

**In the midst of purple song and dance:  
coming to terms with hegemonic systems of  
*patriarchy* and *kyriarchy* within the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA)**

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*Abstract*

The question on gender inequalities sounds strange in the circles of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa. Currently, issues of hegemonic systems of *patriarchy* and *kyriarchy* are not openly discussed given the existence of several women and men ministries introduced in the church. The challenge and fact remain: the institution continues to fail many women and men based on its perennial patriarchal and *kyriarchal* systems, practices and culture. The current structure and culture of teaching, management, leadership and governance do not favour the course of women. The presence of the prayer women's league (PWL) as a women ministry structure deepens the pain and scars of *patriarchy* and *kyriarchy*. In fact the course and commitment for women space and support remain a mere matter of *decorum* and nothing else. The article questions the structure and culture in the church that deliberately undermines women in the household of God. This article will also aim to challenge how systems and processes oppress and silence women. A number of case studies will be cited as examples in this regard. The work of the PWL within ELCSA will be highlighted as a *lame dog* without teeth to bite but remain a compromised God's mission.

**Introduction**

The colour purple in this article is identified with centres of power and royalty. One finds herself and others dancing to the high note of the purple song. The choice of this colour is to try and symbolise the rule of power in the house of the Lord spearheaded by the hegemonic systems of patriarchy and kyriarchy in our foremother's time. Their successors have played a remarkable role regarding social transformation, but often their gifts, abilities and ministries have not been recognised due to the negative impact of patriarchy. Early history has projected a picture of women as having an inferior role in a male centered and dominated society (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Laws did not address women or most of them did not acknowledge their existence. Women were acknowledged only in the role as mothers where they were accorded status and honour; yet they are always subject to their fathers, husbands or brothers except when widowed or divorced. Voicelessness can be by choice due to lack of confidence or could be exerted to other people by others who are more confident and dominant than others. There is no specific form of oppression as it is not one size fit all. The voices of the voiceless are unspoken language that belongs to those who have no voices in their lives, those who depend on other people to send their messages across. The messages never reach the destination or they reach the destination misconstrued and miss-represented.

Women happen to be one section of the community that suffers these ills and to this end the same ills are still in the process of being remedied. The interesting part is that this is a political, ethical, corporate, social and theological challenge that is experienced across the board even though the types of oppression might differ in nature. The universe is preaching emancipation, freedom and better life for all, but many countries and organisations are still practising oppression on women and the voiceless such as children and some of men who don't matter. Voicelessness creates resentment and secrecy amongst the oppressed. Fear of being identified as the defiant person creates untrustworthiness and this becomes dangerous to all role players.

The plight of the women within the spheres of church can only be addressed by other women as men have no interest in addressing this challenge. The placement of women by other women in all church structures is the way to go. Women need to be prepared to study church matters in order to have

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a strong base for their argument. More women pastors need to be trained in order to close the gap that is so wide between male and female church leaders. This article intends to research more on the plight of the women to get more theory that will be instrumental to spearhead women emancipation campaign within the church circles. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA)'s Prayer Women's League will be used as a case study to demonstrate the level of voicelessness. The article aims to highlight both the challenge and prospect for women voicing their challenges in the church.

## Background

Patriarchy is a form of government or control by men. According to Phiri (2000:12), patriarchy can “be defined as a father-ruled structure where all power and authority rests in the (male) hands of the head of the family”. On the other hand, Humm (1995:200), defines patriarchy as: “A system of male authority, which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Patriarchy has power from men’s greater access to, and mediation of, the resources and rewards of authority structures inside and outside home.” Patriarchy is defined in various ways by various theologians, but finally it narrows down to the same concept of domination. Webber (1978) refers to it as the system of government in which men ruled society through their position as heads of households. In this usage the domination of younger men who were not household heads was important, if not more important than an element of men domination over women via the household. My view on Webber’s concept is that it does not address the plight of women as it does not quiet address the issues in this article. According to Webber (1948), older men dominate younger men because they are not yet heads of their own households. My understanding of Webber’s concept of domination of younger men is that it is a temporary situation that will prevail until they also become heads of their own households when they start dominating their wives and other women just like those who dominated them. Whereas with women, there was and still is in other quarters that they still have no voice.

Kyriarchy is not so much different from patriarchy as it refers to male domination as well. This word is not anywhere in the dictionary but it refers to Lordship which implies male power. Kyriarchy is a neologism coined by Elizabeth Schussler (2009) to describe interconnectedness, interacting and multiplicative systems of domination and submission, within which a person oppressed in one context might be privileged in another. It is an elaboration within intersectional theory of the concept of patriarchy. It further extends the analysis of oppression beyond gender (as in traditional feminism) to sexism, racism, economic injustice and other forms of dominating hierarchy in which the subordination of one person or group to another is internalised and institutionalised.

