

Challenges Faced by Women in Church-leadership:

A multifaceted and intersectional map

By

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Abstract

This study examines the hurdles women encounter when seeking leadership positions within religious institutions. It highlights that despite changing cultural standards and increased recognition of the need for diversity and inclusiveness in religious leadership, women still face numerous barriers. The study takes an intersectional approach, recognizing that gender discrimination intersects with other factors such as race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status, leading to specific challenges for women from diverse backgrounds.

The challenges explored in the study include doctrinal and theological interpretations that have historically supported patriarchal structures, societal norms, deeply ingrained biases, and institutional obstacles like limited access to leadership roles, disparities in compensation and recognition, and a lack of mentorship and support networks. These challenges vary in intensity depending on individual circumstances, creating a complex landscape of adversity.

Furthermore, the study examines the psychological impact of these challenges, including burnout, self-doubt, and emotional fatigue, affecting both women in leadership and the communities they serve. The ultimate goal of the research is to raise awareness of these difficulties and encourage collaboration among religious organizations, academics, and activists to create more inclusive and equal environments for women in church leadership. This study contributes to the ongoing discussion about gender equality in religious institutions and emphasizes the importance of addressing the interconnected nature of these issues. It is part of a broader effort to shed light on the challenges faced by women in leadership roles across various industries and sectors, driven by deeply rooted cultural norms and systemic biases.

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CHAPTER 1

1. Background and motivation for the study

1.1. Introduction

Sill (2010:46) has asserted that when it comes to gender inequality at home and in the church, women leaders have made progress toward more equality. However, there are many spaces where this progress is not visible (it is not reflected), has not been fully realized, or no change has occurred at all. One such space where the progress is not fully realised is the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA), where women are still underrepresented in leadership roles.

In this regard, Sill (2010:46) has stated that constructed gender roles can be an impediment with regard to the advancement of women's leadership. People frequently focus more on the variety of experiences leaders have while leading rather than their actions when analysing the distinctions between men and women's leadership styles. Their capacity for leadership may be constrained by stereotypes regarding gender roles. The perceived respectability of women in leadership roles presents impediments to leadership, resulting in conflicting standards, unfavourable performance assessments, and double binds (Sill 2010:46).

The focus of my research is to connect and map the intersectional and multifaceted problems women face with regard to attaining leadership positions, and this is focused within a Christian theological and religious context, namely the church. My background is in the UPCSA, and thus, this denomination will feature in this research while I attempt to, clarify and explain women's issues with regard to church-leadership. These problems are frequently firmly ingrained in cultural values, workplace cultures, and institutionalized discrimination. Touchton & Ingram (1995:36) identifies stereotypes and gender prejudice as preconceived notions about the qualities and leadership abilities of women that may contribute to bias in decision-making. Women may be perceived as being too emotional or lacking in assertiveness, which might harm their chances of being accepted as good leaders. Simultaneously, the absence of women in high management roles might contribute to the death of female role models and mentors for aspiring female executives. Due to this lack of representation, it may be challenging for women to envision themselves in leadership roles, which may have an effect on their self-esteem and career aspirations. Juggling leadership responsibilities with family commitments can be challenging because women are generally

expected to care for children and the house. It may be inferred that women are not as committed to their profession as their male colleagues as a result (Sill 2010:46–47).

According to Touchton & Ingram (1995:36–48), these issues represent an imbalance with regard to opportunities. As a result, high-profile projects, mentorship roles, and professional advancement programs are usually out of the reach of women. This can restrict their access to the experiences necessary for enhancing their leadership abilities and prevent them from moving up the organizational hierarchy. Women may have trouble arguing for better treatment, particularly respect. Sometimes, cultural norms praise males for being forceful in negotiations while punishing women who do the same. These unintentional prejudices that harm women's contributions and self-esteem might take the shape of micro-aggressions. Women are being disrespected, being cut off, or being handed administrative tasks rather than ones that require strategic thinking. Men and women in leadership roles may be subjected to different standards when it comes to their conduct, appearance, and verbal and written communication (Sill 2010:48).

Their apparent assertiveness may be interpreted as either being excessive or lacking, which would lead to a deadlock. In conventional, male-dominated networking venues and events, women may find it difficult to establish the kinds of connections and bonds that are necessary for career advancement. Women who move into leadership positions may endure isolation in companies where males predominate, leaving them to feel lonely and disconnected from the community. It can be difficult for women to gain the confidence and respect of their colleagues when they are promoted or nominated to leadership positions not based on their qualifications but rather as a display of diversity (Sill 2010).

Within the framework of the Christian church, the study's main objective is to investigate the difficulties experienced by women in church leadership. It seeks to present a comprehensive understanding of these difficulties in line with the notion of the glass ceiling. The phrase glass ceiling in this sense refers to an imperceptible but powerful barrier that prevents women from rising to top positions inside companies or institutions. According to June (2007:46), this metaphorical glass ceiling refers to structural barriers that frequently go unmentioned that prevent women from rising to positions of higher authority within the Christian church, such as becoming pastors, bishops, or occupying significant decision-making positions. These obstacles may include gender prejudices, deeply rooted patriarchal traditions, restrictive theological interpretations of women's duties, and unwillingness to change (June 2007).

This study intends to show how comparable processes develop inside religious institutions by making comparisons to the idea of the glass ceiling in corporate and secular contexts. In an effort to help women overcome this significant yet symbolic barrier inside the Christian church, it aims to recognize, analyse, and offer insights into the many difficulties they encounter. Through this investigation, the study hopes to advance knowledge of gender dynamics in religious leadership and provide strategies for tearing down this metaphorical glass ceiling, promoting a more welcoming and equitable environment for women in church leadership positions (Sill 2010: 46–50).

My background and experience with the difficulties experienced by women in church leadership in the UPCS stem from my involvement and observation of my religious community, which is my church (June 2007). In many church congregational contexts, where women frequently encounter challenges to obtaining leadership positions and decision-making positions, I have observed the battle for gender equality and inclusiveness. These difficulties include things like prejudices, cultural interpretations of the Bible, and institutional opposition to change. I gained first-hand knowledge of the difficulties and continuous attempts to resolve these challenges within faith communities thanks to my participation in these debates and support for gender equality in church leadership (Touchton & Ingram 1995:3).

According to June (2007), various variables, such as individual experiences, religious convictions, and societal concerns, might affect the desire to research the difficulties experienced by women in church leadership. In light of this, my desire to advance social justice and gender equality was what inspired me to do research on the difficulties experienced by women in church leadership. I noticed and acknowledged inequalities inside religious institutions where women's leadership and voices were frequently silenced or limited. This unfairness concerned me because I think everyone should have an equal chance to offer his or her skills and viewpoints to spiritual and communal leadership (June 2007:10).

Furthermore, I may have been exposed to the particular challenges experienced by women in church leadership posts by my own experiences or relationships with them. My drive to undertake a study was fuelled by these encounters, a want for good change, and a more welcoming religious community. By researching these issues and bringing them to light, I sought to advance important debates, spread awareness, and promote a more just future for the church (Groothuis 1997:15).

In light of Groothuis (1997), it is important to emphasize that different religious groups and denominations have quite varied perspectives on the patriarchal nature of the church. To subvert ingrained patriarchal traditions, several religious organizations have taken action to advance gender equality and women's leadership. Talk of gender equality and religious leadership, however, frequently brings up the notion of patriarchal systems inside the church. In historically patriarchal eras, institutional norms and institutions that place a premium on male dominance and authority have frequently restricted and limited women's leadership. A societal system known as patriarchy places males in dominant and powerful roles while demoting women to frequently lower roles. This has always been a characteristic of several groups throughout history, from both ancient and modern civilizations (Groothuis 1997).

The patriarchal period is defined in the Bible as the time between the fall and the exodus. As patriarchs, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his sons oversaw their households, according to Hurly (1984:121). The Catholic Church's canon is the Bible; hence, the patriarchs' history affected, moulded, and defined how the Church's teaching was developed. Men are traditionally expected to be the head of the home due to social norms, yet God can still call both men and women. Maybe it is just that there has not been enough focus on the dating problems that women face. The assumptions made in the research on leadership in the church and society are supported by the following extract from Groothuis (1997) and Phiri (1997). Men have historically resisted women holding positions of leadership in the church, according to Groothuis, but Phiri invites the African Church to re-examine its structures in order to acknowledge the status and role of women (Phiri 1997:23).

Led by women who made Old Testament prophecies, including Anna (Neh.6:14), Noadiah (Neh.6:14), Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3), and Miriam (Exodus 15:20; Micah 6:4) (Luke 2:36). Traditionalists frequently attempt to justify why a role as significant and strong as Deborah's was an exception to the pattern of biblical male leadership. However, there are no exceptions to God's moral rule; they only occur in the context of nature and society. "If God has called Deborah to her mission, it cannot be argued that female leadership violates God's moral principles." "God put Deborah in a position of civic and spiritual authority for a couple of different reasons. God guided Debora's ascent to authority, proving that there was nothing improper or immoral about a woman holding political or spiritual power (Groothuis 1997).

According to Rush and Allen (1984:121–123), women had a personal relationship with God during the patriarchal era. He notes that Sarah (18:15), Hagar (16:7–14), and Rachel (30:6)

all went to God and prayed for their issues (Hurly 1984:122). Neither matriarchs nor priests were women during the patriarchal era. As a result, it may be inferred that males are priests and "women" are not. In my opinion, this is a bad place to start (Ibid.). Moses lived at a period when both men and women participated in ministry. God gave Paul the authority to proclaim the gospel and start churches. Although he had Jewish roots, he was a Christian who believed that men and women should be treated equally in the Apostolic Church. It describes what the women accomplished and declares that they are just as entitled to inherit the kingdom (new covenant) (Hurly 1984:120).

The new covenant was acknowledged to have begun and ended with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God gave the woman at the empty tomb the responsibility of sharing the Gospel (the Good News) with other Christians after this significant shift in the spiritual order (Matt. 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–7; Luke 24:1–10; John 20:11–18). According to God, women are not regarded as witnesses since they lie (Groothuis 1997:193), contrary to Jewish belief. In certain congregations within the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA), women may still not assume positions of authority for a variety of reasons, including religious convictions, cultural norms, and historical influences. It is essential to keep in mind that the precise causes may differ from one denomination to another and change over time (Hurly 1984). A typical illustration of what I am attempting to describe is traditional beliefs. Therefore, cultural and traditional ideas can have a big impact. Some communities have engrained gender norms and expectations that place a strong emphasis on male leadership and female subjugation. Religious rituals and hierarchical systems may be influenced by these cultural ideas. It is crucial to understand that certain churches within the UPCSA may have a more liberal and inclusive attitude to women in leadership and others may follow more conventional beliefs and practices. When it comes to change in this area, there is frequently a complicated interaction between theology, culture, history, and the efforts of church members who want more gender equality and women in leadership (Groothuis 1997).

1.2 Literature Review and Research Gap

1.2.1. Literature Review

Consideration of existing literature on this particular problem and setting provides the foundation for establishing a research gap. Numerous studies in Social Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Education, and more have examined theological reasons in favour of and against women holding leadership positions in the UPCSA, looking at how different scriptural readings and theological traditions affect women's roles in the church. The historical backdrop is included in this debate, according to Cody (2006), who assumes that future studies will examine the historical development of women's positions within the UPCSA, tracking shifts and continuities in leadership possibilities through time. According to the leadership structures and policies method, research may examine the UPCSA's organizational structures and policies and determine how these impact women's access to leadership roles (Longman & Shawna 2011).

According to Blankman and Augustine (2004:8), research may be able to pinpoint particular difficulties and impediments that women in the UPCSA experience in their pursuit of leadership positions, such as prejudice, preconceptions, and cultural norms. Issues experienced by women in church leadership within the UPCSA may be evolving or changing over time, thus it is crucial to critically evaluate the findings, pinpoint gaps in the current research, and consider this while completing your literature analysis. This will give a thorough grasp of the subject and suggest areas for prospective follow-up study or action (Blankman & Augustine 2004:16–36).

A recent report on leadership by Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) states that when women thrive, organizations thrive and nations thrive too. Women make up more than half of the population in several nations and account for around half of the labour force. They claim that women provide bread for more than 40% of households and influence 70-80% of consumer purchasing and spending. Women possess nearly 60% of bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees, and women occupy approximately 50% of management and professional-level occupations (Chisholm-Burns et al. 2017). Despite their advanced degrees and widespread employment in most professional areas, including healthcare, business, and higher education, women are frequently underrepresented in leadership positions such as chief executive officer (CEO), board member, president, and dean. Perhaps no industry has been more widely probed for gender discrepancies than business. (Chisholm-Burns et al. 2017).

Numerous obstacles prevent women from fully participating in and exerting their influence inside religious organizations, according to the issue statement regarding women in church leadership (Belleville 2017:16). Their capacity to successfully contribute to their faith communities is ultimately hampered by these difficulties, which frequently result from conventional and gender-based norms, theological interpretations, and structural restrictions (Belleville 2017). Doctrinal obstacles, where many religious traditions maintain long-held interpretations of sacred scriptures that limit women's responsibilities in leadership positions, are one of the difficulties faced by women in church leadership. Women's access to pastoral positions, preaching, and decision-making within the church may be hampered by these doctrinal impediments. Women who want to be leaders in the church may conflict with established gender norms, which are sometimes reinforced by societal and cultural expectations. These standards may deter women from seeking leadership positions or create opposition in certain situations. Lack of representation is defined as the absence of women in leadership positions within churches, which can prevent the development of varied viewpoints and limit the capacity of female members of the congregation to connect with and receive support from the leadership (Belleville 2017).

Women in church leadership commonly experience a glass ceiling, where they may experience unfair treatment that prevents them from moving up to more senior leadership roles (Allan 2018). Subtle prejudices and preconceptions may influence how church leaders view and treat women, which may diminish their standing and credibility. Women may have less access to formal theology education and leadership development programs in various religious traditions, which further limits their prospects for personal growth and development. When it comes to religious organizations, resistance to change can make it difficult to push for more gender inclusion in leadership and to criticize the status quo.

Women serving in leadership positions in churches may experience social pressure from both inside and outside of their religious communities, including criticism and doubts about their competence. Many women in church leadership positions handle family duties as well, which might provide special time management and work-life balancing issues (Allan 2018:18).

Women pursuing leadership positions may face challenges finding mentors and role models who are female in church leadership. Theological re-examination, cultural reforms within religious communities, and structural adjustments within religious institutions are all

necessary components of a complex strategy to address these issues. Promoting gender equality in church leadership is crucial for building welcoming, flourishing religious communities in addition to being an issue of justice (Allan 2018:18–22).

1.2.2. Research Gap

The research Gap centres on understanding the obstacles and barriers that women encounter in their pursuit of leadership roles within religious institutions, specifically within the context of church leadership. Thus, the role of women in church leadership has been a subject of debate and discussion for centuries (Mckoy 2011). While progress has been made in recent decades to increase the participation of women in various leadership positions within religious institutions, there is still a significant research gap when it comes to understanding the unique challenges faced by women in these roles. This thesis aims to explore the research gap surrounding the challenges encountered by women in church leadership, highlighting the importance of addressing this gap to promote gender equality and inclusivity within religious organizations (Mckoy 2011).

Mckoy (2011:12-20) explains that to comprehend the challenges women face in church leadership today, it is crucial to recognize the historical context. Traditionally, many religious institutions have upheld patriarchal structures that limit women's involvement in leadership roles. It was not until the latter half of the 20th century that significant strides were made toward gender equality within religious organizations. Ordination of women, for example, became more widely accepted in various denominations during this period. However, the historical barriers continue to influence women's experiences in church leadership today. The challenges they encounter are often rooted in deeply ingrained gender norms and traditional interpretations of religious texts (Mckoy 2011).

Further, considerations concerning how the traditional structures and beliefs inside these organizations may be adapting (or resisting adaptation) to allow women in leadership roles are raised by the shifting character of religious institutions and their responses to contemporary societal changes (Mckoy 2011). A thorough analysis that takes into account both these organizations' internal dynamics and their interactions with the larger social milieu is necessary to determine whether and how religious institutions are addressing these issues. Having said that, while some studies have looked at gender differences in leadership positions across numerous professions and businesses, the difficulties experienced by women leaders in the church have not, in comparison, gotten enough attention. There are various

causes for this research gap, including the lack of Comprehensive Studies. Even though there are studies on gender issues and leadership in religious contexts, many of these tend to be fragmented and do not provide a thorough analysis of the particular difficulties experienced by female church leaders. This research gap emphasizes the necessity for a comprehensive investigation of the various characteristics of obstacles preventing women from advancing in leadership positions (Mckoy 2011).

A thorough investigation of the effects of having women in leadership roles on the congregation and the general dynamics of the church is lacking. It is critical to look at how the congregation views women leaders, whether they are welcomed or rejected, and how they influence church culture and practices (Mckoy 2011).

1.3 Research Questions

Rq1: To what extent do cultural and religious norms influence the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in the church, and how do these norms intersect with theological perspectives and historical factors?

Rq2: What are the specific challenges and opportunities experienced by women in ministry, and how do these experiences vary across different regions, linguistic groups, and cultural contexts within South Africa?

Rq3: How have women-led advocacy and activism initiatives within the church influenced changes in church policies, practices, and theological perspectives related to women in leadership, and what lessons can be drawn from these efforts for promoting gender equity in church leadership more broadly? (Mckoy 2011:50).

1.4 Methodology

In this study, I will be conducting a literature review using a thematic-descriptive methodology. This approach involves systematically analysing and synthesizing existing literature to identify and describe recurring themes, patterns, and key concepts within a specific field of study or research topic (Phiri 1997:15). Through this method, I aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter by organizing and summarizing the relevant literature to uncover meaningful insights and trends. This is done by reading through the selected literature and identifying recurring themes, challenges, and barriers that women encounter when attempting to bridge the leadership gap. These challenges could include stereotypes, bias, work-life balance, etc. (Phiri 1997). The idea is to create a conceptual

framework and map that illustrates the relationships between these challenges and how they collectively contribute to the leadership gap for women (Myers 2013:77). Intersectionality as a theory will be utilised in this study to provide a comprehensive conceptual framework of challenges faced by women in church-leadership. It is a concept that recognizes how different aspects of a person's identity intersect and interact, resulting in unique and often compounded experiences of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw 1989:139). When applied to the challenges faced by women in bridging the leadership gap, intersectionality helps us understand how multiple dimensions of identity can shape their experiences.

1.5 Structure of the Study

Chapter 1 of my research serves as the foundation for the study of the challenges faced by women in church leadership.

Chapter 2 focuses on the church's call to radicalism and dives into critical subjects such as gender, inclusiveness, and equity within the framework of the church. This chapter is divided into many sections, beginning with an introduction to the broad themes of inclusiveness and gender equity within the church. It stresses the importance of these problems and sets the stage for future debate. The chapter then dives into the historical backdrop of women's leadership roles within the church, particularly during patriarchal eras, perhaps emphasizing cases of women who held leadership positions despite prevalent gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, it presents an overview of the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA), providing insights into its history, organization, and theological beliefs, all of which are necessary for assessing its stance on gender equity and inclusion. The chapter also looks at unique gender experiences and difficulties inside the UPCSA, maybe mentioning actions and initiatives aimed at fostering gender equity.

The research's chapter 3 focuses on the prevalence of various gender-related issues within religious contexts, specifically women's responsibilities and obstacles in potentially patriarchal situations. It addresses unique problems, experiences, and inequities encountered by women, such as gender segregation. The UPCSA's efforts to combat patriarchal conventions and promote gender equity and diversity are highlighted. The chapter also investigates the distinct contributions that women may make in religious groups, as well as ways for combating and altering the dominant masculine culture in the church, which may include advocacy, legislative reforms, and cultural adjustments. Overall, Chapter 3 offers a thorough examination of gender-related difficulties, possibilities, and methods within

religious contexts, with an emphasis on attempts to address these issues and encourage change within religious groups.

