
AFRREV LALIGENS

An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 2 (1) February, 2013:56-66

ISSN: 2225-8604(Print)

ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)

Re-discovering Women's Leadership Potential through Improved Involvement: A Case Study of Deeper Life Bible Church

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Abstract

Women's leadership in the church is imperatives for spiritual progress and growth. However, only few churches recognized this and make use of women. It is against this background that this paper highlights the hidden potentials of women and benefits that the church could derived from women leadership using Deeper life Bible church as a case study. Deeper life doctrine as noted in the paper believed that the ministry of women is purely to women and their family. Hence, no leadership position was given to them and they are not allowed to sit on the altar. The paper therefore recommends that since women constitute the significant population of church, they should be given opportunities to realize their full potentials through improved involvement in ordained ministry. Also, women should be allowed a level playing ground with males in leadership structure of the church.

Key Words: Women, Leadership, Deeper Life, Church

Introduction

Over the years, women status have improved remarkably in many societies through the activities and written works of feminist scholars and theologians. (Akintunde 2000:67, Amba 1997:89, Olademo1998:56) However, in some cases, these efforts have not yielded appreciable results; women continue to lack access to power and leadership position compared with men. One wonders what it is that cause some men to be stressed up to the point of withholding their support for women who wanted to be in leadership of the church. In some churches, only few women are given opportunities to make use of their God- given talents while in some other extreme cases, their gifts have been unappreciated and their services exploited, and often refused.

The lack of women in leadership position used to be explained by many as a pipeline problem that is, the interpretation that women with the appropriate education were not available. Also, the motion exists by a lack of acceptance that women will ever make good and capable church leader. However, it needs be noted that the basis of most argument against women is founded in some selected biblical passages coupled with patriarchal informed cultural wisdom.

While it is true that men are more naturally inclined as leaders because of the way God designed them, some women too are better leaders than men. For example, both the Old and New Testament of the Bible gave us the picture of some outstanding women who used their potentials and leadership prowess for the benefits of their society. Women like Huldah, Miriam, Deborah, Esther and the likes. It is true that all the biblical examples were either ‘charismatic’ rather than institutional, (i.e. appointed directly by God, like the prophetesses, not by the church, like presbyters), or informal and private (like Priscilla teaching Apollo’s in her home) rather than official and public (like teaching during Sunday worship) (Stott 1997:50). Nevertheless, if God saw no impediment against calling women into a teaching and leadership roles, then, why is it that some churches do not appoint more women to similar responsibilities?

Also if we believe that Jesus set the precedents for people to follow in his relationship to women and the utilization of their gifts for leadership, then, why is it that our contemporary culture and churches are not being aided by this? The aim of this paper therefore is to examine the level of women’s involvement in leadership position of Deeper life Bible church. The paper

will also examine women's leadership in both the Old and New Testament with a view to bring out what the church stand to benefits if women are given more opportunities in leadership.

Some Females in the Old Testament Whose Leadership Potentials Were Discovered

In the Old Testament, there were Prophetesses as well as Prophets, who were called and sent by God to be the bearers of his word. In Exodus, Moses and Aaron were definitely the most notable figures, but Miriam features prominently as well. The Prophet, Micah even groups the three together when he speaks for God saying, 'for I bought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the house of bondage and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam' (Micah 6: 4). Miriam is even referred to as Prophetess (Exodus 15:20), which shows that it is possible that God had been speaking to the Israelites through her over the years. Besides, it reveals that, even when there are male leaders, a woman can have prominent role and in this case, that of Prophet. On this, Olajubu affirms;

The ability of Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt through understanding, patience and a sense of responsibility can be traced back to Miriam, his sister, because the supervision of Moses boyhood was probably committed largely to his sister Miriam (Olajubu 1991: 74-75).

