

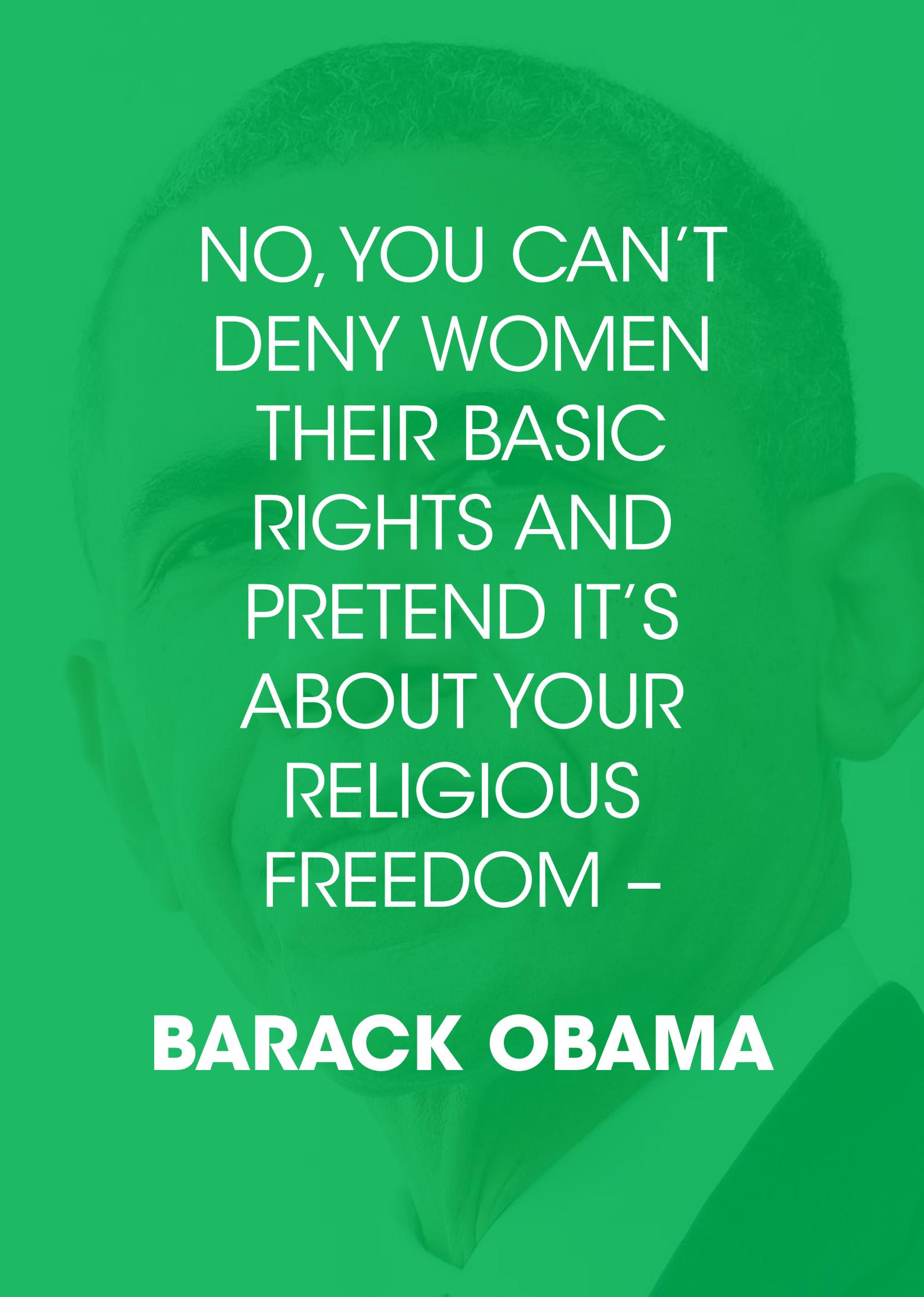
Issue 62 • June, 2017

Arise

A Women's Development Magazine Published by ACFODE

RELIGION, GENDER & WOMEN'S RIGHTS





NO, YOU CAN'T
DENY WOMEN
THEIR BASIC
RIGHTS AND
PRETEND IT'S
ABOUT YOUR
RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM –

BARACK OBAMA

Vision

A just society where gender equality is a reality

Mission

To empower women and influence legislation and policy for gender equality in Uganda

Core Purpose

Advocacy for gender equality and equity

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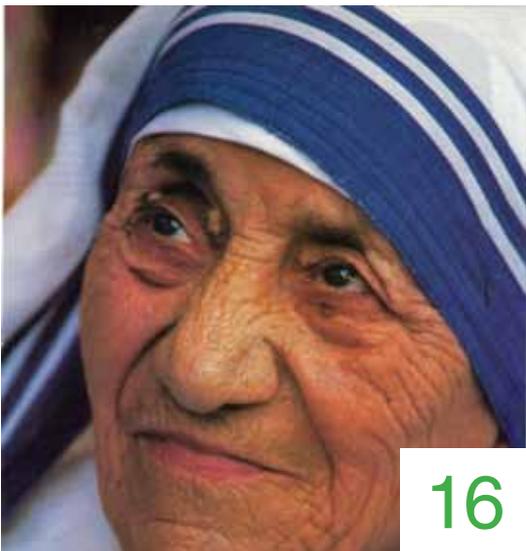
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THE LIFTING OF THE
WOMAN DOES NOT
REQUIRE THE TEARING
DOWN OF THE MAN. IN
FACT, A STRONG WOMAN
APPRECIATES A STRONG
MAN. CONVERSELY, A
STRONG MAN IS NOT
INTIMIDATED BY A STRONG
WOMAN.

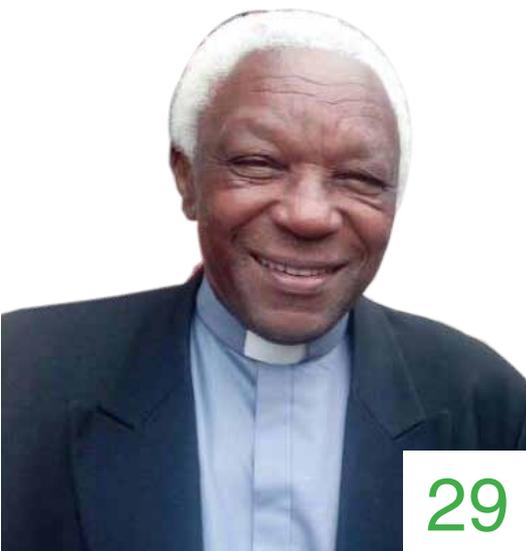
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12



16



29

Contents

08 GENDER COMPOSITION ON THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE – INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL STATISTICS

10 DOES RELIGION HAVE A WOMAN PROBLEM?

12 RELIGION AND WOMEN: EVOLVING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

16 THE BATTLE BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM – WHY WOMEN MUST BE ORDAINED PRIESTS

19 FEATURE INTERVIEW: THE RISE OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN MINISTRY

24 RELIGION DOESN'T JUSTIFY DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

29 VOICES OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AT THE FOREFRONT OF PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

35 ISLAM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS – COMMENTARY FROM A RELIGIOUS LEADER

38 INFLUENTIAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON WHAT THEIR RELIGIONS ARE DOING TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

42 RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE: CAN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE JUSTIFY DIVORCE?

45 BOOK REVIEWS

47 DOES RELIGION PROMOTE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN?

49 HOW RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS CAN USE SOCIAL INTEREST GROUPS TO ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY

52 EDUCATION BEYOND IMAGINATION



38

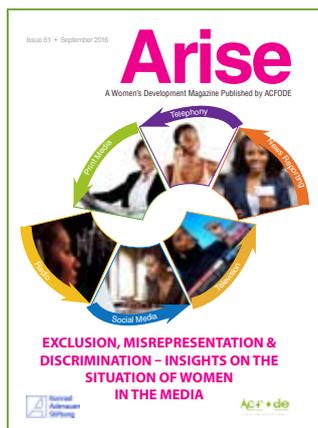


47



52

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor,

I was very much excited about getting to know a wide range of female media personnel in issue 61. Particularly the interview with Remmy Bahati from NBS TV caught my eye. This reminded me of how she was bundled up on

a police truck while in the field early last year but she did not stop the live coverage amidst all that. I therefore urge all women in the media to remain zealous despite of the occupational hazards they face.

Olive Nazziwa – Freelance Journalist

Dear Editor,

It was very gratifying reading the various pieces that were put together in a professional manner. Issues 61 was very informative, I pray that God will continuously bless you with knowledge and wisdom to share with his people what will uplift women and eventually give men respect for women as God's special partners and friends.

Rev. Canon. Dr. John Senyonyi – Uganda Christian University Mukono

Dear Editor,

I would like to appreciate the effort put in Arise issue 61. It vividly paints a picture of how the media (local and international) views women as well as women in media. They have been portrayed in a negative way and this has had impact on child perception. This is evidenced through sexually explicit dance moves as shown in various media. Nevertheless some women have been privileged to be portrayed in positive light.

Emmanuel Yiga - Makerere University

Dear Editor,

We need to celebrate the unique beauty in each of us and not fantasize to be like models, actors and musicians. I completely agree with Onyait's advice to build confidence in women and let them know that beauty is natural and neither is it photo shopped nor makeup. I kept smiling throughout this article. Kudos!!!!

Agaba Marlon – Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU)

Dear Editor,

Thanks for the Arise about women and media. Truth be told, the fourth estate is a powerful tool and no matter how much content a media outlet publishes for and about women or how committed management is to remuneration, if there isn't a physical representation of women in the newsroom, then gender balance is a dream away from reality.

Diana Namanda - Kampala

Dear Editor,

In addition to the article on, "The roles of new media in mobilizing attention to women's rights," I think institutions need to increase skills and leadership abilities through mentorship and development programs. This will ensure that women/girls gain confidence and skills that are handy in moving up the job ladder thereby creating gender equity and equality.

Scovia Khayiyi – Marie Stopes International Uganda

Dear Editor,

The book review, "Challenging images of women in the media", is very catchy. It explores trials of women in media which causes them (women) to constantly question their role in global culture. I believe this would make media houses realize the different struggles women go through while executing journalistic duties so that they work upon them. I really look forward to reading this book.

Grace Mayanja - Kyebando Kampala



Sandra Nassali

Editor In Chief

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FROM THE EDITOR

Arise issue No. 62 delves into issues of religion and gender. Since time immemorial, humankind has been religious. And religion as an expression of our innate spirituality has not only evolved but has taken on several forms. Some, such as Christianity – in its various manifestations –, Islam and the Baha’i faith, have spread to the point where they have come to count among the major world religions. How do women fare in the context of these faiths?

A look at various Christian faiths – Catholicism, Anglicanism and Pentecostalism – throws light on the doctrines, attitudes, trends and motive power inherent within each one. In terms of numbers, to what extent are women involved in Christianity? Besides attending prayers, what other roles do women play in these churches? What opportunities exist for women to make headway in the hierarchy of each church? And for women who aspire to the top position in their church, is this a realistic possibility? Are the spaces that can accommodate women’s legitimate leadership aspirations expanding or shrinking? And why? Are women discriminated against more in some churches than in others? What about the issue of domestic violence –what does the Bible say about this? What about the thorny issue of divorce – especially in a situation where persevering in marriage might mean death? This question becomes particularly important in cases where domestic violence rears its ugly head.

The magazine also offers invaluable insights into the views and promulgations of the Qur’an on women’s place in the domestic sphere and in holy spaces and on why certain things are done in certain ways. The subtle – and sometimes not-so-subtle – differences in interpretations of the Qur’an regarding gender relations and how women should relate to Islam, greatly enrich the discussion. And so do the comparisons made between Islam and the Baha’i faith as far as gender relations and equality are concerned.

At the end of the magazine are reviews of two important and insightful autobiographical books – both of which dwell on the lives of emigrants to the United States who find themselves having to grapple with utterly different situations. The first, *Behold the Dreamers*, by Imbolo Mbue, originally from Cameroon, is about the struggles involved in finding one’s feet and trying to succeed in a new land. The second, *When Breath Becomes Air*, by Paul Kalanithi, originally from India, is about the certainty of impending death – at the early age of 37 – from cancer after everything else has turned out so well.

Arise No.62 is a rich and varied tapestry of voices, views, experiences and texts that will set you thinking like never before about the nexus between the various major religious faiths and gender equality. And the book reviews are just the kind that will spur you to add yet another couple of captivating books to your must-read list.

GENDER COMPOSITION ON THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE – INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL STATISTICS

BRIAN MUTEBI

Many leadership roles in the Church have been restricted to males. In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, only men serve as priests or deacons; only males serve in senior leadership positions such as pope and bishop.

Christian traditions that officially recognise saints as persons of exceptional holiness of life do list women in that group, however. The most prominent woman is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is highly revered in Roman Catholicism as the “Mother of God”.

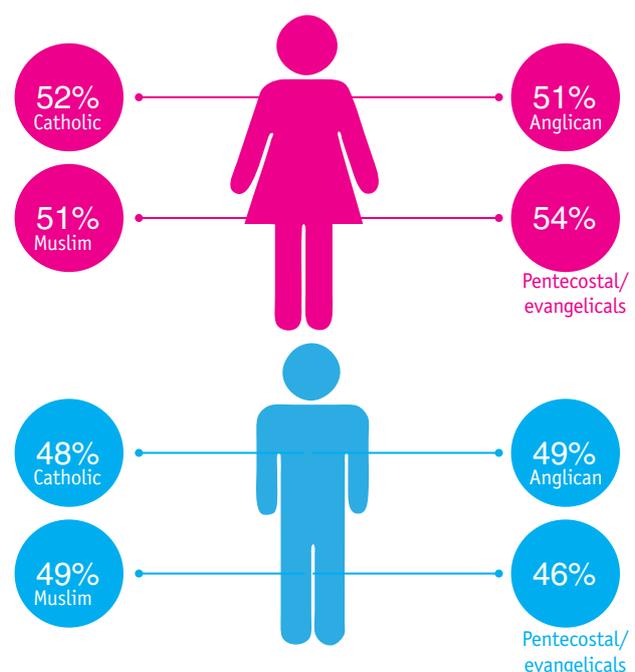
Protestant denominations are relaxing their age-old stand on the position of women ministers in the Church. Today women are ordained into the priesthood in the Anglican Church.

Charismatic and Pentecostal churches have embraced the ordination of women ministers, and have a good number of women in senior positions. We delve into a little more detail in regard to statistics of women in religious spaces.

Uganda

In Uganda, the gender gap in religion is small. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church, the religion with the highest number of followers, according to the 2014 National Population and Housing Census, account for 39% of the 34.6 million Ugandans, of whom 52% are women and 48% are men.

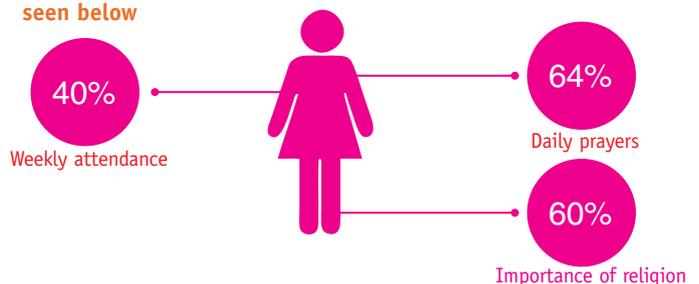
Gender composition among religions in Uganda

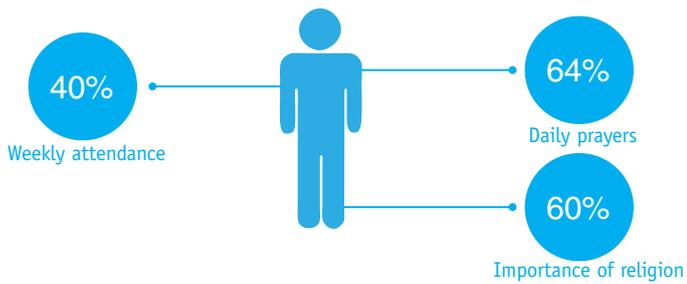


The United States (US)

A typical US congregation draws an adult crowd that is 61% female and 39% male. This gender gap characterises all age categories (US Congregational Life Survey, 2003).