Chapter 4 dives into theological, scriptural, and theoretical elements of overcoming gender inequality in religious contexts. It explores a variety of themes and arguments aimed at resolving women's difficulties, with a focus on tactics to fight patriarchal standards. The chapter investigates the connection of women, feminism, and theology, analysing how feminist theological viewpoints challenge standard interpretations and contribute to conversations about gender equality in religious settings. Subheadings such as "Choices," "Inherent Tensions," and "Feminism, Feminist Theology" imply an examination of various aspects of feminism and feminist theology, such as individuals' choices regarding feminist perspectives, tensions within religious contexts, and the broader impact of feminist theology on theological discourse. Chapter 5 offers a thorough examination of women's experiences, roles, and positions in religious and cultural contexts. It examines how diverse worldviews and traditions impact the status of women in church and society by combining cultural, theological, and anthropological viewpoints. Within these circumstances, the chapter may also emphasize areas of critique and opportunity for reform. Simultaneously, this research is designed in a way that highlights the various issues that women confront in church leadership (UPCSA), which cannot be completely comprehended via a single perspective. This is accomplished by segmenting the research into chapters that address multiple elements, such as theological, historical, social, and practical factors, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of the subject. Overall, the structured research project is intended to give a comprehensive examination of the issues faced by women in church leadership (UPCSA). The goal was to provide a sophisticated knowledge of this complicated subject and to contribute to dialogues on gender equity within religious organizations by studying historical, theological, cultural, and practical dimensions while also recognizing intersectionality.

CHAPTER 2

2. Inclusion and Gender Equity

As Alvarez & Materne put it (2020:10), gender inclusion is a term that goes beyond equality. The belief is that all services, opportunities, and facilities are available to everyone and those roles and expectations in society are not determined by gender stereotypes. Gender equality is important because it protects women and girls from abuse, isolation, and exclusion. Essential for personal and spiritual growth. Gender equality is a human right because a society that treats women and men equally is safer and healthier. Equality means everyone has the same opportunity. Equality is linked to justice and gives people the (often different) means to achieve equal and fair outcomes. With all of this comes the responsibility to accommodate people and be respected (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Inclusion and gender equity are fundamental principles that promote fairness, equality, and social justice in our society. At their core, they aim to create an environment where every individual, regardless of gender, can fully participate, contribute, and thrive without facing discrimination or bias (Scotland 2018). Inclusion entails embracing diversity in all its forms, and recognizing that each person brings unique perspectives and experiences to the table. It means breaking down barriers and ensuring that no one is excluded or marginalized based on their gender identity or expression (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Alvarez & Materne (2020), gender equity, on the other hand, strives to rectify historical and systemic imbalances that have disadvantaged women and gender-diverse individuals. It seeks to level the playing field, ensuring that opportunities, resources, and responsibilities are distributed fairly, regardless of one's gender. Gender equity recognizes that differences in gender should not determine one's access to education, employment, healthcare, or leadership roles. It is about empowering everyone to reach their full potential while dismantling the stereotypes and biases that have perpetuated inequality. (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Inclusion and gender equity are not just ethical imperatives; they are also critical for the well-being and progress of societies and organizations. By fostering diverse perspectives and providing equal opportunities, we harness the full spectrum of human talent and creativity. Ultimately, embracing inclusion and gender equity leads to stronger, more vibrant communities and workplaces where everyone can thrive, irrespective of their gender, and contribute to a more just and equitable world. (Alvarez & Materne 2020:36-37).

2.1 Gender Readings of Scripture

The term "gendered readings of the Bible" refers to the study and interpretation of religious texts, especially those from the Christian religious tradition, with an emphasis on how roles, identities, and the relationships of gender are expressed and created in these texts. Gendered interpretation of scripture is more important than ever as society continues to debate issues such as gender equality, women's rights, and diversity of gender identities. Gender is viewed differently in many religious texts and traditions, and these interpretations can reveal complex levels of meaning and interpretation (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Gender readings of scripture play a pivotal role in shaping the discourse surrounding women's leadership within religious contexts (Alvarez & Materne 2020:38). These readings involve interpreting religious texts, such as the Bible, the Quran, or other sacred writings, through a gender-conscious lens. The aim is to challenge and reinterpret traditional interpretations that have often relegated women to subordinate roles within religious communities. Throughout history, many religious texts have been used to justify patriarchal power structures that limit the role of women in religious leadership. Thus, gender readings of scripture seek to uncover the historical and cultural biases that have contributed to these interpretations. Alvarez & Materne (2020:40) put it that by examining the language, context, and societal norms at the time these texts were written, scholars and religious leaders can offer alternative perspectives that empower women in leadership roles. Gender readings of scripture involve a critical analysis of passages that have been traditionally used to justify the exclusion of women from leadership positions. For example, in Christianity, passages from the New Testament, such as 1 Timothy 2:12, have been used to restrict women from teaching or having authority over men. Gender-conscious interpretations argue that these passages should be read in light of the broader message of equality and justice within the faith, emphasizing the inclusion of women in leadership positions (Alvarez & Materne 2020:42–43).

One of the primary goals of gender readings of scripture in women's leadership is to promote gender equality within religious communities. By re-evaluating and reinterpreting religious texts, advocates can challenge the historical and cultural biases that have marginalized women. They argue that religious traditions can evolve and adapt to support the equal participation of women in religious leadership roles, including clergy, scholars, and community leaders. Gender readings of scripture also recognize the importance of

intersectionality, which acknowledges that gender is just one aspect of a person's identity. These readings take into account how other factors, such as race, class, sexual orientation, and disability, intersect with gender to shape a person's experiences and opportunities in religious leadership. Intersectional gender readings highlight the importance of addressing multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization within religious contexts.

Alvarez & Materne (2020), by providing a theological and scriptural basis for women's leadership, gender readings of scripture empower women to take on leadership roles within their religious communities. This empowerment extends beyond formal positions of authority to encompass a broader sense of agency, influence, and decision-making within religious institutions. It is important to note that gender readings of scripture often face resistance from conservative or traditionalist elements within religious communities. Some argue that these reinterpretations are inconsistent with the original teachings of their faith, while others view them as a threat to established power structures. Overcoming such challenges requires dialogue, education, and a commitment to inclusivity within religious communities (Alvarez & Materne 2020:44).

In conclusion, gender readings of scripture in women's leadership are a vital aspect of the ongoing struggle for gender equality within religious contexts. They provide a foundation for reinterpreting traditional texts in ways that support the inclusion and empowerment of women in leadership positions, fostering a more equitable and just religious landscape. These readings are not only about changing interpretations but also about transforming religious practices and attitudes to align with the principles of equality and justice for all (Schreier 1992:40-43).

2.2 The Church's Embrace of Proactive Change

The Church's Embrace of Proactive Change" suggests a positive and forward-looking approach within the context of a religious community. This title implies that the church is not merely reacting to external forces or circumstances, but actively and willingly taking steps to bring about positive transformations. The use of "proactive change" indicates a deliberate effort to initiate positive shifts, possibly addressing issues, adapting to societal changes, or promoting a more inclusive and progressive stance within the church community.

One aspect of the Church's proactive change is reflected in its response to social issues. Rather than maintaining a rigid stance, many religious institutions are increasingly addressing topics such as social justice, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability. This embrace of change seeks to align religious values with the evolving moral consciousness of society, fostering a sense of relevance and connection among believers (Alvarez & Materne 2020:40). Moreover, technological advancements have not been overlooked by the Church in its pursuit of proactive change. Embracing modern communication tools, social media, and digital platforms, religious organizations are leveraging technology to reach a broader audience, facilitate community engagement, and spread their messages. This adaptation not only acknowledges the changing modes of communication but also recognizes the potential for technology to enhance the spiritual experience of believers (Alvarez & Materne 2020:40-44).

Alvarez & Materne (2020) advocate for women's leadership in the Church and often point to historical precedents of strong female leaders in early Christianity, such as Phoebe, Junia, and Priscilla, to argue that women have played significant roles in the Church's history. In addition, the Church's proactive approach involves revisiting and reinterpreting religious doctrines to make them more applicable to contemporary circumstances. This process of theological reflection allows religious leaders to provide guidance and support to their followers in navigating the complexities of modern life. It involves a balance between preserving core principles and adapting interpretations to address the unique challenges and opportunities of the present (Alvarez & Materne 2020:46).

Overall, the Church's embrace of proactive change underscores a commitment to remaining relevant and responsive in a dynamic world. By engaging with societal shifts, utilizing technology, and re-examining traditional teachings, religious institutions aim to continue playing a meaningful role in the lives of their followers while contributing positively to the broader global community. This approach not only ensures the continued relevance of religious institutions but also fosters a sense of inclusivity, compassion, and understanding within the diverse tapestry of contemporary society.

In conclusion, the Church's call to empower women in leadership positions represents a significant shift in the way many Christian communities approach gender equality and inclusion. It reflects changing theological interpretations, evolving social norms, and a desire to ensure that all individuals, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to contribute to the spiritual life and leadership of the Church. However, the journey toward full inclusion and

acceptance of women in leadership positions is ongoing and continues to face challenges within different branches of Christianity (Alvarez & Materne 2020:48).

2.3 Women's Leadership during the Patriarchal Period

The patriarchal period" generally refers to a historical era or a societal structure where power and authority are predominantly held by men, and family or social systems are organized around male leadership. In the context of the Old Testament, the term is often used to describe the time of the biblical patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. However, when someone refers to "the patriarchal period which spans much of human history," they are likely using the term in a broader sense to suggest that, historically, many societies across different cultures and periods have exhibited patriarchal structures. In this sense, it does not specify a precise historical period but rather a recurring social structure that has manifested in various forms throughout history (Hurly 1984:119).

The idea that the patriarchal period "spans much of human history" acknowledges that patriarchal social structures have been prevalent in many societies across different eras. It does not necessarily mean that all of human history is considered patriarchal, but it recognizes a significant and enduring pattern. Whether the contemporary world is considered patriarchal or not is a matter of ongoing debate. Many argue that, while progress has been made in terms of gender equality, patriarchal elements still exist in various societies. The term may be used to describe a historical context, but it does not necessarily imply that we are completely out of that period in the present day. Some believe that elements of patriarchy persist in modern societies, while others argue that progress has been made towards more egalitarian structures. It is a complex and evolving discussion within the realms of sociology, gender studies, and cultural analysis (Hurly 1984).

The role of women in leadership within religious institutions, particularly within the Church, has been a topic of discussion and debate for many years. In recent times, there has been a growing call within the Church for radicalism in promoting women's leadership (Hurly 1984:121). Women's leadership during the patriarchal period, which spans much of human history and is characterized by male dominance and control in various aspects of society, including politics, religion, and family structures, is a complex and nuanced topic. While patriarchy limited women's formal leadership roles and authority in many cultures, it's important to recognize that women still found ways to exert influence and demonstrate leadership in various ways (Groothuis and Phiri 1997).

Phiri (1997) says in patriarchal societies, women often exercise leadership in less overt ways. They could wield significant influence through familial and community connections, even if they did not hold official positions of authority. Women played crucial roles in managing households, passing down cultural traditions, and nurturing the next generation, which was essential for the stability of communities and societies. At the same time, in some cultures, women held important roles in religious and spiritual leadership (Phiri 1997:23). They served as priestesses, prophetesses, or spiritual advisors. In ancient societies like Egypt and Greece, some female priestesses held influential positions within their respective temples. While formal political leadership was typically reserved for men in patriarchal societies, some women found ways to exert political influence. For instance, queens and royal consorts often played pivotal roles in shaping the policies and decisions of their ruling husbands or sons. Cleopatra of Egypt and Queen Elizabeth I of England are notable examples. Women in some societies engaged in economic and business activities and were influential in trade and commerce. They might manage family businesses or estates, make financial decisions, and contribute to their communities' economic well-being (Groothuis 1997).

Women could also act as educators and pass down knowledge and wisdom to younger generations (Groothuis 1997). In some cultures, they served as teachers and mentors, helping to shape the intellectual development of their communities. Throughout history, women have been at the forefront of social and political movements advocating for gender equality and women's rights. Their activism and advocacy efforts were a form of leadership in challenging patriarchal norms and striving for change. Women often made significant contributions to art, literature, and culture, using their creativity to convey messages and influence society. Writers, artists, and musicians like Jane Austen, Frida Kahlo, and Maya Angelou used their talents to address social issues and inspire change (Groothuis 1997:193).

It is essential to recognize that women's leadership during the patriarchal period was often constrained by societal norms and structural limitations. Still, many women found ways to navigate these constraints and make meaningful contributions to their communities and societies. Their leadership, though often overlooked or downplayed, played a vital role in shaping history and laying the groundwork for future generations of women to expand their leadership roles and opportunities (Groothuis 1997:198).

In conclusion, the Church's call to radicalism in women's leadership represents a significant shift in the way many Christian communities approach gender equality and inclusion. It

reflects changing theological interpretations, evolving social norms, and a desire to ensure that all individuals, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to contribute to the spiritual life and leadership of the Church. However, the journey towards full inclusion and acceptance of women in leadership positions is ongoing and continues to face challenges within different branches of Christianity (Phiri 1997:141).

2.3.1 An Overview of the Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church is a significant denomination within the broader landscape of Protestant Christianity. Its origins can be traced back to the 16th-century Reformation period, particularly associated with the teachings of John Calvin. The name "Presbyterian" is derived from the Greek word "presbyters," which means elder, highlighting the church's distinctive system of governance by elected elders (Duncan 2019).

One of the defining characteristics of the Presbyterian Church is its form of church government, known as Presbyterian polity. In this system, elected elders and ministers, who together form a ruling body called the session, govern local congregations. Above the session, there are regional governing bodies known as presbyteries, and these presbyteries are further grouped into larger bodies called synods. At the highest level, the General Assembly is the supreme governing body of the denomination. This hierarchical structure allows for a system of checks and balances and ensures that decisions are made collectively within the church (Duncan 2019).

Presbyterians are known for their emphasis on the authority of Scripture, and they subscribe to a set of doctrinal standards, including the Westminster Confession of Faith, which serves as a theological guide. They believe in the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the importance of grace and faith in salvation. Worship in the Presbyterian tradition is often characterized by simplicity and a focus on the preaching of the Word. Worship in the Presbyterian Church is typically marked by reverence and simplicity. The order of worship may include hymns, prayers, Scripture readings, and a sermon, with an emphasis on the preaching of the Word. Sacraments, particularly the Lord's Supper (or Communion) and Baptism hold central importance in the life of the church and are celebrated with solemnity (Duncan 2019:6).

Social justice and community engagement have also been prominent aspects of Presbyterian identity. Historically, Presbyterians have played active roles in movements for civil rights, peace, and humanitarian causes. This commitment to social justice stems from their

understanding of the Christian faith as a call to love one's neighbour and promote justice and equality in society (Duncan 2019:6-7).

In summary, the Presbyterian Church is a Protestant denomination with a rich history rooted in the Reformation. It is characterized by a distinctive form of church government, a commitment to the authority of Scripture, and a tradition of social engagement. While there may be variations among individual Presbyterian denominations, these core principles unite Presbyterians in their faith and practice (Duncan 2019).

2.3.2 Gender in the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

Gender dynamics and inclusivity within the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) reflect the broader context of social and religious developments in the region. The UPCSA, like many Christian denominations, has been grappling with issues related to gender equality, roles, and inclusivity. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness and commitment to addressing these issues (Duncan 2019:7).

The UPCSA, in line with its Reformed theological tradition, acknowledges the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, irrespective of gender. This theological foundation underpins the church's stance on gender equality and inclusivity. Over time, there have been efforts to encourage women's participation in leadership roles within the church, including the ordination of female ministers and the appointment of female elders. However, progress has been uneven across different congregations and regions, and some traditional gender norms and biases persist (Duncan 2019:7-9).

In recent years, the UPCSA has taken significant steps towards fostering a more inclusive and gender-sensitive church environment. This includes theological discussions and educational initiatives aimed at challenging patriarchal interpretations of Scripture and promoting a more egalitarian understanding of God's call. The church has also been actively involved in advocating for gender justice and addressing issues such as gender-based violence within South Africa and the broader region (Duncan 2019:10).

While there is progress in promoting gender inclusivity within the UPCSA, there is recognition that more work needs to be done. The church continues to engage in conversations and initiatives that seek to empower women, challenge gender stereotypes, and create safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals. The UPCSA's evolving understanding of gender

reflects a commitment to justice, equality, and compassion in line with its Christian mission and values (Duncan 2019).

In conclusion, (Schrage 1988) the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa is navigating the complex terrain of gender dynamics, aiming to foster greater inclusivity and equality within its ranks. While progress is being made, challenges remain, and the church's journey toward a more inclusive understanding of gender continues to evolve in response to its social and theological contexts (Schrage 1988:91).

2.3.2.1 In Christ no more Male and Female

Women's leadership was frequently restrained and limited during patriarchal eras in history by prevailing cultural norms and institutional systems that valued male authority and domination. A patriarchal social structure is one in which men control the majority of positions of authority and in which women are frequently relegated to supporting roles. This has been a typical trait of numerous communities throughout history, dating back to both ancient civilizations and more eras that are recent. Recognizing that women's leadership during patriarchal periods was characterized by tenacity, innovation, and the capacity to maneuver social restrictions is vital. It has been a long process, but civilizations all around the world are still moving toward gender equality and recognizing women's leadership potential (Ruether 2011:10).

The view that in Christ there is no more distinction between male and female is deeply rooted in Christian theology and is often drawn from the teachings of the Apostle Paul. This perspective underscores the belief that through faith in Christ, all believers are equal and share the same spiritual standing before God, regardless of their gender (Ruether 2011:13).

One of the key passages supporting this view can be found in the New Testament, in Galatians 3:28, where the Apostle Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse emphasizes that in the realm of faith, distinctions based on nationality, social status, and gender are transcended by the unity believers find in Christ. It suggests that within the Christian community, all are equal heirs of God's grace, and no gender is favoured or privileged over the other (Ruether 2011:14).

This perspective challenges traditional gender roles and hierarchical structures within both the church and society. It promotes the idea that both men and women can serve in leadership

roles, ministerial positions, and various other capacities within the church without restrictions solely based on gender. Advocates of this view argue that it aligns with the fundamental Christian principles of love, justice, and equality and is reflective of God's intention for humanity from the beginning (Ruether 2011).

While this view has gained prominence and support within many Christian denominations, it is not without controversy, and interpretations may vary. Some argue that there are still instances where gender-based distinctions are recognized within certain Christian traditions, and discussions on the practical implications of this theological viewpoint continue to evolve within the context of individual denominations and congregations. Nevertheless, the view that in Christ, there is no more male and female represents a powerful expression of the Christian belief in the equality and unity of all believers through faith in Jesus (Ruether 2011:15).

Ruether (2011), political, societal, and cultural conventions will shift, but God sees men and women as equally important and capable of salvation. Although Jews and Greeks have differences, "both are reconciled to God via the cross" and "both have access to the Father through one Spirit" (Ephesians 2:16–17). Males and females are in the same boat. Both men and women are sinners in desperate need of Christ's forgiveness. Neither men nor women have any benefit or privilege in salvation because of their gender, and both men and women have the same right to the church's ordinances, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as to every spiritual blessing (John 1:12; Romans 8:17; Ephesians 2:19). "There is no male nor female," says the Bible, revealing our equal worth in God's sight. It serves as a reminder that our differences are brought together in Christ. It unites us as God's family and forces us to regard one another as brothers and sisters. We are all one because we are all Christians in Christ (Ruether 2011:14–16).

