

**THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DISCOURSES  
ON THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN THE  
MINISTRY: A VHUSADZI (WOMANHOOD) PERSPECTIVE**

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Submitted In Accordance With the Requirements

For the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

In the subject

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

At the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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OCTOBER 2011

## STATEMENT

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“I declare that **The impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership development of women in the ministry: A vhusadzi (womanhood) perspective** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.”

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

# **THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DISCOURSES ON THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY: A *VHUSADZI* (WOMANHOOD) PERSPECTIVE**

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Subject: Systematic Theology  
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## **Summary**

Culture and religion have both healthy and unhealthy effect on the leadership development of women in Africa. In this regard, the impact of especially African Pentecostal Christian discourses, as well as Vhavenda cultural discourses, on the lives of women leaders are brought to the surface through literary reviews, questionnaires and interviews. Accordingly, the data obtained by means of these methods are analysed using existing theological and cultural hermeneutics methods. Furthermore, they are deconstructed in terms of a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective of empowerment regarding women in the ministry, which is applicable in an African-South African context. The present role of women in Pentecostal churches in the Venda context is studied historically and critically with reference to a future of empowerment. It is found that the leadership role of women in the ministry in Pentecostal churches in Venda is faced by certain challenges, which include rereading the Bible from the perspective of women in partnership with men, validating women's ordination in dialogue with patriarchal interpretations of presumed biblical prohibitions on women's ordination, rescoping cultural influences on church leadership roles, which are supported by Venda proverbs and rituals and reframing perceptions of women in the ministry amongst church leaders and the laity. The unique contribution of this thesis is, firstly, its focus on Pentecostal women in Venda. Secondly, a *vhusadzi* perspective is formulated that has never been done before in the literature. This perspective encompasses the experiences and expectations of Vhavenda women living in the Limpopo Province in South Africa. Thirdly, a link is drawn between culture, religion and ministerial leadership with a gender focus that produces new knowledge of the relationship between religion and culture as it manifests itself in a Venda

context. The *vhusadzi* approach is informed by the *bosadi* approach of the Old Testament scholar, Madipoane Masenya, and feeds on her insights into women's access to the interpretation of biblical texts. The *vhusadzi* approach takes these insights further by applying them to Vhavenda women's access to leadership roles in the church. It opens up the future for further research, inviting African women scholars to contextualise issues related to women's ordination.

### **Key terms**

African Pentecostal Christianity, Venda culture, *vhusadzi*, womanhood, gender issues, women's ordination, religious and cultural discourses, ministerial leadership, cultural hermeneutics, female genital mutilation.

## **DEDICATION**

To my beloved late mother Mrs. Itani Matamela Mulaudzi, a powerful woman who has raised me up to become a powerful woman today. Her good memories will always remain with us.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4: 13). NIV.

It is an honour to acknowledge the contribution of the following people who made a positive impact to this study:

- Professor C. Landman who worked tirelessly day and night for this research to be completed.
- Professor M.J Masenya for her support towards the completion of this research.
- Mrs Carol Jansen who edited the language of this research with courtesy, dedication and ready assistance.
- All the respondents to both the questionnaires and the interviews for their insights and rich experiences.
- Dr. Apostle A.M. and Pastor Florence Masakona for the encouragement and prayers that he offered during the dark moments of writing this work, and for trusting me with his pulpit that opened a world of knowledge pertaining to women issues.
- Pastor R.T and Mrs Rathando, my spiritual parents who introduced me to the work of God, his faith in me raised a woman out of a girl. Your labour in the Lord is not in vain.
- Pastor Mudimeli A. Showy, my spouse, my honey and my dearest who was devoted and had a lot of understanding and who created time for me to do this research. To you I give my heartfelt gratitude. Your inspiration and passion to see this dream realised gave me persevering strength and has positively impacted on the woman that I am today.
- My children, Yadah, Ndivhuwo, and Thendo for their understanding and constant support during the writing of this research.
- Chaplain Mabe S.E. and the entire Limpopo SAPS Chaplaincy thank you.
- Grace Missionary Chapel saints whose corporate effort, thoughts and ideas have given me the exposure I needed in this field of study.
- Calvary Saints Equipping College students of 2008 and 2009 who helped me gain important insights in relation to this study.
- All the glory be to God.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