The US is one of the countries where the gender gap is wide as seen below



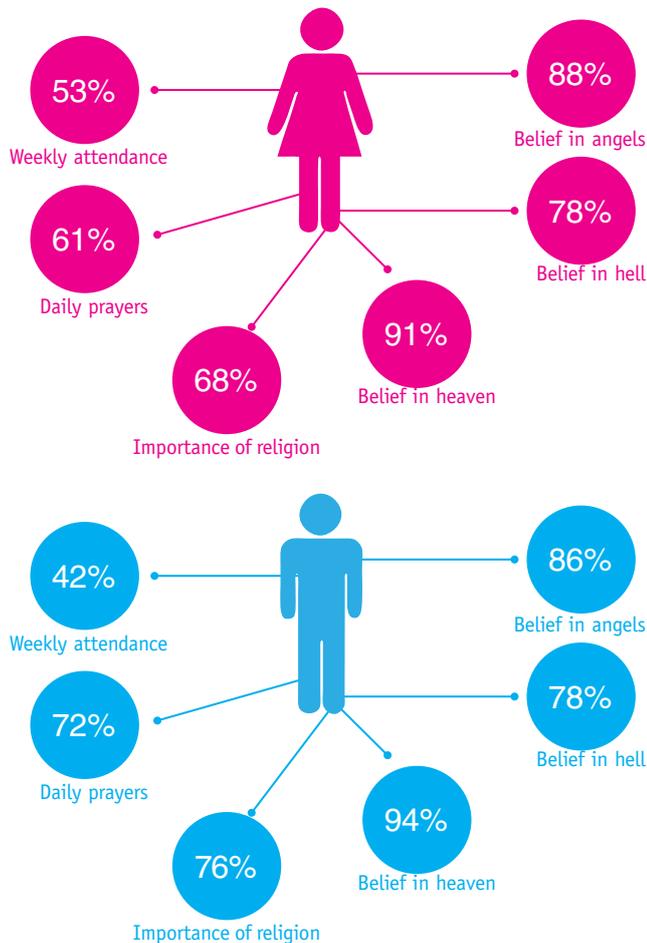


Nineteen per cent of American women are religiously unaffiliated (people who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” and are sometimes called the “nones”), while 27% of American men are religiously unaffiliated. Of these, however, 5% and 3% respectively attend religious services weekly (Religious Landscape Study, Pew Research Center, 2014; Global Picture, Pew Research Center, 2008-2015).

Around the world, 83.4% of women identified with a religious group compared with 79.9% of men.

The gender gap in worship service attendance differs between Muslim-majority and Christian-majority countries. Men attend more religious services in predominantly Muslim countries and Israel while women attend more in predominantly Christian countries.

Christians



The gender gap in worship service attendance differs between Muslim-majority and Christian-majority countries. Men attend more religious services in predominantly Muslim countries and Israel, while women attend more in predominantly Christian countries.

The writer is a development worker and communication specialist; he can be reached at: brmutebi@gmail.com



DOES RELIGION HAVE A WOMAN PROBLEM?

BOB G. KISIKI

||
In a number of religions, women have played significant roles that have furthered the cause of those faiths. A good example is the Catholic faith where nuns play a vital role in the church: taking care of the vulnerable, teaching tenets of the faith and educating as well as providing health services in countries where they have bases.

Enter any church anywhere (I must confess I don't know what goes on in a mosque) or go to any gospel crusade or Christian conference; you will find that the majority in attendance are females. This could be brought down to the fact that the world has more women than men, which is plausible, but haven't you seen bodies with near-exclusive male membership, even though the world has more women than men? There's just something about women and religion.

A 1997 study by Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle put the above phenomenon to three primary causes. One, they said that women

feel emotions at greater heights than men do, thus they tend to turn to religion more in times of high emotions such as gratitude or guilt. The second explanation they came up with is that female socialisation is more likely to align with values that are commonly found in religion, such as conflict mediation, tenderness and humanity.

Finally, they said that females are more likely to identify with religion as a natural consequence of societal structures. For example, since many religions emphasise women as caretakers of the home, the societal expectation of women to take greater responsibility than men for the upbringing of a child makes religion an appealing commitment to them. Because women are more likely to be found looking after the sick, giving birth and all those things that require more direct divine intervention, they tend to rush to religion faster than their male counterparts.

In a number of religions, women have played significant roles that have furthered the cause of those faiths. A good example is the Catholic faith where nuns play a vital role in the church: taking care of the vulnerable, teaching tenets of the faith and educating as well as treating nations where they have bases.

Scripture is also rife with cases of women who played significant roles in society. We read about women like Ruth, Esther, Deborah, Jochebed, Moses' mother who refused to kill him and instead placed him in a basket on the River Nile; Pharaoh's daughter who actually raised Moses; Dorcas (also known as Tabitha) in the book of Acts and the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume and wiped them with her hair... All

Where Islamic face veils or headscarves are banned and where they are mandatory



of having cavorted with the snake and, consequently, led to the curse of death, when you read the portion of this story (Gen 3.6) where Eve chatted with the devil, it actually says: “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye... she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was there with her, and he ate it.” Did you see that? The husband was actually in attendance as all this evil was happening. Who had God spoken to in the beginning? Adam. It is to him that God had given instructions about not eating from this tree and, typical man that he was, he just stood there as Eve gave away our destiny. Who is to blame?

In the case of women talking in church, the explanation I found in my research is that women used to sit in a separate section of the synagogue and, sometimes, they would talk amongst themselves as the service was going on. This would disrupt the proceedings, and it is the reason Paul says they should keep quiet, and if they need to inquire about something, they should ask their own (I like this one) husbands at home. It had nothing to do with preaching or other church rituals.

Finally, the one about the woman who is bitterer than death – this is not about all women, as some choose to misquote the verse. It is about the temptress, and surely we should all agree that she is not good for society, unless you’re the kind who thrives on her favours. Women are not a problem to religion; women have a problem with religion.

The writer is a Senior Sub-Editor with the New Vision.

these women make a great contribution to what Christian denominations profess.

Yet, strangely, many religions still have issues with women as far as roles and responsibilities are concerned. The Anglican Church, for instance, has still refused to consecrate female bishops; while their Catholic counterparts do not even ordain women as priests. I can imagine having to change the entire set-up to allow either for “female fathers” or to now talk about “mothers”. The concept of mothers is found among nuns, who have the position of Mother Superior. In Islam, most leadership positions are filled by men, and in some sects, even the way women dress have been contested. So the question comes up: Does religion have a problem with women; or do even women have a problem with religion... or both?

We will focus mainly on Christianity, which I understand better than any other religion. Most of the issues people have against women are derived from stories in Scripture, ironically. Let’s start with Genesis, the most logical place to start. Because the snake (the devil incarnate) is said to have tempted Eve, the woman, men have always cited this as

reason to look at the woman as the cause of trouble as far as our relationship with God is concerned; specifically, when we’re overcome with loathing for the consequence of death. Notable evangelist Apostle Paul also talks about this, when he is arguing about the place of women in the church.

The other issue is about women speaking in church, again propounded by Paul, in the letter he wrote to the Corinthians. In 1Cor. 14:33[b]-35, he says, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.” Finally, in Eccl. 7:26, Solomon, the all-time cradle of wisdom, wrote: “And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters.”

There are many other negative and easy-to-misrepresent scriptures in the Bible, but let’s work with those, for lack of space. While one may blame the coming of death on the woman who is accused



RELIGION AND WOMEN: EVOLVING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

WANZALA E. MARTIN

We often ask whether religion is good for women. However, I think it would be just as interesting to ask: “Are women good for religion?”

As the roles and responsibilities of women in society at large have changed, religion in various contexts across the world has responded to the changes in a number of ways. New professional roles in churches and synagogues as well as mosques have been opened to women, including, in most mainline denominations, that of ordained clergy. Lay leadership positions, are increasingly being filled by women. Along with these structural changes, a number of theological issues have been engendered, including the recovery of women’s share of religious history, changing images of God and the church, and issues relating to sexual equality and justice.

On the other hand, some religious groups have taken the lead in opposing women’s assumption of more public roles and also movements to free women from the domestic role through, among other things, birth control and divorce. These issues have been joined to larger movements such as the gay rights movement over which religious groups and denominations across the globe have become polarised. They have also

Pastor Joyce Meyer, a renowned international preacher, charismatic Christian author, motivational speaker, and President of the Joyce Meyer Ministries.

affected the churches' expectations of a large pool of female volunteer workers. Thus the general pattern of changing roles and responsibilities for women has changed the structure, both social and ideological, of religion worldwide.

A closer look at trends in global theological history indicates that women have been yearning for greater roles, more leadership positions, and greater participation. At the same time, however, this has actually been getting harder for them to do – thereby creating a bit of tension.

Women have always been interested and extremely active in religion; in fact, they have been central to all the world's religions. Historically, women have been able to play very significant roles in religion. In the Christian tradition nuns, for example, had a lot of authority at certain times in history, acting as very independent groups without a great deal of clerical control.

As already pointed out, women around the world have always been central in all religions. That is partly because women have always had a big stake in developing their relationship with the divine, in getting closer to God, to what they see as the most true, the most beautiful, the most powerful; but also because women deal with the real everyday important issues of life and survival – birth, life, marriage, illness and wellbeing and, of course, death.

Women historically have been able to play big roles in faith communities, without necessarily having to defer to male leadership. The equality of women to men when it comes to holding authoritative positions and doctrinal and scriptural belief varies based on each religion. Some religions give more freedom to females, while



Pastor Imelda Namutebi. She is the Senior Pastor and Founder of Liberty Worship Centre International Lugala, Kampala

others are still largely patriarchal and male-centric in nature.

Of course, women have attained higher levels of education in modern times, entering the workforce and gaining much greater public prominence. Many religions have not kept up. though: what we see is male leaders, clergy and learned men increasingly trying to expand their control over religion and over women – notably in fundamentalist movements but also elsewhere – to hold onto power. And that is leading to intense debate around the world.

The Anglican Church, where I used to belong, has been the site of a serious contestation for some time now (especially in the Church of England)

between women wanting to be in positions of equal leadership as bishops – as they are in the United States Episcopal Church – and a leadership unwilling to accept female authority. This can also be seen in Buddhist countries, where female nuns want to be ordained as well as to have equal status with monks. In Islamic countries, greater numbers of educated women who are very skilled in interpreting the Qur'an are starting to challenge men for leadership positions. In all these cases, rather unsurprisingly, there is a bit of a struggle over power.

In writing this piece, out of curiosity I analysed the situation of women in the Islamic nation

of Senegal and found that Islam there plays a very important role: it forms the entire domain of collective thinking. Because some religious texts are interpreted in ways that label women as inferior, many feminists posit that Islam is an obstacle to women's emancipation. However, the role of women in Senegal's pervasive religious context is more complex than one might think.

The role of women in Muslim societies became a budding field of study in the early 1980s, coinciding with the rise of religious conservatism in Senegal. At that time, life was extremely difficult for Senegalese women who dared to talk about the Qur'an as a source of freedom, especially when preachers on radio and national TVs condoned beating one's wife "according to instructions in the Qur'an". Certain passages in the Qur'an were often interpreted in ways that were unfavourable to women, giving rise to religious discourse about the obedience of women, the superiority of men and the duties of women to manage a home, have children and accept polygamy as an inevitable occurrence. In addition, women were legally considered minors.

However, the determination of Senegalese women to move forward, coupled with international pressure for women's rights, has opened up interesting new prospects. Senegalese women now have a place of their own in religious life. Participation in public intellectual debates on gender equality in Islam was the first step in making the role of women visible in the religious public sphere.

For example, much controversy surrounds the interpretation of the 34th verse of Surah an-Nisa' in the Qur'an which states that men are the "maintainers" of women. While many point to this verse as proof of Islam's subjugation of women, they pay little attention to the ensuing justification – in the same verse – which describes a de facto state of affairs: "because they spend of their property [for the support of women]". The authority of men over women depends on their capacity to provide for the needs of their wives, in other words. However, because women are now increasingly able to provide for themselves and their children, not to mention their husbands, this dependence no longer defines their relationship with men.

In addition to their own interpretation of religious texts, Senegalese women have also created a space for themselves in other areas of religion. One example is Sokhna Magat Diop. Diop inherited her father's responsibilities as a religious leader of the Mouride Sufi order in Dakar following his death in the 1980s. She not only owned land that was cultivated by her followers, but also provided them with religious guidance and appointed imams.

Another example of the dynamism of Muslim Senegalese women is former journalist Ndiaye Mody Guirandu, who founded a new Sufi order. Like the leaders of other religious communities, Guirandu demonstrated the role and status that women can legitimately achieve in Senegal.

The criticism unleashed about Guirandu's vocation is edifying. In a country where Islam is central to

all activities, where eschatology is a part of daily life, Guirandu is viewed as a "heretic" because she broke with the tradition that women were confined solely to membership of religious associations and to the organisation of ceremonies.

In a country like Senegal, gaining strength and prominence in the religious sphere, even making the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, can serve as a launching pad for women into the public sphere. Although women are discouraged from political participation, marginalised in public affairs, legally denied land governance and religious leadership in public places, they have begun to change the status quo by creating awareness of important religious issues for women, encouraging public debate about women's roles in Senegal and taking part in religious ceremonies.

Some progress has already been achieved, and this is encouraging. However, more needs to be done to introduce democratic values into the relationships between men and women. In the absence of these, the concept of gender equality in religions is a mere fantasy.

The writer is a social worker and can be reached at: weamartin@gmail.com



Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe. Among the works for which the 53-year-old nun has been recognised is the rehabilitation of girls who had been abducted by the LRA rebels, and their children. In 2014, she won the UN Women of Impact Award. In addition, she was a winner of the inaugural CNN heroes awards that celebrates ordinary people making extra ordinary differences around the world.



THE BATTLE BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM – **WHY WOMEN MUST BE ORDAINED PRIESTS**

TUMUSIIME K. DEO

Mother Teresa, is known in the Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta. On 7 October 1950, Teresa received Vatican permission for the diocesan congregation which would become the Missionaries of Charity. In her words, it would care for “the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone.” By 1997 the 13-member Calcutta congregation had grown to more than 4,000 sisters who managed orphanages, AIDS hospices and charity centres worldwide, caring for refugees, the blind, disabled, aged, alcoholics, the poor and homeless and victims of floods, epidemics and famine.

In a normal conventional family, there’s a father and a mother, named so naturally arising from their reproductive role. This nomenclature incidentally does not reflect in the Catholic Church family where we see priests named “Fathers”, but the religion is muted on “Mothers”,

in as much as the roles they (priest “Fathers”) play are not predominantly for men in nature. Even when the Catholic Church provides for the female vocation of nuns, they are called “Sisters”, in a way depicting them to be in a rank below the priests (“Fathers”) and, I dare say, relevance. Yet we know very well

that lots of nuns do a great deal of spiritual and vocational service that practically tallies with the work that priests do. So, why shouldn’t women be ordained priests in the Catholic Church?

The official argument adduced

usually is that Canon Law of the Catholic Church does not provide for women to become priests. This, in my opinion, is consistent with the history of the church where women are not viewed as being suitable for positions of leadership; and African traditions also hold that the woman's place is in the kitchen. However, going by the developments in the 21st Century where women are actively involved in all spheres of society including media, politics, engineering, medicine, innovations and business, it would be unrealistic to undermine women's potential in religious affairs. In essence, there's dire need for Canon Law to be brought into line with the thrust of modern developments.