The above assertion is not unlikely since it was quick and courageous action of Miriam that saved Moses, Otherwise, it is most probable that nothing would have been heard about Moses today. In addition, Miriam was mentioned right along with Moses as one of the triumvirate that delivered and led the Israelites out of Egyptians slavery this, illustrates the authoritative, highly influential role she exercised. She had lovely prophetic and musical gifts that made her an ideal praise leader and Prophetess. (Exodus 15: 20, 21)⁴

Another revered Prophetess, Judge and woman leader in the Bible is Deborah. She was described as the leader of Israel in Judges 4:4. Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth delivered the children of Israel from twenty year long occupation by an alien army. Through Prophetic insight, she settled the peoples' disputes, and as a Prophetess, she gave orders from God to the male leader of Israel's army. God gave this woman authority that was both

religious and civil. In spite of the fact that there were qualified men to lead Israel at this period, it was a woman who God took to take up these responsibilities (The Shepherd Staff 1983:72-73). The office of the Prophetess held by Deborah was described by Herbert Lockyer as a high one which corresponds to the ministry of the world today (Herbert Lockyer 1971: 40).

Huldah was another good example to be mentioned here. During the reign of King Josiah, the book of the law was discovered in the temple. When the priests began to read it, they realized the nation had departed from the way of God. They knew the nation was in jeopardy of punishment. To find out what to do, King Josiah sent to Huldah, the prophetess who gave authoritative words to Hilkiah the priest and other men. Huldah inspired king Josiah, the priest and the other leaders of Israel to implement the most sweeping moral and spiritual reforms ever recorded. Her advice for reform was heeded and there was a sweeping change in the nation of Israel for a short time.

The most significant thing to note here is that at this time, Jeremiah too was engaging in a prophetic ministry (Jeremiah 1:1). So, Josiah could have easily sent to him for the word of the lord. But he insisted he sent for a woman. So again, it could be rightly said here that it is not true that women can only serve when men are not available (Joseph Tkach).

Female Leaders in the New Testament

The New Testament is filled with examples of women being actively involved in many aspects of the gospel. Jesus accepted and affirmed women as persons of worth unlike His society which neglected or rejected them and He taught and included women among His disciples so that women also participated in the proclamation of the gospel, to the point that many of the women who associated with Jesus were known by name, His paradigm shift becomes a water shed for His church in successive generations (Olubayo Ibijole 2012: 12).

Women were important in Jesus ministry, unlike most rabbis, Jesus taught women (Luke 10:38-42). Women were among his traveling disciples (Luke 8:1-3). Martha was given the spiritual insight to recognize Jesus as the messiah, the son of God (John11: 27). Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he was the messiah (John4:7-26). The lesson he gave her about living water was just as profound as the lesson he had a better response. She went and told her townspeople about the Messiah, and she was effective in testifying about

Jesus. Many of the people believed in Jesus because of what she reported (verses 28-29).

After Jesus was resurrected, he could have chosen to appear to men, but he did not. He revealed himself to women first, and told the women to relay his orders to the men (Matthew 28:8-10). He apparently expected the men to follow the women's instructions. Thus, from the above, it could be said that Jesus provided the foundation for the positive place of women in the earliest churches and their ministry.

However, it needs be noted that there are no women leadership model in the ministry of Jesus. But the fact that there are no women among the twelve may not be cited as evidence that Jesus did not intend women to exercise leadership or authority in the churches. It would not have been culturally possible to have included women in that most intimate group of Jesus followers. But it is remarkable enough that many women, at least eight of whom are known by name and with as much or even more data than some of the twelve. Such women were included as disciples and proclaimers during Jesus' ministry (not to mention Elizabeth and Anna in Luke 1-2). It has often been observed that all of the twelve were Jews yet the early church, as it developed in other social contexts included Gentiles in leadership (Mary J. Evans 1983:46).

But was maleness to be regarded as a requirement for leadership or authority in the church in males? There is clearly a difference in this case. First, all male composition of the twelve is irrelevant to the question of future ministry in the church, including ordained priesthood. The twelve are not the unique or even the principal precursors of the later church officials whom we call priests (Sandra M. Schmeiders 1977:p.28).

Therefore, even though clear role distinctions is seen in Christ's choice of the apostles, and in the exclusive type of work they were given to perform, no barriers need to exist between male and female on the issue of leadership. The twelve apostle did not set a pattern for future leadership- not in ethnicity, not in number and therefore possible not in gender.