### *Women considered subordinate*

One of the major ways in which people can be labeled subordinates is to consider them a minority. A minority is “a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination” (Wirth 1945:347). Women are still without power in many parts of the universe and this is a scourge that nations led by women should start remedying by involving their male counterparts making them realise the importance of women in the society and their value in life as a whole. Women in powerful positions are still in minority and a study in America in 1990 reveals that women held only 175 out of 6,502 corporate officer’s positions, which constitute less than 3 percent of the jobs that are rated as “top” (Ball 1991:48). The souring point in this matter is that women are in majority. Churches have more women than men in membership, but leaders are still men.

Discrimination against women in the workplace, be it corporate or at church level, emanated from the notion that fathers and the elderly in the households especially in the African family set ups made a ruling that girls should not be educated as they will be mad or they will undermine their husbands as girls were only seen as someone’s wife to bear and rear children for that man and nothing beyond that. So many years were lost between the primitive times and when women decided to educate themselves. The gap between educated women compared to educated men is still vast but dedication and encouragement and motivation by other women will make a huge difference. Women’s existence in the family household is overpowered by male domination at all times as from the beginning a woman must change her identity to become a wife of an individual. The man’s surname will be used by the children as well. This is one of the aspects of domination that is so clear. A woman gets married to a family and the main purpose is to assist the man to create a family. Hence in African culture, women have no say in family matters except talking about children and food.

This was seen in parliament during the apartheid error where the parliament was meant for white males only. Women who found themselves serving in those structures like the late Helen Suzman had it tough to make male counterparts listen to them and take what they say seriously. Lack of respect for womenfolks signifies a common understanding that women were inferior by birth. Schussler (2009) describes independent stratification of gender, race, class, religion, hetero-sexualism and age as; “structural position assigned at birth”. The issues of experience and capabilities crops up where males do not want a female to take a certain position. Thus, Schussler (2009) gives an example of this kind of discrimination as: “in context where gender is the primary privileged position (e.g. patriarchy), gender

becomes nodal point through which sexuality, race and class are experienced. In context where class is the primary privilege position (i.e. classism), gender and race are experienced through class dynamics”.

### *The symbol of purple colour*

The purple colour is identified with Lent in the Lutheran Church, and this is when we remember our Lord's crucifixion. This is a very important time as it symbolises the Lord's suffering. The bishop's clerical shirt is in purple which is a symbol of power. Interestingly, this colour is used mainly by the bishops of the mainline churches all over the world and it is easy to identify bishops from any gathering irrespective of the denomination they belong to. This is one colour that unifies power in the church anywhere in the world. There might be women wearing this powerful colour somewhere in the world, but it is not easy to spot them even in conferences as they are so few. I personally haven't seen any in South Africa. One's biggest question is, are there no capable women to take up these positions of power?

### *Locating the silencing of women in the biblical narratives?*

It could have started before the Old-Testament time, but one hasn't heard anything before the Old Testament regarding the treatment of women in that time where women were used as instruments or as passports to open the gates of foreign countries and get preferences at the expense of a woman. Therefore, one concluded that it started in the Old Testament. Let's look at a few examples of the incidents that happened to women of that time and it is very clear that those women did not refuse to be used as such as their husbands were their masters and women had to listen and do what their husbands (masters) say no matter how bad it could be.

Abram and Sarai (as they were called before the Lord gave them new names) experienced a severe famine in their country which led to their temporary move to Egypt to wait for their country's situation to normalise. Sarai then accepted Abram's proposal to take the option of calling herself Abram's sister in order to save his life. The intentions were good but what happened to her was not right at all (Genesis 12:11-16). Sarai and Abram later moved to Kadesh where Abimelech was a King. God had to intervene on behalf of Sarai at this stage from king Abimelech, (Genesis 20). Esther is one of the women who went through the same ordeal of being used as an instrument (Esther 1-10). What happened to Sarai and Esther in this regard shows that men know how other men behave in situations such as these. Behavioral patterns of the King of Egypt and that of King Abimelech were similar and Abraham treated these two cases in a similar way. This tells me that men behave in a similar way no matter whom they are and where they are.

Although in other African cultures girls did not choose their husbands, in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) a boy would not go to another village (*isigodi*) to look for a woman therefore they were expected to confine themselves to their own village (*isigodi*) and find a woman there, otherwise tensions would arise. This culture is no longer practised, but it portrays what used to happen in some parts of our local society. This behaviour of men led to girls getting married to men they did not even know or loved. A man was always chosen for a girl and a girl must just obey. This brings us to a conclusion that boys and girls were socialised differently with boys given the authority over girls. This can be seen in how Esther was given away by her uncle to the king; Esther had to comply with what her uncle wanted her to do. This culture seems to have faded away in some parts of the universe, but it is still alive in the rural areas where girls are being chosen by men and the family receives the dowry and gives the girl away. This is not different from human trafficking. Human trafficking is when persons are traded by other persons for different use anywhere in the world where the demand and supply of such persons is needed. Women and mainly girls are mainly trafficked for sexual purposes while boys are trafficked for labour. Both boys and girls in some instances are trafficked to work as drug mules. People are treated as objects in this regard when transactions are finalised without the concern of the individuals who are to be sent to different places without their consent or knowledge of what they are sent to those places for or told that they have no choice but to comply.

