

# THE MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN IN THE AFRICAN INITIATED CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1882 TO 2006

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## *Abstract*

This article contributes to the continuing debate on gender equity in the African Initiated Churches (AICs) and their leadership, emphasising the united stand taken by women of the Zionist and Apostolic wings of the AICs. The marginalisation of women and patriarchy in the AICs is thus examined from the Zionist and Apostolic perspective. Women in the AICs have initiated and established their own churches, which has established a foundation from which to interrogate male dominance in the Church and seek better approaches that accommodate women. Contributions from men are welcomed, provided these are made in support of women.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to examine the historical and current marginalisation of women in the African Initiated Churches (AICs), and to argue that such marginalisation has no place in the present dispensation in South Africa. The discussion begins with a brief background to and analysis of gender inequality in biblical times and in the early South African context, with due acknowledgement of the fact that this phenomenon is not restricted to these two contexts, as pointed out by Walker (1982:69-145). Conscientisation regarding gender inequality in South Africa is not entirely absent: the isiZulu saying *wa thinta abafazi wa thinta imbokodo*, meaning “you strike a woman, you strike a rock” is common among women, particularly in African National Congress (ANC) circles. It goes without saying that in the present and more general contexts one will encounter both women who bow to patriarchy, and those who strive for change.

In a number of African traditions, the English term “woman” is rendered as *mosadi*. Masenya (1996:156-163) has investigated the concept of *bosadi* (the plural of *mosadi*, signalling “womanhood”) within the context of the book of Proverbs, and reviewed the patriarchal system in the Bible. Although she does not oppose the Bible, she nevertheless takes a liberal theological approach that is of interest to us here.<sup>1</sup> Interviews conducted with women in AICs in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville revealed the interviewees to be optimistic about progressing to higher positions in their respective churches. As local leaders and intermediary agents, women in the AICs were seen to play a crucial supporting role in their churches.

As noted by Sundkler (1961:139), women have an unquestionable status within the AICs. Despite having to battle against male chauvinism, women in the AICs were adamant that they would soon rise to occupy leadership positions equivalent to those held by men in the churches and society.<sup>ii</sup> The opinion was expressed that women who try to live as servants to their spouses end up living bitter lives of abuse and misery. This echoed the sentiment expressed at the ecumenical conference held in Amsterdam in 1948, at which it was stated that “the church as the body of Christ consists of men and women, created as responsible persons to glorify God and to do God’s will” (Paton 1976:107).

For as long as women are largely excluded from decision-making processes, they will be unable to realise full partnership with men, and the church will be unable to achieve true unity. To be truly free, all people must participate in their own liberation. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has duly acknowledged the hopelessness experienced by women in the political, economic, social and ecclesial spheres (Paton 1976:108). The periodisation in this article is the attempt to trace marginalisation of women from as earlier as possible in South Africa.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

In the research on which the present article is based, a participatory method was employed because of its collective and reflective character. A participatory method strives to improve the rationality and justice of social and educational practices, and also helps to improve people’s situational practices and their implementation (Lawson 1999:285). A number of people were interviewed and their views analysed to create the basis of the present article. Both ordinary and elite AIC members were given the opportunity to express their opinions (Khumalo 2003:20-23). The participatory method allowed women in the AICs to contribute to the solution of problems they face, making them not merely recipients of knowledge, but also solution providers. A study of the views of experienced women of the past was made as a means of laying a dependable foundation for meaningful debates concerning current challenges. In this article, women are viewed as supporters of life who deserve to be given space to express themselves.

## 3 GENDER INEQUALITY IN BIBLICAL TIMES

Gender inequality can be traced back to Old Testament times. Then, women were associated with nature, and men with culture. Ruether (in United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 1999:457) in this context comments that “nature” was interpreted as signalling an inferior reality below,<sup>iii</sup> separate from the superior reality of humankind. However, she notes that nature should more correctly be viewed as part of a single nexus in which humanity is inseparably embedded: human beings cannot live apart from the rest of nature, as nature constitutes our life-sustaining context. Since communities of plants and animals were able to live together for billions of years without humans, the concept of humans outside of nature is a cultural reversal of natural reality (Ruether in UNEP 1999:457).

