

WOMEN MARGINALIZATION IN LEADERSHIP ROLES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GROWTH AMONG JEHOVAH WITNESSES IN ABEOKUTA

DR. ONIFADE, Sarah Anuoluwapo

Christian Religious Studies Department

Federal College of Education

Abeokuta, Ogun State

Email: onifadesarah@gmail.com

Abstract

The marginalization and, in extreme cases, the exclusion of women from Church governance structure has rightly led to some stereotypes; perceptive, traditional, religious issues to mention but a few. In the literature reviewed in this study, numerous studies support this assertion about the marginalization of women from church leadership. Among the numerous attributable factors revealed in the literature, are the biblical, traditional and other androcentric stereotypes.... Religious scholars note that, the obstacles that retard women's development within the Church structures, are almost, always attributable to gender than any other reason. This has not only barred them from advancing in the Church's leadership hierarchy, but prevented them from exercising their spiritual gifts. This writer employed descriptive survey and quantitative research methods. Random sampling technique was used to select 20 women each from four (4) selected Jehovah witness churches to make a total of 100 respondents as sample for study. Findings revealed the peoples' perception of the marginalization of women among the Jehovah witness in Abeokuta. The cumulative value of Yes (77.3%) is greater than value of No (22.7%) responses, it is therefore shows that marginalization of women exist among the church fold especially among Jehovah Witness. The paper concluded that indeed there are several cases of leadership marginalization among the Jehovah Witnesses. This paper recommended that inclusiveness and intentional ingratiation of women in leadership and governance would help the growth and developmental stride of Jehovah Witnesses in Ogun State.

Keyword: Gender marginalization, leadership, governance.

Introduction

Human being was the last creature in the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2, and was given charge to dominate over all God had created. Every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before and it came in a unique way. Part of the creature created in a unique way is woman. Every woman's foremost task is the actualization of her uniqueness, unprecedented and never receding potentialities and not repetition of something that another gender has already achieved. However, the status of woman is still that of a minor in our society where the influence of woman remain rejected or neglected in one way or the other.

Different meanings have been given to the concept of woman. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, woman means an adult female human being. But biblical meaning of woman in the Hebrew Bible of Genesis is "Ishah" while man is "Ish" because Eve was taken out of man (Adam). And some see woman as evil, due to the event in the Garden of Eden (fall of man). Based on the fact that women are seen as inferior this is because different cultures describe them in uncomplimentary words. This age-long tradition is seen also as divinely given. Many scholars, especially feminists have been thrown into defensive rather than a systematic and expository role of women in the church. The time and energy used in these controversies would have been channeled towards other meaningful discussions. Worst still, many feminists' theologians, historians and sociologists have been insensitive to this great omission of women in the religious, social and political spheres of life (Burroughs, 2011).

Jehovah's Witnesses is a millennial restorationist Christian Denominations with nontrinitarian beliefs distinct from mainstream Christianity (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2009). They have over 8.7 million members throughout the world, 389,961 members with 6,081 congregations in Nigeria. Jehovah Witness is a Denomination of a millennialism that has a great development in the 19th century in the US and has since spread worldwide. Therefore, the main objective of this paper was to examine Women Marginalization in Leadership Roles among the Jehovah Witness, in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The research question is; what are the peoples' perception of the marginalization of women among the church fold among Jehovah Witness?

Conceptual Clarification of Marginalization

The word marginalization is derived from the word marginalized. According to Chambers 21 Century dictionary, it gives the meaning as to push something or someone to the edge of anything (especially of society or one's consciousness), in order to reduce its or their effect, relevance or significance. Also Cassell student English Dictionary put its definition on marginalization to reduce in influence, power, and importance. It also means 'to seem irrelevant.' Women by nature are of the weaker sex. Instances in the Bible lends credence to this fact. Husbands are directed to show understanding to their wives since they are the weaker sex. The traditionalist have grossly abused, this often held notion that a woman is peaceful, loving, enduring and submissive among others. It was obvious from this submission that women were not accorded due treatment. However, Paul though now a Christian at the period, he could still not break so easily from the established tradition, rather than adjusting for a change, Paul was equally apt in adhering to the known tradition. All these can be traced to the Old and New testaments. In the Bible just like many other sacred books, women are not given the expected recognition.

Concept of Marginalization and Exclusion of Women from the Church Governance Structures

The history of the Christian church, since its inception, has denied women, their rightful place. This notwithstanding, the critical reading of scriptural text reveals multitudes of women, who played a significant role in church history, but remain unacknowledged. The liberative and leadership role played by these women, Dar-Ethiopia (2017) argues, remains obscured and continues to be inaccessible, because of the deep-rooted male-centred construal of the biblical

text, which reduces the role played by women – whether this, they did in collaboration with men or by themselves. The arguments advanced by Magwaza (2014) and Kobo (2016), as barriers to the advancement of women into leadership roles, can be justifiably classified into three clusters, namely, personal, interpersonal and structural barriers.