In the New Testament women were seen as outcasts. Each time a woman is found, seen or suspected of doing what was labeled adultery, the sentence was to be stoned to death. And according to John 8:5, this was the Law of Moses that says that any woman who is caught in the act of adultery must be stoned to death. Interestingly, the woman who was found in the act of adultery could not have been alone in that act, but his partner was not found guilty. The socialisation of boys and girls, that boys are more important than girls, has poisoned the male folks to a level that rational thinking about the existence and the importance of women in their lives lacks. If this woman was a prostitute, only men are her clients so her business is thriving because there will always be men going to her for business. The unfortunate part is that the judges were always men as women of that time and place were not allowed to speak (1 Corinthians 14:34).

There were a number of outcasts during the New Testament and those women knew themselves and they wouldn't go where there were crowds as they knew that they were outcasts. This stigma affected widows, the sick, prostitutes and those with demons (Matthew 9:20). The examples of those are: people such as, firstly, Jairus who had a sick twelve-year old daughter whose name is not known, and she is always identified by her father's name, who Jesus raised her from the dead (John 8:7; Luke 8:41-56). Secondly, the widow who offered her last dime, her name is not known (Luke 21:1-4). Women who followed and supported Jesus' ministry had their demons casted out by Jesus (Luke 8:1-30). Thirdly, the woman who had had hemorrhage for twelve years who mingled with the crowd just to get to touch Jesus gown's hem so that she could be healed (her name is not mentioned), did not want to alarm the crowd by calling for help as she knew she was an outcast. This woman was voiceless. This woman's act in silence made such a huge noise that Jesus and the crowd could not resist. These are the silent voices that have been heard in politics, homes and churches as women took quietly to the street to fight for the nation and to the churches to fight for their spiritual beings (formations of Prayer Women's League).

Jesus Christ allowed women to proclaim the word of God and He, unlike other people did not choose women to work with him because they were holy, he chose those who were seen as outcasts because he did not come to Earth for the holy ones but he came for the sinners who are prepared to repent and leave their old way of life. One of those was Mary Magdalene whose seven demons were cast out by Jesus. A woman followed Jesus up to his grave and she was the first person to see Jesus alive as she was the first person to go to his grave on the third day after his death and burial. There are women who are prepared to work for the church but the system is still such that it gets a shock as the patriarchal rule is not comfortable when assertive women are amidst them. The interesting part is that these acts of discrimination and sidelining of women are still happening in today's life as it was before us. Apostle Paul put all sorts of rules for women such as dressing appropriately, women should be modest and women should listen and learn quietly (1 Timothy 2:9). Women have learnt quietly and now they feel they cannot be bottled up anymore. My observation is that vocal women amongst men are still seen as outcasts especially in church circles. This had been propelled by the teaching of Apostle Paul who believed that women should be submissive (Ephesians 5:22-24). Interestingly, the male society only interest itself with verses 22 to 24, yet Apostle Paul goes further to say that men should love their wives (Ephesians 5:25). This becomes a mammoth task for men as abuse in many ways is so rife in families and one believes that no one can abuse someone they love.

One takes it that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) adopted Apostle Paul's stance of women who should be quiet at church meetings and that they should ask their husbands at home if they want to ask anything that comes from the church meetings as it is not appropriate for women to talk (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). There are very few women in the top structures of the church, and most of those who are in those structures are there to make up a quorum and to mark present on the register. This kind of behaviour from women creates a huge vacuum in the space of women who would like to contribute positively to the plight of other women in the church. Paul's stance on women in church spread to the reformation time where bishops influenced each other on the issue of ordained women pastors. This behaviour indicates the comfort zone male pastors found themselves in and the emergence of women in the ministry made them very uncomfortable just as St Paul was uncomfortable. The church of Sweden in its Synod of 1957 a number of bishops, pastors and laymen refused the proposition to allow women to become pastors (Sidenvall 2002). It is very disturbing to read about these men who chose to sideline women from the church activities. There is something about women that makes men meet and discuss in order to try and stop women from being active in anything especially where power lies.