The other not-so-popular argument why women are not ordained priests is the fact that women traditionally bear the brunt of child-bearing through pregnancy, menstrual periods and child care, all of which are considered to be direct impediments to the priestly vocation. These arguments have, however, been demystified by modern trends, considering that women today are involved in even more demanding vocations, and yet these concerns have not been seen to hinder their progress in any significant manner. We have many female lawyers, politicians, business moguls, journalists, engineers, name it. Why should women, therefore, be viewed differently when it comes to the priesthood? In any case, what ought to matter is what women are able to deliver through preaching rather than their physical dynamics.

Perhaps one other argument could be that Jesus was not seen to work with women in his worldly mission. Indeed we see Jesus choosing only men as apostles, and all the Gospel writers in the New Testament are men. I find it risky though to use this as a basis to deny women the chance to be

ordained Catholic priests, because while it is true that Jesus worked mostly with men, nowhere does he give an explicit command to lock women out of the priestly vocation. A "calling" we are often told it is, but there's no evidence or even guarantee that God or Jesus, for that matter, only calls men.

The Catholic Church, headquartered in Rome, believes that "this requirement is a matter of divine law and thus doctrinal", purporting that not even the pope has the authority to change its position. In 1994, Pope John Paul II declared in his letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*:

Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance...I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.

This position was more recently re-emphasised by the current Pope Francis, who in 2014 said: "With regards to the ordination of women, the church has spoken and says no ... That door is closed." And while it is true that the sanctity of church doctrine ought to be guarded, such explicit declarations quite contradict the popular teaching on the equality of women and men as children of God.

In holding her ground on the question of the ordination of women, though, the Catholic Church ought to be reminded of the fact that her sister, the Anglican Church, has successfully moved to the next level with remarkable success. The year was 1976 when the Anglican Church eased out of the crowd, seeing the first ordinations of women as priests. Two decades later, we had the first woman elevated to the position of Bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada. Victoria

Matthews was elected suffragan bishop in the Diocese of Toronto on 19 November 1993, and was ordained to the episcopate on 12 February 1994. It ought to be emphasised here that the Anglican Church evolved from the Catholic Church, and both follow in the footsteps of the same Jesus.

On the other hand, while Islam, being the other big religion in the world, has not yet given the green light for women to serve as imams either, there's currently a debate around the argument that the spirit of the Qur'an and the letter of a disputed hadith indicate that women should be able to lead mixed congregations as well as single-sex ones. The prohibition of this is, therefore, widely seen to have developed as a result of sexism in the medieval environment, and of patriarchal interpretations of religious texts that are not part of or reflective of true Islam.

To this end, I personally believe that the issue of women being ordained priests is long overdue, especially in this 21st Century where many of us are now able not just to read and write, but to discern the relationship between women and men vis-à-vis the one God who created them both. So much may be enshrined in historical books and attributed to God, but it is very important that we do not live behind or ahead of our times. We must live within our times, and going by current trends in all spheres of life, this issue needs not be overemphasised.

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WHEN GOD CREATED
MAN AND WOMAN,
HE WAS THINKING,
'WHO SHALL I GIVE
THE POWER TO GIVE
BIRTH TO THE NEXT
HUMAN BEING?' AND
GOD CHOSE WOMAN.
AND THIS IS THE BIG
EVIDENCE THAT WOMEN
ARE POWERFUL

MALALA YOUSAFZAI





FEATURE INTERVIEW: THE RISE OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN MINISTRY

*Gender equality has its foundation in the fact that both male and female were created in the image of God –
Pastor Sarah Ssegane*

Sarah Ssegane is a pastor at Omega Healing Centre, Namasuba, Zana in charge of administration and ministry development. She has been married to Mr. John Ssegane for 21 years and the couple have a 12-year old son. She was ordained a pastor in 2007, at a time when there were no women pastors in the Church. Ssegane had, however, been involved in voluntary ministry service since 2002. She joined ministry while still young in salvation, only driven by passion and the love to serve people. She has since become one of the respected Church leaders at Omega. A former journalist, Ssegane is a communications consultant. She is a former banker and has also worked with international non- government organisations in the country. One of our writers, Brian Mutebi caught up with her for an interview on women's role in ministry.

Q Should women be at the forefront in ministry or in the background?

It depends on what you call forefront or background. Before God, what we see as background may be forefront and what we refer to as forefront may be

Pastor Sarah Ssegane



Sarah and her husband Mr. John Ssegane

**GENESIS 1:27-28;
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background. That said, I think women should be given equal opportunity in ministry like men because God created us equal. God has no favourites and shows no partiality in qualifying us for his blessings or service. He treats us equally and we ought to emulate his heart in dealing with others. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them", and Deuteronomy 10:17 says, "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes."

God does not call us into ministry based on gender but as he deems fit. I know women who are senior pastors/leaders of Churches while their husbands serve in support roles like management and administration. I also know women who are effectively co-pastoring Churches with their husbands.

Some people have alluded to a scripture in 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul urges women to keep silent in the Churches and rather ask their own husbands at home to disqualify women from serving

in certain ministry roles. We need to understand that Paul was addressing a specific community and congregation that had gone out of order. His words were meant to bring correction to the women in the Church of Corinth who seemed to have stepped out of their place of submission in their homes, resulting in chaos and disorder in the Church. Effective ministry begins at home. If we are not in our God-ordained places – that's husbands loving their wives as Christ loves the Church and wives submitting to husbands as to the Lord – then our ministry in the Church is bound to suffer. Today's Church is, not immune to these challenges and, like the Church at Corinth, the leadership may have to take some corrective decisions like temporarily pulling back someone from a ministry role to restore order.

Q Does gender equality have any roots in the Bible?

Yes, gender equality has roots in the Bible. These roots were established in the beginning at creation. Gender equality has its foundation in the fact that both male and female were created by God. They are both the source and

a product of the good thoughts of God. In creating them, He shows no preference of importance. These thoughts are backed by scriptures like Galatians 3:28 which says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Q What evidence is there in the Bible concerning gender equality and women empowerment?

The Bible states that God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." (Genesis 1:27-28). Dominion over everything was given to the woman as well as to the man. The woman was not created inferior to the man; nor was the man greater than the woman.

However, when sin entered the human race, one of the consequences was that men and

women became separated from God, which distorted the Divine order in many ways, one of which was that men began to rule over women (Genesis 3:16). However, God restores this order through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:14 says, "For He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...."

God elevated the status of women when He chose to send His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be born of a virgin. The words and actions of Jesus underscored His elevated opinion of women:

- His first miracle was performed in response to a plea from His mother (John 2:1-11).
- His first revelation of Himself as Messiah was to a woman (John 4:25- 26).
- Following His resurrection, He appeared first to a woman (John 20:1- 16).
- Ancient prophecy was fulfilled when the Spirit of God was given equally to men and women at Pentecost (Acts 2:17).
- The first Church in Europe was begun with a group of women who actually met in the home of a woman (Acts 16:13-15).

For the Bible to carefully record all of the above, it reveals God's purpose to re-establish the position of women to that of equality with men.

Q What are the challenges that women in ministry face today?

Women in ministry, just like women in other arenas of leadership, encounter similar challenges. Pentecostal women who are called to ministry walk a fine and often precarious line. We, on the one hand, are not radical feminists who demand certain rights, or refer to God as "she" at every turn, and, on the other, are not simply passive about our call to ministry. We do notice

the "man's world" in which we must function. But we understand, too, the "female world" that helps make up what we know about the image of God. We are not women who wish to displace men, nor do we view women who are not called to ministry as being in any way inferior. We are women who simply and humbly ask that we be given room to be obedient to the Lord who has called us.

In addition to this difficult personal situation for women, there is also the greater reality of a world desperately needing every anointed person to preach the gospel, while the Church busies itself with unending doctrinal debate over who is qualified to minister in what position. The time has come for Pentecostal women in ministry to leave the arena of debate and simply be who they are and do what God has called them to do.

Then there are issues of being undermined on a gender basis. There are those who misquote scripture in advancing their agenda to keep women away from ministry opportunities or even frustrate them in their pursuit to fulfil their ministry calling. One of the reasons some have advanced the agenda to discredit women in the aspect of Church ministry and leadership relates to their responsibilities in the home. There is the belief that Church ministry takes women away from home and makes them ineffective in their first calling, which is to the home, so women are continuously under pressure to prove this wrong and to prove themselves as able. This is not to say these challenges are indeed absent. Many women in ministry, especially those called to positions of leadership, struggle with the need to balance ministry, careers and home/marriage.

Q How can such challenges be overcome?

I think the starting point should be for women to come out of the victim mentality and pursue who we are and what belongs to us. We need to stand out and be counted. The victim mentality has two extremes. It will either make one passive or aggressive. My view is that in advocating for and pursuing our place in ministry, we need to find the balance and be guided by scripture. For instance, the same Bible that does authenticate our calling to the ministry is the same that calls us to the place of submission.

We also ought to appreciate that amidst those challenges, God will be at work, changing and transforming us to reflect His image in order to be effective in our calling and ministry's roles. The Bible says many are called but few are chosen. We need to be aiming for the latter which requires a deep inner and outer refining by God.

Pentecostal fellowships must be willing to give equal opportunities to women who are called to ministry, not merely allowing them the traditional female roles in the Church but recognising the fact that no position in the Church or servant leadership is gender-restricted.

Those in leadership over women in the Church and those serving with them ought to return to the true and original Pentecostal teaching regarding ministry. One's calling to ministry is confirmed by the gifting. While denominational ordination is important in validating one's

calling, it is simply that – validation. Ministry is through empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Women in ministry should be encouraged to pray for the sick, preach, teach, evangelise, everything.

There is also need for role models that the young generation can emulate. This, coupled with mentorship, would help to prepare the young women for ministry and leadership. In Titus 2:3-5, older women are encouraged to teach the young. Senior church leaders who have successfully appreciated and supported women to pursue their ministry calling without bias should act as role models and be emulated.

Q What role can men play in supporting women in ministry?

I think, first, there has to be recognition that women have a place in ministry in the Church not just because that is what is trending elsewhere, like in the corporate world, but because it is embedded and provided for in scripture. The Church should never be playing catch-up with culture; the Church has always been and always will be a radical counter-cultural community that is defined by scripture and the Spirit of the Living God. The Church is not meant to be following the world but leading the world into fulfilment of God's purposes for it.

Men who are married to women in ministry can support them by allowing them the time to work out their calling. This is not so much a physical thing but mental and emotional. They can also support them by being good listeners, especially at the infant stages of ministry. It does get frustrating, emotionally involving and draining. One needs someone to talk to. They can encourage them by praying for them.

I have been quite blessed to have an

understanding husband who actually is not of my faith but has never objected to my calling and has supported me to do what God has called me to do. I, however, know there are women out there who are not as privileged as I am. It is tough to be called by God to serve Him in specific ways and yet not have the liberty to do it.

Men who minister alongside women should recognise and appreciate the call of God of women to ministry. They should accept and appreciate their gifting and anointing and open themselves up to receive from them and to serve alongside them.

Q How have you managed to excel in ministry?

Well, I am not sure if I have excelled (smiles). I am perhaps on the journey. But what I can say is, it is by God's abundant grace. I cannot take credit for it. It is a journey of pursuing a deep intimate relationship with God, seeking to know who I am in Him and who He really is. You find many women struggling, seeking to take on other forms of identity because they have not sought to know God's original design and intentions for them as women. For me it is a journey of absolute surrender and total dependence on God to have His way in and through me and allowing His power to transform me to be a vessel that would effectively minister to Him and others. It is a journey of self sacrifice; pursuing purpose above all; seeking the truth of God's word, engaging with it and by His grace applying it. It is a journey of continuous learning and unlearning; falling and getting up, to be a better person, a better lover of God and people.

Q How have you balanced ministry, career and marriage?

This is one area where I have fallen and

the Lord has picked me up several times. Had it not been for God's grace, I think I would have lost my marriage. I am quite passionate and resolute by nature so usually when I get introduced to something new, I tend to completely get consumed by it. That is what happened when I got into ministry. I threw all my weight in ministry and my marriage suffered. I had an incorrect perception of ministry. I was doing much more for church than I did for my relationship with my husband. I got the wake-up call when my marriage was hit by some really deep challenges. It is through these challenges that God brought correction. Correction can be painful but they who are disciplined by it, reap a good harvest. I matured in the Lord through prayer, seeking revelation in the Word and, through mentorship, I was able to know how to manage my time better. At the time I was into self-employment, so my career was not that affected. I would say one needs to be both intentional and spiritually sensitive to balance the three well. I have also been privileged to have the Lord teach me certain things without a high demand on my choice. A lot of things that have happened in my life, both positive and negative, have not been by choice. The Lord has always moved ahead of me to work them out. For instance, in a bid to train me to balance the three and make me effective in all, I have had cases where the Lord cut me off from both career and ministry opportunities to allow me time to sit at His feet and learn, and I am still learning.

Q What advice do you have for women in ministry?

I think as women we need to appreciate and accept who God created us to be and what He placed in us. We need to seek to understand it, pursue to become it with all our hearts, and release it into the world. I think many are releasing a counterfeit that influences the world negatively. A lot of things happen to us in life that tend to distort our image and authenticity and as such we carry labels of who we are not. Many become victims of these labels. In an effort to rid themselves of these labels, others have lost their authenticity. But in each of us is an

image of God and potential to dig out. Only God can perform this work with our willingness and commitment.

Q What does the future hold for women in ministry?

I think the future is bright. A lot has changed in the last 30 years in this respect, which I believe will continue. The culture of women in ministry looks much different than it did when I was in my early 20s. At that time, finding a female pastor was a rare thing in the Pentecostal Church. Today we have more women called and taking up pastoral roles. With such women being role models and mentors to the younger generation, I

believe more women will take more leadership roles in the Church. Given their gift of multi-tasking, women will enrol into theology and ministry training. Women will be more valued for their perspective and contribution to the Church community. Women will continue to spread the Gospel through the avenue of social media. Follow Christian women on social media networks and you will find they are quick to share a verse of the day or issues they want promoted. They are quick to get connections. Women are relational – even if the relationship exists over the internet.

A CHURCH WITHOUT
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IS MORE IMPORTANT
THAN THE APOSTLES,
AND THE CHURCH
HERSELF IS FEMININE,
THE SPOUSE OF CHRIST
AND A MOTHER.

POPE FRANCIS





Catholic women are still treated very differently if they choose to follow a religious life.

RELIGION DOESN'T JUSTIFY DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

DESPINA NAMWEMBE

Religion has been a strong factor in keeping families together the world over. Since it forms the basis of a divine shared belief, in the sometimes unknown world of a greater superpower that can transform lives and strengthen that communal sense of being, networking and collective learning, religion is seen as being the unchallenged channel of strong family cohesion and stability by those who follow a particular faith tradition. However, there is a lot that goes on within religious settings that has resulted in little attention being paid to gender issues. Many religious faiths want to maintain the status quo that supports men's supremacy, hence the need for a dialogue about this state of affairs.

Statistically, women are the majority in any faith tradition. Various prayer centres are always filled with women.

Women are also the most ardent believers and this is passed onto their children as they grow up. However, various religious beliefs treat women as second-class in many ways. This can either be in terms of participation, service in most faith groups, leadership on the central governing bodies, property ownership or even social-cultural opportunities that accrue in families and communities.

Is religion masking the challenge?

Many religious groups the world over will openly share that they value and respect women in any religious setting. However, their actions in this regard are usually contrary. Few will go try to unearth the inner and objective feelings of women in their communities.