2.3.2.2 Human Dignity and the Daughter of Jephthah: Female Resistance against Injustice

The terrible tale of Jephthah's daughter is told in Judges 11, and it provides a horrifying picture of how patriarchy dehumanizes people. Not only does the fact that this young lady has no name demonstrate how little importance women and other minorities hold in a culture centred on male honour but Jephthah's daughter is killed as a result of patriarchy's influence. But there are traces of female rebellion despite dominance in the daughter of Jephthah's account and its reception. As a component of a bigger project effort on human dignity and

gender, I suggest that we could be better able to understand this narrative if we read it through the prism of human dignity, which draws on gender and postcolonial interpretation. You might talk about systematic oppression if you like; either way, patriarchy played a vital role. I am trying to address the issue of women still voicing their roles within the church. This thesis will pay particular attention to female resistance to injustice, which demonstrates the indisputable and unbreakable essence of human dignity. The story of the daughter of Jephthah and the history of its interpretation provides an example of a woman who, while imprisoned in circumstances that violate her sense of self-worth, fights against the humiliation that has befallen her. Although this resistance is frequently constrained, it is by no means trivial, as I will explain in this thesis. In trying to navigate my way through, I shall make my point by explaining this through patriarchy's power (Claassens 2010:609).

2.3.3 Patriarchy's Power

The tale of Jephthah's daughter is perhaps the saddest ever told. Judge 11's tragic story describes the hasty commitment a father made to his God to win the battle with the Ammonites. The story details the unsettling repercussions of this pledge when it turns out to be Jephthah's daughter who welcomes her victorious father back to his home after making the vow to sacrifice as a burnt offering the first person who comes to greet him (Claassens 2010).

The story of the daughter of Jephthah is a horrifying picture of how patriarchy dehumanizes people. Not only does the fact that this young lady has no name demonstrate how little importance women and other minorities hold in a culture centred on male honour but Jephthah's daughter is killed as a result of patriarchy's influence. Her father's egotistical acts destroy any chance for this girl to have a fulfilling life, and she passes away a virgin (Claassens 2010:611).

It is disturbing to see how the daughter's acquiescence contributes to the text's patriarchal agenda. The young lady doesn't seem to confront her father about the injustice done in God's name that is destined to take her life. Instead, she comes to be seen as the "ideal daughter whose loyalty and submissiveness to her father has no limits," as Esther Fuchs (2000:244) accurately puts it. The daughter, imitating the official position, suggests that by keeping his word, her father is doing a "fair and dignified deed." Her belief that God did defeat the Ammonites in exchange for Jephthah's vow suggests that she has accepted patriarchal ideology disguised as religion. Additionally, she shows how women participated in the battle by dancing and singing to welcome home the victorious troops, which, sadly, would result in

the daughter's death. She is also showing how women participated in the war. But there are traces of female rebellion despite dominance in the daughter of Jephthah's account and its reception. I contend that interpreting this story through the prism of human dignity, which incorporates knowledge from gender interpretation, may help us better comprehend this narrative. This thesis will pay particular attention to female resistance to injustice, which demonstrates the indisputable and unbreakable essence of human dignity. I contend that, in the end, being human entails opposing those forces that aim to violate, undercut, or obfuscate one's human dignity. ⁵ One can see an example of a woman who, despite being entrapped in circumstances that are incompatible with her sense of self-worth, perseveres in the story of the daughter of Jephthah and its historical interpretation and fights off the humiliation that has been falling on her. Although this resistance is typically minimal, it is nonetheless significant, as I will argue in this thesis (Claassens 2010:4).

2.3.3.1 Resisting wrongs

We can see how readers have resisted the daughter of Jephthah's tale from the very beginning. The fact that interpreters made every effort to stop the injustice done to this young woman is heartening, even though it is impossible to change the outcome of this horrible incident. The number of medieval interpreters who have proposed that the young girl was not sacrificed but instead lived out her days in seclusion is evidence of this. It seems as though these interpreters fervently wished that the horrifying crime of a father killing his daughter had not taken place because of their inventive acts of interpretation. One can also observe some excellent instances of rabbinic interpretation, which aims to correct the story's lack of resistance. Thus, when the daughter is shown as fighting back against her circumstances in Tanuma, we see an inventive narrative of the girl rejecting dehumanization:

When he sought to approach her, she wept and said to him, "My father, in joy I went out to meet you, and you are going to slay me?" Did the Holy One of Israel write in his Torah that human beings are to be offered up as sacrifices? "It is written in the Torah that when a man sacrifices to God, it shall be of the herd (Lev 1) and not a human being!" He said, "My daughter, I have vowed that whatever comes out to meet me, I shall offer it up as a burnt offering." "Can one who has made a vow not redeem it?" She said: "Jacob, our father, vowed to give me everything thou givest me" (Gen 25), and God gave him twelve sons. He did not offer one of them up as a sacrifice to God! And Hannah also vowed and said, "If the Lord of

Hosts will allow it." (1 Sam 1), and did she offer her son up as a sacrifice to God? "All these things she told him, and he did not heed her." (Bledstein 1993:15-18).

Additionally, in Tanuma, Jephthah's daughter is even alleged to have gone to the Sanhedrin to make her case when she realized that her father would not reverse course, displaying her resolve in decrying the embarrassment that would soon befall her. A profound sense of injustice has been done to this girl that underlies these historical examples of female resistance. Additionally, when the young woman is depicted as a fervent debater who is knowledgeable about the law and fights for her dignity to be recognized, even going so far as to appeal to the courts to stop the injustice, she acquires the autonomy that she is lacking in the tale itself (Claassens 2010:610).

By emphasizing the brief instance of female resistance that can be found in the text itself, modern (feminist) interpreters have likewise attempted to oppose this horrific tragedy. Therefore, it is believed that the daughter's wish to spend two months lamenting the loss of her virginity and the subsequent custom that grew up around it are examples of a female rite of passage that is indicative of women's religious experience. Peggy Day (2015:201), for instance, suggests that this act of lamenting Jephthah's daughter's virginity was a recognized life-cycle ritual that acts as a rite of passage for adolescent girls based on comparative literature in ancient civilization. According to Peggy Day (2015), Jephthah's daughter's act of mourning her virginity was a recognized life-cycle ritual that served as a rite of passage for teenage girls, which, as we'll see in a moment, can be interpreted as a form of protest on the part of the young girl (Claassens 2010).

Cheryl Exum also draws attention to the daughter of Jephthah's act of agency. According to her, the annual remembrance of the daughter is a linguistic act that "makes her live again via words" by retelling the tale of Jephthah's daughter. Exum correctly notes that "the injustice done by the word of the parent" cannot be undone by this act of resistance. According to a friend of hers, "She keeps that word from wiping her memory with her life." Using oral history as a method of cultural memorialization, Mieke Bal (1987:20) [who also claims to be the daughter of Jephthah] gives her fellow virgins the impression that forming strong bonds between them is an important undertaking that is the only thing that can save them from perishing completely. In actuality, these feminist interpreters join the women who have gathered themselves around the daughter of Jephthah in an act of fighting injustice by highlighting the female resistance in this text and regretting the events that led to the young

woman's death. On the one hand, their interpretations are grounded in the recognition of the oppressive structures of dominance that continue to shape the reality of many women's lives today as well as then, but on the other hand, they attest to the conviction that women still possess power despite this oppression (Exum 1993:131–145).

2.3.3.2 Power as solidarity and resistance

This emphasis on female resistance in the Daughter of Jephthah story as described above might be strengthened by some consideration of the nature of power that has dominated feminist discussions in recent years. In her book, *The Power of Feminist Theory*, Allen (1999:20) creates a feminist theory that highlights the linkage between the ideas of dominance resistance, and solidarity. Allen (1999) draws inspiration from the writings of Michael Foucault, Judith Butler, and Hannah Arendt. According to Allen (2018), it is critical for a feminist perspective on power to transcend the binary between victim and perpetrator. Even though men have historically dominated women, feminists in recent years have claimed that domination can take many different forms, with some women potentially dominating others based on a variety of factors. Additionally, Allen contends that by focusing only on dominance, one negates the power that women possess. He further argues that it's crucial to take into account the idea of empowerment, or more specifically, "the power that women have despite the power that men exercise over us; the interest in resistance emerges out of the need to understand the power that women specifically exercise in response to such dominance." Allen (2018) develops a concept of resistance that includes "the capacity of an agent to act despite or against social constraints" in light of Judith Butler's research on how people can be limited by social forces while still acting in defiance of them (Butler 2004:40). She claims that the primary act of resistance is to proclaim one's ability to act in the face of another agent's dominance. Finally, a feminist concept of power emphasizes the value of solidarity, namely how a variety of people can come together to oppose, undermine, and finally topple a system of dominance. Allen (1999:20–40) examines this idea of power in terms of the "collective ability that results from the receptivity and reciprocity that characterize the relations among individual members of the collective," using Hannah Arendt's (2003:44) definition of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert." An effective way to depict these connected ideas of power despite dominance and power as unity is to use bell hooks' (2015:15) concept of "home place." To fulfill the nurturing and caring roles connected with domestic work, dominant power structures mainly

pushed African-American women to the periphery of society, which Hooks refers to as a "home place." However, the "home place" turns into a place of resistance where its residents can develop a collective counter-language that questions the powerful, acting as a vital space for survival and resistance. In his postcolonial investigation of Jeremiah, Davidson *et al.* (2013) explain this counter-language about bell hooks' notion of the home place as serving as a language of resistance, a language of refusal, and the voice of the margins. The intentional selection of marginality serves as a "critical response to dominance" that makes it possible to preserve and recreate the subjectivity of the colonized in ways that open up new avenues for influencing and engaging with reality (hooks 1990:47–57).

It is useful to think about the feminine actions of resistance in the Daughter of Jephthah story in terms of this interconnected concept of power as resistance and power as solidarity. A perspective on the power that says this young woman has some ability to create a space where she and her friends can lament their virginity suggests that even in the face of the horrific injustice done to her, Jephthah's daughter is not entirely helpless (hooks 1990).

The daughter's speech, which begins "my father" and finishes "my companions," carries her to a point of solidarity with her female friends and with other daughters, the daughters of Israel, who refuse to forget, as Exum writes about the women's act of lamenting together. Androcentric interests are unable to control the final image. The androcentric narrative separates men and women; the daughter spends two months with female friends, away from her father and male company; and only women participate in the ritual of recollection. Through an act of female solidarity, these women establish a distinct area that challenges the predominant power systems. The women gathered around Jephthah's daughter participated in a collective act of lamenting, which Weems refers to as "mourning tragic stupidity," much like the weeping women in Jer 9:17–20, who are commanded to teach their daughters and their neighbours a song of lament. According to Weems (1988:30), "through tears and groans," which, in a misogynist culture, were no doubt too hazardous to say with words, these women's tears serve as a powerful outward manifestation of the injustice of the circumstances created by the power structures in which they find themselves (Exum 1993:132). The lamentations of these women offer a stark contrast to the dominant ideology, which embraces war and violence and only results in more violence with innocent victims caught in the crossfire. This contrast is reminiscent of hooks' (2015) idea of a counter-language that offers a means of challenging or "talking back" to dominant power. Israel makes history by waging battles and straying; the daughters of Israel narrate the cost that such a history entails. Mieke

Bal expresses it best. Even though the women's cries do not alter the course of the story, solidarity, and power despite dominance help to retain and reclaim these women's agency (Bal 1988:39).

Weems (1988) confirms "the power that comes from sobbing and the strength that comes from being able to cry," as she puts it. In addition, Cooper (2004) explains the daughter of Jephthah's narrative via a womanist lens, she writes: "Despite the horror and the lack of a viable alternative in her circumstances, Jephthah's daughter manages to find dignity and solace in her tears and the tears of her comrades." Thus, we observe how the dignity of this young woman, who has been tragically violated by patriarchal power, is restored in this collective act of lamentation that fights injustice (Weems 1988:489).

Finally, feminist theorists like Judith Butler have argued that other people and groups that are being victimized should be included in a feminist definition of power as solidarity. Judith Butler suggests that those who find themselves in precarious positions as a result of unfair power structures should act in solidarity with one another, forging bonds that cut beyond boundaries of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, and resisting injustice as a collective. No one is secure in the middle of unjust structures built on aggression, power, and might. One should note that the young woman is not the sole victim in the Jephthah story. It would be vital to expand the focus of injustice in terms of gender to other victims who find themselves in a precarious situation in terms of a feminist concept of power as solidarity. In the fight between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites, 42000 men are slaughtered as a result of a mispronounced shibboleth, placing the terrible incident of a father's mispronounced pledge and his daughter's subsequent loss of life against a backdrop of violence with thousands of men losing their lives. According to a postcolonial perspective, it is clear that language is used as a sign of ethnicity in the conflicts between Israel and its neighbours. This blatant distinction between an in-group and an out-group ended in death. Furthermore, if one accepts Bledstein's claim that the entirety of Jephthah's Daughter serves as a subtle indictment of men's wars, the folly of the daughter's death as a result of a careless phrase is joined by the foolishness of thousands of men dying (Claassens 2010:63–78).

CHAPTER 3

3. Exploring the Nature of Women's Contributions

The phrase "Exploring the Nature of Women's Contributions" suggests an inquiry or investigation into the characteristics, qualities, and various aspects of the contributions made by women. It implies a desire to understand, analyze, and appreciate the diverse ways in which women have contributed to different fields, such as science, arts, literature, politics, or any other aspect of society. The exploration might involve examining the historical context, societal expectations, challenges faced, and the impact of women's contributions. Overall, it signifies a focus on acknowledging and comprehending the significance of women's roles and accomplishments across various domains.

The presence of women in church leadership positions is indeed a significant and evolving issue that intersects with a wide array of societal dimensions, including social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. Historically, many religious institutions, including various denominations within Christianity, have perpetuated male-dominated leadership structures. However, in recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of diversity and gender equality in leadership, and this shift is now making inroads into religious contexts (Alvarez & Materne 2020:30).

From a social perspective, the underrepresentation of women in church leadership reflects broader societal inequalities. It mirrors patterns seen in many other sectors, where women have been excluded from top leadership roles. As societies have progressed in their understanding of gender equality and women's capabilities, there has been a corresponding push for greater female representation in various fields, including religion. This social shift recognizes that diverse leadership brings different perspectives, experiences, and skills to the table, ultimately enhancing the decision-making processes and the overall effectiveness of organizations, including churches (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Culturally, the inclusion of women in church leadership positions challenges traditional gender roles and norms that have been deeply ingrained in religious contexts for centuries. Different denominations and congregations may have varying interpretations of scriptural texts regarding the roles of women, which can further complicate this cultural dimension. However, many progressive religious communities are revisiting these interpretations and are

actively encouraging women to take on leadership roles within the church. This cultural transformation promotes inclusivity, empowers women to serve in positions of influence, and sends a powerful message about the equality of all believers. On an economic front, the inclusion of women in church leadership can also have implications. Women's leadership in religious institutions can serve as an example for other sectors, encouraging women to pursue leadership positions in diverse communities. This, in turn, can contribute to closing the gender gap and improving leadership opportunities for women both within and outside the church (Alvarez & Materne 2020:30-36).

From a political perspective, the push for women in church leadership positions is part of a broader global movement advocating for gender equality and women's rights. It aligns with efforts to promote female representation in politics and governance. When women hold leadership roles within religious organizations, they can inspire political and social change by challenging patriarchal structures and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

In conclusion, the issue of women in church leadership positions extends beyond the confines of the church itself; it is a multifaceted topic with implications for social justice, cultural norms, economic equality, and political representation. As the conversation continues to evolve, it reflects a broader societal shift towards recognizing the value of diversity and gender equality in leadership across all sectors of society.

3.1 Segregation

Through segregation, it is critical to acknowledge at the outset of this journey that most people choose to isolate themselves from people who are secure and known to them. This phase is defined by Salter-McNeil (2020:39) as "the space of comfortability," in which people are surrounded by others who look, act, and interpret the world in the same way they do (Alvarez & Materne 2020). This is where most women find themselves when they take themselves out of the equation. When women do this, they allow men to consume them, including their God-given rights. People frequently fall into this phase as a result of a natural desire to protect themselves. Isolation, as seen in the diagram, prevents people from engaging in a process of reconciliation, which necessitates a paradigm shift. As a result, if someone is unwilling to be challenged or transformed, the natural default is to isolate themselves and protect what they know. This helps to explain why the Church has such great apprehensions about adapting to a culture that values gender equality. After observing and speaking with dozens of women about the issue, the overwhelming majority said that when they confronted

their churches about the lack of gender inclusion, they were rejected, belittled, or outright ignored, hence segregation. This is the outcome of the church's isolation from gender diversity, which leads to a dismissal of the issue at hand (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

This type of preservation or isolation is linked to a refusal to accept someone else's point of view. Ethnocentrism is the appropriate term for this. We see ourselves as the centre of our reasoning, according to the ethnocentric-Trinity paradigm. It indicates that unless another person's wants, convictions, ideals, and difficulties are in line with our own; their way of life and understanding is unacceptable. As a result, you will not be able to hear and appreciate why another person's point of view could be equally valid. Instead, those in positions of authority promote their worldview as the epicentre for determining what is reasonable. Dismissing their realities also makes it more difficult to resolve the tension and fosters feelings of isolation and separation. As a result, ethnocentrism serves as a rationale for women's lack of leadership and fosters a society in which their time and resources are thought useless. That is where the problem lies (Alvarez & Materne 2020:50).

3.1.1 Awareness

It is vital to be aware of things around you because that allows you to be prepared and informed simultaneously. "Realization is more than intellectual awareness or cognitive comprehension," says Dr. Salter-McNeil (2020). It is a visceral sense of one's connection to reality. Accepting these new realities might be unpleasant since they tend to put our sense of self-preservation to the test. As a result, people and groups may find it difficult to engage in this transition and realization process. As a result, the church must re-examine its sense of self, because historically, self-preservation has resulted in the church remaining disconnected, unaware, and ignorant of the various challenges that women experience (Alvarez & Materne 2020:54).

Research implies that the church's future sustainability is in jeopardy until it recognizes its shortcomings, flaws, and biases. According to recent research by the Christian Forum, church attendance in South Africa has declined for the second decade in a row. South Africa is now around 70% Christian, down from 78 percent in previous years, owing to a 30% drop in population. The top five reasons why young women between the ages of 23 and 30 are quitting the church. This suggests that among the younger generation (Millennials and Gen X), there is a rising gap and trend for the church to be a "major source of support for people who have been discriminated against." The desire for equal treatment of women and their full

inclusion in leadership is among those political and social issues. As a result, the church must recognize and take steps to address its inequities against gender diversity while also preserving its vitality and potential. After pastoring, mentoring, and counselling hundreds of women, the most common reason they left the church was the church's leadership's deep disempowerment. Women are fed up with feeling invisible, unheard, and underequipped in their churches. They have had enough of having their identities, callings, and gift sets dismissed, so they've joined the mass exodus from the Church. Only by realizing and adopting a more holistic perspective of who the church is can this be rectified (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

The identification phase is the next step in the reconciliation process. In this phase, people move from a place of isolation and individualism to one of collaboration and togetherness. Identification, according to Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil, is "the movement and action through which your people, especially women, become my people." Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the former chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, refers to the identification step as "Ubuntu". This concept asserts that, as human beings, our own identities are inextricably linked to the identities of others (Alvarez & Materne 2020:54–55).

Simultaneously, individualism is the cultural norm, but this collaborative and collective social structure contradicts it. Individualism is viewed as a strength in most individualistic countries, whereas collective societies are viewed as a sign of weakness and unhealthy dependency. This thesis, on the other hand, contends that by adopting a more collectivist mindset, the church will be able to engage in a process of identification with women. As a result, the Church would be able to help society move forward in closing the gender gap for women. Combating individualism's deeply ingrained value systems is no easy undertaking. This idea has been so deeply embedded in the fabric of our society that it can be difficult to separate and comprehend. As a result, societies must understand where individualism came from and how adhering to it only serves to reinforce a fragmented and oppressed society (Alvarez & Materne 2020:55).