Martin Luther's (founder of the Lutheran Church) influence as based on St Paul's writing to Corinthians drove him to a level that he spread the word so much that church leaders of that time believed him and they implemented what they were taught. There is one element of women that, men do not acknowledge and that is the role they play in organisations and at home. Women realised how important it was for them to contribute to their families by joining the world of men as they started to polish up their careers and to be in the workplace like men and to do everything that men do in order to augment what their husbands bring home. Traditionally, women are supposed to stay home and look after the children while the husbands provide for the family. This happened to be the same at church level whereby the pastors are expected to do their hard core pastoral work and women organisations dealing with soft issues such as prayers for the sick, solace for the lonely and the depressed. The soft issues are those issues that are handled by those who are not qualified pastors, in this case lay women volunteered to do this work as pastors on their own could not reach out to those who needed support. These lay women were organised as they formed a church women organisation for identity and for drafting of the constitution that will legitimise their work.

In other families women are the breadwinners and they are doing well and the husbands look after the children while their mothers are at work and it is a normal life because a family is made of three people, namely mother, father and children. The good thing is that the government has taken a stance to address gender issue. This addressed the gender imbalances in workplace. This gender issue was supposed to have been spearheaded by the church and not the government, but the opposite is the case whereby for the church to implement gender issues, it is like the camel going through a hole of a needle. Is the church going to realise that she is left behind in this issue and follow suit or is the church saying that according to Genesis 3:6 status quo remains? Which at this stage seem to be the case in church and it almost appears to be the churches' comfort zone as leaders seem to be turning a blind eye and a deaf ear on this issue? That's how difficult it is.

Women are experiencing all sorts of oppressions due to what happened at the creation phase. Some expositor's view on Eve, the first woman, is as follows:

- That the woman was weaker and inferior to the man;
- That the woman sinned first because she was the final perfecting element in creation;
- Eve was the only influence to the temptation because she had not personally received prohibition from God as Adam did; and
- The serpent approached a woman because of her difference in personality (tender, warm, inviting easily influenced which made her more vulnerable to attack) (Genesis 3:1-7)

This led to very harsh consequences towards both men and women. Men always blame women for this while he as the person who received the information about the fruit in the centre of the garden could not resist that same temptation. These consequences seem to follow women through generations.

#### **The case of women voicelessness in the ELCSA**

Women realised that they are not involved in the church affairs and came up with something that will get them connected to the activities of the church and be counted. They found an opportunity to care for the sick, supporting women who were in distress and praying for those who needed prayers and supported them on continuous basis. In other words women found a niche within the church circles. That niche gave birth to women's associations in various sections of Lutheran church in Botshabelo in 1883 before the merger or the formation of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) in 1976. The association was formed by domestic workers hence their prayer meetings were on Thursdays when they were all off (the day was called Sheila's Day). After the merger in 1976 a process started to collapse all different Lutheran churches into one entity called Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA). The Payer Woman's League Organization is no longer fragmented as it now belongs to ELCSA.

Women formed this organisation from different provinces such as Northern Transvaal, Southern Transvaal, in Beckville, Pietermaritzburg. These areas established their Prayer Women's League in the 1920s while Cape Orange was formed in 1889. African women were inspired by the German women who came to South Africa and continued to play their role of looking after the sick and the vulnerable children by cleaning the homes of the sick, bathing the sick and the babies. The Africans based their association on helping the pastors in the church by doing a number of chores. These women activities made the male pastors to be comfortable that this is what women can do and nothing else.

Pastors' wives came into these associations and carried on as leaders or chairpersons of the Prayer Women's League for the purpose of unifying the women in the Church. Women got educated in the process and their eyes began to open and they realised that they can do more than just church chores. A number of old Prayer Women's League members were interviewed which led to the information gathered that some women are not comfortable with pastors' wives in the leadership as they tend to be their husband's spies. This led to leadership dictating to this organisation in terms of Prayer Women's League constitutional matters that are supposed to make this organisation autonomous.

#### *The church and associations*

The word patriarchy is seen in different light in the eyes of different scholars and while such arguments ensues. Rubin (1975:168) argues that "First it intends to be applied to all gender differentiated systems and to such systems in which men oppress women; and second, many masculine gender systems are

not strictly patriarchal.” Patriarchy is a specific form of male dominance and the term ought to be confined to the Old Testament type pastoral nomads from who the term comes, or groups like them. The Old Testament type of dominance is what is still experienced in our church environment. It is again male dominance which comes in very strongly as women are not at liberty to decide on how best they can run their association without male interference. Between 1940 and 1960 there was a new conviction that elders wives needed to join Prayer Women’s League as the elder could not be working with Prayer Women’s League women while his wife is not involved. That was the conviction of that period. To other women the association was seen as a solace as they can be supported when their husbands pass away while they are still young with young children to bring up. Other women formed the association purely for prayers. In other regions the formation of the associations was mainly to fill up the vacuum that was left unattended during the normal Sunday practices. It was a normal practice for women not to play an active role in the Lutheran Church and other denominations including the independent churches that women were not allowed to play an active leading role in those churches. According to B Ramaila (date unknown), the associations were formed to enable women to conduct their own service and be able to fulfill their inner-most urge to pray by themselves without interference from men.