Is their existence and participation by personal decision or fear and compliance? On the other hand, most women are brought up in any African setting fully aware of their space as being subordinate. The social-cultural nurturing and preparation for their future, even by their own mothers and paternal aunts, don't help much in changing the status quo. The individuals who introduced most of the diverse religions and spiritual expressions in Africa and Uganda, for that matter, were men and were very careful not to tamper with culture. The religious teachings and interpretations, therefore, were emphasised around making most women submissive and law-abiding as opposed to having an equal voice with men.

The Bible talks of women being submissive to their husbands (Eph.5:22-33: "Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as you are to the Lord..."...verse 25 "...and husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church..."). If one is to emphasise the part that talks of Christ loving the Church, I am sure that society would value and respect women. Jesus went through a lot of sacrifice, including His death. He forgave sinners, loved everyone indiscriminately and never judged; nor did he lay a hand on a human being even in his moments of anger. Why don't those who preach emphasise that part of loving your partner to the level of sacrificing one's interest for the good of love but instead they emphasise the women's submission as being one of the key principles of marriage?

On March 23, 2017 one of my nieces who was getting married to her white Canadian boyfriend invited me to be her matron. It was a working day, which made everything easy for us to go through apart from the distance to the church as they were wed in

MANY RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE WORLD WILL OPENLY SHARE THAT THEY VALUE AND RESPECT WOMEN. HOWEVER, THEIR ACTIONS IN THIS REGARD ARE USUALLY CONTRARY.

Mukono. The priest who presided over the ceremony kept on emphasising how my niece was now a servant of her husband. "You are now his servant, okay? Do you understand that?...You have to obey him at all times. He is now your master...I don't want you to copy western cultures that don't respect men...Just know that from today you are his servant and that is the only way your marriage is going to last...". I couldn't believe what I was hearing and I knew that her husband was feeling the same way. If I had my way, I would have told him something right away. However, in my faith tradition women don't speak in church (1 Corinthians 14:34-36: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church"). I still struggle with that. I still find it difficult to embrace the reasons as to why it should be so. All I can see is a law about which there is little certainty whether it's man-made, depending on the prevailing circumstances or whether it's actually

from God, and if it is from Him why He wanted us to be told only by our husbands....etc. After the church service, I was given a chance to speak at the reception and I made it a point to air my disagreements to what the priest had shared during the sermon. The groom and some other women, including his own wife, were all smiles and later thanked me in person. This is a sign that people are becoming more enlightened about some of these religious misinterpretations

There are many verses, for example in the Bible, which make a woman slow down and just either feel uncertain, guilty or even unworthy. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:11-15: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing." And Titus 2:4-5: "Teach the young women to be ... obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

The Qur'an, on the other hand, also has some verses that delegate women to inferior positions in many ways. There are verses that give more authority to men than women in the Qur'an. For example, in Sura Nisaa 4:11: "God directs you as regards to your children inheritance to the male a portion equal to that of 2 females." This clearly shows favouritism towards the male child. If a male child grows up knowing that he can have more than a girl, then he can easily start to underrate her. Some verses

argue that a woman be subjected to psychological and physical torture, for example Sura Anisaa 4:34: "...a woman of ill conduct or disloyal...admonish first, then stop sharing the bed, beat her lightly till she is obedient..." So I always ask myself: How one can measure the gravity of beating in a situation of anger? It is a spiced up way of saying just beat up this lady who is your personal property of sorts. Denying a woman conjugal rights is illegal but also causes emotional stress. Society tends to deem a woman who denies a man sex as being very abusive to him as compared to a man who does the same.

Chapter 4:15 of the Holy Qur'an: "If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, take the evidence of four reliable witnesses from amongst them and if they testify, confine them to houses until death do claim them."

How I wish a similar verse would also be directed at men! I am sure that both genders would be fearful of committing such a sin. We have also seen that people can hate someone and decide to connive and accuse you of wrongdoing when in fact you are innocent. Subjecting a human being to such a horrendous death is not fair, and being selective makes it worse. Nobody condones sin in any form but at the same time avenging sin with sin doesn't make the world a better place.

Religion shouldn't be the vehicle for injustice towards women

If we are to appreciate religion, we need to have that inner human calling of treating and loving another human being the way we love ourselves. This should be the cardinal principle – also referred to as the Golden Rule – found in all religious backgrounds and spiritual expressions the world over. It does no harm to reach out to one another

through teaching positive verses in any faith rather than spreading negativity, hate and destruction. This is so because negativity can never bear positive fruits but will instead only fuel further negativity.

A woman is someone's daughter, sister, mother, grandmother and even close friend. Nobody wants to hurt any of those from a personal perspective. The more we distance ourselves from those realities, the more we are bound to be indifferent. This will blind us to the fact that we are creating current and future generations of people who couldn't care less about a woman.

In the Holy Bible, the book of Romans 2: 11 says: "For God does not show favouritism." Also, in James 2: 8-9 it says: "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself', you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers." Therefore, if God doesn't show favouritism, then it means that the prevailing gender imbalances are man-made.

There are verses in the Holy Qur'an which teach non-favouritism as well. For example: "Whoever does an evil act will only be repaid with its equivalent. But whoever acts rightly, male or female, being a believer, such a person will enter the Garden, wherein they will be provided for without any reckoning." (Surah Ghafir: 40). Also the Holy Qur'an further states: "...and women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner..." (Holy Qur'an, 2:228).

Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Baha'i faith, teaches the following: "The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak,

flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be."

The Baha'i faith further teaches about women and their inherent rights in society: "Women have equal rights with men upon earth; in religion and society they are a very important element. As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs" (The Promulgation of Universal Peace).

It's not too late

The cycle of women's struggle in achieving equality in society seems not to be over yet. This, therefore, calls for a major focus of women themselves on socialising their male children in such a way that they are aware of the dangers of male supremacy and the social discrimination against women. Women bring up their male children without eliminating their domineering attitude towards girls. This cycle has to be broken and women have to provide strong support to their fellow women to ensure that this happens

Positive religious practices and teachings are important and are actually needed in family settings. A family that has less inclination towards faith has a tendency of being in disarray, with each family member acting negatively or sometimes indifferently towards the others. The sustainability of their relationship is also not that much guaranteed. The wives will have less interest in putting their homes

in order and the husbands will always be looking for satisfaction elsewhere, which sometimes becomes a serious family problem. The children, on the other hand, because they have almost no benchmarked control measures, will find them elsewhere, especially among their peers, on social media and the general public.

A community that adheres to positive religious practices is cognisant of each other's pain and suffering and will always communally respond in a positive way by offering support and comfort. Positive religious teachings coupled with our African way of communal life are important. I emphasise the phrase "positive religious practices and teachings" because I have witnessed and also lived through religious situations that portray love yet promote subjection and torture of any human being and, especially, women. If religion is practised and lived positively, and in the awareness that all other human beings need to be respected and accorded the same value, then we are bound to witness a vibrant and interconnected community of individuals that value one another in their diversity.

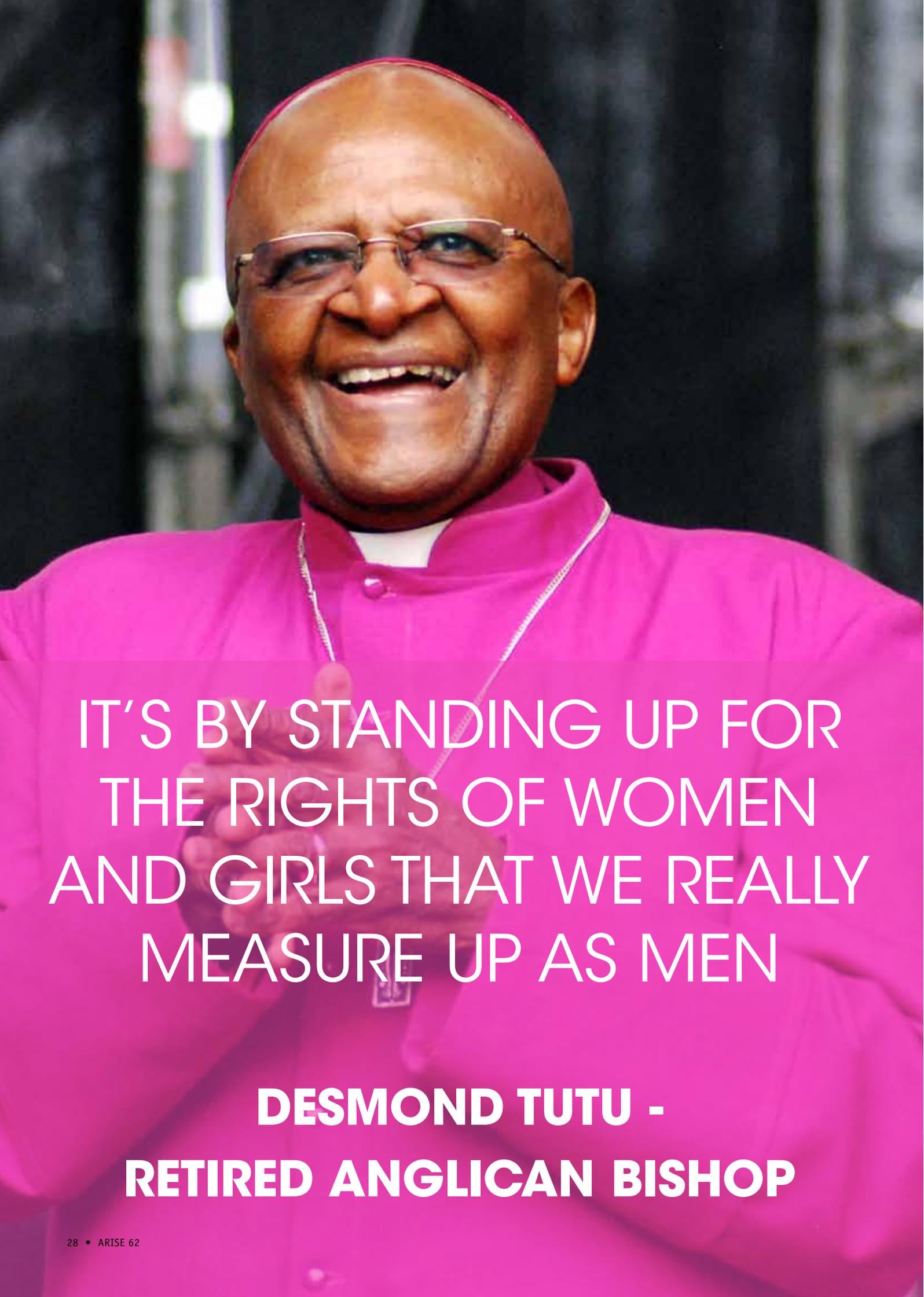
The golden rule, which is a set of scriptures from the different religious backgrounds, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions, teaches us to treat the others the way we want to be treated. It actually places a lot of value on all human beings. Although it is found in all these diverse teachings and in the different spiritualities the world over, we still identify a lot of issues regarding the way women are treated – it is as if they are second-class citizens. Even the countries considered to be most deeply religious continue to overlook these issues.

In conclusion, therefore, most religions and spiritual traditions the world over treat women differently and usually place them lower than men. That is a common practice, whether religiously mandated or not. Cultural stereotypes, for example in Africa and most Asian countries, are another influence. In Uganda, many people are obsessed with having a male child for different reasons, with the most dominant being carrying on the family name. This has cast a cloud over what a girl can offer in development. We can't change religious texts as this can be considered abominable but we can change our inner attitudes towards a fellow human being for the sake of sanity. We can only live on this earth for a short time and enjoying it together as human beings irrespective of perceived social cultural differences can go a long way in supporting our efforts to develop our communities and nations.

We cannot develop fast when we still feel that one part of humanity has to be in the lead and the other should always follow. Much as this may literally be okay, the question is: How strong is the one following you? If you stumble, who is there to hold you in case you fall? There is no way we can go through life's journey without expecting setbacks, in which case a strong helper is key. It is, therefore, up to the men to decide whether this helper is more supportive when strong or weak, especially as the man prepares for the occasions when he stumbles and falls, which is a common phenomenon in today's society.

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THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH FURTHER TEACHES ABOUT WOMEN AND THEIR INHERENT RIGHTS IN SOCIETY: "WOMEN HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS WITH MEN UPON EARTH; IN RELIGION AND SOCIETY THEY ARE A VERY IMPORTANT ELEMENT. AS LONG AS WOMEN ARE PREVENTED FROM ATTAINING THEIR HIGHEST POSSIBILITIES, SO LONG WILL MEN BE UNABLE TO ACHIEVE THE GREATNESS WHICH MIGHT BE THEIRS" (THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE).



IT'S BY STANDING UP FOR
THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN
AND GIRLS THAT WE REALLY
MEASURE UP AS MEN

**DESMOND TUTU -
RETIRED ANGLICAN BISHOP**



VOICES OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AT THE FOREFRONT OF PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

ARISE REPORTER

*I braved opposition to take up
the case of women – **Hajati
Negebah Hussain Tegulwa** -
Board member, Inter-Religious
Council of Uganda*

I am a teacher and counsellor by profession. I taught for eight years in a primary school before I went into community work. The first project I worked on was on the prevention of HIV/AIDS integrated with positive parenting. But there was a low turnout of women so I took a day off to go door-to-door, asking them why they didn't come for my sessions yet I was a Muslim (like them). They said it was because the project was funded by non-Muslims who have a hidden agenda (ulterior motive). I said HIV has no religion. I realised that if I was to do anything among these women, I had to go out of my way and work with them.

I walked through the gates of Gaddafi Mosque (headquarters

of Uganda Muslim Supreme Council) and asked to see the imam. I asked to volunteer with women on development issues. My passion was in education and health. The leadership said since I was interested in women issues, I should go ahead and work with the women, but the question was “which women”? I read through the constitution of the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, and except for the first article that states that all Muslim men and women in Uganda are members of this association, there was no mention of women.

I needed to understand the dynamics. Who, for instance, matters in decision-making? I started with engaging the mufti and the secretary-general directly. The mufti suggested a women, children and human rights desk, but with no budget because such work was not constitutionalised. I ran most of the activities using my own money.

Then I had to deal with opposition from people who felt I had no business there since that was not a woman’s space. I had to find a way to keep my idea alive. I requested for contact persons at various mosques, at sub-county and district levels. That’s how the women district coordinators movement was born. I needed to work on their mindset first. It took me about a year. I formed them into CBOs (community-based organisations), searched for and made available scholarships and contacts for other social services like clean and safe water.

While this was good, it did not go down well with some people. At some point I was reported to the mufti that I was going against the norms (of the Islamic faith). For instance, I was reported that I shook hands with people (in Islam, women are not supposed to shake hands). I asked that person be brought to testify

against me. I did not deny shaking people’s hands. I did so because I worked with people from various faiths. I needed to be accommodative. The particular person who reported me for shaking hands with people had felt underrated when I refused to shake his hands. I asked him if it would be Islamic if I shook his hands only and he had no response. I did not say this to the mufti but the reason was whenever I shook hands with him, he would tickle my palm, which is a form of sexual violence, so I stopped. And many others did that to me. They thought I would open up my skirt for them. How could I? I went to school without my father’s money because being an Arab he believed as a girl I did not deserve an education. I would go door-to-door asking for school fees, and some people wanted to sleep with me first before helping me. I needed an academic qualifications that bore my name but refused to pull my skirt up for men. How could I do it now? So I wasn’t a friend to many, but it was okay.

Nevertheless, my work was constitutionalised in 2014. I became the chair of the Women of Faith Uganda and I sit on the board of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, where I am the only woman on the board. That was also a struggle at first. We would go to meetings where we were invited but never get recognised until I demanded for an explanation. I still hope we can have more slots for women and youth on the board and women to chair some of the committees, like the finance committee.