Individualism has become the norm in South Africa, which may be traced back to the country's strong colonial roots. The wealthy "virgin" territories of the African continent afforded the chance for European residents of lower social classes to start a new life during the colonization process. As the expanding migration of dreamers established themselves

here, people's allegiances to a kingdom and civilization began to fray. As a result, the essential pieces for a philosophical concept known as the "American Dream" through Africa were created. This long-held belief asserts that anyone can achieve anything if they set their mind to it. The American Dream ignores the fact that not everyone starts at the same level in society. It also ignores the systemic prejudices and privileges that some people are born with and some without. All in all, what has been said thus far, both in chapter two (2) and chapter three (3), depicts the impact of this reality on women's and girls' abilities to attain success (Alvarez & Materne 2020:57).

Individual success ignores the fact that most underrepresented groups, including women, are not born with the same benefits and authority as their male counterparts. As a result, it is believed that men undermine the reasonable and equitable representation of women in leadership positions because their privilege allows them to overlook the flaws. This leads to and results in a significant lack of support and activism for gender diversity, a condition referred to in this thesis as "privileged disengagement." This concept implies that those who are fortunate can detach from the suffering of others. This form of detachment has its roots in a deep-seated sense of individualism. This results in a disconnected attitude toward other people's concerns (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Thus, "your troubles are your problems, and my problems are mine" is communicated. We presume that because each person is in charge of their destiny, we, as a society, have no inherent responsibility for another person's success or failure. In terms of sociology, this generates a culture in which we are not responsible for the pain of others but instead project that they have the key to their emancipation. Furthermore, it is considered that if someone is suffering, it is because they have brought it upon themselves or are simply not doing enough to get out of the circumstance. You are no longer reliant on others if you are self-sufficient. This promotes self-sufficiency by stating that a person will someday be able to live without relying on others. This concept, when combined with the African and American Dream, leads to the conclusion that dependency is a bad thing because our success should not be determined by the acts of others. As a result, many people ask themselves, "What's in it for me?" or "Why should it be my responsibility to assist you?" The privilege of independence has allowed a person to believe that the suffering of others is not their concern and, as a result, is not their responsibility to bear (Alvarez & Materne 2020:55–57).

3.1.1.1 Rehabilitation and Rebuilding

Creating a supportive and inspiring atmosphere that tackles the difficulties and obstacles women in leadership positions may encounter is a crucial part of their rehabilitation and rebuilding. With the aid of this procedure, women should be able to overcome obstacles, develop resilience, and flourish in positions of leadership. Efforts at rehabilitation and rebuilding for women in leadership positions should be comprehensive and adapted to each person's unique requirements and situation. Organizations and society may foster an atmosphere where women can thrive in leadership roles by addressing both systemic problems and personal growth.

In times of despair and retaliation, one has to rebuild his or her persona to be productive. Burnout is one of the most common issues that reconcilers experience. Several academic women have become leading experts in building a reconciliation process that not only leads to sustainability but also longevity as women with many years of experience in the field of rehabilitation and rebuilding. Their collaboration and contribution to scholarly writing have helped bridge the gap between men and women. This leads us to intentional rehabilitation, which serves as the key to longevity. Restoration benefits not only oppressed people, such as women but also majority populations, such as men, who are confronted with the weight of reconciliation for the first time. Restoration or rehabilitation will differ from one individual to the next and from one situation to the next. Restoration is a critical component of many minority cultures' abilities to resist forced assimilation or decline. Because of their ability to provide comradely, solidarity, and common knowledge based on social experience, Salter-McNeil linked restoration with the need for socially created meetings such as isolation circles and women's collectives in the Roadmap to Reconciliation Curriculum (Alvarez & Materne 2020: 66).

Regrettably, rehabilitation and restoration are frequently motivated by a majority culture's refusal to embrace, make way for, and give a safe space for minority cultures to thrive. Meaning that preservation is a by-product of a majority culture's tendency to isolate itself. As a result, the following three themes should be explored to specifically assist women in the task of reconciliation (Alvarez & Materne 2020:67).

Renew: Ministries must give institutional support that allows persons who are tired of fighting for reconciliation to rest and have moments for self-care, solitude, prayer, and lamentation. This permits them to be replaced, refilled and restored to their original state.

After a tragedy, for example, your ministry could arrange a sacred time of grief where people can meet and hold each other in prayer while renewing their hope (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Recharge: For women, living and working in a gendered society has a physical and emotional toll that is debilitating and draining. As a result, the deliberate design of life-giving environments that meet these demands by offering opportunities to be strengthened, fostered, and replenished is required. This could include meeting spaces for women to congregate regularly or a retreat for women to be recharged (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Reconnect: Women in male-dominated leadership positions need to acknowledge the need to engage with other women. This creates a safe environment where people can be understood and reconnect with God and others in culturally meaningful ways. Women can redirect their thoughts and recommit to their purpose and willingness to engage in reconciliation when they can move away from "the war." A ministry may choose to dedicate a specific area where women can reconnect with their ethnic identity through artifacts, music, and other culturally appropriate and affirming tools to help support this gathering (Alvarez & Materne 2020:65–68).

3.1.1.2 Women as Moral Agents

Within numerous religious traditions, there has been controversy and disagreement regarding the role of women as moral agents in church leadership. Various religious communities and denominations view the degree to which women can participate in leadership roles and exercise moral authority within the church differently. In the end, the issue of women acting as moral agents in church leadership is a complex and nuanced one that changes depending on one's religious convictions, cultural background, and personal viewpoints. Many religious institutions are struggling with how to deal with these difficulties while adhering to their core beliefs and ideals as societies continue to change and discussions about gender equality advance (Saiving 1979).

The Human Situation: A Feminine View, a ground-breaking thesis in feminist theology by Valerie Saiving in 1960, drew a clear distinction between men and women as moral agents. Saiving showed how unsuitable the works of Anders Nygren and Reinhold Niebuhr are to women's experience by drawing on their descriptions of much of theology in the middle of the 20th century. According to these theological perspectives, man's predicament stems from his reparability and the anguish it causes, and they associate sin with self-promotion and love with selfishness (Saiving 1979, 1992:26).

Women also committed these crimes, at that time, religious statements were considered to apply equally to both men and women. Man is attempting to get over the existential anxiety that he is merely a small portion of the universe, according to theologians from the pre-inclusive language era. Sin is the unreasonable desire of the ego for power and prestige; it is an imperialistic impulse to reduce others to the status of mere objects so that they can then be considered appendages of the self and manipulated accordingly. According to this theological perspective, love is the exact antithesis of pride; it entails entire self-giving, forsaking one's own needs and interests in favour of the other. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is the finest place to find the definition of love: "Love is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope, and to suffer whatever occurs" (1 Cor 13:7). If one understands how these ideas of sin and love relate to one another, Saiving contends that there is nothing wrong with this depiction of love as the perspective for moral conduct (Sailing 1979).

However, if there are various perspectives on sin, then the notion that love is the source of human behaviour is insufficient. In all civilizations, women are socialized to love, which is the antidote to male prudence of human behaviour is insufficient. In all civilizations, women are socialized to love, which is the antidote to male pride. It is considered that self-giving and service come naturally to them. Women consider themselves the slaves of everyone; therefore, they give and give of themselves. While this may appear admirable, it is harmful to women. Mothers learn, for instance, that a woman can give too much of herself, resulting in the loss of all of her individuality; she can become nearly a zero, without value to herself, her fellow men, or possibly even God (Sailing 1979, 1992:37).

Women need to have a strong sense of self to accuse themselves of pride, as men are expected to do. According to Sailing, women are lacking in this. The same lack of focus and reliance on others (men) for one's sense of self is also a fault committed by women, and they all point to the underdevelopment or negation of the self. These male theological positions are of no help to women because they are told that desires to be both a woman and an individual in her own right—a separate person some portions of whose mind and feelings are inviolable and some portions of whose time belong solely to herself—are temptations to sin that lead to actual sin. However, a woman must not tremble and reject herself, and it's better if she wants to function as a fully human and responsible person. Instead, as God loving daughter, she must assert her human dignity and value and act from that position of strength (Sailing 1979, 1992:37).

3.1.1.3 Women can contribute something special.

Women bring unique and invaluable qualities to the realm of church leadership, enriching the spiritual community with their diverse perspectives and experiences. Embracing women in leadership roles fosters a more inclusive and holistic approach to the congregation's needs. Their empathetic nature and nurturing instincts can create a welcoming atmosphere, promoting a sense of belonging for all members. By allowing women to participate in decision-making processes, the church benefits from a broader range of ideas, fostering creativity and innovation in addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by the community (Billing and Alvesson 1989).

In the context of church leadership, women often exhibit exceptional relational skills, forming strong connections within the congregation. These connections contribute to a supportive and collaborative environment, where individuals feel understood and cared for. Women leaders often excel in building community, encouraging open communication, and fostering a sense of unity among the members. Their ability to listen empathetically and understand the diverse needs of the congregation enables them to guide the church towards a path of spiritual growth and communal harmony (Billing and Alvesson 1989:71).

"This women-centred perspective celebrates and exonerates female difference instead of suggesting that women imitate male lack of features with an androgynous sprinkling of communal qualities" (Grant 1988: 58). "

Women's differences in terms of experience, values, and methods of behaving, feeling, and thinking can be emphasized with varied degrees of power. A moderate perspective will be explored first, followed by a more compelling case for far-reaching differences later in the chapter. According to the methodology outlined in this part, women possess complementary qualifications and, hence, the ability to make new and substantial contributions to the field of management or leadership due to tiny but significant distinctions compared to men. The "special contribution argument" is a term used to describe this situation. There appears to be a common conviction, especially among women that women can make significant contributions to organizations. Many women's interests in the field should be viewed from this perspective. Women are said to have an impact on leadership style, affect the workplace climate, and make the social structure less hierarchical (Billing and Alvesson 1989).

Furthermore, women's involvement in church leadership challenges traditional gender norms and stereotypes, breaking down barriers and promoting equality within the faith community. Emphasizing the spiritual gifts and talents of women allows the church to reflect a more accurate representation of the diversity present in the body of believers. Recognizing and utilizing the unique contributions of women in leadership positions not only enhances the overall effectiveness of the church but also serves as a testament to the equality and inclusivity inherent in the teachings of many religious traditions (Carlsen and Toft 1986).

With that in mind, the idea of a particular contribution might be considered a reflection of a broader societal tendency. Traditional leadership patterns are becoming outmoded as society and churches' change, prompting people to consider non-traditional types of behaviour that, it is claimed, allow women to fit in better even in leadership roles. All of this suggests an acknowledgment and belief that women possess unique qualities, perspectives, and abilities that can bring added value to leadership roles within a religious or church context. It implies a recognition that diversity in leadership, including gender diversity, can lead to a richer and more well-rounded leadership team. In the context of a church, women may contribute in various ways, such as offering different insights, nurturing a sense of community, and providing leadership grounded in empathy and compassion. This perspective challenges traditional gender roles and promotes inclusivity, suggesting that women have distinctive strengths that can positively impact the dynamics and effectiveness of leadership within a religious community (Billing and Alvesson 1989:72–3).

In summary, yes women bring a distinctive and indispensable contribution to church leadership. Embracing their talents, perspectives, and leadership skills enhances the richness and depth of the spiritual community, fostering an environment that is more compassionate, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse gifts within the congregation (Billing and Alvesson 1989:72).

3.1.1.4 What type of contribution can women make?

Like people of either gender, women have a wide range of valuable contributions to bring to leadership roles. Women provide a variety of contributions to leadership, many of which are distinctive because of their viewpoints, backgrounds, and personal traits. It is crucial to remember that leadership skills can exist in people of any gender identification; they are not characteristics that are innately associated with one gender or the other. The unique contributions that people from various backgrounds, including women, bring to the table

must be acknowledged and valued to practice inclusive leadership. In the end, a diverse leadership team, made up of individuals with multiple viewpoints and strengths, is frequently better able to handle difficult problems and promote organizational success. Thus, communication and cooperation, affiliation and attachment, power, intimacy, and providing care are all important themes to investigate, according to Grant (1988). She claims, for example, that women are generally effective at communicating and caring for people because they have had a lot of practice from a young age. This leads to the ability to support cooperative behaviour, which is crucial in terms of consultation, democratic decision-making, and workplace climate, among other things. Women, according to Grant and many other female authors, have a different attitude toward authority than men (Grant 1988:26).

Unlike men, women perceive power as a capacity—not as dominance and the ability to control others, but as a potential that stems from and is oriented toward the entire community. As a result, women's perspectives on power are more relational than solely individualistic. Women, according to some authors, have more flexibility, intuition, and a stronger ability to be sympathetic and create a more productive work environment than men. Women, according to Loden (1985), could influence leadership styles by exercising authority more constructively, better mobilizing human resources, encouraging creativity, and changing hierarchical systems.

Much of what is mentioned is a little vague. Part of the problem is that it's still unclear how much of a difference it would make if women held these roles. In general, however, women have been socialized according to a variety of values, norms, orientations, and psychological characteristics, which may be considered as complementing or even replacing existing values, norms, and psychological characteristics. According to the writers cited, female traits imply a disconnect between women's inclinations and typical organizational practices. Empathy, attachment, and providing care are rarely promoted in the latter. The contributions indicated, on the other hand, say little about the denominations' devotion to growth and other traditional goals. Thus, women could very well come to provide the necessary oil to make the machinery work better, and/or their motivational and persuasive skills could be used as a potential tool for smoother implementation of unpopular rationalizations, with women acting as mediators between top management and the workers (Billing and Alvesson 1989:70).

Writers arguing for the unique contributions those women can make rarely express this viewpoint. On the other hand, men and women have different psychological qualities, which

will result in diverse approaches to challenges, with women from outside bringing a different set of views; accepted standards may also be questioned, promoting progressive evolution. The notion that "exaggerated masculine psychology of autonomy and separateness" leads to "an overvaluing of reason, objectivity, and analysis and, conversely, an undervaluing of nurture, interpersonal relations skill, and creativity" (Grant 1988: 62) could indicate a shift. The whole thing happens by providing complementarity and balance to the leadership techniques that have previously prevailed. However, it might be perceived as directly contradicting these, as well as the dominant male organizational ideas. Of course, how far this concept is applied will determine whether complementarity or conflict reigns supreme. As previously mentioned, I have thus far offered a mild version of what is going on. The following paragraphs will look at a clearer, more explained, and more accurately described version of what is happening. Of course, the special-contribution perspective is not opposed to the two methods outlined previously in this research thesis, but there is some friction between the equal opportunity and meritocracy perspectives on the one hand and the special-contribution argument on the other. The former highlights and illustrates the similarities between men and women and advocates for "gender-neutral" career paths and leadership selection. Certain characteristics of the special contribution model call into doubt the idea of "gender neutrality" (Billing and Alvesson 1989).

Because of the enormous variances between the sexes, judging "typical" males and females on a single scale is challenging. Rather, it seems more logical to suppose that many women and men possess qualities that qualify them for various roles, including leadership roles. The special-contribution attitude indicates that this does not result in the reproduction of conventional male hegemony in top leadership positions but rather encourages women to follow career paths that assist them in advancing to their intended leading positions.

(It should not be a concern the fact that exceptional contributions may not be acceptable to a leadership class or position; if this is the case, the contributions must be considered alternative rather than special.) The strategy that follows from the special contribution argument does not emphasize that women should compete with men on "equal" grounds, as it did in the two previous situations; rather, it emphasizes that women can contribute something other than the traditionally dominating male attributes and skills. This strategy appears to have the following practical effect:

"Recent developments in training for women aim to discover women's strengths, skills, and management style to change the male models of effective leadership." "Women are no longer willing to let the organization, including the church, mould them" (Clutterbuck and Devine 1987: 6).

As a result, women's special qualifications and orientations are the vehicles for their advancement into leadership roles (Billing and Alvesson 1989: 70-73).

3.1.2 Regarding breaking the patriarchal norm

Despite the presence of women in traditionally male-dominated religious settings, my thesis here is founded on the notion that patriarchal normativity is still upheld within the clergy through the reproduction of knowledge. Using the term "mothers" to refer to female ministers and elders, in my opinion, sanctifies patriarchal hierarchy and preserves the priesthood's essentially patriarchal nature. Furthermore, neither the clerical nor the lay spheres of the church addressed the "exclusion of women from the priesthood, as well as theological developments that convinced otherwise." Instead, a large portion of the congregation still refers to the clergy as "father or minister," and the male clergy tends to stick together, while a large number of female clergy members look for sincere ways to navigate their ministry beyond patriarchal normative barriers in ecclesial settings, whether on design or not (Pillay 2017:2).

Headship theology gives patriarchy a double-banded halo, a religion-cultural halo when it justifies it. In recent years, there has been an increase in "conservative" religious movements that are frequently linked to nationalism or right-wing politics, which has led to the defense of male headship in many church circles. Therefore, opposing patriarchy is frequently "seen as an effort to undermine Christian" beliefs or "African traditions." Pillay (2017): Any attempt to challenge this viewpoint results in subtle or perhaps unconscious patriarchal re-inscription. For instance, African nationalists have resisted the need for gender reform because "it is a Western imposition," according to Ezra Chitando (2015:277). The study discovered that men are "more willing to accept the pursuit of gender justice when it has been proven that their importance" is protectors of African culture. Since African women theologians have long expressed their worries about the degrading impacts of patriarchy on both women and men, Chitando's argument, as I have previously noted, "smacks of androcentric" and drowns out their "voice." Pillay (2017: 8–13). Over the years, many African women theologians have argued repeatedly that inequalities of power and privilege

along gender lines exist in many important spheres of life, including sexuality, health, family, religion, education, economy, and politics. It also "justifies the role of men as the gatekeepers of patriarchy," according to Chitando's reasoning. Women are frequently co-opted into traditionally male-dominated venues as part of the gatekeeping effort to uphold the status quo of gender (Pillay 2017:8).

Therefore, even though women's ordination has opened up new leadership opportunities for them, there have been few indications that historically male-dominated ecclesial environments are now being transformed. The continued impacts of patriarchy as an institutional force are highlighted by the social reality of ecclesiastical places. The social force that underlies hyper-normative patriarchy stifles new, liberating options. Despite its pervasive, invisible influence, gender biases that are structural and social are reproduced as a result of it. Furthermore, patriarchy is made "palatable" (Nadar 2009:55) by arguments that uphold and defend male headship and also pass for being kind to women. I agree with Young (1990:40), who claimed that "domination" refers to more than just a dominant party practicing oppression (cf. Pillay 2015:68).

Some people experience injustice and disadvantage not as a result of dictatorial power but rather as a result of the "daily practices of a well-intentioned liberal society." According to Young (1990), oppression and dominance also refer to "the vast and deep injustices that people experience as a result of well-intentioned but frequently unconscious assumptions made in everyday interactions, the media, cultural stereotypes, and structural elements of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms" (Young 1990:41). Young (1990) also made the point that oppression, in all of its forms, refers to the structural rather than intentional limitations placed on a group. This is because the causes of oppression are "rooted in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols as well as in the assumptions behind institutional rules and the collective penalties for adhering to those rules," according to her argument (Young 1990:45). Thus, structures and practices within the church and society that support patriarchal symbols and hierarchical relationships must be critically and methodically examined by women (and men) who seek to make sense of the life of faith and those who envision dramatic change (Pillay 2003:148).