There are various theories about where patriarchy belong and who is affected by it, while arguments regarding the status of patriarchy ensues, women still find themselves subjected to this male dominance, most of whom are not prepared to get out of their comfort zone of oppression to women. Women understood their struggle when they started this association. As women everywhere else in the world get left out by male supremacy while they run their affairs as if women are not there, they always find a way to come together and deal with their plight. This determination brought women to realisation that they need to educate themselves if they want to counter patriarchy that is exerted to their spiritual lives. In 1923 the association was now given the legal status of a league. In 1975 different Lutheran Church Regions opted for a merger that unified all Lutheran Churches and so did the Women’s League from the various regions, forming the present Evangelical Lutheran Church Prayer Woman’s League.

#### *Fear of women taking over*

The church agreed with these Prayer Women’s League groups, more so that such groups existed in Germany although their emphases were not on prayer per se. It was necessary for the existence of these groups to be endorsed by the church as they were not autonomous bodies but they were seen as organs of the church in their respective areas. Nevertheless there was some resistance from some of the male counterparts who saw these women as a threat. Patriarchy played a big role in trying to mould the woman’s league the patriarchal way to suit and to give male dominance comfort. The fear from the male dominance brings back to my memory that Paul did mention it that women who attend church meetings should just sit and listen and not say a word. I will always wonder what was happening in Paul’s mind when he took that kind of a decision because to me the purpose of attending a meeting is to participate and to contribute to the wellbeing of the church. What value does one add to a church meeting if one goes in there and keep quiet and ask questions after the meeting. How does that help the church?

The fear for women taking over the running of the church increased to a level that very few women occupy senior positions in the church structures. Lutheran Church women wanted to have a purpose in their own church by contributing towards the wellbeing of those less fortunate than them. Women wanted their voice to be heard in the church environment. Women wanted to reach out to those who did not know the Lord. This is how women proclaim the word of God outside the pulpit environment, and be there with other women and their families as they pray with them. Madipoane Masenya (date unknown) writes about the fear of men in getting involved with immoral women, looking at the advice from Proverbs 2:1-22, 5:1-23, 6:24-35, 7:1-27, 9:1-6, 13-17. Immoral women are dangerous to men with integrity. Sexual behaviour is always used to insult women without any other reason given. This is seen when a woman prostitute was to be stoned to death because she was caught in action committing adultery. My concern in this regard is that how does one commit adultery by oneself, a man must have been involved in this act. Again this piece of information clearly indicates how male dominance was used without a blink of an eye. One wonders what propelled male counterparts in the church to have reservation about the formation and growth of Prayer Women’s League. Pollution as mentioned in Masenya’s paper (date unknown) could have been the case but most women just want to contribute and be counted.

The association was established by domestic workers in 1883 and carried on with the activities of prayers, solace to the lonely pastor’s wives who lost their husbands and struggling to raise their

children and to support the bereaved families of the congregants when death strikes. Professional women joined the association from the year 1960 to date. This is the caliber of women who came in and begun to analyse the situation and the role of the association within the church and gradually led to the formation of the constitution and the legalisation of the association as it then became ELCSA Prayer Women's League. Male dominance takes away women's confidence as they get intimidated not to participate as they should. The same dominance sometimes comes from other women during elections as women mainly feel confident in being led by men rather than women. The challenge of women not having confidence in other women was caused by the same male dominance that women should always see men as leaders and women should remain subordinates. This is still happening now in the nineteenth century that women have more confidence in male leadership than in their women counterparts. Church councils at all levels are still lead by men and not women in the church of women. Who voted them into positions? The answer is: women. Therefore, patriarchy is still very much alive in the church environment.

This brings back the issue of socialisation in our society that girl child and boy child are socialised differently yet coming from the same family. Boys are moulded to become leaders while girls are moulded to become subordinates. Women usually do not vote for other women to lead them, but they instead vote for men to lead them and the few women that get elected into positions of power meet with a lot of intimidation exerted from male counterparts, taking women nowhere in the structures hence the structures remain male dominated. It will take a while to change the female mindset and make them have confidence in other women. It will also take a while for male counterparts to realise that women are here and here to stay and they will stop at nothing to see themselves developed enough to stand for what is right no matter what it takes or how long it takes.