Moreover, in the rest of the New Testament, there are evidences that women were very active in the ministry of Paul. Although the structures of leadership and authority in the early churches, especially those of Paul, for which the best evidence is available, were somewhat fluid and unstructured. In such contexts women did exercise leadership and authority (twelve women are

known by name among Paul's coworkers in ministry see Romans 16:1-16, Phil 14:2-3, 1Cor 1:11, Col 4:15, Acts 16:14-15, 40). (Olubayo Ibijole 2012:12).

Brief History of Deeper Life Church

Historically, the establishment of Deeper Life Bible Church can be dated to Sunday 7 November, 1982, when its first Sunday worship service was held at Gbagada, an outlying district of the mainland of Lagos. Prior to 1982, there had been a number of Deeper Life Bible study groups in some major cities in the country. As soon as Sunday worship started in Lagos, these other groups began to hold services too, mostly in 1983 (Matthew A. Ojo: 1993: 162).

By 1988, the congregation has grown to 50,000 and now numbers 120,000 members, making it the third largest Christian church in the World. Dr Johan Combrink reports that the Deeper Life church not only has attendance of 120,000 every Sunday, but has planted over 500 churches in Lagos, 5000 in the rest of Nigeria (with an independent estimate of more than 800,000 members in Nigeria alone). He also noted that possibly the church has 3,000 elsewhere (with missionaries to 40 countries of Africa).

From the teaching of the general superintendent, Pastor W.F. Kumuyi, Deeper Life can be classified as Pentecostal. It is a Pentecostal body that took its roots from the holiness tradition. The teachings or religious ideals held by Kumuyi and propagated through the Deeper Life Church is holiness and exhortation of all members to live holy lives takes precedence over all other teachings of the church. As observed by Matthew A.Ojo, the religious ideas of Kumuyi and of other charismatic groups that arose in 1970's have continued to attract attention because they are presented with a vigor and vitality that make them appealing. They are also presented with freshness and they often look new (Matthew A.Ojo 1993: 170).

However, it needs be noted that up till now, Deeper Life Bible church is still growing in membership and in number of branches. Besides, the church has made a tremendous impact on Nigerian Christianity through extensive evangelistic activities, emphasis on miracles and healings.

Women Leadership in Deeper Life Bible Church

In Deeper Life, allowing women to be involved in leading is not acceptable. However, as observed by Omotoye, the late wife of the general

superintendent shared leadership position with her husband before her death. The wife of the founder as noted by him was usually seen as the second in command. But in an interview granted Alan Isaacson by Kumuyi, he says, in the church that women only have an important ministry to women. So, the whole church seems to believe that the women have a role to play in evangelistic and missionary work, talking to those who have not known the lord. He further explained that since women have a lot of things to do at home, it would be better for them to take care of their family and the children. To him, it would not be a good thing for their ministry in the church to conflict with the training of their children at home (Alan Isaacson 1989:101)

Further, he says, in the early days, single women usually led Bible studies, but now that they have been getting married, they have slightly changed so that they can fulfill their roles at homes, and work with their husbands, rather than working alone. It could therefore be said here that, Deeper Life women ministry has been playing a key supporting roles within the Deeper Life Christian ministry right from inception focusing on meeting the specific spiritual and family needs of women both within the church and the entire world as a whole. They serve as ushers, choristers and also involve in the decoration of the church.

In addition, women's Representative is chosen from each of the zones, while late Biodun Kumuyi serves as the Women's co-coordinator. She even has a magazine called Women's Mirror credited to her. Her work was to teach the women leaders on Bible study, making the home comfortable, intimacy with God even though they are busy at home (Alan Isaacson 1989:102).

Therefore from the above, it is suffice to say that, women are not made pastors in Deeper Life. They are also not given leadership roles over men; rather their ministry is only to women and more importantly to their family. The main reason for this as rightly noted by Kumuyi is that, 'a closer look at the scripture shows that there is more on the side of men being into some roles and responsibilities'. Also he noted that leadership role of the women in the Old Testament was mainly among the womenfolk and also in the home. Therefore because of this women are not given ministerial duties to perform in the church.