African cultures are replete with aspects that are both liberating and harmful to the lives of women, as is stated by at least two prominent African women theologians, Musimbi Kanyoro and Mercy Oduyoye. Kanyoro (2002) argues that cultural practices, such as female circumcision, polygamy, and the stigmatisation of barren women are acts of injustices which can, however, be changed without abandoning culture altogether. The words of Oduyoye (2001:12) concerning culture clarify the concept of ‘culture:’

Culture is a broad concept, which always needs fine-tuning, but in the African women’s language, the broad description used for it is ‘What human beings have made from nature and because of nature and community’. All that is not nature has been ‘cultivated’, worked upon, devised, dreamed up, and given shape and meaning by the human mind and hands. Culturing, therefore, is a continuous activity of the human community, and culture has become the locus of resistance.

In South Africa, on a national level, the leadership of women is visible, both in women climbing to the rank of deputy-president<sup>1</sup> and in the constitution<sup>2</sup> acknowledging women as equals. The fact that many women occupy top positions of power in government and the private sector shows that South Africa recognises women’s potential in leadership. However, despite such transformation in South Africa, a vast majority of women are still marginalised and living under harmful cultural practices that keep them from gaining from the liberty awarded them by the constitution.

What is true of the double nature of culture, applies to religion as well. On the one hand liberation theology assisted in launching South Africa into democracy. On the other hand, the Christian religion locally struggles with the interpretation of biblical passages that

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<sup>1</sup> These are Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka and Baleka Mbete.

<sup>2</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (No 108 of 1996).

deny women leadership in the church. The exclusion of women from the leadership of the church splits and confuses members of the church. This exclusion is based on interpretations of the scriptural texts such as 1 Timothy 2: 8-15 and the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2.

On an international level, prominent women scholars such as Ruether (1985:114; 1998) and Schüssler-Fiorenza (1994) over decades have described the dilemma that women encounter when they write on women's experiences in the church. It is apparent that women are oppressed by male dominated cultures, and are defined in terms of who and what they are through andocentric interpretations of the Bible, as a book that has predominantly been interpreted by males.

In Africa, the issue of women's leadership in the church has been, and still is, debated by African women theologians (see Oduyoye 2001; Masenya 2004; Hinga 1992; Musopole 1992; Njoroge & Dube 2001). African women studies reveal that there is an increase in the awareness amongst Africans regarding the issues of women in the church. These studies address many aspects focussing on women experiences, women's ordination and biblical interpretation. Ironically, perceptions against women's ordination are giving women a very strong voice, and open up possibilities for a new meaning in their lives.

Motivated by this background, this study focuses on the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership of Venda women in the church. The motivation for the aims is given in the next section.

## **1.2 THE AIMS OF THIS STUDY**

The aims of this study are threefold: firstly, to identify and describe the impact of the Christian religious discourses and the African South-African Venda cultural discourses on the leadership development of women in the ministry; secondly to determine the impact of these discourses on the present roles played by Vhavenda women in the ministry, and thirdly, to present a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective of empowerment to women in the ministry. A description of the aims of this study is presented below:

### **1.2.1 Identifying and describing the impact of Christian religious discourses and the African South-African cultural discourses on the leadership development of Vhavenda women in the ministry**

This study is about the impact of the Christian religious discourses and the African cultural discourses on the leadership of women in the ministry in Venda. Women dominate the pews of the Venda churches, but regarding pastoral leadership positions, women's presence is still a concern. The arguments in favour of refusing women to become leaders are based on religious and cultural discourses.<sup>3</sup> This study aims at identifying the religious and cultural discourses and describing their impact on women's leadership development. This study will firstly discuss the religious discourses in the lives of women in the church, to be followed by a discussion of cultural discourses.