We have Women of Faith Uganda represented at the African Council of Religious Leaders in Africa and Religions of Peace International. I am Ambassador of Peace-Building through Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue. I oversee the U.S.

International Visitors’ Leadership Programme and the Interfaith and Inter-Cultural Engagement Understanding Chicago. I have seen many girls get scholarships in and outside the country. I also started a programme for student interns. Today we have female interns in all departments at the Supreme Council. What started as a desk today is a full department at the Supreme Council and the lady who heads it now sits with the mufti on the management team. It’s been tough, though. When we celebrated the first Muslim Women’s Day in March 2017, the mufti recognised me for these efforts.



*The sexual violence
against women
I witnessed
inspired me into
doing advocacy
for women's
rights— Reverend
Canon Samuel
Mfitumukiza*

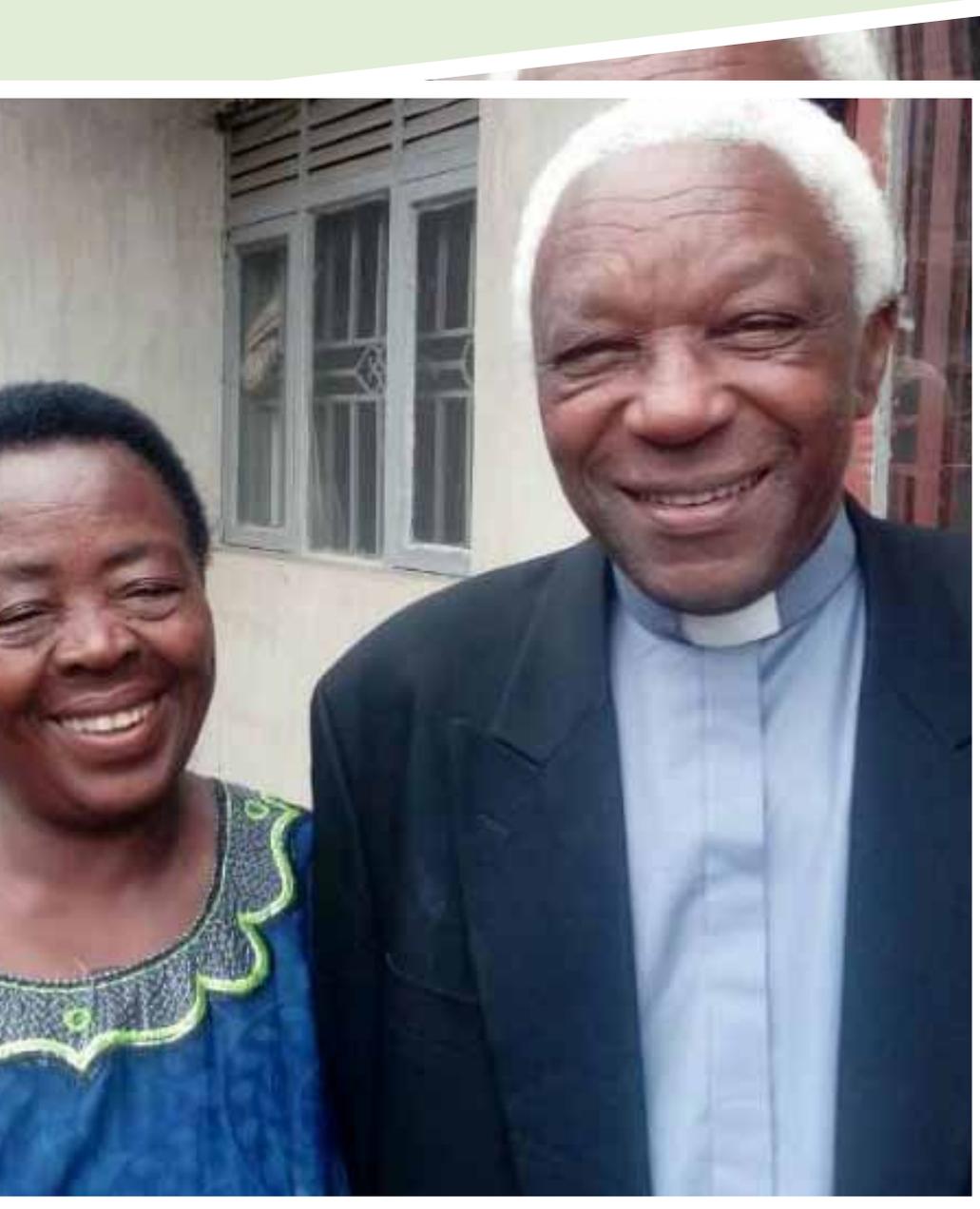
My name is Reverend Canon Samuel Mfitumukiza. I am 72 years old. I am a Mufumbira from Kisoro, South-Western Uganda. I am a trained minerals prospector. I worked with the government, Ministry of Minerals and Petroleum Development for 10 years from 1967 to 1977, after which I joined church ministry. It was a calling from God. I trained at Bishop Barham University College in Kabale where I got a provincial certificate in ministry, after which I joined Makerere University for a Degree in Theology; then

I went to Edinburgh, Scotland for a Master's in Development Studies.

I am involved in pastoral care and community development, working with the masses in the villages. I first worked with Kigezi Diocese for five years and after the creation of Muhavura Diocese, I moved to the latter, particularly in Kinyamali Parish. It is here that I witnessed gender disparities, mainly because of the cultural ways of life of the people, which propelled me into advocacy work. I wanted to make a positive contribution in my community.

One time a girl was kidnapped to be forcefully married off. She had gone to fetch water. Her captors ensured that the moment she reached their home, she was forced into sexual intercourse with the man who was supposed to become her husband. This would mean the marriage had been sealed. But I went to the home and got the girl out. Imagine this was your daughter: the little girl goes to fetch water and then she is kidnapped into marriage? No. I could not allow such a thing to happen. Strangely, even her father had accepted and allowed his daughter to be married off, he was interested in getting dowry.

I took the girl to my home. The law is very clear: you do not



marry underage girls. I threatened to take the father and the young man to prison. I succeeded in saving the girl. What helped me was my position as a church minister and a pastor, which is respected. I was motivated to do much more in advocating for girls' and women's rights, so I would say it was the sexual violence against women I saw in the communities that inspired me into doing advocacy for women's rights.

Yet it is not only sexual violence but property rights. Women are denied rights to own property and when they marry, they are treated as property. It is endemic among the Bakiga and Bafumbira.

One may ask why a man chose to advocate for women's rights? Well, I do it as a father, a concerned parent. And in our culture, the opinion of elders is respected. I use my position as an elder, church minister to influence my society positively. That is not to say there are no challenges. Sometimes parents collude with sexual offenders in order to get cows, which is difficult to imagine, but it happens.

Nevertheless, I have seen a lot of positive developments. I convinced the synod to adopt a five-year development plan for the diocese which includes community projects aimed at empowering women which I run. Forty-eight community-based women groups have been formed. Women have formed themselves into savings and credit societies. It is one way of gaining access and control to wealth.

I have also shared my experiences with other dioceses in Uganda and beyond borders in East and Central Africa. And at Bishop Barham University

College where I have been a lecturer for 10 years, I have impacted several students with knowledge on women's rights.

There is excitement that women are embracing development, but we must be careful how we promote women's empowerment. The man is the head of the family. The woman is a helper. Man and woman work together; they are partners in development. We should not preach women's empowerment without taking note

of our values. Some western education values may kill our values. Some of these values are extreme. To succeed in this kind of work – advocacy for women's rights and empowerment – you must know the laws and cultures of the people. If we balance rights and values, where people understand their roles – that the man is the father figure while the woman is mother figure – the future will be good.



I use my spiritual office to advance the rights of women

– Mrs Sarah Nyende

Women's Ministry Director, Seventh Day Adventist Church Uganda Union



My job is to ensure that women are nurtured in their faith, know and make Christ known, uphold unity in diversity, families thrive and finances are taken care of. We want women who are financially stable, for being a woman is not a disability.

The Adventist Church teaches that every human being, man or woman was created in the image of God so every person is loved by God so should be respected. However, women are not allowed to be ordained ministers. There were serious discussions on ordaining women ministers during a General Conference held in 2016 but they voted against it. They continue to give excuses that women, are physically and emotionally weak, were the first people to eat the forbidden fruit and that among the 12 disciples of Jesus, there were no women.

It is hard to change these beliefs because when they vote, and you speak against it, you are expelled from the group of believers. We had badges that read "Ordination of women: this is the right time". We asked all leaders to put them on but when I came with it here, people were uncomfortable. They said I should remove it. Nevertheless, we are sensitising the leadership and there is progress. Five years ago, I was the only woman in the church's top leadership team that consists of 13 persons. We would sit in a meeting and even if you had a good idea, you would lose once the issue was subjected to the vote; they were the majority. But in the term that followed, we brought on board another woman. We are now two women on the team. Some people are not comfortable, though. They say when you bring on board more women, they will disturb. I told them there are many women out there who can serve better than men. And I have been proved right. When

the woman was brought on board in charge of children, there has been tremendous improvement. Putting children under the care of a man was going to be difficult. When a woman came into office, a mother who knows how to care for children, there is a big difference.

There is still a lot of work to do. One time there was a project at the Inter-Religious Council for people aged 65 years and above. The SDA Church had to recommend 20 persons. When I went to the meeting, the 20 people whose names were submitted were all men. I asked whether the council had asked for only men who were 65 years and above. Moreover, the people who live longer in our country are women. I insisted that the programme should benefit all. They were uncomfortable with my "gender sensitivity things". They apologised nevertheless.

Sometimes we have meetings abroad and the majority are men, if not all of them. But we keep reminding them that women should not be discriminated against. If the Bible talks about women not speaking in public, that was the culture then. Today, we respect our spouses, but we don't have to ask for permission to speak in public.

We encourage freedom of worship and the right to own property, though it is still challenging. When women get married, oftentimes all property is registered in the man's name. Rarely do you find it in the woman's name. We encourage women to write wills but then they do not know/have what they should include in the will. Clothes are all they have. When property is bought and the woman asks to have her

name on the agreement, the man will question her trust in him.

I have also tried to support education for women. When I came into office, I found 85 church scholarships but all of them were awarded to men. This was church money so I asked whether there weren't women who would benefit from the same, or whether the scholarships were for men only. It was because the people who recommend scholarship recipients are men so they favoured fellow men. I drew up guidelines stipulating that at least 20% of scholarships should go to women. Today we have over 100 scholarships and at least 20% are awarded to women.

What I know is that women are diligent. When given activities to spearhead in the church, activities like evangelism, we deliver. But that's where it is a bit funny. Women do much of the evangelism yet when it comes to baptism you have to wait for a man to baptise the candidates, and you have to accept it; otherwise they will say "go and form your own church". We respect them because we want to keep the unity.

We have set aside days to raise awareness on issues like abuse prevention. We have materials that we distribute to all levels of the church. You can't end abuse unless women know their rights. It is also important that women know their obligations, since for sometimes it is women who abuse men. The church doesn't want me to appear political or civil, so I use my spiritual vehicle (office) to advance the rights of women.



I have been holding community sensitisation meetings at the mosque. I use them as a platform to rewire people's attitudes, especially men towards women – Yunus Saleh

At the main mosque in Ibuje sub-county, one may fail to recognise that Friday is a day of worship. Only a few people trickle in for the day's prayers. In one corner of the mosque is Mr Yunus Saleh, the imam. He has invited us to the mosque to join in the prayers.

In 2012, Yunus being a staunch Muslim, did not believe that he had a role to play in the development of his community. He was chosen by ACFODE as one of the male role models on the basis of being one of the influential religious leaders in his community. He has created a village savings group for males at his mosque. He shares that a lot of domestic cases were brought to his office. Like many other Muslims, he did not accept that women had the right to make decisions. Together with other clerics, he always thought that women had no place in decision making in the community.

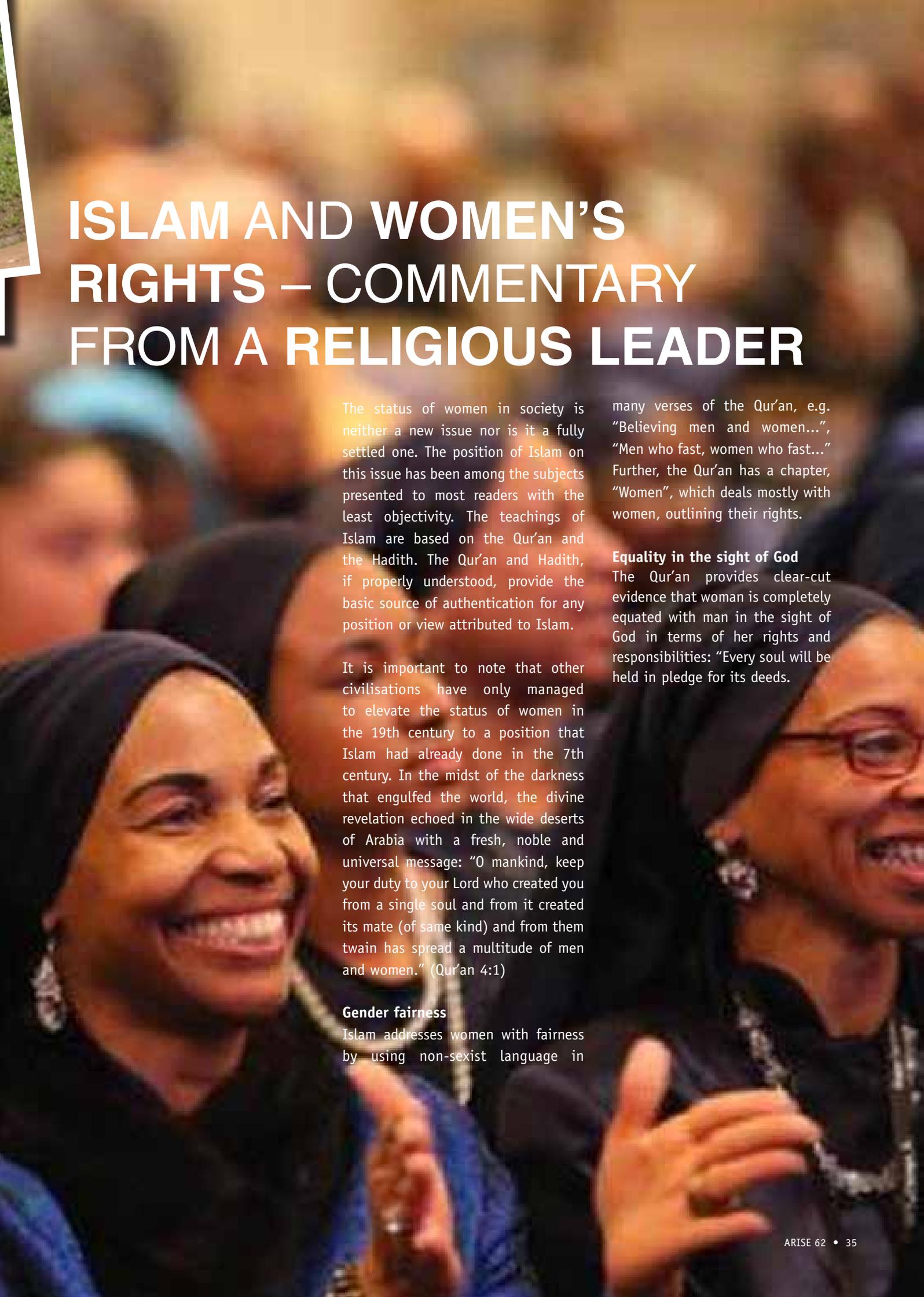
"We thought that the Islamic tradition," Yunus observed, "concerned only us and women had no say.

In fact, we envisioned that Islam was more or less a religion, as the men. Many cases especially relating to domestic violence were mostly reported by women.