As Oduyoye (2009) noted, the church's structures, orders, and ministries are all set in stone, and none of them appear flexible enough to accept women's visions, talents, and charismatic offerings—God-given talents that the church and the rest of the world sorely lack. I want to

make the case that, even though it comes with risks, "interrupting" the "natural order of things" in ecclesial places means putting such critical reflection into practice. Women now have the right to preside over (or be the head of) the "table" thanks to the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa's decision to accept them to the priesthood. My statement does not exclude other denominations that have made strides in their efforts to empower their women. As a result, it's important to be aware of the various ways that language is utilized to control the creation and perpetuation of gender bias in patriarchal societies. Additionally, it is vital to restructure ecclesial settings in addition to exposing, uncovering, or "cutting into" patriarchally imposed knowledge by interrupting normative ideas and behaviours. "Resistance lies in self-conscious interaction with dominant, normative discourses and in the active development of opposing analytic and cultural spaces," wrote bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress*. I'm going to use interruption as a revolutionary tactic now. I will then use Luke's account of the annunciation as an illustration of gender-normative beliefs and behaviours and as a potential ecclesiastical resource (hooks 1994:22).

3.1.2.1 Interruption: How to fight against and change the prevailing masculine culture

When strong, uplifting, God-centred women encounter their male counterparts, Cannon (1994:60) writes that they are frequently given a subtly institutionalized choice to adhere to whatever has been established as the norm. Women and other oppressed groups' willingness to challenge or adopt a dominant male culture in religious settings is determined by how passionately they hold that belief. Those who comply with this notion believe that knowledge and authority are held by powerful, knowledgeable individuals from whom one is meant to learn; those who oppose this notion feel that knowledge is proclaimed by a dominating culture and that "truth" is believed to be contextual. Meaning that the latter situation acknowledges that the received information is tentative and not absolute. This allows for various liberation readings of what is liberation accepted as normative. If "the ordinary" is interrupted by innovation, alternative understandings are then investigated, and such creative possibilities emerge. As a persuasive tactic, interruption defies expectations and stirs up chaos by opposing what has come to be perceived as the normal course of events. This, in my opinion, acts as a call to action to involve others in the process of meaning-making and as a platform for the production of new knowledge (Cannon 1994:66–63).

According to Juliana Claassens, a South African biblical scholar, such an interpretive alternative is not a foreign venture because it already exists in the biblical tradition.

Regarding the issue of "what it means to be responsible readers of the text," Claassens (2008:55–59) referred to the translated works of Derrida and Levinas in an article titled "Interrupting God-language: Rethinking the image of God as a liberator in Isaiah 42." She noted that using interruption as a hermeneutical technique entails "cutting through" the text and re-stitching it using a thread that is already present in the text. My understanding of Claassen's (2008) thesis is that it interrupts the normative and offers a counterculture alternative in the inner texture of that particular text. I want to make the case that an intertextual reading may also serve to interrupt and modify patriarchal normative tendencies in the Bible when they have been re-inscribed in the text. An understanding of the dynamics of intertextuality is a useful reading strategy to distinguish between elements or ideas in the text that are historically contingent and those that transcend time and space because the Bible itself is a multi-cultural, multi-vocal document with writings that span many centuries and cultures (Claassens 2008:55–59).

CHAPTER 4

4. Addressing Gender Inequalities: Contributions from Feminist (intersectional) Theology

It takes a mix of societal, corporate, and individual actions to address gender inequities in women's leadership. To encourage women's leadership and lessen gender disparities, a variety of measures can be used. Keep in mind that overcoming gender inequities in women's leadership is a continual process that calls for constant dedication, collaboration, and adaptation. It's critical to adapt methods to the unique cultural, social, and economic circumstances of various locations and organizations.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role played by the church in the development and maintenance of gender inequality, as well as how it influenced and limited gender equality via a stereotyped lens. The previous chapters were intended to provide context for the research thesis. Furthermore, the aforementioned chapters were supposed to paint a picture of what was to come. Chapter four (4) 's ultimate goal is to address gender imbalances within the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA). I looked at numerous kinds and methods of patriarchal oppressive systems that may be found. As a result, traditional cultural practices have played a crucial role in clarifying my claim concerning female leadership. From this vantage point, we can understand women's concerns and what women go through in their efforts to emancipate themselves. Traditional cultural practices that are harmful add to the misery of women and frequently result in violence, such as systematic exclusion in patriarchal societies. In light of the church's opinions on women and their conventional societal roles, led women to re-evaluate who they were. The second area of emphasis will be gender inequality in the African setting. Last but not least, I shall make the case that the church needs and has to examine its stance on gender inequality and consider how it can support women's equality. I shall try next to offer a metaphor for the church: "the tree of gender equality (Wood 2019).

To build a more varied and equitable society, it is imperative to address gender inequality in leadership roles. A comprehensive, multifaceted strategy including people, groups, governments, and society is needed to address gender inequality in leadership roles. We can fight to create a future that is more just and equitable by putting these tactics into practice.

Genesis 1:26-31, claims that God created humans. After blessing them, God realized that all he had made was good indeed, that it was exceedingly good, and that he had created male and female versions of them in his image. Male and female were both enjoined to reign, procreate, and raise offspring. According to Kimball (2004:465), it costs a lot to keep people from realizing their potential. The same can be said about gender inequality. She further claims that when Peter stated in Acts 2:17 that sons and daughters will make prophecies in the coming days and that the Spirit will be poured forth on both men and women, every gender and class barrier was removed (Kimball 2004).

According to Klingorová and Harvlek (2015), inequality is one of the most pervasive types of social construction and is defined as differences between men and women. Such misconceptions including negative approaches are the results of the cultural and social norms and when both sexes do not partake equally in a society's wealth and decision-making (Ridgeway 2004:510). The geographic setting, predominant religious beliefs, and cultural and historical trends all contribute to inequality (Stump 2008). The same is true of religious communities. This leads us to a quick look at the long-standing issue of patriarchy, more specifically analysing equality under creation (Klingorová and Harvlek 2015).

Figures exceeding 100, so the church might stop denying the discrimination experienced by women. The church has a crucial role and responsibility to reform gender roles that influence justice and equality for women to prevent their marginalization and victimization. That being said, the church has the great burden of reversing the injustice done to women through the years and ensuring that people are aware of women's equality and full potential. Where women are still subject to patriarchal systems and cultures, the church, which resembles the trunk of the tree, should confront them head-on and more visibly. Despite the church's efforts to combat patriarchal tyranny and the dehumanization of women, more needs to be done to guarantee women's equality in all aspects of life. In addition to helping its members and the general public recognize the unfairness that the patriarchal system bestows upon women, the church should establish safe spaces where both men and women can be guided away from patriarchal tendencies. This can be accomplished through community outreach and education programs that encourage society to take an active role in correcting the injustices that women experience because of the concept of male domination, superiority, and identification (Wood 2019).

4.1. Equality under the creation (imago Dei doctrine)

I believe it is better to begin by asking, "What does it mean that God made humanity in his image?" So God made humans in his image, in the image of God he formed them; male and female he created them. The idea is that all humankind carries God's image and should be seen and treated with respect from conception to death, regardless of their social station. Therefore, the completion of the healing that results from Christ's redemptive work and the inheritance he paid for sinners asks for by creation as males and female putting their trust in and to God. Christ redeems the fact that human beings (males and females) are co-heirs of the love of God and this stems from sin. In conclusion, God created both males and females in his image for them to be wholly, radically, and exclusively devoted to the Lord.

Having said that, the creation tales in Genesis 1:26–27 and Genesis 2:18–24 emphasize the human family's distinctive role in creation. This is evident from the fact that humans are likened to God in that He made them in his image, as stated in Genesis 1:27: 'So God created mankind in his image,' which is known as the imago Dei dogma in systematic theology. The goal here is not to delve into great depth on the imago Dei dogma, but to look at it from the perspective of gender equality, to determine if it has any significance in today's gender-ethical debate (Bøsterud 2021:2)

When it comes to the imago Dei and gender, two key issues emerge: first, God's method of actualizing himself through humans, and second, God's love for humanity. The fact that human beings are made in God's image implies that innate human attributes enable God to manifest within them. As a result, humans are God's tools for communicating and demonstrating his designs and purposes, recognizing humans' role as co-creators with God. Love - our love for God, our love for other people, and God's love for us – is a crucial ethical implication of the theology of imago Dei. Regarding the woman's creation, Scripture not only affirms her as a full human being but also distinguishes her as superior to other creatures in comparison to her male counterpart (Gn 1:26–27; 2:18–24). The woman is described as his counterpart and equal partner in her relationship with the male human, holding an intimate relationship as a collective team, a team that is required for the fulfillment of God's goals for humanity and the larger world (e.g., Gn 1:28; Ps 24:1) (Bøsterud 2021:4).

However, the second creation story, contained in Genesis 2:21–24, leaves an opportunity for interpretation. Both the technique of creation, i.e., the woman being produced from a man's

rib, and the timing of creation have been used to prove male supremacy over women, yet such arguments will necessitate ignoring how both were created "in his image" (Gn 1:26). It is also easily argued that the imagery in Genesis 2 does not support perceiving the female as inferior; rather, only after she is created does she achieve perfection and completion. The Talmud even goes so far as to suggest that God created Eve with superior mental capacities to Adam (Stewart 2012).

Another perspective is to see the second creation story as emphasizing the unity of the two sexes and emphasizing the fellowship of the two sexes. Being made of a rib promotes gender equality since the rib is a neutral portion of the body to which no distinctive folkloric or semiotic human attributes are usually attributed (Stewart 2012). She may have been fashioned from either his head or his feet, implying that she would either rule over him or be governed by him. The female being produced from the male's rib (Gn 2:23–24) can be interpreted to emphasize the closeness of the sexes, as men and women are one difference, as they 'were' one. The depiction of the connection as harmonious, with no emphasis on sexual distinctions, is also noteworthy since they 'were both naked, and they felt no shame' (Gn 2:25). As a result, the distinction at this point was based on sex rather than nature (Bøsterud 2021:7).

In any case, Adam can have a variety of connotations in Hebrew, ranging from the soil from whence 'Adam' was created, to 'humankind' or 'humanity,' to the personal name Adam. As a result, the term 'Adam' does not always imply the male sex, implying equality between men and women as made in God's image (Alexander & Baker 2002; Alter 2018). While the Fall narrative (Gn 3) could be seen as a punishment for females, exposing them to the difficulty of childbirth as a result of their disobedience, another viewpoint could be added, establishing the female as the protagonist. She is depicted as leaning forward, hungry for knowledge while pushing boundaries, or in other words, being human, displaying attributes inherent in mythical and real-world heroes and leaders while also allowing birth and death to enter her existence. To some, the Fall is a beautiful story about a woman who is fooled by a snake, by a guy who is a rather hilarious, passive bystander. Others believe Eve was not harmed by a snake since she intentionally chose knowledge, but Adam's actions can be considered as passive disobedience, with some even blaming Eve (Gn 3:12). Genesis 2 and 3 sequences led to action respect, by caring for the two after Sarah forced them to leave her home (Gn 16:4; 21:14–20) (Bøsterud 2021).

Rebekah is another intriguing lady in the Bible, who is depicted as a powerful woman who manipulates the men in her life like puppets in performance (e.g., Gn 24:1–67; 25:19–28; 26:1–11). Her knowledge may be seen in her capacity to listen and pull the necessary strings to achieve her objectives, always working behind the scenes. Because she lacks institutional authority, her power may not be the empowerment sought by today's women. She is, however, depicted with many of the characteristics associated with heroines, such as being smart, strong, and self-assured, as well as superior to the men around her in wisdom and political dealings (e.g. Gn 27:5–14), demonstrating women's power in a male-dominated world through the use of playfulness, comedy, and irony (e.g. Gn 27:5–14) (Bøsterud 2021:8).

On the other hand, Tamar (Gn 38:6–30) is depicted as a wise lady who employs deception in her quest for existence. Following her evil husband's death (Gn 38:14), she is tricked by her father-in-law and finds herself at the lowest of society: a widow with no children (Gn 38:11). Recognizing her difficulties, she conceals her identity and assumes the character of a prostitute, charming her father-in-law (Gn 38:18) and forcing him to care for her (Gn 38:25). Tamar's son Perez is one of the progenitors of Boaz, who married Ruth; hence, Tamar and Ruth are both matriarchs with bloodlines that lead to David, Israel's greatest hero (Rt 4:18). This proves the predicament that women have always been faced with from equality under creation (Bøsterud 2021:2-9).

4.1.1. Women in the New Testament

A new era for females began with the birth of our saviour and lord. This Jesus we claim was not only born of a female, but he also had a large number of female followers and ministers. In the good book specifically the New Testament, Jesus' teachings improve women's responsibilities, namely by Jesus' inclusion of women in his teachings and women's devotion to him (Mt 5:27–32; Lk 10:38, 42). The manner and design of how women were added to Jesus' circle of followers reflect his high regard and respect for women, and Jesus' interaction with women is a vital aspect of any theological dispute about Christianity and women. Women did play an important role in Jesus' life: he was delivered by a woman, he met women at various places and phases of his life, and he was initially approached by a woman following his resurrection (Mk 16:9; Jn 20:14). He also commissioned women to tell the disciples about his resurrection, which is arguably one of Christianity's most fundamental messages (Jn 20:17).

Women had an important role in Jesus' life and teachings, as seen by their involvement in most accounts. Women are consistently mentioned as disciples of Jesus in the Gospels, and his desire to include them in his teachings goes against Jewish tradition at the time. His teachings did not contain specific language that defined women as a different class; rather, they reinforced the notion that every woman should be treated as an equal individual in her own right. It's easy to conclude from all three Synoptic Gospels that Jesus rejects hierarchies in Christian relationships, which, by extension, would apply to gender: “You are aware that the Gentile rulers rule over them and that their senior officials have control over them. That is not the case with you.” (Mt 20:26–26; Lk 22:25; Mk 10:42; par: Mt 20:26–26).

Women played a significant role in the early church, as seen by the stories of Jesus and his views on women. Women were included among the first followers (e.g., Ac 16:13–15), and the apostles showed great respect by sharing such essential soteriological material. This is further emphasized in Mark 16:9, which states that Jesus appeared to Mary before anybody else, even his closest disciples Peter and John. She is the one who shares the greatest and most crucial news in Christian theology, that Jesus has risen from the dead, and she is sent by God to tell the apostles about it (Jn 20:17).

Another noteworthy feature of the New Testament is the significant roles that women played as early church leaders. Nyampha, for example, is described as an independent head of a church in her home (Col 4:15). Similar stories reference Mary's house (Ac 12:12–17) and Lydia's house (Ac 16:14–15, 40), while Priscilla is one of Paul's most influential women, as she and her husband led a house church (Rm 16:3–5 and 1Cor 16:19). These home churches are thought to have incorporated a worship space and a place for early church members to meet, as well as housing for the residents. Priscilla's ministry and leadership abilities are thought to have helped lay the groundwork for congregations to flourish and prosper in her various house churches (Frymer-Kensky 2004).

She owns real estate, engages in trade, and manages church gatherings while doing all of these things (Ac 16:11–15, 40), making Lydia's story about managing house churches and blending worship with the trade in purple cloth noteworthy for several reasons. Given the foregoing, it is logical to assume that female spiritual leaders who had titles like apostle or deacon were real-life leaders because their titles were not merely honorific (e.g., Rm 16:1, 7). Instead of through marriage or any other male derivation, these women were conferred titles based on their qualities and accomplishments (Frymer-Kensky 2004; Hylén 2018).

As previously stated, women in the New Testament were given pivotal and crucial roles in Jesus' life, as well as future church formation and missionary activity.

4.1.1.1. Female leadership as demonstrated by Phoebe

Who is Phoebe? Phoebe is only mentioned in Romans 16:1–2. This woman is introduced to Roman believers by the Apostle Paul. Paul, in her KJV [KJV], refers to her as "her sister", "servant" and "sufferer", welcoming her to her Roman saints and meeting her needs. I am asking for help with anything. From what I understand and think, she was the one who carried Paul's letters to Rome and repeated them verbally while explaining them. She acted as Paul's envoy, introducing him to the Roman believers and himself due to various factors leading to the uncertainty about a church he had not founded. With Phoebe at the forefront, this thesis tries to cover a few key topics. Phoebe is used to showing the power, knowledge, and compassion that women always have within. The thesis will also seek to investigate the significance of her (Phoebe) function as a letter carrier and presenter, as well as the meaning of Paul's three descriptive nouns. Paul gladly recommends Phoebe to other Roman Christians. He respects, trusts, and recognizes her as a local leader in Cenchreae. However, many translations downplay the importance of her influence in the first century, as this thesis indicates. In terms of women in leadership and the Christian practice of giving proper attention to a fellow labourer in the Lord, Paul's presentation of Phoebe is significant today. This remarkable woman, on the other hand, appears to have been underrated for ages. As a result, this piece takes a risk in shedding light on Phoebe, a remarkable early believer, and in continuing Paul's practice of honouring her. The apostle Paul introduces Phoebe, a famous early church figure, very generously in Romans 16:1–2. The introduction identifies her character, urges a warm response from Roman believers, and publicly honours her service, prestige, influence, charity, and leadership, even though this is her lone appearance in the biblical text. It portrays this woman's "great standing among the early Christians" (Jankiewicz 2013:10).

The New International Version (NIV) renders Romans 16:1–2 this way:

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me."

The King James Version (KJV) (Rm 16:1–2) renders these verses thus:

“I commend unto you Phebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that ye may receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and myself also “

Wilder (2013:43) correctly points out the split among scholars and translators on these verses. An examination of them, as well as the succeeding list of Paul's associates, reveals that not only is Phoebe under-appreciated now, but that in the early years of Christianity, both men and women were recognized as leaders. There is no indication of fighting when Phoebe is mentioned. Over the ages, translations and religious traditions have modified or diminished the meanings of important phrases linked with Mary. Although Paul recommends Phoebe in the same way he recommends Timothy in 1 Corinthians 16:10–11, her significance for the early Christian missionary effort is underappreciated (Fiorenza 1986:423).

In the paragraph, Phoebe was looking at the canonical approach. A canonical approach includes the following:

- Examines the Bible in its complete form to "reveal its theological message" (Arnold & Beyer 1999:478).
- Considers the books of the biblical canon to be the Jewish and Christian societies' authoritative literature (Klein et al. 2004:61).
- Acknowledges inspiration and attests to both the literary and theological unity of the Bible (Klein et al. 2004:118).

4.1.1.2. Regarding breaking the patriarchal norm

The term "breaking the patriarchal norm" refers to putting old gender roles, expectations, and power dynamics—which have favoured men and reinforced their dominance in a variety of societal spheres—to the test and tearing them down. This may entail defending gender equality, advancing women's rights, and correcting systemic injustices caused by patriarchal structures. It's crucial to keep in mind that challenging patriarchal norms is a continuous process requiring the participation of individuals, communities, institutions, and governments. Making the world more egalitarian and inclusive for people of all genders, entails changing societal attitudes, convictions, and institutional frameworks (Pillay 2017).

My argument is based on the idea that, despite the presence of women in formerly male-dominated ecclesiastical places, patriarchal normativity is nonetheless maintained within the

clergy by the reproduction of knowledge. In my opinion, referring to female priests as "mothers" sanctifies patriarchal hierarchy and maintains the priesthood's inherently patriarchal essence. Furthermore, neither the clerical nor grassroots domains of the church have addressed the "exclusion of women from the priesthood, as well as the theological developments which convinced otherwise" (Pillay 2017:2). Instead, many congregations still regard clergy as "father," and male clergy tend to stick together, while many female clergy strive for genuine methods to work around patriarchal norms in ecclesial settings (Pillay 2017).