The personal barriers are specific to women aspiring to leadership roles and encompass their personality traits, their background and influences, socialisation and cultural influences. These became evident in Magwaza's (2014) discussions with the Shembe Church women, when one respondent objected to another, who she perceived to be suggesting that, there were women who could competently hold leadership roles in the church. Her brash retorted that,

'I particularly do not appreciate people who talk like you do about the... church and do so, out of context', may be interpreted to highlight the need, not to challenge the status quo, and the consideration of the complex context within which the church establishment operates.

This may further be characteristic of the varying levels of the internalisation of the practice among women (Magwaza, 2014). This contention, was earlier alluded by Gupta (2003), when she wrote that, these varying levels of internalisation, were the barriers which each woman brought to the church setting.

The interpersonal barriers such as sex-role stereotyping and inter-group polarisation characterise the interaction among women aspiring to leadership roles and the dominant power groups. Gender role stereotypes about the capabilities of women, their motivations and their readiness to take up leadership roles are examples of interpersonal barriers that 'keep women in check'. These barriers result from the interplay between women and the church environments, and can occur among fellow congregants across hierarchical levels in the church. The church hierarchy may be designed, in such a way that, it restricts the entry and advancement of women or minority groups, in the case of the founders of the Ethiopian church, who felt that they could no longer accept the treatment they were getting from missionary-led churches.

These structural barriers, such as the recruitment, placement, evaluation and reward systems, may be formal or informal, influencing the culture of how things are done in the church (Magwaza, 2014).

Brief background/History of Jehovah Witness

Jehovah's Witnesses originated as a branch of the Bible Student movement, which developed in the United States in the 1870s among followers of Christian restorationist minister Charles Taze Russell. Bible Student missionaries were sent to England in 1881 and the first overseas branch was opened in London in 1900 (Wills, 2006). The group took on the name International Bible Students Association and by 1914 it was also active in Canada, Germany, Australia and other countries. The movement split into several rival organizations after Russell's death in 1916, with one—led by Joseph "Judge" Rutherford—retaining control of The Watch Tower and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Under Rutherford's direction, the International Bible Students Association introduced significant doctrinal changes that resulted in many long-term members leaving the organization (Wills, 2006). The group regrew rapidly, particularly in the mid-1930s with the introduction of new preaching methods. In 1931, the name Jehovah's witnesses was adopted, further cutting ties with Russell's earlier followers.

In 1945, the Watch Tower Society, which Russell had founded as a publishing house, amended its charter to state that its purposes included preaching about God's Kingdom, acting as a servant and governing agency of Jehovah's Witnesses and sending out missionaries and teachers for the public worship of God and Jesus. The denomination was banned in Canada in World War I, and in Germany, the Soviet Union, Canada and Australia during World War II; members suffered widespread persecution and mob violence in some of those countries and in the United States. The group initiated dozens of high-profile legal actions in the United States and Canada between 1938 and 1955 to establish the right of members to sell literature from door to door, abstain from flag salute ceremonies and gain legal recognition as wartime conscientious objectors. Members of the denomination suffered persecution in some African countries in the 1960s and 1970s; since 2004 the group has suffered a series of official bans in Russia (Wills, 2006).

What makes Jehovah's witnesses different from other religions

The Jehovah's witnesses are different from other religions in their partial belief of the Bible. They believe some part of the Bible are written in figurative or symbolic language. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe and follows the teaching of Jesus Christ and gives him due honour as the son of God. But they believe that Jesus is not God like the belief of other Denominations about trinity (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2001).

Belief of Jehovah's Witnesses

Like the Muslim have some belief in Islam, the Jehovah's Witnesses also have some belief in their practice which is as follows;

- i. God is a simple being whose personal name is Jehovah. They also accept the name Yahweh and other transliteration.
- ii. Jehovah is alone and He's above all other beings
- iii. Jehovah has a son called Jesus Christ
- iv. Jehovah's outstanding qualities are love, pure in justice, full of wisdom and power above every other.

Positive Effect of Women Participation in the Church

The involvement of women in the church has caused the expansion of gospel to all the corners and crannies of the world. Women are intelligent and hardworking. They have succeeded in breaking down some of the cultural impediments that limits them from participating, either in socio-economic activities, societal norms and values, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, religious belief, constant threat and ethnicity (Dorothy, 2009). Women are the vital instruments for rapid evangelism and transformation in African society. For any meaningful, progressive and sustained achievement of church expansion, the effective participation of women is imperative. Right from creation this collaboration was necessary in that creation was only completed after the woman was created, and was not without a purpose (Dorothy, 2009). There are not few example of women that showed their exemplary ministry for all to see. Mention ought to be made of Mary Slessor who did not only preach the gospel, but through her efforts, she successfully put an end to the killing of twins in the eastern part of Nigeria (Calabar to be precise). Morrison reiterated about her commitment to service, she said, speaking of her, it is difficult to avoid the language of extravagance (Women In The Church, 2005).