*All are invited in the house of the Lord*

Jesus allowed women to go out there and proclaim the word of God (John 20:17-18) "go find my brothers and tell them that I am ascending to my father and your father, my God and your God". John 4:23-24 "But the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way". God is not looking for men, but He is looking for anyone, all inclusive. Just as much as Jesus did not look at women as sinners, but he accepted them just as he accepted men. This was experienced when He protected the woman who was about to be killed because she was found committing adultery. Where was the man who was in the same act at that time? The Samaritan woman was also accepted despite the fact that she was a foreigner and she went and proclaimed the word to her fellow Samaritans. Where does Paul's first letter to Corinthians 14:34 stand with regard to women that are not supposed to speak in a church meeting.

Nowadays political organisations are even much better in this regard as they turn to force their structures to vote for equal percentage of women and men. Political organisations do recognise the abilities of women in management and this skill is seen when a woman is left alone to raise her children. That kind of a person can manage anything. This kind of policy was supposed to have been driven or spearheaded by the church as the church is supposed to be a neutraliser and a unifier. Gender issues could have made sense driven from the church's point of view.

### **Reflections for moving forward**

It has become a practice in the house of the Lord that the weak get suppressed from doing what is right for their spiritual growth. The church becomes the house of the purple colour and the rest are expected to dance to the purple colour tune. Patriarchal system does not let women think for themselves. The systems are not in place for women's growth and development. Women constitutional matters become an issue for male dominance to dictate how women should take resolutions on how to run their affairs. The only time women are seen as important members of the church is when they contribute financially to church activities, and when they are supposed to do some chores when a big function is to take place. How can women move forward with male counterparts breathing on their necks making sure that the affairs of the Prayer Women's League are under their patriarchal control? Religious women will have to stick together like when women in the ANC and other political organisations marched to Pretoria in 1956 for their rights and making their voices heard in a significant way. It is very clear that patriarchy is not confined to one area of oppression as Delphy articulates that patriarchy is a domestic matter. Marxist-feminist scholars Hartmann (1976) and Walby (1986) argue that women domination is not only experienced at the domestic spheres of the family but also in the public spheres of work, education and religion. For Hartman (1976:139), the primary mechanism of male domination is not

domestic production but job segregation by gender. For Walby (1986), patriarchal domesticity articulates with capitalist class relations to produce patriarchal relations beyond the domestic sphere.

In ancient times, women were given men to be their husbands and their husbands called them their children. It is for this reason men were allowed to marry more than one wife because a wife as a child had no say to what her husband plans to do. This kind of situation has been relaxed a bit as more and more men are supportive to gender equality.

According to Hooks (1984), political and economic power is in the hands of men, so is religion. Religious traditions are intertwined with historical and social context, the one draws from the other and they cannot be separated. Also, Ackermann (1993:285) attests that women's experience of patriarchy and androcentrism in religion has had many effects. For the majority of women this became the way of life as it led to the passive acceptance of a kind of second class status within their religions and believed that this order was divinely sanctioned and is aptly called "psychology of the oppressed". For others, it meant learning to live with contradiction. Most world religions affirm the inherent worth of people's humanity and the ideals of justice, equality, freedom and love, yet women's experiences of these values are not practised in their religious institutions.

Ackermann (1993) states that the world religions as being by-and-large oppressive towards women, and yet they all contain the potential for liberation, "the sacred canopy versus the prophetic" as compared to the familiar saying: "the orthodox versus the reformed". This indicates that women oppression derived more from custom, culture and traditions. The challenge usually lies in the field of hermeneutics, and the interpretation of sacred writings of the Torah, Gita, the Koran and the Bible and other sources of literature. People from diverse ethics and religious backgrounds have different belief systems, different values, norms and behaviours. Therefore, religion, culture, social and economic factors play a large role in the subordination of women in Africa. Many African communities had strong traditional, cultural and religious beliefs that contribute to abuse, violence and other forms of discrimination against women. Examples of those are: girl child could not choose a man she loves, but she had to be married by a man chosen for her by her father. A girl child could not come back home if the husband is violent because her father will remind her that he received cows for her to be there. This was a way of life and it was not documented anywhere. These are some of many other traditional practices that were once not seen as dangerous. The revelation above aims to indicate how culture and religion has contributed to the suffering and pain women experienced.

According to Ofbea-Afboagye (date unknown) "culture is neither static nor monolithic". Women rights activists argue that communities must dismantle those aspects of culture that oppress women while preserving what's good. "Male mastery and domination over women must be altered" (Rosemary Ofbea-afboagye Ghananian lawyer). A Sudanese physician, Nahid Toubia asks a question, "Why is it only when women want to bring about changes for their own benefit that culture and custom become sacred and unchangeable?" Women are undermined due to cultures, religions, beliefs and practices that are entrenched in those institutions by men, and this contributes to gender based violence. At recent conferences it is revealed that more and more women get killed because of cultural beliefs either to appease the ancestors or for pleasure. A study of women homicide in Alexandria, Egypt, found that 47 percent of women were raped and killed by their own relatives. At a conference in Jordan, experts from six Arab countries estimated that at least several hundred Arab women die each year as a result of honour killings (Sidebars 2000:231). Women are the ones who must die to appease the ancestors and for pleasure. When will this come to an end, and who must stop it?