When headship theology is used to defend patriarchy, it is given a two-banded halo or a religious and cultural halo. The goal of this thesis is to try to discover the true meaning of a man's (male) headship of women since this can assist us in identifying the profound meaning of gender equality. In trying to make of all this, let us examine the facts followed by exegetical observations on Ephesians 5:21-22 which is one of the texts that explains something about the concept of "headship of man". Second, the meaning will aid in shaping our perspective of how we should approach the subject of women's rights and gender equality in African Christian churches and families, particularly in South Africa. The difficulties that women encounter as a result of misunderstandings about the concept of leadership have previously been explored, and this does not end there. Feminist theology and other movements are becoming louder in African countries, particularly in South Africa because women believe that the church and the Bible support female subjugation. Several anthropology academics, particularly theological experts, believe that women's subjugation in society is caused by Christian male sexist theology (Fiorenza 1986:67)

In recent years, there has been an increase in "conservative" religious movements that are frequently linked to nationalism or right-wing politics, which has led to the defense of male headship in many church circles. Therefore, opposing patriarchy is frequently "seen as an effort to undermine Christian" beliefs or "African traditions" (Pillay 2017:8). Any attempt to challenge this viewpoint results in subtle or perhaps unconscious patriarchal re-inscription. For instance, African nationalists have resisted the need for gender reform because "it is a Western imposition," according to Chitando (2015:277).

Men are "more likely to accept the pursuit of gender justice when it has been shown that their value system leads to gender justice" as defenders of African culture. Since African women theologians have long expressed their worries about the degrading impacts of patriarchy on

both women and men, Chitando's (2015:270) argument, as I have previously noted, "smacks of androcentric" and drowns out their "voice" (Pillay 2017:8). Over the years, numerous African women theologians have asserted time and time again that gender-based hierarchies of power and privilege exist in many important spheres of life, including sexuality, health, family, religion, education, and politics. The reasoning made by Chitando also "justifies the role of men as the gatekeepers of patriarchy." Pillay (2017:8). Women are frequently co-opted into traditionally male-dominated venues as part of the gate-keeping effort to uphold the status quo of gender.

As a result, while women's ordination has expanded their leadership options, there have been few indications that historically male-dominated ecclesial venues are now being transformed. Ecclesial settings' social reality emphasizes the persistence of patriarchy as an institutional force. The social force engendered by hyper-normative patriarchy thwarts new possibilities, liberated possibilities. Despite its pervasive invisible influence, gender biases that are structural and social are reproduced as a result of it. Furthermore, patriarchy is made "palatable" (Nadar 2009:55) by arguments that uphold and defend male headship and also pass for being kind to women. This study agrees with Young (1990:40), who claimed that "domination" refers to more than just a dominant party practicing oppression (Pillay 2015:68). Some people experience disadvantage and injustice as a result of "daily practices of well-intentioned liberal society," not because of the coercion of a tyrant force (Young 1990:41). According to Young (1990), oppression and dominance also apply to:

“The enormous and pervasive injustices that people experience as a result of well-intentioned but frequently unconscious assumptions made during routine interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural elements of bureaucratic hierarchies and market procedures”
(Pillay 2015:41).

Young (1990) also made the point that oppression, in all of its forms, refers to the structural rather than intentional limitations placed on a group. This is because the causes of oppression are "rooted in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols as well as in the assumptions behind institutional rules and the collective penalties for adhering to those rules," according to her argument (Young 1990:45).

Therefore, structures and practices within the church and society that sustain patriarchal symbols and hierarchical relationships must be critically and methodically examined by women (and men) who seek to make sense of the life of faith and those who envision

dramatic change (Pillay 2003:148). The church's structures, orders, and ministries are all fixed, according to Oduyoye (2009), and none of them appear flexible enough to accept women's visions, talents, and charismata contributions, which are God-given gifts that the church and the world urgently need (Oduyoye 2009:30).

This study intends to make the case that, even though it comes with risks, "interrupting" the "natural order of things" in ecclesial places means putting such critical reflection into practice. The General Assembly of the United Methodist Church's decision to allow women to become ministers or reverent gives them the power to preside over (or be the head of) the "Table." As a result, it's important to be aware of the various ways that language is utilized to control the creation and perpetuation of gender bias in patriarchal societies. Additionally, it is vital to restructure ecclesial settings in addition to exposing, uncovering, or "cutting into" patriarchal imposed knowledge by interrupting normative ideas and behaviours. "Resistance lies in self-conscious interaction with dominant, normative discourses and in active development of opposing analytic and cultural spaces," wrote Hooks (1994:22) in *Teaching to Transgress*. The research uses Luke's account of the annunciation as an illustration of gender-normative beliefs and behaviours and as a potential ecclesiastical resource (Hooks 1994:22).

4.1.1.3. Women, Feminism and Theology

Women, feminism, and theology according to Ackermann (1991:50) are interrelated subjects that examine gender, equality, and religious convictions. Within a variety of religious traditions, feminist theology has significantly influenced how religious discourse is framed and promotes gender equality. It keeps changing as fresh viewpoints and insights are offered by academics, activists, and those working to question and alter social conventions. It is not acceptable to exclude women, feminism, and theology from theological conversations, discussions, and debates. This is because women in their own right are powerful and outspoken in defending their particular position and situation. Because of who they (women) are in terms of being strong-willed, caring, and delicate all at the same time, these beings (women) need to be heard and seen. Women are forced to be strong enough to stand up for themselves and fight for what they believe in as a result of neglect and isolation. Women have fought for equal rights for generations, hence the feminist position. It has always been about recognizing varied women's experiences, identities, knowledge, and strengths, as well as working to enable all women to fully achieve their rights. The goal is to abolish sexism,

exploitation, and oppression. Because these ladies are Christians who want to be religiously accepted, theology has played an important role in their lives. As a result, as theology students and scholars, it is critical to address women, feminism, and theology in the same phrase. To examine all of this, it will be useful to discuss women's choices, tensions, and feminism (Ackermann 1991).

As a result, various reforms are required in the areas of women, feminism, and theology. This is because, for nearly two thousand years, theology has evolved from masculine research and experience to maintain a male-dominated church. Even if these efforts are significant, ordaining women or committing to inclusive language will not fix the problem. Significant changes must be made. Feminist theology is one way for women to express their criticism of theology and religious practices as they currently exist, as well as contribute creatively to theology's unfinished business (Ackermann 1991:197).

4.2. Choices

As with other theologies, there are decisions including choices to be taken when practicing feminist theology. This thesis and paragraph express a certain feminist theological perspective. First of all, its methodology is rooted in Christian tradition and history. Women who abandoned the Christian religion do certain forms of feminist theology because they found it to be extremely patriarchal. Women practice feminist theology in all major world faiths, including Christianity as well as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism (Ackermann 1991).

The dialectic between our theological ideas and practices is at the heart of this thesis's feminist practical theological approach. To advance toward healing and liberation, this necessitates a constant evaluation of the connections between our theological conceptions and religious practices. In the conviction that outside of the real and daily praxis of who we are and what we do, we as a people cannot know or speak of God at all. Feminist theologians consequently opt to practice praxis-oriented theology (Ackermann 1991:198).

Thirdly, the interpretive key for feminist theology starts with a mistrust of current doctrines and biblical interpretations. The male study from centuries past, which has unavoidably focused on the world through the perspectives and lenses of males, cannot be taken at face value as the standard for women. Different feminist theologians employ various hermeneutical tools. In other words, the fundamental tenet of this hermeneutic is that women are completely human and ought to be respected as such. Any idea, perspective, way of

thinking, deed, or practice that oppresses and discriminates against women is not regarded as normal (Ackermann 1991).

Feminist theologians argue that how we conduct theology is just as essential as what we do. Thus, feminist theology arises out of communities of girls seeking wholeness, this suggests a commitment to being accountable to the actual community of girls one comes from. All that theology does is reflect on the story of a person's relationship with God. Thus, women's narrative, context, and experience give their theology its uniqueness. The feminist theological process begins with a critique of existing interpretations. It then enters a period of struggle and risk as memories, traditions, and women's references to labour interact with the current setting.

Finally, the process continues to the creative doing of theology that supports and affirms women's humanity and is consistent with God's reign ideals such as justice, love, freedom, equality, wholeness, and peace (Ackermann 1991:197-199).

4.2.1. Inherent Tensions

In terms of inherent tensions, this study refers to a situation in which women are apprehensive and do not trust anyone else, and there is a risk of abrupt hostility or conflict. As a result, a woman may begin to wish or hope that goodness is inherent in others. Inherent tensions refer to those unresolved concerns that cannot be isolated or remedied. As a result, a plan cannot have an inherent fault that would cause it not to succeed; similarly, a person may or may not have the intrinsic personalities and interests that everyone would want. Any role within the church usually has a conflict between its operational and administrative functions. This is especially true when it comes to women's issues and their roles as leaders. When this is not carefully checked and maintained, it can go out of balance and cause long-term demotivation. As a result, there is a lack of desire to confront the status quo. When operational and administrative responsibilities are out of balance, three things usually happen 1. Ministers and elders tend to diminish their visibility and presence in the church. 2. They participate in empty compliance. 3. They frequently experience a sense of loss of authority and autonomy.

It is necessary to identify the contradictions that emerge when practicing feminist theology. First off, a feminist perspective that supports the emancipation of all people while yet needing to especially address women's oppression which creates an inherent contradiction. In the requirement for human dignity, justice, and love as universal ideals and the extremely

specific need for actions that represent these values in the South African context, there is a tension between the universal (broader community) and the church. An abstract formulation of a utopian goal that avoids direct engagement with the very specific threats to these values in our setting can come from overemphasizing the universal components of these principles (Ackermann 1991:200).

Focusing on the unique features of our setting might result in myopia, which treats women's suppression as an evil that needs to be abolished without considering concerns of class and gender and how they interact with radical difficulties faced by women. To present a comprehensive vision for change, feminism makes a concerted effort to analyse all forms of oppression. However, its uniqueness lies in its focus on the mistreatment of women. The tension is present here. Another source of stress is the challenge of upholding one's integrity while adhering to a religious tradition that has subjected one to abuse (Ackermann 1991:201).

Reinterpreting ideas, metaphors, and symbols with strong patriotic connotations is one method of coping. Language is essential to this endeavour because it is seen as both the creator and the manifestation of human consciousness. The conflict of writing as a white woman who has relied on the benefits bestowed upon her in an apartheid system is another factor. By that I mean, it becomes impossible to comprehend and simultaneously be accepted by the majority when you write and speak from a different racial background. For some reason, race does play some role in it. Only by accepting the uniqueness and ambiguities of one's situation and clinging to feminist theology's inclusive, comprehensive, and liberating urge can one engage in theology in an authentic way or approach. Then feminist theology emerges from a critical consciousness that entails acknowledging social contradictions. It is this approach that shapes both our personal lives and our collective existence (Ackermann 1991:200-203).

4.2.1.1. Feminist

The intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment serve as the philosophical and political foundation of contemporary feminism. Its political inclinations as a socio-political movement have varied, ranging from bourgeois and liberal to socialist and Marxist. Like many other movements of this kind, it has an ethically ambiguous past, at times championing truly radical and moral objectives and at other times failing to recognize its racism and classism. It is hardly surprising that many women still view the label "feminist" with scepticism if not outright hostility. Pollak (2022) concurs with Rhoda Bertelsmann-Kadalie when noting that

dismissing feminism as a bourgeois concept is to lose sight of its complexity and diversity when dealing with derisory conceptions of feminism. A feminist perspective's declaration is both a political and a spiritual act. This is because it is a result of the masculine domination that has existed in families, workplaces, society including the church (Ackermann 1991).

It represents a dedication to women's fights against oppression and carries with it a history of gender inequality. Feminism is the study of and dedication to the practice of releasing women from all forms of oppression. Feminism does not favour any one ethnicity, race, or class of women and does not advocate for giving women advantages over males. It concerns itself with a different awareness, a fundamentally altered point of view that challenges our social, cultural, political, and religious norms and asks for change in each of these areas (Ackermann 1991:204).

4.2.2. Feminist Theology

As Ackermann (1991) puts it, to confront and correct gender-based inequities within religious contexts, feminist theology is a subfield of theology that explores religious beliefs, practices, texts, and traditions from a feminist standpoint. It first appeared in the second half of the 20th century as a subset of the larger feminist movement and has since grown into a huge and complex field of study. The field of feminist theology is not one-dimensional; there are various perspectives within it, ranging from more reformist approaches that aim to incorporate feminist insights into already-existing religious traditions to more radical approaches that call into question the very viability of patriarchal religious structures. In addition, feminist theology has inspired a variety of theological traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and others.

According to feminist theology, oppressive male power and dominance structures in religion need to be replaced with ones that promote equality, justice, and the emancipation of women including those affected by patriarchy. Research studies conducted using the feminist methodology and ideas of interpretation are referred to as feminist theology. As a perceived male-dominated including the androcentric systems of power and dominance have impacted the affected, therefore the history of Bible translation and interpretation, and the Bible itself, feminist theology works for the liberation and emancipation of women. The Bible is not usually regarded as the infallible, freely given Word of God. Numerous "feminist theologies," each reflecting various issues, cultural, and global contexts, and many of them make use of intersectional analysis. The backdrop for modern liberated preaching is provided for by

feminist theology, which, like feminism more generally, seeks revolutionary transformation and has far-reaching repercussions (Ackermann 1991).

Alongside and in conversation with secular feminism, feminist theology has grown. While the name "feminism" can imply a comprehensive, monolithic philosophy or movement, it serves as an umbrella term for a variety of feminisms that employ various approaches, handle various issues, and advocate various viewpoints, some of which are incompatible with one another. "Feminist theology" is the same way. There are numerous "feminist theologies," each emerging in a particular historical, cultural, and international context. Current feminism and feminist theology are characterized by this state of flux and diversity, which is seen favourably as representing feminism's ideological commitments.

Rather than being theology and biblical studies conducted by women, feminist theology is theology and biblical studies conducted by diverse feminist techniques and theories of interpretation. Feminist theology generally aims to advance the equality and well-being of women by combating and destroying what is viewed as patriarchal or androcentric (male-centred) structures of authority, dominance, and exclusion. Women are oppressed, silenced, and excluded in all spheres of life, including the church, according to feminist theologians who believe that these systems of male power and privilege have shaped the history of the church, the history of traditional biblical interpretation, and occasionally even the content of the Bible (written by men for men). Feminist theology draws inspiration from this and is typically regarded as a subset of liberation theology in its quest to free women from these institutions (Ackermann 1991: 206).

4.2.3. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an all-encompassing concept that includes a wide range of societal issues. This word tries to recognize that everyone has different experiences with prejudice and oppression and that we must evaluate everything. To the point of reconsidering anything that has the potential to and will marginalize individuals - gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and so on. Because of how and why various personalities interact creating unique patterns for oppression, it is critical to explain and describe the word. Originally, intersectionality is derived from an oppressive point that began in America; the word illustrates how race, gender, class including other aspects are interrelated.

It is critical to discuss this phrase because it is pregnant with topics that directly or indirectly concern women. This concept resonates with marginalized groups, particularly women

because their (women's) effort is to break free from the bonds of patriarchal tyranny. It goes without saying that all types of inequality are mutually reinforcing and must thus be examined and handled concurrently to avoid one type of inequality from reinforcing another. For example, addressing the gender wage gap alone – without considering other factors such as race, socioeconomic position, and immigration status – is likely to exacerbate gender inequality in and for women. Feminist theologians' concerns and methodologies have expanded from a focus on women and gender relations to include the compounding effects of several various issues, like (dis)ability, post-colonialism, and what is viewed as other dynamics of power and privilege. Intersectionality understanding has become increasingly important in recent years. "Intersectionality" refers to these social categories' connections and it overlaps at times. The goal of the intersectional analysis is to recognize and analyze the ways that various marginalization processes and experiences interact, compounding their negative impacts. Third and fourth-wave feminism share this characteristic (Ackermann 1991).

According to this analysis, the viewpoint and needs of the underprivileged—among them black and white, educated, middle-class, Western women—take precedence over those of the privileged. This includes the gender essentialism that characterized much (Western) second-wave feminism, which assumed that all women's experiences were the same (e.g., poor and rich; Western and non-Western), which is also deemed problematic. Do remember that my research is not about race, but the previous statement intends to address a specific point about the topic. As a result, post-modern subjectivism and diversity have taken the role of gender essentialism and, occasionally (contrary to intuition), even a binary understanding of gender. Feminist theology now uses a variety of approaches and viewpoints to reflect the diverse experiences of women around the world, such as African-American women (womanist theology), Hispanic-American women (mujerista theology), Korean women (minjung feminist theology), low-caste Indian women (dalit feminist theology), African and Asian women, women in post-colonial cultures, women with disabilities, and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, including transgender women (biological males) (Ackermann 1991).

Despite this diversity, the majority of perspectives are curious about body-soul dualism and theories that link women to their physical selves and the natural world while men are associated with the "higher" world of reason. They are also interested in the nature and implications of women's embodiment. It is usual to reject the complementary relationship between men and women that is depicted in the Bible and was up until recently widely

accepted in historic, orthodox Christianity. Instead, feminist theology emphasizes the importance of women's lived experiences as the source and culmination of theological study, as well as the necessity of acknowledging and presenting women's bodies and the reality of female suffering in sacramental rites and liturgy (Ackermann 1991:210).

4.3. The Diversity of Feminist Theology

Feminist theology is on its own very diverse. When we look at and deal with feminist theology in any given moment and space, we must be careful not to separate what is out there and try to put labels on unnecessary topics. Yes, feminist theology takes a very different approach to concerns. At the same time, feminist theologians collaborate to share information and communicate with one another. Feminist theologians are not all the same because they represent different perspectives and agendas. As a result, these methods are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are always in dialogue with one another (Ackermann 1991:230).

The fundamental purpose of these theologians is to portray the most prominent criticisms of sexism in the Christian tradition. Women's approaches to issues concerning them should and must be radical and regarded as some innately religious phenomena. Second, this and any other method must be discovered within the work of feminist theologians who endeavour to stay within the boundaries of the Christian faith. Most feminist writers who have written on any topic are seen as part of the growing feminists in their nations. Forgetting that they, too, have and confront comparable challenges as any other woman in the world. These activists consistently criticize the inter-structuring of oppressions and frequently regard themselves as participants in the struggle to find freedom. To distance themselves from middle-class feminists, some feminist scholars have opted to identify themselves as womanist theologians. As though their burdens are different from the people. Nonetheless, South African women have chosen a different path or viewpoint. They have done so because they face different difficulties than other women around the world, such as tribalism, ethnicity, and race. Various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become a primary mechanism for creating a discourse between world liberation theologies, putting women's theology on the agenda in a variety of venues. The approach has been quite favourable, prompting several publications by women theologians (Ackermann 1991:230-34).

Feminist theology is not limited to a single region or continent but rather is as global as feminism itself. Recent publications by diverse experts demonstrate that this worldwide dimension of new and creative perspectives on critical issues impacting women is explosive.

Despite its recent appearances, feminist theology involves more than only the women's movement. It not only works with women in their current situations but also strives to reflect on women's experiences as a means to understanding women's spirituality. Simultaneously, it seeks to critique all instances of male domination in both past and present theologies. It does contribute by reforming and recreating our faith conceptions, symbols, images, and knowledge from a feminist perspective, and as such, it faces a tough task throughout the world, including South Africa (Ackermann 1991).

4.3.1. Feminist Theology in the South African Context

The current battle of feminist theology to take root in our culture has another strong justification that is tied to its standing in academia, especially in South Africa. Although it is a relatively new theological field, its academic underrepresentation in our educational institutions, in contrast to the representation of other modern theologies, raises concerns regarding priorities, adherence to anti-sexism, the substance of curricula, and teaching strategies. The female voices beg important issues about the nature of and how it is transferred. Feminist theologians, including us, should prioritize this issue in their respective research plans and us too (Ackermann 1991:210).