This reversal seems to have taken place gradually, occurring simultaneously with the emergence of agriculture, when land was redefined as male private property, and the phenomena of urbanisation, class hierarchy and slavery, which became recognisable during the period 10 000 to 3000 BC. By the time the patriarchal law codes of the Babylonians, Hebrews and Greeks were formulated between 3000 and 500 BC, a system of ownership had been codified in which women, slaves, animals and land were all seen as types of property and instruments of labour, owned and controlled by male heads of families as a ruling class (Ruether in UNEP 1999:457).

A shift from the view that patriarchal dominance is “nature” and cannot change is called for. Recognition is needed of the fact that patriarchal dominance is the root of distorted relations, and that these can be healed through gender equality, equity and co-operation between men and women in all aspects of life.

Having briefly explored the marginalisation of women in Old Testament times, we may now turn to a partial historical overview of efforts to counter the marginalisation of women in South Africa from 1882 to 2006.

#### **4 SELECTED HISTORICAL EFFORTS TO COUNTER THE MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1882-2006**

In South Africa, the first activist to campaign for the rights of women was Charlotte Maxeke, founder of the ANC Women’s League (Gerhart & Karis 1977:81-82). Born in 1874 in Fort Beaufort in the Cape, she studied at Wilberforce University in Ohio, from where she graduated in 1905, the first black woman from South Africa to be awarded a bachelor’s degree. She married Rev. Marshall Maxeke, another South African studying at Wilberforce, and on their return to South Africa, they founded the Wilberforce Institute, which later became one of the leading Transvaal (now Gauteng) secondary schools for black pupils.

Maxeke was the president of the ANC Women’s League for many years. She attended an American Methodist Episcopal (AME) conference in United States in 1928, and remained active in the church and women’s activities until her death in 1939 (Gerhart & Karis 1977:82). (The American Methodist Episcopal Church subsequently became the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME.)

Lillian Ngoyi was another woman to make an invaluable contribution to the cause of women’s rights in South Africa. Born in 1911 in Pretoria, she worked at a clothing factory between 1945 and 1956. In 1952 she joined the ANC Defiance Campaign, and was arrested. An excellent public speaker, she joined the Federation of South African Women in 1954, becoming president of the organisation in 1956. In 1955 she became a member of the Transvaal ANC executive, and in 1956 she became the first woman ever elected to the ANC national executive committee. She was also the first president of the ANC Women’s League (Gerhart & Karis 1977:113-114).

Two more women of importance in this context are Annie Silinga and Florence Matomela, both born in 1910. Annie Silinga was elected to the executive committee of the Federation of South African Women on its founding in 1954. In 1956 she was arrested for refusing to comply with pass regulations and was deported to Transkei, but later appealed successfully to join her family in Cape Town (Gerhart & Karis 1977:141). Florence Matomela became a leader of the ANC in the Cape in the 1950s.

These are some of women born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries whose contribution to the cause of women's rights has been an abiding one, and whose leadership inspired the solidarity encountered among women of that time. With specific reference to the AICs, Maxeke exerted an important influence in that the Wilberforce Institute, in the Vaal triangle area, became a name synonymous with the training of ministers and bishops of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission, founded by Mrs Christinah Nku (MaNku) (Molobi 2006:43). Mrs Mbele (MaMbele) worked closely with MaNku, and became a successful prophetess and leader of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission.

Women in the AICs were subject to patriarchy, which relegated them to the lowest rungs on the ladder both within and outside the Church. Some have viewed these subservient roles as being indicative of the physical presence but mental backwardness of the AIC communities.<sup>iv</sup> In refutation, however, Sundkler emphasises the role played by E. Mdlalose, Grace Tshabalala (1976:68), Mrs Nku and Mrs Mbele (1976:92), acknowledging the latter two as having established themselves as outstanding leaders in their assemblies. They also became strong financially and in evangelic outreach. Thus, women in the AICs demonstrated their unwillingness to subjugate themselves to male domination in the church, raising their voices loud enough to be heard both in and outside the Church.