"But I got to understand after attending ACFODE trainings that women were being left out. We are a big influence in our community. However, we were not using our power well by undermining the womenfolk.

"We had been blinded by the negative attitudes – women can't eat this and can't participate in clan meetings. I really felt bad and that was when I knew I had a role to play in the community," he added.

"I have been holding a lot of community sensitisation meetings at the mosque and in my drama group. I used them as a platform to rewire people's attitudes, especially men and the mosque towards women."



ISLAM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS – COMMENTARY FROM A RELIGIOUS LEADER

The status of women in society is neither a new issue nor is it a fully settled one. The position of Islam on this issue has been among the subjects presented to most readers with the least objectivity. The teachings of Islam are based on the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Qur'an and Hadith, if properly understood, provide the basic source of authentication for any position or view attributed to Islam.

It is important to note that other civilisations have only managed to elevate the status of women in the 19th century to a position that Islam had already done in the 7th century. In the midst of the darkness that engulfed the world, the divine revelation echoed in the wide deserts of Arabia with a fresh, noble and universal message: "O mankind, keep your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate (of same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women." (Qur'an 4:1)

Gender fairness

Islam addresses women with fairness by using non-sexist language in

many verses of the Qur'an, e.g. "Believing men and women...", "Men who fast, women who fast..." Further, the Qur'an has a chapter, "Women", which deals mostly with women, outlining their rights.

Equality in the sight of God

The Qur'an provides clear-cut evidence that woman is completely equated with man in the sight of God in terms of her rights and responsibilities: "Every soul will be held in pledge for its deeds.



“(Al- Qur’an 74:38), “Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him we give a new life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.” (Al Qur’an 16:97)

The right to education

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has said that, seeking knowledge is compulsory for both Muslim males and females. In fact, the wife of the Prophet, Aisha, was a renowned scholar to whom Muslim leaders referred matters after the death of the Prophet.

Right to consent before marriage

According to Islamic law, a woman

cannot be forced to marry without her consent. Ibn Abass reported that a girl came to the messenger of God, Muhammad, and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it) (Ibn Hanbal No. 2469). The girl said, “Actually I accept this marriage but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right (to force a husband on them)” (Ibn Majah No. 1873).

Right to dowry

Besides all other provisions for her protection at the time of marriage, it was specifically decreed that woman has the full right to her “Mahr” (dowry),

a marriage gift which is presented to her by her husband and is included in the nuptial contract, and that such ownership does not transfer to her father or husband. The concept of “Mahr” in Islam is neither an actual nor symbolic price for the woman, but rather it is a gift symbolising respect, love and affection.

Right to seek divorce if necessary

As the woman’s right to decide about her marriage is recognised, so also is her right to seek an end to an unsuccessful marriage. God commands Muslims in the Qur’an to deal with women properly and with kindness. When marital relations have gone sour, some



people keep the wife in suspense, neither divorcing her nor fulfilling the role of a husband. Islam forbids this. Islam also discourages men from beating up their wives.

Right to own property

According to Islamic law, a woman's right to her money, real estate, or other properties is fully acknowledged. This right undergoes no change whether she is single or married. She retains her full right to buy, sell any or all of her property. It is also noteworthy that such right applies to her property before and after marriage.

Honour of woman's role in the home

Islam regards a woman's role in society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. Neither maids nor babysitters can possibly take the mother's place as the educator of an upright, complex-free and carefully brought up child. Such a noble and vital role which largely shapes the future of nations cannot be scorned as idleness. However, there is no decree in Islam which forbids women from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions which fit their nature and in which society needs them most.

Right to inheritance

In addition, Islam restored to the woman the right of inheritance. Her share is completely hers and no one can make any claim, including her father, or her in-laws. In this regard, God revealed in the Qur'an, "To men (of the family) belongs a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and to women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be

a little or much – a determinate share." (Al- Qur'an 4:7)

Are Islamic teaching adhered to?

Do Muslim women in the contemporary world receive this noble treatment described in Islamic teaching? Unfortunately, no. There is a wide spectrum of attitudes towards women in the Muslim world today. These attitudes differ from one society to another and within societies. Nevertheless, certain general trends are discernible. Almost all Muslim societies have to an extent deviated from the ideals of Islam with respect to the status of women. These deviations have, for the most part, been in two opposite directions – the more conservative, restrictive and traditions-oriented, and the more liberal and western-oriented.

In the former, women are treated according to the customs and traditions inherited from their forebearers, standards far different from those applied to men. A girl is received with less joy at birth than a boy; she is less likely to go to school; she might be deprived of any share of her family's inheritance; she is under continuous surveillance in order to ensure that she does not behave immodestly while her brother's immodest acts are tolerated; she might even be killed for committing what her male family members usually boast of doing; she has very little say in family affairs or community interests; she might not have full control over her property and her marriage gifts; and, as a mother, she herself would prefer to produce boys so that she can attain a higher status in her community.

On the other hand, there are Muslim societies that have been swept over by western culture and the western way of life. They imitate, unthinkingly, whatever they receive from the West

and usually end up adopting the worst fruits of western civilisation. In these societies, a typical modern woman's top priority in life is to enhance her physical beauty. Therefore, she is often obsessed with her body's shape, size and weight. She tends to care more about her body than her mind and more about her charms than her intellect. Her ability to charm, attract and excite is more valued in the society than her educational achievements, intellectual pursuits and social work. One is not expected to find a copy of the Qur'an in her purse since it is full of cosmetics wherever she goes. Her spirituality has no room in a society preoccupied with her attractiveness. Therefore, she would rather spend her life striving more to realise her femininity than to fulfil her humanity.

An appropriate explanation for the reasons why Muslims have not adhered to the Qur'an guidance with respect to women would be beyond the scope of this article. It is important, however, to note that Muslim societies have deviated from the Islamic precepts concerning very many aspects of life. There is a wide gap between what Muslims are supposed to believe in and what they actually practise. This gap is not a recent phenomenon, but for centuries it has been widening, and the consequences have been disastrous in almost all aspects of life: political tyranny and fragmentation, economic backwardness, social injustice, scientific bankruptcy and intellectual stagnation.

Sheikh Waiswa Mohammad Ali is the Deputy Mufti, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council

INFLUENTIAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON WHAT THEIR RELIGIONS ARE DOING TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

GILLIAN NANTUME

While women have hit the glass ceiling in almost all aspects of life, religion might still be the barrier to gender equality. However, changes are being effected, such as the ordination of female priests in high positions in the Anglican Church. Different religions have different ways in which they handle the gender question in their congregations.



Sheikh Abdul Wahab Butane
Assistant Imam, Kibuli Mosque and Marriage
Counsellor

There is gender balance in Islam but in a way people do not understand well. The Prophet (PBUH) said that if you have something to give to your parents, your mother should take 75% of it. How come women do not complain about that? God in his wisdom created different roles for both sexes according to their abilities. You cannot give a baby to a man because he was not given the ability to look after a child. In terms of dressing, Islam dictates women wear long clothes because God decreed they are too valuable to be exposed. However, when it comes to the economy and education, there is balance between the sexes. They can compete in the marketplace.

In Islam, there are some laws that are followed by men. For instance, a man must pay his wife for breastfeeding his child. Also, on the wedding day a man must give a woman whatever she asks for, whether property or money. Whatever is given to her remains solely her property.

We encourage men to perform domestic chores at home. Those who have never truly studied Islam are the ones who treat women badly. Even in our counselling before marriage, we teach the men how to treat their wives with respect. Even when the marriage breaks down, the man is supposed to give the woman a part of his property before they separate.



Reverend Diana Nkesiga
Vicar, All Saints Cathedral
Nakasero

The Church has generally been male-dominated. However, the Constitution of the Church of Uganda does not discriminate against women; it is only that there are few women, or none at all, in the decision-making body. For example, there are no women bishops so no feminine voice can influence a vote in the House of Bishops. You find that the gender language is even different, because if they ask who the next bishop is going to be, everyone asks about a "him". So, already you see the language is biased. When people begin to think about who the next bishop could be, it is always in terms of the next man, not woman. Even if a woman was in the race, they will always choose a man.

However, the Church has done research and is working to make the constitution more gender-sensitive. But in terms of participation in choosing the people in leadership positions, I think the women are not in key positions of power, so they are not able to influence the vote. Sometimes it is highly dependent on the personality of a particular church or parish leader when it comes to whether or not there are women in leadership positions. But I should let you know that in the Constitution of



Reverend Canon Steven Gelenga
St John Anglican Church, Kamwokya

Right from Genesis, God made them male and female in His image. So how can we go against that? A female is the image of God just as the man is. We respect that.

On the issue of leadership in the home, many people get us wrong. When the Bible says the man is the head of the family, God does not intend to make women subordinate. God tells couples to submit to each other. They become one. However, there are gender roles in the family. A man should be the leader of the home and take care of it just as God is the head of the Church. Neither is a subject of the other.

The problem is when we tend to follow our cultures, which determine the role of a man in the home. Some cultures say a woman should not own property and yet the Church teaches that all that a husband has, he should share with his wife. A woman is entitled, and has the right, to own property and her opinion should be respected in the home. But if culture does not respect that, then the woman will be subjugated in the marriage. It is even worse if the husband and wife come from different cultures. We always tell the men in our congregation that they are Christians first and must live according to what the Bible teaches.



All Saints Cathedral, the leadership deliberately made sure the position of vicar is reserved for women.

Pastor Michael Kyazze
Omega Healing Centre

In the Pentecostal faith, we are encouraged by the Scriptures to support the ministry of women. In this era of grace, there is no Jew, or gentile, woman and/or man. We are all the same so we do not treat anyone differently. We believe that, just as God uses men, He uses women because He says, in His Word, that he will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. So women can minister as well as men.

The problem, though, is that the Bible says women are the weaker vessels. But a weak vessel can also hold the anointing. A plastic cup can ably hold the same amount of water as a metallic cup. Of course, biologically women are weak because men take up more oxygen than women. This high oxygen consumption means a man is able to burn more energy. Men are designed to do harder work but that does not mean a woman cannot attempt to do the same kind of work.

I do not find it necessary to deliberately teach gender equality in our church because we live in a free environment. Gender equality is not a programme in our church; it is a lifestyle.

Monsignor Gerald Kalumba
Vicar General, Christ the King Parish

The Church does not in any way demean human beings, man or woman, neither on the basis of gender nor of economic status – rich or poor. The Church does not make people's differences the basis of belonging to its community. We are all the same; everybody is welcome.

Even the Gospels emphasise that if you behave in a manner that demeans

others, as Jesus Christ put it, the first will be last and the last will be first. It is just that what we do and the roles we have might be different. It would have been okay if everybody in the Church was a priest; what is wrong with it? But we are all priests and leaders, in our own way, and teachers of faith according to our baptism.

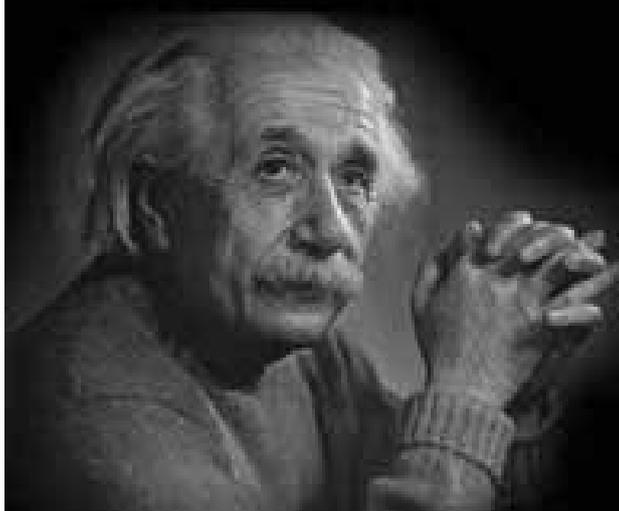
That is how we advance the ministry of Jesus. But then, we have specifics; people do not do the same work. There are ministries given to particular individuals. It is the practice in the Roman Catholic Church that we only ordain men as priests and not women.

The role of a priest is the representation of Jesus Christ in his ministry which he gave to the apostles who were men, although there were also women among his disciples. On the other hand, there are many women who are also doing a lot of work in the church, in communities of nuns and sisters. Therefore, women are not discriminated against.



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In the Pentecostal faith, we are encouraged by the Scriptures to support the ministry of women. In this era of grace, there is no Jew, or gentile, woman and/or man. We are all the same so we do not treat anyone differently.

**BEFORE GOD WE ARE
ALL EQUALLY WISE -
AND EQUALLY
FOOLISH.**



Albert Einstein
German Theoretical-Physicist
(1879-1955)



**RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE:
CAN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
JUSTIFY DIVORCE?**

ARISE REPORTER



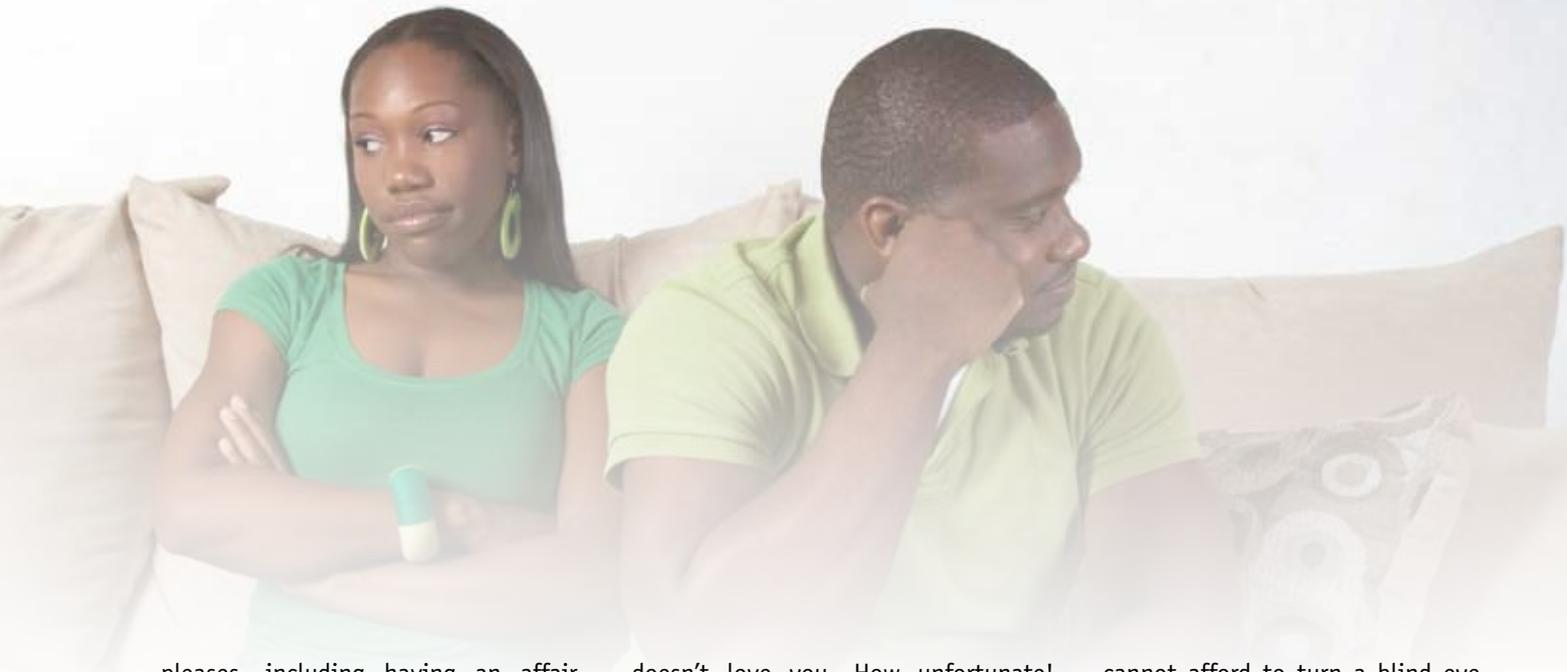
Oh, yeah! It is controversial, isn't it? I mean divorce. Two persons, a man and a woman formally joined together in holy matrimony parting ways. It is irrational; she calls it quits. She is supposed to stay in her marital home and put on her everlasting garment of patience, humility and perseverance, since she pledged "for good or for worse".