Certain marriage practices can disadvantage women and girls, especially where customs such as dowry and bride-wealth have been corrupted by Western "consumer" culture. Dowry demands can escalate into harassment, threats and abuse as the bride in other instances is seen as a bought object, therefore she must just succumb to what her husband and her family demand of her. It becomes very sad when some of the women end up being killed or commit suicide freeing the husband to pursue another marriage. Culture is used by men to justify their actions. Till when should women be subjected to men's brutality and their undermining tendencies?

Further, the theologian Harper makes a clear statement of a traditional belief or prejudice, but represents significant movement from indifference to conviction. Harper's simple interpretations are not only theologically accurate but also socially authentic. He links the ordination of women with the nature of family life and feminism woman. The church needs the heart of a woman to respond to the hurts of the society. There are deep feelings of many women who have to wait year after year, for what they regard as their calling and right to be Priests. Women have and still feel judged, discriminated against and belittled by the views of those who are against them. This discrimination is in my view still alive and kicking as delays are put over women's heads when ordination time comes. So many stumbling blocks are always put in the way and women find themselves waiting for up to five years before they are ordained. Even after ordination women are never considered for higher positions and

the response is always that women are not competent enough to hold such offices such as the office of the Dean or the office of the Bishop.

Other critics are of the view that Eve's transgression not only caused changes in her life-style but for every female descendant of all times. Women's submission and men's domination are by divine decree as the punishment for yielding to the temptation first and influencing Adam to also be a partaker. This statement from the bible is used to confirm the punishment women experience: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:6.). So, it was concluded that women should accept their fate and submit to male domination, regardless of the meanness of some men. The transgression caused much change in the future lifestyle in that motherhood was bathed in sorrow and heartache and a woman was to be ruled by her husband.

However, we see and live the reality of the stigma after the fall, past, present and future. The degrading power of the forbidden tree began its work. Fearfully, sulking and burdened with sickening guilt the man and woman did the only thing that seemed reasonable. They tried appeasing God, hoping to soften his anger for their disobedience. The blaming game originated in the Garden of Eden. Eve's answer to God's integration confirms acceptance of the blame of deception: "The serpent deceived me and I ate." Thus, woman became the symbol of deception and the symbol of evil influence. Adam, however, tries to escape his responsibility and shift blame to God: "The woman you gave me, she gave me to eat". Ever since the fall, women bear the consequences of influencing men with the forbidden fruit and have struggled through generation with the stigma and effects of the "curse".

The Lord God said to the woman, "You will bear children with intense pain and suffering. And though your desire will be for your husband, he will be your master" (Gen 3:16). Some church fathers interpreted "desire" as strong sexual longing for her husband. The complexity of the issue, coupled with the exegetical difficulty of relevant Scripture, has made general agreement elusive. Part of the discussion has focused upon the last phrase of Genesis 3:16: "yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you". The word for "desire" in Genesis 3:16 can mean craving or longing. The issue is best understood if we make the simple substitution of God for her husband. The woman's desire should be for her God. Instead, her desire/craving/longing is misplaced. It is no wonder that certain denominations require their followers to abstain from intimate relationships with women and do not enter the institution of marriage (e.g. Monks and nuns). While there are so many definitions about the desire of a woman for her husband, and although those definitions shed some light in the intended meaning, we cannot positively determine that this was the intention of the curse. The curse sowed the first seed of male chauvinism and women's liberation. The hierarchy, which functioned so well to produce unity and harmony prior to the fall, was subjected to abuse from both sexes. Women have come against male authority ever since the fall of the humankind (Genesis 27:5-27). Women are working tirelessly to make sure that the bondage of male dominance is finally loosened up.

Men are suggested to be harsh, domineering, and un-loving in their attempts to crush and conquer women. The *burkha* – the full-body veil created to hide women completely from the gaze of men – is one of the most hateful symbols of women's oppression. These burkhas have been enforced for centuries in Central Asia by feudal patriarchs as a sign of *their* honour. A tiny mesh of cotton gauze covers the women's faces and barely allows them to see where they are walking. Women appear in that world as faceless swaths of colour – made invisible, anonymous and powerless.

We are not allowed to know or learn and think about important things ... It is always men in the family and society that decide for us, whether or not we have the right to study, work outside the house, think, or participate in political, social and economic activities ... When they want to praise a woman they say she is quiet, shy, obedient ... When she struggles against the oppression she and other women feel they say she is stepping over limits, she is no good, outspoken ... Thus they try to silence the voice of women's struggle (A young Afghan woman (unnamed), International Women's Day 1999, Quetta, Pakistan, RW #997).