## **5 THE ROLE OF AIC PROPHETESSES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHURCHES**

In the interviews conducted between 1984 and 1990 in the townships of Mamelodi and Atteridgeville, near Pretoria, a number of prophetesses confirmed having appointed bishops and ministers in their respective healing ministries. They indicated that men were vital for growth in their ministries, and explained that in consequence their husbands and other men of their choice were elevated to the positions of bishop and archbishop. As an example, Landman (2006:12) cites Mr Lazarus Nku, who married MaNku in 1916 and later became the archbishop of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission. This is not unusual among the AICs. The AIC model of leadership is patriarchal, and the Bible is interpreted strictly and followed closely. Theological education plays a vital role, since AIC members are generally not highly educated. Men in the AICs are viewed as the head of their family, although this may not always be deserved: an AIC dean in Mamelodi assaulted his wife, yet social pressure precluded her reporting him to the church authorities or the police. Sadly, this is only one of many similar instances.

## **6 TOWARDS THE RECOGNITION OF WOMEN IN THE AICS**

Moser identifies the obstacles encountered on the path towards gender development, and explains that gender planning is not an end in itself, but is the means by which the emancipation of women can be achieved (Moser 1993:211). The empowerment she suggests relates mostly to organisational structures formed by women for specific roles. Moreover institutionalisation, operational procedures and training are given high priority (Moser 1993:108-190). These are more specific and require certain skills, and if these skills are to be mobilised, more human resources will be needed. Among the women in the AICs, things tend to happen spontaneously. Women with the ability to heal and prophesy simply begin their work to help those in need of their services. They may not bother to report their church practices to the authorities unless forced by circumstances to do so.<sup>v</sup> Any assistance that they receive comes from large charity organisations that generally categorise them as belonging to the poor<sup>vi</sup> in South Africa.

The poorest of the poor (women in particular) are likely to give up on the idea of ever attaining a good life. They then succumb to ill treatment at the hands of their partners or husbands, delinquent behaviour, witchcraft, jealousy, excessive drinking, quarrels and unstable families (Kadzandira et al 2002:55). Liberation from women abuse and marginalisation must be addressed from the perspective of factors such as those just mentioned. Marginalisation entails being excluded from the mainstream, and may be associated with varying degrees of social disadvantage. It is thus frequently associated with factors such as immigration, ethnic minority status, poverty, long-term unemployment, status as a social work client, and mental illness.

In general, the AICs were supposed to be institutions that rallied behind women and supported gender equity. However, patriarchy within the AICs meant that little support was extended to women. Some discriminatory behaviour on the part of men towards women may have been viewed as normal because of the perception of husband or male partner as breadwinner,<sup>vii</sup> with women lured into relationships with promises of financial security, and then made to suffer abuse. Women were excluded from leadership positions in the AICs since male leadership remained unchanged, and thus no space was created for women, who were used as no more than window dressing, and not considered viable participants in leadership roles.<sup>viii</sup>

Women in the AICs have nevertheless made a vital contribution to society in terms of healing and caring. Although most of these women worked in kitchens, cafés, and factories, they contributed enormously towards improving their society. West (1975:14) confirms this through his observation that most families in Soweto would be unable to survive if women did not go out to work. As much as political intolerance was a crisis for South Africa during apartheid, women's bids for freedom have escalated in an endeavour to reclaim social control and livelihood. Women have felt themselves doubted potentially and materially. As a result, their values have been undermined by those who participated in diminishing them.