The Hidden Potentials in Women That the Church Needs to Harness

Myles Munroe in his book analyzed some of the major potentials in women. These potentials as noted by him if adequately utilized would not only help men but make our churches and societies better. The potentials are:

- Women give life to things, meaning that if you need life in your life; get a life – giver which is woman.
- The woman is an emotional feeler
- The woman is a logical thinker
- Women don't forget things so easily, but men have to be reminded again and again. Do you know to whom God first gave the resurrection message? Women. Do you know why he didn't give it to the males at first? They forget too much. He waited until the woman arrived. If you give a woman at a well a message, she will turn it to an evangelistic crusade team (see John 4: 4-30).
- Women are a perfect balance. The female was created to help the man in that, whatever the male lacks, the female has.
- Women are constantly changing; men level up and stay the same.
- Women sees possibilities and potential
- Women ponder words, actions and relationships between things.
- Women processes words, ideas and problems
- A woman conceives and invents.
- A woman develops ideas, plans and programs.
- A woman protects what she has received while it develops.
- A woman produces something new from what she receives.
- Women multiply what she is given. (Myles Munroe 2001: 163).

Apart from the above, women are above average, stable partners during periods of crises especially financial ones. Most men are seemingly good when the going is good and cash flow is favourable, but when there is a reversal, they breakdown, became irritable and unapproachable. In time like

this, women are always placed in a position of innocently bearing the brunt of the situation. (Ogba Okey 2002:185).

From these catalogues of potential and others not mentioned, one could see that the “Weaker Sex” is loaded with heavy and onerous tasks in the church. Let us now look at what the church stand to benefit if women’s hidden potentials are made use of.

Benefits of Women in Leadership Position to Individuals and to the Church

The benefits of women’s leadership in the church are diverse and innumerable and this are listed below:

1. Given their experiences enroute to the top, they would have seen the mounting evidences that our most revered leadership need to embrace flexibility and new innovations. They will understand the innovations that the church must adopt if they are to become magnets for the next generations of young Christians.
2. Encourages projects and ideas that infuse new vitality into the church.
3. Able to minister to the married women who form the vast majority of the church.
4. Value time and motherhood which are of such high importance in our church and society at large.
5. Have ministry skills and know how to teach that new Christians need follow-up and discipleship.
6. Seek inclusiveness and collaboration, not because they are more altruistic, but rather because those qualities served them well during those terms when they were denied authority and leadership.
7. Christian women leaders will be confident women, assured of their worth before God and in society, with training to give them skills to minister.

Therefore it is sufficed to say that, our churches should encourage women leadership and act on it, the benefits would extent to all facets of the society.

Conclusion/Recommendation

Rediscovering the potentials of women through improved level of involvement is one of the ways of attaining church growth and sustainability. Given women opportunity to make use of their God-given talents will give them improve quality of life and positive contributions to the church and society.

Men who negates female leadership or withholding their support for such position because of cultural up bring and an improper interpretation of scripture need to be have a change of focus. Such men must be taught about the benefits they can attain as a result of comradeship and cooperation between them and their female leaders or companions. The issues are that each one, male or female, must be allowed to use the spiritual gifts God gives. The all-male tradition is in direct opposition to God himself because it prevents women from serving God according to their spiritual gifts.

Therefore the church (Deeper Life) is encouraged to change their attitude towards women by using them. The legacy (Women Mirror) of the General Superintendent Wife is still being read by most people in Nigerian society and even in abroad. If she was not given this kind of opportunity, how would she have impacted lives if she had been kept in the background?. The women mirror had settled many disputes and spiritual problems in Nigeria and abroad. Not only this, it has influenced so many women positively in their matrimonial homes.

On this note, I conclude that the church should take decisive steps towards using women for ministerial assignments. The church should always be at the forefront championing the cause and the rights of women. Their desire to be involved in leadership role should not be interpreted as subordination, rather the agitation is as a result of the zeal they have for the lord's work.

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