We must be careful while examining the topic of feminist theology from the South African perspective, to avoid appearing to divide it into categories that are only useful to feminist theologians. People should view themselves as working in constant interchange and conversation with each other, notwithstanding their profound differences in their separate methods. Feminist theologians are not a monolithic group; thus, they represent a range of perspectives and methodologies. Feminist theology in South Africa is still in its infancy, judging by the dearth of publications (Ackermann 1991).

Recent efforts to publish collected works by black and white women as well as a few males on the topic of women in Southern Africa resulted in the publication of "Women Hold up Half Sky," edited by Draper *et al.*, (1991). Within the South African setting, feminist theology is failing to take hold of its rightful position. This situation has developed for a variety of reasons. Years of isolation from our counterparts in Africa, North America, Europe, including the third world have hampered us, and this isolation is made worse by the very patriarchal nature of our society and our churches. Understandably, the fight against apartheid has prioritized racial injustice as the main evil for so long. The in-structured mechanisms_of race, gender, and class in the subjugation of people have not been sufficiently

understood in this process. Class, geography, and economic status have separated women from the beginning of time. Our differences alienate us from one another rather than providing people with solutions as a starting point for conversation since this division has been codified and perpetuated over many years of oppressive white authority.

The challenge of feminist theology to take hold in our culture has additional, significant reasons relating to its status in academia. Although it is a relatively new theological field, its academic underrepresentation in our educational institutions, compared to the representation of other modern theologies, raises concern about priorities, a commitment to anti-sexism, the substance of curricula, and teaching strategies. If and when boys and girls are educated well enough about the imbalances among genders, maybe we can achieve something. In reality, the lack of female voices raises important concerns regarding the nature of recognition and the way which information is communicated. Feminist theologians should prioritize this issue in their research plans (Ackermann 1991).

4.3.1.1. Action for Justice and Transformation

Women's rights advocacy, tackling gender inequality, and building a more just and equitable society are the goals of the "Action for Justice and Transformation for Women" program, which seems strong and significant. Such an initiative may want to think about implementing several processes and techniques. Remember that every community is different, and the precise techniques may change depending on cultural, social, and economic circumstances. The secret is to pay attention to the needs of the women in the neighbourhood and modify the strategy as necessary, always keeping the initiative's focus on women's empowerment and change. A good woman acts decently. Women who are aware of their inherent worth as people can unite to make their region of the world a place where human life thrives. The kindness of women overflows into behaviours that both oppose the evil around them and act in solidarity to build new possibilities of justice and peace for the human community, just as healthy trees produce delicious fruit. Ethics, the fundamentals of moral behaviour, encompass a variety of interconnected concerns. The person as a moral agent is the first (Rakoczy 2001).

Since many times women have not acted from a developed sense of self, this is an incredibly crucial place to start for them. Women have frequently been blamed for the world's wickedness, as we have seen when talking about women as individuals. The option to do good is at the heart of ethical behaviour, but occasionally evil is chosen under the appearance of doing good. The difference between how men and women experience evil and sin is thus a

second issue. Sin is not just an individual deed; it is also societal in nature, a web of oppression that stifles people's and communities' potential for life and growth (Rakoczy 2001).

According to a Christian viewpoint, salvation—which is provided to us by Christ, our Lord, and Saviour—is the cure for sin. Consequently, a third challenge is having a conception of salvation that women can grasp and that liberates them. A free woman, a healed woman, can make moral decisions that have an impact on both her own life and the lives of those around her. Another objective of this thesis is to describe the tenets of African feminist ethics and the moral judgment procedures that arise from them. Hence chapter five (5) shall dwell more on these and more issues (Rakoczy 2001).

CHAPTER 5

5. Perspectives from African Theological Anthropology

First off, there are differences between cultures, locations, and religious denominations in the experience of women in the church and society over time. Women have historically experienced several instances of marginalization, discrimination, and inequity. Women were frequently denied access to education, property rights, and positions of authority and decision-making. Women's roles in the church were frequently restricted to supportive duties and they were not allowed to hold official leadership positions. The position of women in society has changed over time because of numerous social, cultural, and legal advancements, which brings us to our second point: an examination of the place of women within various systems like society. The advancement of women's rights and their status in society has been greatly aided by feminist activism and women's suffrage campaigns. Education, employment prospects, and political representation are becoming more accessible to women. However, there are still gender biases and disparities in the job, families, and media portrayals (Block 2009:115).

Thirdly, women's status in the church and society refers to their place in social, economic, and political spheres. Even while there has been substantial progress accomplished in many areas of the world, prejudice and gender-based inequality persist. Women frequently deal with issues like the gender pay gap, a lack of leadership positions, and a higher risk of abuse and harassment. The status of women in the church varies greatly depending on the denomination and theological perspectives. Some religious organizations actively support women's empowerment and gender equality, pushing for women's full involvement in all facets of religious life. Others uphold more traditional viewpoints that categorize men and women into different roles based on theological interpretations. In conclusion, the experience, position, and status of women in the church and society are intricate, diverse issues that are always changing. Although there has been progress, more needs to be done to ensure that women have equal opportunities and rights in all spheres of life and to achieve full gender equality (Block 2009:120).

Indeed, no one in our world lives alone. You are a human being who requires all assistance possible. The same is true for female-related topics and issues. It is impossible to leave out women since they know how to put things together and organize them. Especially when things at home are not going well. This is seen in churches and communities. If moms or

women were not like that or were not regarded for leadership positions, they became marginalized in churches. In this case, women's experience, caring, and nature are required. Women are compassionate and have passion because they are careful when they do something (Block 2009).

We must respond to the inquiry about a woman's place in the church and society. Each woman in the Church must understand and uphold the divine roles of women, which include those of wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and friend. This obligation comes with being a follower of Jesus Christ. In family, faith, and relief, they stand firm and unwavering. Biblical women play important roles in society, from serving in the church to carrying out the Great Commission. The Bible exhorts all Christians, male and female, to carry out God's instructions in evangelizing others (Block 2009).

Christianity is frequently blamed for having a chauvinistic or sexist attitude toward women. However, the Bible emphasizes that women have a specific place in the church in society. Because they share the same goal as Christian men—keeping God's commandments—Christian women should play a significant part in evangelism and be able to help. Men just have distinct obligations; men are not the superior or dominating gender according to the Bible. According to God, the only thing that separates one person from another is their salvation and level of faith in Christ. The idea that women should be "quiet" in the church is especially addressed in situations involving the church and marriage in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:3. These verses seem intrusive without considering the context. God has empowered many women to share the gospel and guide others in godly leadership outside of the church. In carrying out God's purpose, women have been instrumental throughout the Bible. They have also had leadership roles and duties related to Gospel propagation. Paul forbade women from having an overt, authoritative role in the church, but he recognized women's work inside the church and their efforts to spread the gospel. Paul refers to Phoebe, a female deacon or servant in the church, in Romans 16:1, referring to women who ran churches out of their homes in other books, such as Nympha in Colossians 4:15 and Chloe in 1 Corinthians 1:11.

5.1. African views of women

This emphasis on the lack of respect for women as individuals is frequently maintained and reinforced by traditional African culture. Women were viewed as so low by the Thembalethu in some regions of South Africa and other African nations that it was thought they did not

even have a spirit (Chinchen 1999:118). Therefore, all women needed to get married for them to be able to share their husband's essence. This is consistent with Augustine's idea that a woman reflects God via her husband. Because of their physical and intellectual frailty, the Masai people of eastern Africa, especially the Nguni people and others in South Africa, view women as inferior. At the time, everyone believed that, but today's reality is different. Men believed that the blood from childbirth and menstruation defiled women. African Christian men are heavily influenced by the idea that women are less than men. When a Kenyan pastor or minister was asked how many people were traveling with him, he responded, "There were two people and three women in the company," because he did not believe women to be persons (Chinchen 1999:119).

Many African tales and proverbs use derogatory language to disparage women. She is "the source and root of all her husband's sorrows" (Nasimiyu 1992:23). She is an "object of disdain; she has every flaw, gossipy, she is incapable of maintaining a secret; she tears unceasingly, and she is envious." The traditional basis for polygamy, according to Wasike (1992), was the idea that women's status and dignity were based on their ability to procreate and marry. First as a daughter, then as a first, second, or third wife, a woman had to be under the protection and direction of a male (Wasike 1992:106). Nyambura Njoroge, a different Kenyan woman, describes a bill that was introduced into the Kenyan Parliament to criminalize wife beating. Nevertheless, due to the vehement opposition from every male member of Parliament, it was defeated. This crime was not only seen as a private matter but it was also justified by tradition (Njoroge 2000:80). African proverbs frequently have unfavourable attitudes toward women. The Gikuyu adage mirrors the Kenyan men's belief that "Women have no upright words, but only crooked ones," which is "Do not reveal a lady secret" (Ayanga 2016:16). These traditional African conceptions of women highlight the following points:

"It is oppressive to regard women as derivative beings. It serves as the foundation for women's exclusion from hierarchical systems and detracts from our complete humanity. Maleness is thought to be the norm for humans. Depending on who is showing them, the same human features are either accepted or rejected (Oduyoye 1995:213)".

Women are uncomfortable with being women and believe males when they are told they are inferior, according to a study of Nigerians of all ages (Isherwood & McEwan 2001:31).

It is striking how dissatisfied girls and women are with their gender identities as well as how satisfied men are.

5.1.1. African Women as Moral Agents

According to Saiving (1992) findings, her understanding, and approach primarily apply to Christian women in Western nations, particularly the United States. She challenged orthodox Christian theology and ethics for propagating stereotypes that constrained women's autonomy by portraying women as inherently charitable and nurturing (Saiving 1992). While some of Saiving's criticism may be relevant to African women's experiences, it is important to tackle this issue sensitively given the varied cultural and societal circumstances in Africa. To determine the applicability of Saiving's views in the particular context of African women's moral autonomy, extensive investigation and analysis are required (Saiving 1992). Oduyoye (1995) also discusses how African women lose their sense of self:

“We African women have been educated through folklore to be loving moms, wives, sisters, and children who always put the needs of others before their own. It appears to me that via this process, we have also learned to vote against ourselves, constantly choosing others and loving them more than we love ourselves, and giving to them what we would otherwise refuse to give to ourselves because we don't think we deserve it (Oduyoye 1995:195).”

The absolute self-giving of the African woman does not benefit her. Njoroge (2000) outlines in blunt words how African women's attempts to establish themselves are rejected:

“Any gestures of defiance and longing for change were derided as anti-cultural. She has been disregarded both as a historical and moral agent. She is the one who lacks the authority to determine her own and her children's futures (Njoroge 2000:74-75).”

How many African development initiatives have been designed and carried out without engaging the local women who collected water and firewood for their families numerous times every day? How frequently do African males physically or verbally silence their wives and daughters? (Oduyoye 1995).

5.1.2. Critique of the Christian Tradition

In her writing “The Human Situation: A Feminine Vision,” Saiving (1992:30) says that the first woman in contemporary theology had different views, arguing that the theologian's gender had a big impact on the work of theology and criticized the conventional theologies of

women's inherent inferiority. This debate focused on the Western post-renaissance period, she labelled it a "hyper-masculine culture" that gave the greatest importance to accomplishments on the outside, the construction of structures with substance and significance, the differentiation of the self, and the disconnection of man from nature. As it recognized the roles of women, children, and the entire reproductive process, it was also a masculine era (Saiving 1992:35).

This was the perspective on women those Western missionaries brought to Africa. Ruether (1993), an American theologian with a degree in patristics and the classics, used this knowledge to challenge the misogynistic beliefs of the church fathers. The appropriation of platonic dualism, which has had very detrimental repercussions on both the theology of the person and the body to this day, is where she found their anti-women ideas. According to her critical critique of the tradition, the underlying problem with conventional Christian anthropology is hierarchical dualism (Hinsdale 1995:26). In her 1985 book "The Church and the Second Sex," Mary Daly (1985:207) explained how the Christian tradition's derogatory view of women was derived from ancient Greco-Roman philosophy and Judaism (Hinsdale 1995:25-26). Additionally, she identified the flaw in Christian anthropology's embrace of Greek dualism, which rendered women the inferior and second sex. She left the Roman Catholic Church after writing this book because she thought it was hopelessly sexist and offered no hope for women. Since she concentrated on Jesus's teaching and preaching of the reign of God, which had an inclusive view of humanity, her earlier writing had been more optimistic. The Vatican's 1976 declaration, "The Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood," thus served as the basis for the most significant challenges of the received tradition in the Catholic faith. The main significance of Christ is found in his physical maleness, according to this statement, which maintained that women cannot be ordained because they cannot physically image Christ. This has been referred to as a fresh form of Christology. This document has been criticized in several studies. Later Vatican publications adopted the standard dualistic, androcentric anthropology once again (Hinsdale 1995).

Keightly (1992) addresses each of the various strands of the unfavourable perception of women in the Christian tradition one by one.

“Physically, women are frail. We simply need to consider the experience of childbirth and the fact that women often live longer than men to see that the data is substantially different. Why

were the repercussions of the collapse for women so much more severe than for men if women were fundamentally inferior? The emphasis placed on a woman's physical attributes in identifying who she is just serves to reinforce that there are men and women. However, it doesn't explain why they behave and behave the way they do. According to church doctrine, human nature cannot change since it is unchangeable. However, science is aware that people have a natural ability to change and that this capacity is impacted by social and cultural variables. As a result, biology is not fate. Male and female stereotypes are not justified by psychological differences between men and women, despite their biological disparities' (Keightly 1992).

It is truly excellent news to learn that Jesus thought and acted differently since they (women) are always inferior and must occupy the lowest position (Keightly 1992:42-45).

5.1.3. Jesus: A Friend to Women

As a Jewish man, Jesus was constrained by social and religious taboos that forbade interaction with women in public. He overcame these limitations in several important ways. He conversed with women in public; his discourse with the Samaritan lady (Jn 4:1–42) is an important illustration. This woman's encounter with Jesus impacted her so deeply that she started evangelizing among her people. If a woman was ill, she was not allowed in public. Simultaneously, Jesus treated women in front of others, including those whose chronic bleeding rendered them ritually unclean. Jesus met the accusers of an adulteress who has been discovered (we may wonder where the man was?) and forgave her in front of everyone, defying Jewish law which demanded that women who committed adultery be stoned (Jn 8:1-11). Mary of Bethany is seated at Jesus' feet in a disciple-like position because Jesus invited women to follow him. Compared to Peter's later statement that he did not even know Jesus, Martha's trust in the resurrection (John 11:27) was far stronger. Women were the first to witness the Resurrection, and Jesus gave Mary Magdalene the task of telling the apostles that he had been raised from the grave (Jn 20:17-18). Fiorenza (1983) has critiqued this method of looking out encouraging passages in the Bible for women as being neo-orthodox and failing to confront the overall androcentrism of the Bible. Nevertheless, to know that Jesus thought and acted differently is certainly excellent news for women who have only heard that they are inferior and must always take the lowest place (Fiorenza 1983:14-21).

5.1.4. Women as truly the Image of God

The idea that women are truly created in the likeness of God has its roots in theological and philosophical debates regarding the worth and character of all people, regardless of gender. This concept questions historical and cultural perceptions that have reduced or devalued women's roles in religious and social situations. The idea that every human being has inherent worth and dignity is fundamental to many religious systems, including Christianity. This thought is frequently connected to the notion that all people were made in God's image. This theological tenet holds that every person has a special divine imprint that gives them intrinsic value and significance, independent of gender, ethnicity, or any other attribute (Okure 1988:46).

When it comes to women, the conventional patriarchal interpretations that have consigned them to inferior duties must be challenged by the realization that they are genuinely made in God's image. It states that women should have equal access to opportunities for leadership, decision-making, and participation in religious practices since they possess the same spiritual, moral, and intellectual capacities as men. Within religious groups and in general society, movements promoting gender equality have grown because of this theological perspective. To develop inclusive readings of sacred texts and traditions that emphasize the equal value of women and men, these movements frequently work to overcome historical and cultural biases (Okure 1988).

It is significant to emphasize that the affirmation of women as really bearing the image of God is not generally acknowledged in all religious contexts, and interpretations can vary greatly based on theological, cultural, and denominational variations. Nonetheless, this idea has influenced discussions about gender equality, human dignity, and the significance of appreciating and respecting the contributions of women in both religious and secular contexts (Okure 1988:49).

Male theologians have not been satisfied with their interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2, which so horribly denigrate women, and have instead emphasized that Eve is the source of all evil and sin in the universe. However, Okure makes clear that Adam is the one who is punished universally for disobeying the command to not eat the forbidden fruit because of this, the earth is cursed, and humanity is doomed as a result (Gen 3:17-19). Adam would not have been punished if Eve had been the only culpable party. Adam designates Eve as the mother of all people who love after the fall, giving humanity hope that life would be restored to

humanity through a woman (Okure 1988:51). By assigning the sinfulness of the world to sole women, this interpretation of Genesis stories restores the equilibrium. Both Adam and Eve transgressed. By placing the blame on Eve, Adam seeks to minimize his accountability. Men and women thus equally partake in the struggles and opportunities of human destiny. Asian women also find the text from Genesis 1:27–28 useful for their observations on women. Kyung (1990) claims that this passage is essential to their religion because it connects the concepts of God and humanity. She asserts, "Whom God is defining who we are as humans" (Kyung 1990:47). As a result, depictions of God as both male and female, as a community, as the creator, and as a spirit that gives life all contribute to Asian women's understanding that is more positive and experience of their humanity (Kyung 1990:47-52).

5.2. Models of Anthropology

Anthropological approaches seek to address the same core issue regarding the connections between reality, representation, and the imaginary. These models have the trait of being the product of the combined knowledge of two partners who are constantly present: the native and the ethnographer. Models are distilled versions of reality that assist humans in making sense of the sensory overload that is essentially undifferentiated. According to Forsyth and Keilhofner (2006), a model is a general term for any organized collection of assumptions or readings that people have about their environment. These models are referred to as theories, hypotheses, theses, paradigms, assertions, or even merely thoughts by certain authors. Only two generally applicable models—folk and analytical—are discussed in this entry. Folk models are the ones who help us navigate through our daily issues. These models, which were present before we were born and which we learned as impressionable kids, are mostly outside of our control. Folk models frequently represent the interests of the socioeconomic elite. With that in mind, this research thesis is all about the relationship, harmony, and stability between men and women Forsyth and Keilhofner (2006). This study is intended to do all of this by looking closely at Dualism and a common critique to explain my point. The question then becomes, Which relationships between men and women are best suited for a theological anthropology that affirms women's full humanity as being made in God's image? How are these relationships portrayed? (Forsyth and Keilhofner 2006).

5.2.1. Dualism

The conventional dualism model is completely insufficient. As opposites, men and women are distinct yet equal. Each has qualities that the other lacks. Male and female qualities are paired using the complementarity language. These consist of action, inaction, intuition and reason, volition and emotion, and so forth. Women's traits are typically seen as being more docile and less significant. The idea is that males are practically complete on their own and just require the assistance and tolerance of women. Women are thought to possess qualities that are inferior to those of men in terms of importance and usefulness in society and the church. The inference is that women have traits that are not as significant and beneficial in the world and the church as are the traits and gifts of men and that men are practically complete by themselves and just need the addition of women's helpfulness and patience (Hilkert 1997).