## 8 THE WORK OF NOTABLE WOMEN IN AIC LEADERSHIP

Pretorius and Jafta (1997:220-221) note that in Zion Apostolic Churches, female prophets are common, and that in fact the majority of prophets are women, as in the case of traditional healers. In the mainline churches, by contrast, black women are generally denied self-expression in the prophetic and healing ministry. These authors point out that women in the AICs are likely to attain higher positions through their own initiative than those in the mainline churches, who cannot progress beyond a certain point because church leadership structures do not allow this. They make special mention of MaNku, whose church has, through her guidance, grown from strength to strength<sup>ix</sup> despite her being a woman. One could be tempted to argue that women in the AICs were favoured by the fact of their situation being worse than that of men, particularly with regard to standard of education.

There are precedents for women assuming leadership positions. For instance, as Mabuza (2006:29) notes, the Swazi Queen Mother is regarded as the mother of the nation. She rules together with the king, and is highly revered,<sup>x</sup> being accorded the respectful title Mhlekazi (The Most Beautiful One). Like the Queen Mother, married women in the AICs rule or lead together with their husbands.

Daneel (1999:302) speaks of the ritual manifestation of patriarchal remoteness being transcended by “agape love” for nature, and recommends that female ascendancy and emancipation from male authority should be apparent to the extent that women should progress and improve the income and wellbeing of their families. She further supports the idea that women should be respected and assisted by their male partners, as in Fabidzano:

In her public speeches, Raviro Mutonga, coordinator of the Women Desk, always acknowledges the assistance received from men in preparing their woodlots for tree planting and the willingness of males in leadership positions not to interfere in the income generation and other projects launched by women (Daneel 1999:302).

At issue here is the presence of women in positions of authority, viewed with suspicion and resisted by the AIC bishops: the first attempt to launch a Women Desk in Fabidzano in the previous century was rejected by bishops and ministers. The process of achieving gender equity and overcoming ingrained male domination of the church leadership hierarchies is, of course, far from complete. Change is in the air, however, and significantly so when male bishops start discovering and admitting that the “lead dancers” in Sarah’s circle can and should be women, and that without compassion, creativity and the leadership of women, the entire environmental struggle will flounder.

## **9 THE WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In 1972 the Women’s Association of African Independent Churches (WAAIC) became an independent group completely separate from the African Independent Churches Association (AICA) led by male bishops and ministers.

The question of the independent status of the WAAIC came to prominence during the 1972 AIC conference in Cape Town, when the WAAIC delegation refused to participate in elections on the ground that attendance at the conference was not representative of WAAIC membership, although the latter was the member organisation of AICA.

The general president of the AIC wished to proceed with the elections, and summoned the WAAIC Board of Management. When he told the women that the president of the AICA had authority over the WAAIC, they walked out on him, and upheld the decision of the WAAIC delegates not to participate in the elections. The AICA conference reiterated its authority over the WAAIC in a special meeting, but this had little or no effect (West 1975:164).

Women are fully cognizant of the role that they are able to play at organisational level. This was revealed during the Faith and Earthkeeping project conducted through the Research Institute for Theology and Religion at the University of South Africa between 1996 and 2001, as it was abundantly clear that the women took the project extremely seriously. They wanted a good life for their children, and therefore embraced any potentially useful suggestion for reducing poverty or homelessness. In the Brazilian context, Melo (2002:389-390) has indicated that “bonding together” allows people (women in particular) to improve their income, which keeps them motivated and hopeful. Similarly, among black African women the notion of *letsema*<sup>xi</sup> has proved to be a useful traditional and grass-root self-empowerment method, also adopted by the government. This has encouraged women to look beyond their immediate context in order to work towards eliminating hunger and fostering stability.

## 10 PATRIARCHY IN THE AICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

As has already been pointed out, men in the AICs are patriarchal, and their behaviour in the home is carried forward into the Church. As a result, women are forced to hide their potential because their husbands deny them the opportunity to express their abilities. The laws of the Church were formulated by men, who were very strict on women:<sup>xii</sup> thus, despite being in the majority, women have been marginalised. Pretorius and Jafta (1997:220) observe that black women were generally denied self-expression in the prophetic and healing ministry.