Marriage is supposed to be permanent, Christianity teaches. If you are a Christian, you probably know one profound reference in the Bible where divorce may be permitted – infidelity. "Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Mathew 19:9).

So, in the case of infidelity, divorce may be allowed. But even then, many will make a case for forgiveness and contend that even when unfaithfulness becomes the untimely visitor in a marriage, forgiveness should overrule any other reactions. Granted. We should all be loving and forgiving. A society without such virtues can be dangerous. You cannot imagine living in the community defined by hate, revenge and malice. That would be terrible! But should she live in a home (not a community, which is much bigger) where she is assaulted, physically harmed?

It is very hard to justify infidelity in a marriage. What can possibly justify it? Probably not many reasons, if any. But there is not one reason that can justify domestic violence against a woman. When he flexes his muscles and hits her whom he promised to love and protect, he has lost it. He has no claim to the beauty of husband and wife living together, in love. She has no business hanging on in there, not any longer. She should quit, I'm sorry! Oh, did I say "I am sorry"? No! There is no need to apologise. It is simply unacceptable.

One of the major reasons advanced for divorce in case she commits adultery is that, she defiled her marital bed. How could she? they say. The same people, however, will say nothing if they don't speak in praise of a man who did exactly the same thing. They will say "omusajja assajjalaata", a Luganda proverb that loosely translates as a man is free to do whatever he



pleases, including having an affair. I am not saying women should be unfaithful, absolutely not. What I demand of society is equality and fairness for both sexes.

If by committing adultery a woman defies her marital bed, then a man who physically assaults his wife does worse. He defiles the body that lies on the marital bed. And the marital bed can never be holy when the body that lies on it is defiled. In essence, physical assault has no place in a marriage, whatsoever.

Am I locking out forgiveness and reconciliation in a marriage? No. I firmly believe in the concept of a marriage being permanent. I believe it was God's idea, a noble idea, that the two – man and woman – whom he joins together, in love, no one should put asunder. What I am saying is that when he ceases to respect your body and instead harms it, do not wait for him to kill you and then forgive him. You need to forgive him when you are still alive; dead people do not forgive. Plan your exit and then forgive him.

You have heard men who, unthinkably, say "I didn't think she would die", or those who, sadly, claim their cultures teach that if he doesn't beat you, he

doesn't love you. How unfortunate! These are retrogressive, archaic, unfounded cultural practices that do not have any place in the 21st century.

The reality is that physical assault of women in marriage has often resulted in women losing their lives. I am not talking about things I heard or read about, but what I have witnessed. In the small village of Kikooba, Kiboga district, Joyce Namusoke was married to her husband and the couple had two sons. The man was violent. He beat her routinely. One time he beat her when she was expecting their third child. She had a miscarriage. And because of the poverty that choked their marital home, Namusoke did not get medical treatment. She would later die from her injuries. What did the man do thereafter? He abandoned the two orphaned boys in the makeshift structure they called a house and got married – yes, got married – to a widow in a village 4 km away. I run a charity organisation in the area. By the time we learnt of the incident, the makeshift structure where the boys lived was about to collapse on them. We mobilised and built a house for the orphans, but Namusoke had lost her life. Should women leave behind helpless orphans as a result of the actions of their selfish husbands? We

cannot afford to turn a blind eye to these unfortunate realities. We should speak out and up against any forces that drag us behind by a million years. The world cannot afford to keep silent on women's woes.

Woman, you don't want your story to be written as "she was so patient and humble she died in her marital home". What is needed in a marriage is peace, love and joy, not body scars resulting from physical assault by a spouse. Doesn't the Bible command men to love their wives (Galatians 5:22) and treat them with respect and honour (1 Peter 3:7)? It does, with emphasis. Do you harm or preciously and jealously protect what you love? Man, it is not the physique but rather kindness, love and respect for her that define a gentleman. The same way the Bible says, rather radically, that he who doesn't work shouldn't eat, is the same way a man who doesn't control his anger but rushes out and assaults his wife, shouldn't enjoy the privilege of being a husband. Period!

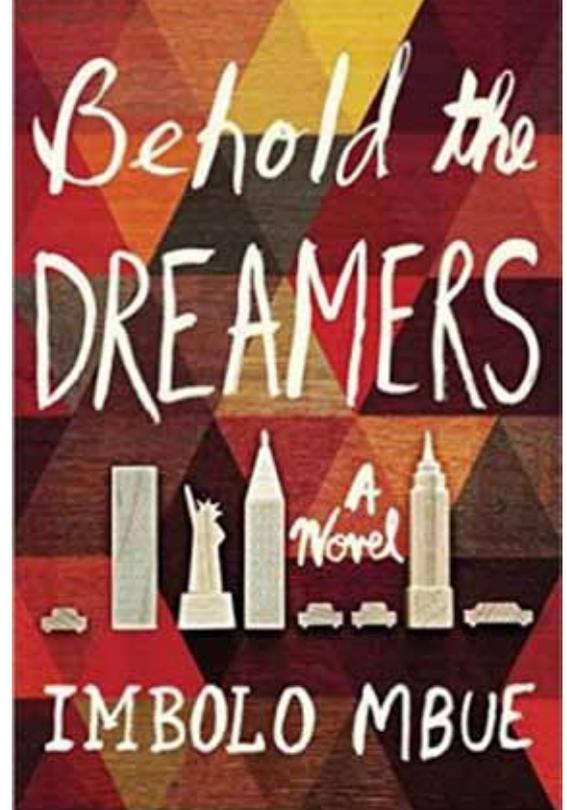
BOOK REVIEWS

TITLE: BEHOLD THE DREAMERS

AUTHOR: IMBOLO MBUE

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 23 AUGUST 2016

PUBLISHER: RANDOM HOUSE



From 2017 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction comes a debut novel about an immigrant couple striving to get ahead as the Great Recession hits home. With empathy, insight and wit, Imbolo Mbue has written a compulsively readable story about marriage, class, race and the American Dream.

Jende Jonga and his wife, Neni, are two of the main characters in Imbolo Mbue's excellent debut novel, *Behold the Dreamers*. Jende and Neni have recently immigrated to America from the city of Limbe in Cameroon, hoping to build a better life for their young son, Liomi. They're barely able to make ends meet. Neni works as a home health aide while attending college – she dreams of one day enrolling in pharmacy school – while Jende drives a cab. Their luck swiftly changes when Jende finds work as a personal chauffeur for a Lehman Brothers executive named, Clark Edwards and his family. The hours are long, but the salary is a massive improvement over his previous job.

Clark grows to trust Jende, and Neni eventually takes a temporary job cleaning and cooking at the Edwards' second home. It doesn't take long before

Jende and Neni both learn that the Edwards' marriage isn't as perfect as it might seem. This becomes painfully apparent after Lehman Brothers declares bankruptcy just weeks before what would become a historic presidential election.

Meanwhile, Jende is forced to confront problems of his own. While his wife is in America on a student visa, he's in the country waiting for his asylum application to be approved. But he's not really facing persecution in his home country, and he's hoping the smooth-talking immigration lawyer he's hired can persuade a judge otherwise.

He can't bear the thought of returning to Cameroon. When he talks about America, it's with joy, and an unwavering belief in the promise of his adopted country. "America has something for everyone, sir," he enthuses to Clark. "Look at Obama, sir. Who is his mother? Who is his father? They are not big people in the government. He is a black man with no father or mother, trying to be president over a country!"

Underneath all this are also questions of love and marriage. The trials and tribulations that Jende and Neni

encounter in their relationship, the challenges in the Edwards' marriage and the comparable but understated patriarchal domination by male partners of their female counterparts in both relationships stand too tall to ignore.

Mbue does not pull punches. *Behold the Dreamers* is, at times, hard to read – not because of her writing, which is excellent, but because the characters keep getting hit, over and over again, by horrible circumstances beyond their control. Jende is reminded that "bad news has a way of slithering into good days and making a mockery of complacent joys"; Neni feels "crushed" by her own feelings of helplessness, "the fact that she had travelled to America only to be reminded of how powerless she was, how unfair life could be."

Behold the Dreamers is a remarkable debut. Mbue is a wonderful writer with an uncanny ear for dialogue; there are no false notes here, no narrative shortcuts, and certainly no manufactured happy endings.

BOOK REVIEWS

TITLE: WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR

AUTHOR: PAUL KALANITHI

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 19 JANUARY 2016

PUBLISHER: RANDOM HOUSE

“I flipped through the CT scan images, the diagnosis obvious: the lungs were matted with innumerable tumours, the spine deformed, a full lobe of the liver obliterated. Cancer, widely disseminated. I was a neurosurgical resident entering my final year of training. Over the last six years, I'd examined scores of such scans, on the off chance that some procedure might benefit the patient. But this scan was different: it was my own.”

When Dr Paul Kalanithi sent his best friend an email in May 2013 revealing that he had terminal cancer, he wrote: “The good news is that I've already outlived two Brontës, Keats and Stephen Crane. The bad news is that I haven't written anything.” It was a good-humoured way of dealing with the unthinkable but also an indication of Dr Kalanithi's remarkable ambition. He had led a fascinating life and was not about to leave it unchronicled. The good news is that in the 22 months left to him, Dr Kalanithi, who died at 37, went on to write a great book, *When Breath Becomes Air*.

When Breath Becomes Air is the memoir Kalanithi had hoped to write in old age. In it he reflects on his personal history and experience, and on the profession to which he considered himself called. It chronicles his journey, beginning with his boyhood, the son of a Christian doctor who had eloped from southern India with Kalanithi's mother, who was Hindu. The family left Bronxville, New York to move to Kingman, Arizona when Kalanithi was young.

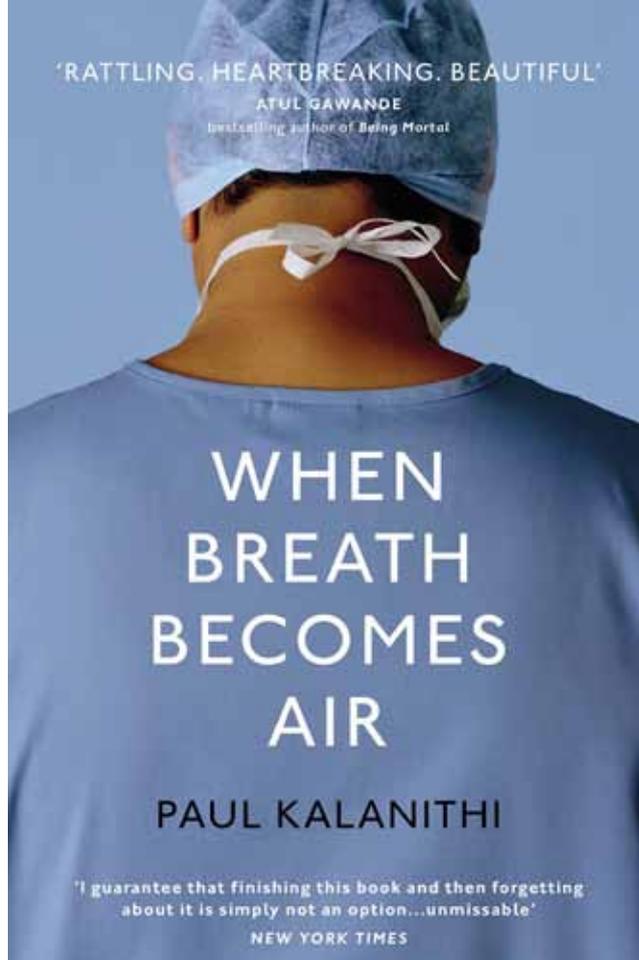
Dr Paul Kalanithi went on to accrue two BAs and an MA in literature at Stanford, then a Master of Philosophy at Cambridge, before graduating cum laude from the Yale School of Medicine. He returned to Stanford for a residency in neurological surgery and a postdoctoral fellowship in neuroscience. His training was almost complete when he was diagnosed with cancer.

As he underwent treatment, Kalanithi frequently asked himself what was

important in his life. He looked at what he valued. He delved into the changes in his identity moving from the subject of his own life to cancer and back. He confronted the choice to have a child, and he and his wife did so.

This is an extraordinary book about something ordinary: how to live and how to die. This book has many important lessons for us, as individuals and as a society. Kalanithi takes the reader on an extraordinarily sensitive, heart-breaking and utterly compelling journey through a young man's struggle with terminal illness. This book left me reflecting on the value of life, and on the need to be grateful for each day we are alive, because so few get the chance.

Books reviewed by Belinda Kyomuhendo. She can be reached at bkyomuhendo@acfode.org



Street Talk

DOES RELIGION PROMOTE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN?

CAROL NAMBOWA



Fred Muganga - Managing Director, FM Quick Printers and Stationers

Religion emphasises respect and love for each gender. It creates a balance between the genders. If religion stops women from doing something, it is out of the woman's interest and the interest of the whole community. In the African setting, religion respects our cultures because there are some things a woman should not do. This is not discriminatory; it is just because women have a moral and spiritual influence over children. You will find that every man was influenced by his mother. If a mother teaches her son to behave well, he will definitely respect women.



Sheikh Hamza Busuulwa - Qur'an teacher

In Islam, women are not discriminated against. In the Qur'an, Allah decreed that they should be treated with respect. People think that because women pray at the back of the mosque, their rights are being violated. The thing is, Allah knows our inner thoughts. Imagine if a woman is standing in front of a man as they are praying, they bow down. That is no longer a prayer because just the proximity of the opposite sex is enough to get one's thoughts off Allah. Besides, a Muslim woman is entitled to a personal gift from her husband on her wedding day. I have never seen that in any other religion.



Joshua Waisswa - Software engineer

What I have seen in the Pentecostal faith is they try to show that everyone is welcome. But, you realise that there are areas in which ladies feel they are not really empowered to serve. It is not really mentioned but there is an atmosphere created whereby men take a lot of dominance, and of course they prefer to work with men. This is a system that has been led by men for quite a long time. They will not come out and say it openly, though. There are few female pastors. I highly doubt there can be a female elder. Women are usually kept in the ushering ministry.



Derrick Korir - Sales executive

I do not think religion enhances gender inequality. Because religion teaches that women should be submissive to men, people tend to take that literally and step on women. There are certain roles that women are not given unless they have a really special calling. Traditional churches take submission too far. I believe a man is supposed to be the head and breadwinner of the family, although there are some circumstances where women take up these roles. Nevertheless, there should be a balance and definition of submission. I think people just lack knowledge of their rights in the God they worship and are taken advantage of.



Peninah Asiiimwe - Editor

Society and religion are hinged on the marginalisation of women. Look at how the debate on female bishops in the Anglican Church has been received. Experience shows that women can do these jobs that are ring-fenced for men and excel at them. When you consider the religion of Islam, I cannot understand why women are relegated to the back of the mosque during prayers. If a man lusts after a woman, the woman is taught that it is her fault. I believe religion has marginalised women because even when they are given leadership in churches, it is to lead women groups.



Joan Apenya - Executive Director, Child Development Centre, Entebbe

The scriptures say God created us equal with complimentary roles. Get to know what you are supposed to do and be confident. When you look at the work women do in supporting families and nurturing children, it is more than what men do. Indeed, the hand that rocks the crib rules the world because every leader passed through the hands of a woman. The problem comes when women want to do what men are doing, and when we get challenges we think men are pushing us down. We can only shine and excel when we do what God designed us to do.

