch time revivals may be held on the streets and many cinema halls, social halls and bars are used for the same purpose.

Women are involved in leading intercessory gatherings, Bible study, praise and worship, prayer and even preaching. Several have been ordained as pastors and evangelists by their international partners, mostly based in America. In these churches, women just like in the AICs, may be vehicles of the spirit and receive spiritual gifts in the same way as men. Unlike in Spiritual AICs, they are not bound by any traditional restrictions. As Asamoah-Gyadu observes:<sup>635</sup>

“The Charismatic ministries do not impose any levitical or traditional taboos on women. They regard this as being inconsistent with New Testament teaching particularly with the missionary experience that followed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts.”

The churches have even set up Bible Schools where, among those being trained, there are women. According to Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries, God calls both men and women to serve Him at all levels. God’s power through the Holy Spirit and Christ’s death and resurrection have dismantled the hold of negative cultural traditions. These women are free to participate in ministry. These churches also apply a liberating hermeneutic in their readings of scripture in this respect. Hence Pauline injunctions directed to women are critiqued within their cultural and historical context. However as Hackett observes, with regard to Nigeria Charismatic Churches:<sup>636</sup>

“[... there still exists] ambivalent attitudes towards women. At one level they may enjoy greater participation and leadership opportunities in God’s army, at another level, they are frequently stigmatized and demonized (notably those of the unmarried and ‘liberated’ vanity).”

Charismatic views of women also show fundamentalist tendencies. Though women, as we have noted, may have freedom to exercise their spirituality and may experience relative stability within marriage due to

<sup>635</sup> ASAMOAH-GYADU, “Fireballs in our Midst”, p. 27.

<sup>636</sup> R.I.J. HACKETT, “Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXVIII, 3 (1998), 259-277, 261.

emphasis on a holiness ethic, churches that adopt a literalist interpretation of scriptures can be oppressive to women. For some, their conception of the female and marriage is patriarchal and sexist. Although they may recognize the need and value of women's occupation outside the home out of economic necessity, the sign of true womanhood to them is a woman devoting her life sacrificially to the demands of husband and children. Her primary function is as wife and mother and being subject to the authority of her husband in all spheres of life.

Those propagating a male-centered theology prescribe and encourage women's silence and subordination in church and society. Such a theology is considered normative and a basis of shaping attitudes and behavior within the churches. These churches embrace the household codes in the New Testament, which prescribe silence of women and apply them literary in practice. Matthew Ojo, writing about perceptions of marital relationships among some Nigerian Charismatic and specifically Deeper Life Bible Church, says:<sup>637</sup>

“Charismatics teach that a couple should have a joint account which they call a common purse to which all incomes go and expenses are deducted. However, the financial responsibilities of the home are those of the husband. The *wife should be obedient and submit completely to the husband* ... A sure and unmistakable mark of a woman's spirituality is her meek, humble, obedient and whole hearted submission to the husband in everything unto the Lord.”

Though this teaching is biblical, and mutual respect and obedience are virtues within human relationships, an uncritical acceptance of it can be detrimental to a woman's well being. It perceives women as lacking in moral agency which is unbiblical. All the same, the Charismatic churches just like the AICs offer women greater avenues of participation as leaders and members.

## CONCLUSION

Africa, since the nineteenth century, has exhibited varieties of responses to the Gospel depending on the historical, geographical, social,

<sup>637</sup> Mathew OJO, “Marriage and Piety among Charismatic in Nigeria”, in James COX, *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 180-197; 199.

religious and cultural contexts. These responses have produced different types of Christianities that have been labeled as Ethiopian / African / Nationalist / Zionist / Spiritual / Aladura and Pentecostal / Charismatic / Neo-Pentecostal. They have also had gender dimensions. Men and women experienced Christianity differently. Its teaching on the equality of men and women before God—and that they are both equally mediators of God's grace and the Holy Spirit—was empowering to people who experienced the brunt of the negative aspects of African culture. On the other hand, where missionary control and colonial hegemony interlocked to deny women their traditional social, economic, political and religious space, women founded and joined African indigenous churches, where they could utilize their resources and exercise their spiritual power.

In the churches women seem to access power and religious space more easily through the exercise of spirituality in healing, evangelism and leadership. Kalu argues that women have always been healers as is evident among ancient temple priestesses.<sup>638</sup> This too is evident in the African indigenous context and this is the resource that women in the African Instituted Churches, old and new draw from. The potency of female spirituality is acknowledged in these churches and its manifestation explains the attraction, impact and strength of these churches. The Neo-Pentecostal Churches may deny this link, but feminist scholars on spirituality have linked the ascendancy of female roles in churches to their inherent spirituality. In these churches, women's spiritual power is recognized although it is more evident in ritual than in affirmation.

Through the AICs and Neo-Pentecostal Churches, women have displayed innovations in religious ethic and practice through their challenge of cultural practices like widow inheritance, prolonged periods of mourning and other funeral and burial rites affecting them, and witchcraft. Through their experiences as prophets, speaking in tongues and spirit possession, women are also able to challenge male authority and hence acquire a voice in Neo-Pentecostal churches. Where ecclesiastical and cultural prohibitions do not obtain, they are able to empower other women and create positive change. Women have contributed to the humanization of the church by utilizing their talents.

The AICs and Neo-Pentecostal churches have facilitated enlarged female participation and leadership. Nevertheless, their participation is circumscribed, depending on the church, by cultural and ecclesiastical/biblical controls. In some churches, women's "roles are

<sup>638</sup> KALU; *Power, Poverty and Prayer*, p. 189.

defined in function of male authority and male conceptions of the female.”<sup>639</sup> The challenge therefore continues for Africans to evolve theologies that will challenge cultural elements that do not promote women’s well being and that create a holistic community where men, women and children experience God’s kingdom. This is the subject of the next chapter. There is no doubt however, that women have contributed to the growth of Christianity in Africa through their evangelistic zeal, leadership, gift of healing, prophecy and committed service.

<sup>639</sup> HACKETT, “Women as Leaders”, p. 201.