Some women, however, became head of their individual churches as prophet leaders. One such leader is Christina Nku who founded St John’s Apostolic Faith Mission, having previously been a member of the mainstream The Dutch Reformed Church. Much has been said about MaNku, including the admiring observation made below:

MaNku may possibly be overlooked as one walks among the thousands of her faithful assembled for one of the annual festivals. But when the charming woman leads the flock packed into her big church, one soon discovers something of her power (Sundkler 1976:84).

Wasike (2000:128) is of the opinion that men still believe that women are their possession, and that they are entitled to take out their aggression on their wives and female partners without any outside interference. Their belief is supported by the community,<sup>xiii</sup> which turns a blind eye and permits them to get away with it.

Wasike (2000:130) opposes gender segregation in terms of what work women can do and what work men can do as being a factor that contributes to women abuse. Many AICs attend annual synods and conferences, but women are often not accorded the freedom to participate meaningfully. It is made difficult for women to speak in meetings or address men; assertive women are few, and in consequence knowledge, power, strength and education are reserved for only a small number.

## 11 CONSENSUS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

It is often felt that women should not impose their standpoint without first informing their male counterparts. In this regard, in an interview conducted on 13 January 2008, Advocate Molly Malete, a feminist advocate, emphasised her status as a woman, a mother and a wife to her husband, and stressed that these attributes are very important for viable relationships. Nevertheless, she emphasised the importance of consensus in all matters affecting herself and her husband as a couple. She further expressed the opinion that women in the AICs need support and education in order to banish fear and confront their spouses and reveal to them their frustrations and the need for change to make the home a pleasant place for the whole family. If they are to be successful in this, women must patiently and tactfully educate men. If women have ventured into relevant education, they will be productive and useful to global developments. Gender equity for women within the AIC community demands that the Bible be read globally as well.

Daneel (2001:254) discusses Dr Lydia August, the daughter of MaNku, who represents a liberated woman in an African church, the control, existence and growth of which is owed to the initiative of African women, and Dorothy Ramodibe, who examines the oppressive nature of an African church still generally dominated by men. August confidently sketches the biblical grounding of women in the AICs' mission and proudly asserts their status as the "fountains of life", rooted in African soil, and as intercessors and healers, who have drawn the masses into the church. Daneel compares the viewpoints of these two women in the following extract:

Ramodibe agonised as the oppressed woman who barely shares in the communion of the body of Christ in a male-led church where she, so to speak, looks in from outside as a stranger. What August claims as a groundswell of female liberation from slavery, Ramodibe still qualifies as a future condition for gender collaboration in building the church in Africa (Daneel 2001:254).

These viewpoints represent the living realities in the *varied* manifestations of the church in Africa, and are relevant for an African women's theology (Daneel 2001:254). For Ramodibe (1996:14) a lay woman from Soweto,

Johannesburg, has also raised issues from her experiences in the Roman Catholic Church. She exclaimed: “I experienced terrible oppression from men in our society and even in the church, where I expected my salvation to come from” (Ramodibe, 1996:14). According to her, there can be no argument that the church is one of the most oppressive structures in society today, especially towards women. As she notes, women make up roughly three-quarters of church congregations, yet, with very few exceptions, decisions affecting the church are made by men alone. Only once women are sincerely acknowledged as partners, as the body of Christ, will it be possible to establish a new church [in Africa]. Ramodibe speaks of a “new church” because the AIC churches of today are a male creation, in which women have always felt like strangers. To enforce changes, women need to be persistent and vigilant.

## **12 THE PERSISTENT ANXIETY EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN**

There are many factors that perpetuate the marginalisation of women. Many women in the AICs bear the vast majority of household and child care responsibilities in addition to fulfilling their economic roles, being forced to cover household and education expenses out of what little they earn.<sup>xiv</sup> They are frequently the victims of domestic abuse. Women in the AICs face destitution and social ostracism in the event of separation, divorce, or their husband’s death. Lastly women endure extreme insecurity in areas where the customs of polygamy and the payment of bride price are practised.<sup>xv</sup> Some women find it impossible to acknowledge the innovations, wisdom and leadership of others: this relates to a loss of trust and hope, and weakens women’s gender equity efforts.