Man became a tyrant, instead of loving; he hates, instead of gentleness and patience; he is totally selfish. His former kindness has gone, now he reflects brutal self-centeredness and totally domineering. The woman has sorrow; grief and pain greatly multiplied and follow all through life. The consequences of the fall have caused woman to be oppressed, opposed, dominated, cruelly ruled and subjugated to man's selfish gain. Historically women have sought to fit male authority or leadership, only to be crushed and oppressed. Men in turn have abused their role and have been oppressive, domineering, unfair and unloving. They have often pronounced women as inferior (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:9-15).

Women abuse is propelled by the blame game that is used to justify men's violence against women. Women are "blamed as the victim" for inviting violence in various ways which is equivalent of the "bad apple" theories of men (Maynard 1993:110-11). This theory indicates subtly and conspicuously any views that ignore both male domination and power, leading to male abuse by substituting men as victims. This is related to men who are vulnerably aggressive in nature and women who are perceived as unreasonable as they are alleged to be provocative to such men and women end up apologising and sympathising with such men. It is for this reason women end up tolerating such men and staying with them thinking that they are the ones who are wrong and not the abusive men. However, the modern women movements have risen in the past few decades to combat male chauvinism and domination. The principle however, of men ruling over and women fighting back to overcome the "rule" can be overcome by our better understanding of male and female roles. Male domination and female submission have just not evolved historically and culturally, it is a principle deeply embedded and engraved in our human mind and nature.

Although there is evidence that one was designated to "rule" and the other to "submit" (Genesis 3:6), there is no evidence that one will lead and the other will follow, one will provide and the other will be provided for. It became a religious interpretation though, on which difference is built. Before the fall, there wasn't anyone from whom to protect the woman, nothing to provide for her, as both lived in paradise and everything was provided for. Woman was given to man as his associate, his co-worker, his co-regent, and a source of extra strength to fill his weakness and loneliness.

Harper stated that the consequences women face from the stigma of the fall have created the differences between man and women. However, this status of male and female is cancelled by this statement: "We are joined heirs through Christ" (Galatians 3:28). Changes to the plight of women is due to misunderstanding and misrepresentation of issues of women by men where women are not represented and also due to women who sit in such forums but are intimidated to an extent that they end up agreeing to wrong conclusions, succumbing to continuous male domination.

This statement found in the Bible states that man was not complete without the creation of the woman, as it states that, "it is not good that man be alone" (New International Version 1977; Genesis 2:18). Without the woman man was not complete. Together they made one whole person to complement and complete each other. We may argue the theory the Biblical background for woman's debasement and man's exaltation or woman's submission and man's dominance? The answer is vital in this regard to understand the roles, position, and functions of male and female and to know the counter-plan so that both male and female can live in harmony increasing the quality of life yet without being threatened by each other's roles. The best interpretation for the "desire" and the "rule" clause is that after the fall women would rebel against their designated role and that men would abuse their role of leadership, thus creating tension in the male-female relationship. Men in turn have abused the God given responsibilities and roles, and have definitely been oppressive, domineering, unfair and both loving and unloving and have wrongly pronounced women inferior. The principle of man ruling over women fighting back to overcome this rule faces a major challenge (Leese 2011:240).

## **Conclusion**

This article attempts to prove that womanists Theology is still an ongoing field of research and far from a finished matter. There are, in Christianity and other religious and secular society, challenging issues to be addressed. Women and men should join hands for this purpose. The gender differences have been over emphasised through the human generations as if they were significant to human existence and skills. However, historical facts have proven completely the contrary as brave women were found in challenging posts as priests, peacemakers, mothers and parents, healers, counselors and commandants. Indeed, biological sex is natural but gender differences and imbalances are socially constructed. Women's struggles are not restricted to the search for their liberation from men; they are also between themselves. For example, this further occurs between women in rural areas versus women in urban areas, rich and poor, intellectual and non-intellectual, literate and illiterate women as well as young and old. However, this variation does not justify the continuing gap between men and women, and women and women. There is need for, firstly, an internal women programme, and secondly, reconciliation between women and men in order to correct their continuous gender differences. The drivers of change for women liberation should be women themselves if they are serious about their own liberation.

The social evils against women prevent them from realising their full potential. It is shocking to realise that male domination is still rife in our societies especially within the church environment. It is in the church where emancipation was supposed to have started. Women even managed to group themselves in a structured manner to make it easy for the church to utilise these structures properly and professionally, instead the structures are seen as a threat to the male supremacy. Further, research is

needed on women's voices and discoveries from religions other than Christianity only. The issue of women and priesthood ministries as well as the challenges facing pastor's wives and women in church need to be addressed.

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