She is entitled to a place in the front rank of the heroines of history and if goodness be counted as essential element of true greatness, if eminence be reckoned by, love and self-sacrifice, by years of endurance and suffering by a life sustained heroism and purest devotion, it will be found difficult if not impossible to name her equal". Mary was a small and fragile woman, full of pluck that is ever ready to do and did everything for Christ sake. According to report, she served the church as founder and leader as well as a teacher. This activity aided the spread of the Christian faith to various corners in the then Eastern Nigeria (Falusi, 2016).

The contributions of Captain Abiodun Akinsanwo of Cherubim and Seraphin church must be commended. She served under Moses Orimolade before she eventually broke away to establish her own church. This development further aided the spread of the Gospel to places she visited (Filani, 2008).

The Evangelist, Mrs. Bolanle Odeleke-Salau of Agbala Daniel, Evangelist Mrs. Makanjuola of World Soul Evangelist Church and Mrs. Amila of the Christ The Messiah Church Ilorin have all assisted in the propagation of the Gospel in diverse areas, and their work is rewarding going by the number of converts within their Churches. They are backing their claim to leadership with God's special calling.

Negative effects of women participation in the Jehovah Witness Church

Despite remarkable achievement recorded so far by women in the spreading of the Gospel, mention should also be made of their negative aspects, which made people kicked against their active participation in Church leadership and Pastoral responsibility. Some people felt that given women active role to play in the church may bring pride on their side because allowing women to stand before the congregation which include men-folk this is contrary to commandments (Rosemary, 2012). They go beyond what is required of them, instances can be cited of one of the women founders in one of the white garment churches who burnt the hands of innocent children with the pretext of taking them as witches who had been tormenting their families.

Reasons for Women Marginalization in Jehovah Witness

The main factor responsible for women marginalization in Jehovah Witness is the fact that they are fortunately or unfortunately born as female. Some people say they can never work under women, when asked, what if God put his welfare under her ministry and that is where he can be up lifted on time. He said God could never do that because he has a woman at home as a wife whom he controls, so a woman could not control him. Some doctrines like the African tradition regarded women as men's property rather than given leading responsibilities. Some quotes Paul's statement in the scripture - 1 Corinthians 14: 34 "let the women keep silent in the churches for it is not permitted unto them to speak but they are commanded to be under obedience as also suit the law".

There cumulative effect of these show that some men are suffering from superiority complexity which is depriving some of them of good jobs and social amenities, which affect their standard of living in the family, the church and the society.

The implications of marginalization of women in Jehovah Witnesses

There are series of effects as regards to the marginalization of women in Jehoval witness, this has adverse effects on the church. As women are not allowed to take active part in the church, though they may have passion for the work of God. This was caused by the administrative system of the church whereby no individual are allowed to found their own church as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, Cherubim and Seraphim, even in Celestial Church of Christ. A woman can only found a Church but she cannot preach nor enter the altar. This is a factor affecting the development of Jehovah Witness (Gbeje, 2008) because it does not allow the church to expand.

Sheila Collins (2010) who undertook a survey of what women's plight was like came up with this findings according to her, "women were regarded as inferior species to be owned like cattle and unclean creatures incapable of participating in the mysteries of the worship of Yahweh for whatever historical reason.

The finding of Sheila Collins (2010) seems to be a projection of what the Jewish cultural norms upheld with regards to women. However, this ideology of women inferiority is still upheld in Jehovah Witness which is not presentable in the 21st century because the whole world now knows that what a man can do, a woman can do better. The issue of inferiority complex between a man and a woman should now be a thing of the past.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprised of Women of Jehovah Witness in Abeokuta, Ogun State. Random sampling technique was used to select 20 women each from five (5) selected Jehovah witness churches to make a total of 100 respondents as sample for study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. It was developed in closed-ended of Yes or No. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage statistical tool.

Suggested solutions to marginalization of women in Jehovah Witness

There are lots of things that could be done to bring sanity and close the gap created by marginalisation of women in the Jehovah Witness. Some impressive should be done so that the church will not lose majority of their members because of flimsy excuse that such a practice is not New testament oriented for the new dispensation. If a man get himself into problem what he needs then is solution. Not minding whether the solution come from male or female. If woman could be used for all these believe there should be no limit to woman's Ministration.

Women should be allowed to attend the seminary school with their male counterparts by so doing this will boost the morale of women. The mentality of suspecting women as potential witches or medium of familiar spirits should be stopped. Everybody should be dealt with on his or her own merit.