## **13 PROVIDING SPACE FOR WOMEN**

Men in the AICs should support and encourage women and be sensitive to their needs and aspirations.<sup>xvi</sup> They should provide space for women to lead and preach in the church, help women overcome dependency, and assist them to be independent in applying their minds.

Prophetess Maeko of the St Matthew Morning Star Church in Mamelodi on the 30 November 1994 correctly indicated that: “We women have our own ways of dealing with issues and men should respect that. We need space to prove our leadership abilities not only from home but in the church as well”. In the same interview she explained that she had appointed her own leadership in her church, and was therefore autonomous. However, she cautioned that men have their rightful place in the family, and that in the interests of maintaining peace in the home, they should not be denied this. However, she emphasised shared participation, communication and compromise.

## **14 THE AUTONOMY OF WOMEN IN THE AICS**

The autonomy of women in the AICs from the perspective of their marginalisation merits further study. This will serve either to minimise or exacerbate the challenges these women face. The women interviewed offered a range of responses when asked what challenges they were facing in their

churches. Some blamed these on poverty and unemployment, while others referred to their relationships at home, explaining that their husbands never gave them the opportunity to make suggestions or participate in decision-making. In most instances, responses were elicited only after a certain amount of probing.

In examining the position of women in Africa, Paas (2006:235-236) makes the following threefold observation: women coexist with men in the same environment and circumstances; women are equal to men because God has created man and woman in close relationship to one another and to Himself, as He created them in His own image; and women and men share certain characteristics. The perception that Christ is the head of the church and man the head of his family should not be construed to imply permanent authentication of men dictating to their wives. Regarding family matters, there should be negotiation in the true sense of the word between spouses and partners, and children should be involved in discussions about family affairs whenever possible.

Relationships within AIC fellowships are often tainted by the lack of communication. Parents leave early for work and arrive home late, with children leaving later for school and arriving home earlier than their parents, and so receiving no guidance at home. Parents are then often at a loss as to how to deal with their children's behaviour and violence in the home may even result. Crises such as unplanned pregnancies, diseases such HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, violence and robbery are often an inevitable result in instances where children are inadequately supervised.

Interviews with women in the AICs revealed that, in light of the situation outlined above, a question urgently requiring an answer related to who would instruct and advise children if parents were not available for their children. There is a danger of accusation between parents, which may result into the wife being assaulted. What advice could be offered and decisions made to establish healthy relationships at home?

## **15 THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER EQUALITY LAWS ON DECISION-MAKING**

The decision-making process at family level is inseparable from the power, authority and position of the individual members of the family. A decreasing marriage rate as a result of increasing divorce rate, high birth rate of fatherless children, and increasing number of cohabiting couples are all issues to be faced.<sup>xvii</sup> The difficulties families are facing in the decision-making process concerns most families living in the rural areas, and members of the AICs in urban fringe areas and informal settlements.

Decision-making at family level depends on personality, alternatives outside marriage, the norms of one's peers and reference groups, and the overall status of women and men in society. Decision-making in family life influences decision-making at organisational and state level. By the same token, the laws that influence the rules of family life are connected with decision-making. The implementation of gender equality laws influences the culture of decision-

making in the family. Parents will have to create spaces to communicate with their children, as this is vital for harmony in the family and relationship.

## 16 CONCLUSION

Women in the AICs in South Africa were for many years excluded from leadership positions in the church because male leaders were not open to change, and created no space for them. Women in the AIC leadership have made valuable efforts to prove that the sharing of power by men with women is vital to normal life.