HOW RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS CAN USE SOCIAL INTEREST GROUPS TO ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY

ARISE REPORTER

In almost every religious institution, there is a women's focused fellowship, a social interest group catering for the needs of women.

Although there are few women in the higher echelons of religious institutions, the existence of these social groupings or fellowships point to the fact that the interests of women are not wholly ignored. What is of contention, however, is as to whether these fellowships empower women and espouse gender equality in the church.

In many religious groups, there is a clear-cut difference between men and women, although the difference, in most modern churches, does not espouse roles and responsibilities.

The importance of women fellowships
The Anglican Church in Uganda has the Christian Women's Fellowship

(CWF) and the Mothers Union in all its churches and parishes. Reverend Captain Dinah Natukunda of St John Church, Kamwokya, says the CWF is an organisation whose membership spans all categories of women – the married and unmarried women as well as the widowed. "The CWF, among other things, teaches women to be good wives because that is the most important thing in a marriage. They are taught that marriage is ordained by God, and goes hand-in-hand with a woman learning to submit, give companionship, and communicate with her husband; no radical feminism."

In the Full Gospel Churches of Uganda, the Esthers Ministry, a ministry for single women 18 years and above, is thriving. Julie Balikoowa, the leader, says young women are mainly taught how to wait on God for a husband. "We talk to them about how to get

the right partner because if they make a wrong decision, they will live with it forever. But equally importantly, we tell them that they should not just be waiting for a husband – they should work at developing their careers, among others, because marriage is not everything." Balikoowa says this is important because some women are reluctant to further their education because they fear no husband will stand a woman who is 'too' educated.

In the ministry meetings, experts are invited to speak to the women about life skills such as setting up businesses and owning property like land. Women also trian cookery.

Judith Ojangole, a member of Deliverance Church Entebbe's Sisters of Zion Ministry, further



Men's Bible St

explains the importance of fellowships. "We get real-time advice on handling situations that would otherwise prove difficult," she says. "We pray together and share in a social support network that other women do not have. When, for instance, I face a challenge at work or home, I have no shortage of fellow women to talk to, those who have gone through similar situations."

According to Pastor John Kamiza of the Seventh Day Adventist Church Uganda Union, the objective of the Women Ministry is to enable the Church to focus on uplifting the status of women through education and other activities so that like men, women can serve in church. "There are ladies who have never had the opportunity to go to school so through the Women Ministry, we have adult literacy classes where they are taught how to write and read. These are marketable skills to enable them to live a better life."

In Islam, although women are not allowed to lead prayers, they can lead

their fellow women. Asia Namusoke Mbajja, coordinator, PINA-Uganda, says different mosques have women who lead the female section of the congregation. "The women do not only meet to pray, although prayer is a very important aspect of Islam that cannot be ignored, but some groups have seminars and trainings that are aimed at empowering women according to the tenets of Islam," says Mbajja. For instance, she illustrates the mosque in Lubugumu, Ndejje periodically holds seminars for women about human rights and empowerment.

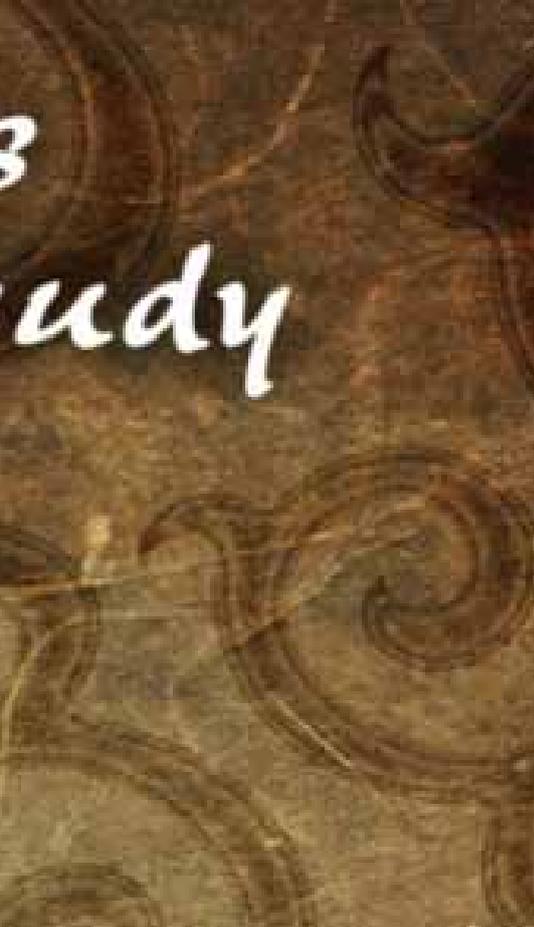
Do women fellowships enslave women?

Claire Ainebyoona, who has been married for five years, joined both the Christian Women's Fellowship and the Mothers Union three months into her marriage and has a different experience. "I honestly cannot say these fellowships enhance gender equality," she says. She adds, "All they teach is what a woman should do to ensure her husband is happy. They do

not talk about how to challenge your man to be a better man. It is all about what a woman should do."

Ainebyoona stresses that women are taught not to crave equality with men because most of the Abrahamic religious texts do not say a woman is equal to a man. "When I dared to challenge the women, they told me to try my best to submit to my husband. I realised this fellowship was not for me, I quit."

Aidah Nabwire, a Born again Christian, has been married for 15 years. Although her church has a women's fellowship called Sisters of Zion, she has attended it only once. The first – and last – time Nabwire attended the fellowship, the speaker, she says, urged women to give their salaries to their husbands, so that the man can save it for them, and give them just a fraction to



cater for their needs. "She said that was the highest form of submission a woman could go through in her marriage," Nabwire continues, "Most of those women would be shocked by the kind of independence I am used to. First, I work while most of them are housewives. My husband has entrusted me with the finances of our home. While he is busy with his job, I make all the decisions in the home; I pay the workers, enrol the children in schools of my choice and have a say in everything my husband does. It occurred to me that the submission the speaker talked about was slavery which I wanted no part of."

However, the Rev. Natukunda disagrees. "The submission the Bible teaches involves both spouses submitting to each other. If a man is a Christian and believes in the Bible, he will have no problem with gender equality," says the Rev. Natukunda.

What ought to be done to ensure gender equality in church or religious institutions?

Shabibah Nakirijja, a journalist, argues that while women's groups are important in Islam, they should do more. She explains, "In the mosque I attend, while women form themselves into savings and credit societies and do cash rounds amongst themselves, no effort is made to get reports on what the money was used for or how beneficiaries can be helped to multiply their incomes. There is need for financial literacy."

Over the years, women have come up through the ranks, especially in Pentecostal churches. This can be attributed to embracing gender equality and women empowerment in such churches. Pastor Imelda Kula Namutebi of Liberty Worship Centre, Lugala, for instance, shot out of Pastor Isaac Kiweweesi's shadow to begin her own ministry. Pastor Jessica Kayanja, wife to renowned evangelical preacher, Robert Kayanja of Rubaga Miracle Cathedral, is a pastor in her own right. She is also the founder of the Girl Power Ministries whose mission is to empower and inspire women.

For women fellowships to espouse and encourage gender equality and build up the confidence of women in the congregation, church leaders should have the personality that treats all people as equal, in spite of their gender. Monsignor Gerald Kalumba, Vicar General of Christ the King Parish, says in the Catholic Church, nuns are not limited by their vows. "Nuns are taking part in other vocations such as teaching and healthcare. Other women who are not in religious orders have also formed movements and clubs. These religious orders and lay movements do not curtail gender equality, but encourage women to rub off [their] inferiority complex

and instead learn to participate in different areas of society."

Assumpta Kafeero, an administrator at a software development company in Kampala, says that while the lay organisations in the Catholic Church, such as Catholic Women's Guild, help in gathering women together, the theme should go beyond prayer. "Women have many challenges in their life, most of which have to do with changing the religious and cultural attitude that women are subordinate to men. There are cases of domestic violence, illiteracy, poverty, HIV/AIDS and male dominance that women struggle with but you will never hear them discussed at meetings of the Catholic Women's Guild or Legion of Mary."

Since women the world over face the same issues when it comes to fighting for their rights, empowering women and educating them in self-confidence involves erasing the differences that exist between them, especially religious differences. There should be some form of partnership between the Catholic Women's Guild and the Mothers Union so that members can learn from one group what is not taught in their primary group.

The common thread among women who have been empowered by their churches is their belief in the doctrine that women are uniquely fashioned to play a complementary role alongside men, rather than a competitive role.

In this respect, religion should encourage gifted women to join ministry, instead of only restricting them to gender-specific fellowships.



SUCCESS STORY

EDUCATION BEYOND IMAGINATION

DR. SIDONIA ANGOM

Kangole Girls' Secondary School was the only girls' secondary school in Karamoja at the time founded by the catholic missionaries. It was at this school that I started to receive career guidance and counseling. My ambition then changed from aspiring to become a nurse to a social worker.

I come from Abim District, Karamoja region located in the north eastern part of Uganda and from a polygamous family of six siblings: five girls and one boy with very many step-sisters and step-brothers. Being the last born to my mother and father, I attracted some favour and attention from my siblings that enabled me to be in school. My other brothers and sisters did not get a chance to complete their primary and secondary level education because my parents were peasant farmers who found it difficult to afford educating all my brothers and sisters. Coming from a large family background, there were many challenges I faced including balancing my academic need and household chores. Karamoja, with its poor human development indicators, posed serious challenges to girl child education even up to today, and I was no exception. It takes commitment of parents, community and the child in order to see one complete one level of education. My challenges in education were numerous: my first challenge was to appreciate the value of education because I could see a lot of my peers not in school. Then there were the long distances to fetch water and wood fuel after school and participating in putting up dwelling structures and fences (mainly looking for grass for thatching and rids for fencing) for family members especially during dry seasons. Besides these, there were many proposals for early and forced marriage (since most of my age mates had to marry early as a result of being out of school). I survived early marriage because I left my village to attend school in Moroto where my eldest sister was working as a nursing aid.

My best moment came in 1984 when I joined Kangole Girls Senior Secondary, about 130 kms from my home village. It was also at this school when I had the worst scare in my life. In 1986 a

group of 30 girls from my secondary school who were walking back home (some 130 kms) for holidays, at the height of insurgency in Karamoja, were intercepted by the Karimojong warriors in the jungles and many girls lost personal properties. Some of the girls lost direction of home for up to 7 days.

Kangole Girls' Secondary School was the only girls' secondary school in Karamoja at the time founded by the catholic missionaries. It was at this school that I started to receive career guidance and counseling where I then had to change my ambition from becoming a nurse to a social worker. The Catholic Church and Church of Uganda Dioceses had very strong diocesan development departments whose work in Karamoja inspired me to appreciate work with the community. Then came 1987 when our class of 53 girls sat ordinary level examinations. Not surprisingly only about 15 of us decided to continue to 'A' Level, many branched off to study nursing and primary school teaching courses. My family was very happy because at least I had moved one level higher than my siblings. Little did I know that this was a short-lived achievement, I dropped out in first term of senior six because it was now a lot more expensive for my siblings to pay my school fees because they also had their own children to cater for. I was not bitter with anyone because I could clearly assess the pains my guardians were undergoing to keep me in school.

Fortunately, I got a contract employment as a Food Monitor with an NGO called Action International contra la faim (A.I.C.F) as a relief worker for the displaced persons in Kotido. My main aim was to raise some money to further my education. In the process I got married and gave birth to my first child in 1990. Giving birth did not stop me from going back to school; I got admitted to

Uganda College of Commerce Aduku under government sponsorship to undertake a course in Business Studies (Secretarial). My challenges from here on compounded because I had to attend to both my books and baby who was 3 months at the time I joined the College. After completing my course, I joined my husband in Kampala and this became the defining moment in my career. I got my second child in 1993 and in 1998 I gave birth to my last child. In between these births I got a job with Makerere University as an Administrative Secretary. I had to take care of my job and family but still harboured the ambition to continue with my studies and get a degree.

I got a green light from my husband who agreed to sponsor me to continue with my education. Since I was working, Makerere only allowed me to attend evening classes, I did not want to lose my job. I joined first year in 1999 to study BA (Social Sciences). I was very happy at this stage because this would be a testimony to many disadvantaged Karimojong girls that one can drop out but can still pick up herself to continue with education.

With determination, I successfully completed my Bachelor's degree and attained an (Second Class Upper degree) and this time the sky was the limit for me. With this additional qualification, I preferred more challenging work environment and tasks which I could not get from the administrative position. It is at this stage that I developed an ambition to share my knowledge and experience with others in need. I then chose to follow the academic path. At this point I developed an interest to further

my studies and my husband agreed to my proposal but this time round in a foreign university. Under the aegis of the African Development Bank, I got a scholarship to study an MA (Social Work and Welfare) degree in England and again I passed highly with a distinction. I had resigned my job at the university to go for further studies but I also made it a point that on return I would share my wealth of knowledge with those in need. I felt the university would provide a better platform where students from all regions of Uganda are represented, including those from Karamoja and far afield. After a few years I got the funding and admission to pursue a PhD in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies in South Africa which I completed successfully and since then, the university classroom has been my workplace. This was only interrupted when I participated in the concluded elective politics of 2016. Today thousands of students pass through my stewardship and I am happy to share my knowledge with those in need.

Being the first Karimojong and still the only one to date with a PhD, my aspirations for politics were intended to encourage the girl child from Karamoja to embrace education as well as to lobby government to prioritise education for the Karimojong. Karamoja (27,000 Km²) accounts for a big proportion of Uganda (land area of 197,100 Km²) accounting for 13.7% of the total land area of Uganda. It is in fact bigger than some East African Countries like Rwanda (land area of 24,668 Km²) and also Burundi (land area of 25,680 Km²). I thought I would join politics to promote this historically disadvantaged (yet resource rich) area through promoting education for the girl child. I am inspired by the following researched statistics, that:

- Educated women boost income growth. Through a study of 100

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different countries, the World Bank found that for every 1% increase in the proportion of women with secondary education, a country's annual per capital income growth rate increased by about 0.3%. This would be a significant boost for Karamoja. An African proverb also says, "If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family – and a whole nation."

- With the same amount of secondary education as boys, girls earn more. The average girl with secondary education has a 10% return in future wages, while boys have a 14% return.
- Infant mortality rates fall when girls' education level rises. Children of women with a primary education are 40% more likely to survive past age 5. This also suits Karamoja
- Educated mothers raise educated

children. Educated mothers are twice as likely to send their children to primary school as their uneducated counterparts. This is relevant for Karamoja.

Tony Blair (former U.K. Prime Ministers) while delivering a Leader's Speech on behalf of the Labour Party in Blackpool in 1996, challenged his audience, that if he were asked the 3 priorities of the U.K Government his answer would be: Education 2nd, and 3rd priority would still be Education. Similarly, I would say the three priorities of Karamoja are: "Priority #1: Education, Priority # 2 is Education and Priority # 3 for Karamoja is still Education." At the centre of all these priorities, is the Girl Child from Karamoja. This will be the only way Karamoja can attain growth as the rest of Uganda.

On the African continent, I have admiration for political leaders such as President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, President Joyce Banda of Malawi and Bousaina Kamel, the very first female presidential aspirant of Egypt (2012), Honorable Rebecca Kadaga, first female Speaker of the House in Uganda's Parliament, Honorable Rabiaa Nejlaoui, youngest Member of Parliament in Tunisia, and Honorable Hlobisile Ndlovu, Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture of Swaziland. I admire Mama Janet Museveni - First Lady of Uganda for in particular her relentless effort, sacrifice and able stewardship to the people of Karamoja.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

OBSERVE
YOUR DUTY
TO ALLAH
IN RESPECT
TO WOMEN,
AND TREAT
THEM WELL.”

**PROPHET
MUHAMMED**





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