There should be equal right, the church should rise to the challenges of contemporary Evangelism and do away with "apartheid" in the church. Holy Spirit is not gender based in sharing gifts. He gives to those who are ready to be used. Many females have gone to other denominations since they are not given freehand to operate. And they will now be training people for other denominations to benefit. Leaders In Jehovah Witness Church should have a second look on women participation in the Jehovah Witness and bridge the gap that has been created for age, so that women too can move forward.

Jesus never made differences between the sexes. Holy Spirit had endowed women as well as men with power to witness years before Paul even believed in Christ. One should remember that women were called by God not Paul or any of the church fathers. Christ shed his blood for everyone with all of the inherited rights, privileges and responsibilities of any member. We should not allow any voice, edict, dogma, rule or doctrine to limit our authority as Christ's witnesses, private or Public or to repress our Christian Ministry to people anywhere.

Presentation of Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

Table: Peoples' perception of the marginalization of women among the church fold especially among Jehovah Witness

S/N	ITEMS	YES		NO		TOTAL	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1.	Women should be allowed to preach in the congregation	96	96%	04	04%	100	100%
2.	The Holy Spirit does not discriminate against women leadership in the Church	52	52%	48	48%	100	100%
3.	Women have been spreading the gospel in the same way as men	84	84%	16	16%	100	100%
4.	Women should be allowed to hold key posts in the church	86	86%	14	14%	100	100%
5.	Both men and women should be given equal right in the church of God	72	72%	28	28%	100	100%
6.	Bible does not condemn the participation of women in the work of God	81	81%	19	19%	100	100%
7.	Men perform better than women in the course of discharging the work of God?	62	62%	38	38%	100	100%
8.	Bible does not keep women silence in the churches for it is permitted unto them to speak	85	85%	15	15%	100	100%
TOTAL		618	77.3%	182	22.7%	100	100%

The study shows that that majority of the respondents 96.00% chose 'Yes' for item 1 while the remaining 4.00% chose 'No'. For item 2, 52.00% selected 'Yes' while the remaining 48.00% selected 'No'. Majority of the respondents 84.00% opted for 'Yes' for item 3 while the remaining 16.00% chose 'No'. However, majority of the respondents 86.00% opted for 'Yes' for item 4, while the remaining 14.00% chose 'No', 72.00% of the respondents opted for 'Yes' for item 5 while the remaining 28.00% chose 'No'. Also, in item 6, majority of the respondents 81.00% opted for 'Yes' while the remaining 19.00% chose 'No'. Finally, 62.00% of the respondents opted for 'Yes' for item 7 while the remaining 38.00% chose 'No' and majority of the respondents 85.00% opted for 'Yes' while the remaining 15.00% chose 'No'. Therefore, since the cumulative value of Yes (77.3%) is greater than No (22.7%) value, this therefore shows the peoples' perception of the marginalization of women among the church fold especially among Jehovah Witness.

Discussion of findings

The findings revealed the peoples' perception of the marginalization of women among the church fold especially among Jehovah Witness. The cumulative value of Yes (77.3%) is greater than value of No (22.7%) responses, it is therefore shows that marginalization of women exists among the church fold especially among Jehovah Witness. The findings is similar to the findings of Hellen (2011) who believed that people perceived women as inferior and this is because

different cultures describe them in uncomplimentary terms. Many scholars, especially feminists have been thrown into defensive rather than a systematic and expository role of women in the church. Therefore, women should be allowed to participate in the leading role in our churches.

Conclusion

One should know fully well that the ministry does not discriminate against sex and the Lord Jesus Christ welcome everybody male and female in to the field to harvest souls for the kingdom. We should cast our minds out of the “male domineering the female folk” and make adequate allowances for the better understanding of the ministry as a ground for both male and female folks. It should also be noted that temperance and self-denial in a vessel, whether male or female qualities such for the use by the Holy Spirit rather than their sexual status.

There is a sufficient record preserved in the bible and in the church history to motivate and encourage women today. The first person to the tomb of Jesus was a woman, the first person to proclaim the message of our Lord’s resurrection was a woman. The first person to share the gospel with the Jews was a woman, among those attended the first recorded prayer meeting after Christ resurrection were women. Among the first to be endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit as witnesses for Christ, were women. The first person to greet Christian missionaries in Europe -Paul and Silas were women. The European convert to believe in Christ was a woman; a woman built the first Christian radio station in the world.

Recommendations

- i. Women with the necessary attitude should be encouraged to play active role in the work of God. Not merely for their own self-improvement but particularly for the expansion of the gospel.
- ii. Equally treatment, opportunities and programme should be given to womenfolk as in case of menfolk. People should be given aware that the sex of a child does not determine what the child would in future.
- iii. The womenfolk should be given opportunity to practice as men do in preaching and holding a prominent role in the congregation.
- iv.

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