To emphasize that a woman's primary function is that of a mother, whether physically or spiritually, the language of women's distinctive or appropriate nature is employed. For several reasons, feminist theologians oppose the dualistic approach. The first is the notion that the man is the superior, more gifted, and stronger member of the pair and that a woman cannot exist without a man. Second, the model lacks an understanding of how culture and social variables affect how societies regard both men and women. This has been observed throughout history, from the rejection of women's capacity for learning and, consequently, for teaching, to the exclusion of women from emotionally demanding professions like law and medicine. Due to traditional presumptions that education is useless for a girl, girl children in Africa are still frequently denied access to education at the same level as boy children. Thirdly, the theological notion that humanity is one and that it was therefore redeemed as one race is undermined by this approach. However, what has been united to God is saved, which is quite fitting in this context. Because men and women are so unlike, Christ did not redeem, save, or liberate men in one way and women in another. He bestows on both men and women the richness of a new existence (Hilkert 1997).

Finally, yet importantly, this approach restricts women to one role in society by emphasizing their function as biological and spiritual mothers. While being a mother is a sacred gift from God that should be honoured, it is insufficient to argue that it will enable women to fulfill their complete destiny. The social construction of motherhood must be critically appropriated so as not to perpetuate patriarchal norms and presumptions (Hilkert 1997).

5.2.2. A Common Critique

Because of the emphasis on the person, Mary Aquin O'Neill makes the following claim based on Catherine LaCugna's research on ties within the Trinity (LaCugna, 1993):

“Androgyny promotes the development of the person in such a way that all that has traditionally been divided into male and female is included within the self; the unisex approach takes one sex as the ideal and works to accommodate the self to it, regardless of what is provided in nature; and the complementary theology is based on the idea of an individual body in which the male is the head and the female is the lower part to be ruled over by the head” (LaCugna 1993).

This is a particularly pertinent criticism because African civilizations are built on vibrant group life rather than the individual. All of these characteristics have helped us understand the multifaceted nature of human beings. Elizabeth Johnson, who discusses how one human essence is cherished in the interdependence of many differences, fortunately, offers a route out of this bind (Johnson 1992:155). She adds additional elements that form the basis of human identity in place of the dualism and androgyny models, which emphasize physical appearance and sexuality. Relationship to the planet, other people and social groups, economic, political, and cultural locales, as well as conditioning in time and space and future orientation. LaCugna (1993) concurs with this viewpoint and maintains the need to repress differences since people are not simply idealistic but rather are shaped by historical realities due to geography and time. Instead, multidimensional anthropology acknowledges the challenge and mystery of our incredible diversity (LaCugna 1993: 89). This multipolar model, in which these various factors come together harmoniously, describes a real person, not an abstract woman, such as a black South African woman who was born in Soweto in 1982, whose parents were from the province of Limpopo, and whose uncle left for exile in 1976 but never returned, who wants to become an environmental scientist and is a biology student in college (Johnson 1992).

LaCugna (emphasizes that the numerous aspects of distinction between women and men's lives show the depth of human life. She claims that we can claim equality because we are unique and each person is distinct. We are all equals, each in our unique way, with equal human dignity, intellectual capacity, and creative abilities. Anthropology that affirms the worth of both men and women must be built on the relationships and community that are so fundamental to African existence (Johnson 1992:94-155).

5.2.3. A Relational Anthropology

Religious anthropology that honours the worth of women as individuals are striped by two viewpoints. The first step is to move to the topic that underpins modern theology. Like many liberation theologies, feminist theology starts in the concrete of daily living rather than with abstract theoretical declarations. Women are actual people who have been entangled in a web of connections since birth. In our theological reflections, this experience is essential. Second, this network of connections continues a common African proverb that reads, "A person is a person through others or I am because we are and because we are I am." The foundation of African life and civilization is the idea of life together including the soil, all living things, and the living dead. Only when life is lived and shared in the community with others can it truly be called life. The person is a thing about other people. The community supports its members and equips them with the skills they need to tackle life's difficulties on both an individual and corporate level (Njoroge 2000:112).

Because everyone and everything shares a common life, there is no place in African feminist theology for the dualism that has so influenced the Christian tradition: spirit vs. matter and man versus woman. Mercy Oduyoye, however, warns against the African emphasis on communal identity because she believes that it relativizes the value of the individual and, along with Christian theology, the value of a woman in particular. Women are under enormous pressure to conform and refrain from expressing their unique identities and talents as a result of the emphasis on group identity (Oduyoye 2001:71). Sophia, the founder of the triad Jesus, and the spirit together are God. According to Oduyoye, the Trinity might serve as a good example of the integrity of people in a community and their interconnectedness. The holy inner life is shared in an unceasing flow of love between people and overflows to all of creation, including humans. As a result, the deeper mystery of God provides the foundation for the enigma of what it means to be a human and what makes genuine human, social, and political interactions (Hilkert 1997).

Asian women also emphasize the community aspect of God. It is the community in relationship with God, not just a man or a woman, according to Elizabeth Dominguez of the Philippines (Kyung 1990:253). A relational anthropology's components are vital when trying to amalgamate what has been said above. The Bible verse, "You must love your neighbour as yourself," serves as the foundation for Denise Ackermann of South Africa's concept of the significance and dimensions of relational anthropology (Mk 12:31). The essence of justice-

centred praxis is active love of oneself and others, which is the antithesis of dualism and alienation. Love is the affirmation of another person's worth and dignity as a being made in God's image. She (Ackermann) bases her ideas on the I-Thou relationship proposed by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. Other people are not tools to be manipulated, but rather subjects. Buber describes the following connection:

“A human being is not a thing among things and does not consist of things if I stand before him as my Thou and address him with the expression I-Thou. However, I oppose him by standing on the primacy of the first word. A relationship may exist even if the person to whom I say "Thou" is unaware of it while going through an experience (Buber 1958:8-9)”.

The walls that have kept men and women apart from one another are starting to fall thanks to relational anthropology. In the Christian tradition, it has been emphasized that men should represent God and that women should bear the brunt of all sin and wrongdoing. Additionally, (until recently in some Christian bodies) a sacramental system dominated by men has put women in a position where true reciprocal connections (are) made impossible because they depend on men for everything and men depend on women for nothing (O'Neill 1993:151).

Men's identification with God needs to change since both genders view the other as a subject in their own right and a real human being. Only then are real relationships and bonds conceivable. Such relationships can undermine the influence of sexism in the church and society. Men's blindness is replaced by the light of the Spirit because sexism distorts men's perceptions of women's humanity, thus when men start to interact freely with women as genuine people, their blindness is removed. Relationships encompass not only those involving people but also those involving the created world. Christian theology has been greatly impacted by a misinterpretation of the biblical mandate to conquer the land, making nature an object of human activity. The human race has neglected to care for the environment, on which it likewise depends, instead alienating it. Thus, this comprehensive anthropology encompasses our interactions with God, who is God with us, as well as with ourselves, other people, and the entire universe. Its emphasis on proper connections lays the groundwork for a liberating praxis in all spheres of life. Oduyoye emphasizes that equitable treatment of all people is necessary for the survival of decent human connections (Oduyoye 1995:214).

The seeds for changing all interactions are already present in relational anthropology. The Bible declares that anyone who is in Christ is a new creature; the old order has vanished, and

a new being can be seen (2 Cor 5:17-19). The vision of those who are in the process is that of the new creation that women long for and that the human community so sorely needs. Additionally, theological anthropology itself functions as a dialogue in which participants are altered as a result of hearing and connecting with others. We develop as people through relationships with others, as African traditions teach (Kopas 1995:228).

5.2.3.1. Women as Disciples

One of the recurring topics in Luke's Gospel is discipleship. According to Barton, discipleship means being a student or a teacher. The word suggests accepting the teacher's beliefs and methods in one's life and psyche. It also alludes to Jesus' followers. By examining particular passages from Luke's Gospel, it becomes clear that the actions and contributions of the women's disciples are not only revolutionary but also express equality and inclusion by continuously depicting women as authentic examples of faith. The stories Luke tells about women help us understand the traits and deeds that provide validity to this definition.

The earliest women who accepted Christ had no such limitations, even though Jewish women were unable to be circumcised and hence could never be full members of the Covenant. Contrary to disputes over the requirements for Gentiles wishing to join the Christian community, there is no evidence that there was ever a discussion regarding whether or not women may be baptized in Christian history. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor freeman, nor male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus, and the ability of the Spirit of Jesus to remove barriers of interaction across race, class, and gender was simply amazing (Gal 3:28).

However, in the initial years following the resurrection of Christ, as they are recounted in the New Testament, women were able to respond to the spirit and minister alongside men. This profound awareness of the oneness of the members of the Body of Christ did not last. Unquestionably, an apostle, Mary Magdalene was a witness to the Resurrection. Paul referred to Prisca and Aquila, a husband and wife, as "fellow labourers in Christ; Phoebe was a diakonos, a deacon of the society." Junia (Rom 16:7) may have started churches.

According to Act 21:9, women who exercised the gift of prophecy also served as preachers and evangelists. For instance, Prisca taught Apollos how to preach properly (Acts 18:26). Men's and women's ministries were not present in the early years of Christianity. Jesus only had a ministry where both men and women worked. According to the New Testament, Jesus

treated women like fellow human beings. Additionally, it shows men and women working together in a variety of church ministries (Tetlow 1980:131).

More women are mentioned in the four gospel accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry than in almost any other secular text from that time. In these, we find Jesus praising women for their generosity or their faith (a poor widow's gift in Mark 12:43–44; the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:28; Martha in John 11:26–27). He included them in his lessons (about a woman baking bread, Matthew 13:33; or a woman hunting for a lost coin, Luke 15:8-10). He freely conversed with women in public, going against social norms, and taught them theology (John 8:10–11). (Luke 10:39). While the male disciples fled in dread of the Jewish authorities, he gave them the message of the resurrection. No woman betrayed him, disbelieved his words, or deserted him as some of the followers did. Women frequently served as role models for males because of their devotion, understanding, and faith. The same devoted women continued to join the men in prayer in an upper room in Jerusalem following Jesus' ascension into God's heavenly realm, as they awaited the promise of the Holy Spirit to equip them for the continuous mission. Some people claim that because these women are not mentioned again in the New Testament, they were never anything more than Jesus's benefactors during his earthly ministry. However, in the remaining New Testament, all but two of the disciples are not mentioned (Tetlow 1980).

CHAPTER 6

6. Conclusion and Findings

The ultimate purpose of this thesis study was to see if a "praxis to help the Church engage women's identity, gifting, and calling will aid women in leadership and contribute to resolving the female/male discrepancies within Christian communities." The goal is to entirely empower and liberate women to lead in the Church and society. This thesis is intended to look at numerous materials, including studies that analyzed the recommended praxis outlined in the research, to discover the answer to this crucial question. The entire study makes an effort to provide a detailed analysis of the findings made during this assessment procedure and the conclusions drawn as a result.

In this study, documents and talks with people from the Thembalethu Uniting Presbyterian Church were studied and examined for their leadership roles and viewpoints. The attitudes regarding women serving in leadership positions in churches, the proportion of males to women in leadership positions, the size of the major decision-making bodies, and lastly women, in general, are all evaluated. It is clear from this endeavour that conventional views of and attitudes toward women continue to influence how women are viewed and treated at Thembalethu in George, Western Cape, as well as in the church as a whole. The roles that women play in the church are shaped and directed by the attitudes of both men and women, which has ramifications for how women are socialized in the church and society.

In light of this, women have continued to hold lower-ranking roles in church leadership and are often given jobs that seem tokenistic in nature, designed to prevent women from criticizing church institutions or structures. Militant women are forceful and fight for their rights as women. As the church enters the new millennium, it must face the reality of women's status and place within the church, particularly about their equal participation and representation in leadership roles and major decision-making bodies that have an impact on the roles women play within the church.

Women must understand that any form of independence they may be advocating will only come to pass if they take the initiative. If anything is to be accomplished at all, it is in their hands to bring about liberation. At all levels of the participating denominations, the experience of having women in leadership positions in South African Presbyterianism has been favourable. Nowadays, women are seldom ever mentioned separately when discussing

leadership in the church. Despite some resistance and archaic patriarchal attitudes and behaviours, there has been a story of progressive integration as leadership was broadened and developed to all facets of the denomination's life.

Despite the still-present difficulties, an integrated ministry has benefitted the church and will do so in the future. Unlike the experience of the denomination and its members, which is largely good, the experience of women in the UPCSA is uneven, with some having major doubts about the sincerity and integrity of their participation. They are still fighting.

6.1. Research Findings

The study hypothesized that the leadership issue at Thembalethu in George, where the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA) is located, deviates from the goal and diminishes the church's commitment to its mission. The Central Cape Presbytery's Presbyterian Church of Thembalethu is currently experiencing a serious crisis as a result of this. Two consequences of the current situation for the Church can be inferred from the arguments in this paper. The potential of creating a male-dominated church and corruption is the first implication. not to mention the patriarchy's monopolistic approach.

For instance, there was great enthusiasm among preachers and leaders to spread the gospel across the church soon after the two denominations merged. Regardless of gender, many of the participants felt motivated to live by Christian principles after seeing and learning from church members' participation. As a result, many people completely abandoned conventional views. All new members embraced the ministers' messages of unity and brotherly love. Unfortunately, the Church's messages and tenets appear to have become meaningless as a result of the persistent disagreements inside it. The church members currently experience patriarchal and tribal oppression. Patriarchy has given the Church a triumphalist mindset. Paul, however, believes that God's love through the Holy Spirit results in triumph in Christ rather than triumphalism, even in the face of situations that other people might reject or shun as indicators of weakness and helplessness (1 Corinthians, 1:25; 2:3; 9:22). As was previously mentioned, those who adopt this tribalistic and patriarchal mindset become very tolerant of immorality and even complacent about traditional beliefs to keep their followers. Even while the Thembalethu branch maintains its membership figures, this highlights the level of moral corruption that is consuming the neighbourhood and church. For fear of losing them, many leaders (ministers) refrain from guiding their followers in the direction of truth.

To achieve this, a life of mutual dependency must be based on moral principles, social justice, and solidarity.

The possibility of the Presbyterian Doctrine disappearing is the second implication. The Presbyterian Church in Thembalethu was adamant in its early years about adhering to its teachings and precepts. For example, new members had to go through a serious confession of sins and then had to make distinctly obvious decisions about the biblical messages. Contrary to what they heard from church pastors, the messages were very different from what they heard from elders. Additionally, there was no change in the message during the missionary era. The missionaries' preaching was strongly Christocentric, especially in light of the Christ-centred nature of this Christian organization. It served as an example of how Jesus' message of redemption for unbelievers was delivered through the Holy Spirit. Contrarily, the messages being spread by Church leaders right now are neither Christ-centred nor based on the Bible. Instead, they sow the seeds of discord among Christians, turning them against God.

6.1.2. Suggestions and Recommendations

Uniting Presbyterian women still face discrimination in this community. This is due to sufficient evidence showing that changes in the church are occurring slowly and often inadvertently when we examine the issues addressed in this research. For instance, the patriarchal aspect of the church is at a crossroads concerning sexism, patriarchy androcentric, and church institutions. These issues have been articulated for many years, but they continue to be a major source of negative effects on the status and location of women in the church. The patriarchal nation of the church, which includes the aforementioned factors, has thus continued to mould and guide how women are valued in society, and how women are portrayed in the church also affects their future.

Women should be seen by the church as whole human beings made in God's image and capable of answering his call. Women should therefore be allowed to freely participate in all aspects of the church. To strengthen stability, the church should consist of a group of believers who are solely in charge of their spiritual connection to God. The church's institutions and hierarchies shouldn't prevent women from using their abilities and gifts to serve the church, of which they are integral parts. Women should lead the church on their own, without asking or receiving permission from men to do so. In the home of God, women and men should cooperate as equals, respecting one another's integrity, abilities, and dignity. Even while women participate in the church today in nearly every capacity, the

church nevertheless has to address the issue of gender imbalances in terms of numbers. Due to this stark contrast, many people believe that women are only included in some positions in the church as a decoy to silence anyone who would dare to challenge the involvement of women and men on an equal footing.

Women have made efforts over the years to free themselves from male dominance. However, they should continue to put in a lot of effort while realizing that their continued pressure on institutions and organizations that uphold repressive and discriminatory practices against women has the power to liberate people (Muriithi 1999:94).

For this to be effective, I recommend these five (5) ways to promote the inclusion of women in Church leadership:

1) Give examples to follow

This could be a hard challenge for male pastors. I advise looking for reputable female lead pastors or females serving in other church leadership positions. Tell your congregation about their experiences. Highlight them in a lecture, a video clip, or on your Facebook page. Even better, let a female guest speaker use your platform. Pastors, both male and female must make a conscious effort to normalize women in positions of leadership. The congregations must understand that female pastors are the norm and not an exception (Fulthorp 2016:11).

2) Remind Congregations

Leaders must explicitly teach their congregations that it is both biblically and theologically acceptable for women to serve as pastors of churches. Additionally, as a woman in a leadership position, you shouldn't assume that everyone in your congregation supports women in leadership. Some people will put aside their opposition to female pastors out of loyalty to "their church" or because they are your friend or relative. All congregation members must be taught how to navigate and interpret contentious Scripture verses about female pastors. They need to receive sound guidance and stand firmly on sound theological premises (Fulthorp 2016:13).

3) Rectify Untrue Assumptions

If somebody expresses hesitation about having a woman preach or serve in a leadership position, politely address their concerns. Correct them gently so they can develop and

become everything the Holy Spirit wants them to be. By defending the Word's truth against ignorance, we must take a stance (Fulthorp 2016:14).

4) Mentor and Coach Female Leaders

Men don't be scared to coach male lead pastors while also including women. Invite a female leader to join an all-male pastor's ministry peer coaching group. Increase the number of female pastors and normalize their presence. Don't be scared to mentor someone of the opposite gender but do it while maintaining your integrity. Use the same guidelines you would while offering advice to men (Fulthorp 2016:15).

5) Applying incremental change

Change can frequently be upsetting and confusing. Consider making modest but significant adjustments to the course materials or program. Change your policy regarding women gradually, and gradually include more women on your pastoral staff. This kind of change is encouraged, according to Dr. Mel Ming, founding partner and owner of Leadership Development Resources: "If you want to change culture, if you can let them experience a change in a non-threatening way, they are more likely to embrace it than if you polarize it. Allow them to experience the novel without even realizing it (Fulthorp 2016:11-16).

In the Uniting Presbyterian Church today, specifically in Thembalethu in George under the Central Cape Presbytery, the topic of women's roles in the church is becoming more and more significant. It is convenient to refer to the opposing positions in the argument as complementarian and egalitarian. According to the egalitarian viewpoint, women and men are equal in both essence and function, hence there should be no functional subordination of women to men in church activities. The complementarian viewpoint contends that although men and women are fundamentally equal, men should lead the church. In essence, women and men are equal, yet they should function differently. Greater complexity is involved in how the details of the egalitarian vs. complementarian perspectives are implemented. A Presbyterian discussion's criteria have been presented in the above chapters (Wallace 2004).

My two biggest worries about this issue are that (1) it is splitting Presbyterians in ways that have never happened before and (2) it has recently brought up the Trinity, and that both sides are understanding the Triune God somewhat differently. In the scheme of redemption, women each perform a special and specific function. They are complete human beings with thought, emotion, and spiritual qualities. To put women on an equal footing and in

partnership with men, it is crucial to acknowledge their human dignity as individuals with their rights, notwithstanding their biological distinctions from men. The pilgrim church must choose which areas women can be given more power in. All facets of society now have women present, including those that were once thought to be the domain of men (Wallace 2004).

For instance, in the civil world, we have female presidents, prime ministers, governors, defense ministers, secretaries of state, financial advisers, eminent scientists, chiefs of police, generals of the armed forces, including the air force, and many more. I constantly ask myself, "What more can we do to empower women, to include women's experience and expression of God, to change attitudes through a proper understanding of the role of men and women in the family, society, and the Church, and to increase awareness of the original mutuality between men and women?" as a Presbyterian. Do we possess the same pioneering courage that Jesus possessed?

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