In the mainline churches, black women were generally denied self-expression in the prophetic and healing ministry. However, married women in the AICs were given the opportunity to lead together with their spouses. Nevertheless, at organisational level, women have been made to feel like strangers in the male-led churches, and have experienced extreme insecurity, for instance where the customs of bride price and polygamy are practised. Women need space in which to express themselves, and shared participation, communication and compromise are necessary for meaningful change. Perhaps the best closing remark was made by Ramodibe (1996:18) that churches in South Africa cannot be improved, but need to be renewed. For effective change, men have to be liberated to accept women, and together with women re-create churches to promote liberation, justice and peace in churches.

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## Interviews

For the purposes of this article, reference is made to the following three interviews only:

Advocate Molly Malete of the United Reformed Church, Atteridgeville. 2008.  
Statement to author, 13 January.

Prophetess Dlamini of the Messengers Apostolic Church in Zion,  
Atteridgeville. 1994. Statement to author, 2 October.

Prophetess Maeko of the Saint Mathew Morning Star Church, Mamelodi.  
1994. Statement to author, 30 November.

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 Masenya's research reveals that women are customarily viewed as household managers, and characterised as industrious, God fearing, worthy and caring (Masenya 1996:186-204). These views are not only biblical, but also contextual.
  - 2 However, some women held the traditional view that *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*, which means literally that "a woman's laws are her grave." This proverb is cited most often in rural areas, from where it has spread to urban areas. Proverbs of this nature are viewed as hampering the progress of women's emancipation.
  - 3 "Nature below" suggests that everything by definition starts from below. Women will have little room to express themselves if they are denied the same context as men.
  - 4 This may once have been an accurate summation, but the confidence being demonstrated by AIC prophetesses in terms of self-governance hints at a need to rethink the charge of mental backwardness. Furthermore, in rethinking the position of the AICs, the political, social and economic challenges they have faced for decades must be taken into account, with due acknowledgement of women who rose to significant positions despite these challenges.
  - 5 The majority of the mushrooming AIC churches are neither monitored nor administered.
  - 6 Kadzandira et al. (in Narayan & Petesch 2002:55) make the observation that people in the informal settlements in Malawi, like those in South Africa, measure wellbeing in terms of luxuries. Cars, groceries, electricity, sofa sets, jobs and education, cellular phones, videos, refrigerators and expensive clothes are viewed as indicators of success, whereas basic necessities such as food, medical care and shelter are not. Nevertheless, hunger, early marriages, a high birth rate and insufficient land are significant problems. Indeed, education for decentralisation of available resources for the people's livelihood and partnerships with local authorities and NGOs may need to be accelerated. This is also relevant for women in the AICs, as many are not educated, and lack the resources to overcome poverty.
  - 7 Pretorius and Jaftha (in Elphick & Davenport 1997:225) classify the AICs as emerging predominantly within working-class communities, with working men tending to dictate financial terms at home, despite the opinion of their wives, who are unable to protect themselves.

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- 8 See the interview conducted with prophetess Dlamini of the Messengers Apostolic Church in Zion, Atteridgeville, held on 2 October 1994.
  - 9 The notion of honour is inseparable from the notion of power. When the king dies, his mother becomes queen regent and remains head of state until a crown prince has come of age and assumes the kingship. This fact could greatly assist the cause of gender equity generally.
  - 10 *Letsema* is a combined effort by a number of women to identify and address the problems that affect them daily (Landman & Molobi 2003:259).
  - 11 Many men have much to gain by maintaining the status quo, even currently.
  - 12 See Moila (2002:77).
  - 13 West (1975:14-15) also notes that women have to deal with the problem of managing the household budget and educating children while at the same time having to work a long way from home.
  - 14 In an interview conducted with her on 30 November 1994, prophetess Maeko of the Saint Mathew Morning Star Church, Mamelodi expressed the view that polygamy is contrary to Christianity, and should be discouraged at all costs. Prophetess Maeko may have had her own reasons for making this statement: nevertheless, some women accept polygamy, while others do not. A comprehensive debate on the subject, however, does not fall within the scope of this article.
  - 15 See interview conducted with Advocate Molly Malete on 13 January 2008.
  - 16 Opinions expressed by Advocate Molly Malete in an interview held on 13 January 2008.