#### ***1.2.1.1 The impact of biblical discourses on the lives of women***

Religious discourses are very powerful as they are mostly based on the Bible. Both women and men of faith who believe in its infallibility view the latter as the authoritative word of God. It is through the interpretation of the Bible that women's lives are governed and shaped. Although the Bible is full of life-giving news for women, but the focus on texts of oppression and the patriarchal interpretation of the Bible have been used to the disadvantage of women. West (2004:160-173) has conducted a study on taming the texts of terror, and indicates that, although the Bible is liberative, it still contains texts that are oppressive.

West examines the effects of 1Timothy 2:8-15 on the leadership of women. He points to the fact that this text sustains its patriarchal ideological grain even many centuries after it was written. Through these texts and by those that interpret them for their own gain, women's lives are shaped. In line with West's pronouncements, the question remains whether the texts that are "tamed" are "un-tamable" or whether their effect is still very powerful because they have survived for so long without being "tamed?" Alternatively, will it need the same amount of time for the reversal of the damage caused? Could it be

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<sup>3</sup> For a definition of "discourse" see 1.5.4.

that the expected change is there though not yet realised, as these texts remain fresh as if they were written yesterday? Is it indeed possible to change harmful discourses into discourses that have a healthy effect on believers? This study will be investigating these questions.

Oduyoye (2007:11) who, as indicated above, is a theologian who specialises in the subject of women, religion and culture holds views similar to those of West on the re-interpretation of the Bible. She points to Biblical passages that are used and interpreted by Christians in ways that are detrimental to women. Regarding what church history and religious teaching have done in terms of creating divisions between men and women and the power of God, Oduyoye (2007:11) makes a significant contribution to this study when she writes that:

Christians love to highlight passages in which biblical culture forces women into subordinate roles. Sarah called Abraham Lord; so women allow their husbands to lord it over them and men take it as their divine entitlement to lord it over their wives. Christians love all that place women on the margins of power and authority and are willing to ignore examples of equity and the common humanity that runs through the Bible.

Both West and Oduyoye point out that this biblical interpretation reveals that there are vested interests at stake as men are enjoying the benefits of their interpretations at the cost of women. The researcher concurs with them that some men, especially those in leadership positions in the church, to shape the lives of women, use the interpretation of the scriptures. They find it difficult to relinquish this power; therefore, they develop the different power discourses as will be discussed in the next chapter of this study. Since women's struggle is against these powerful religious discourses that are controlling their lives, these discourses need to be re-visited and be deconstructed for women to become what God has intended with their lives. This is the challenge that this study wishes to address.

#### ***1.2.1.2 The impact of cultural discourses on the lives of women***

Both men and women traditionally see African culture as justifiably governing the lives of all members in society. This makes it difficult to challenge certain long-held and sometimes harmful concepts and beliefs upheld by this culture. For example, the

researcher's culture has formed her grandmother, her mother-in-law, her mother and herself in terms of what being women entails. It is extremely risky to be critical of culture for the following reason. If her grandmother, mother-in-law, and/or her mother would become aware of her critical stance concerning their culture in any way, they would think that she was not legitimately a member of the family, for how could she criticise "her maker" (culture)? Her mother-in-law would send her back home thinking she was not well-mannered, and under orders to seek the counsel of her mother and the elders. She might even lose her marriage altogether. Her mother would feel disgraced within the family and the society. This is an indication of how serious matters pertaining to culture can become, in fact it can become a struggle against what one has, what is one's own and indeed, a struggle against oneself. Groothuis (1994:150) comments on this phenomenon as follows:

People not only create culture, we are, in a sense, created by culture, as it in turn influences the ideas and actions of humans in society. As such, culture is a potent, pervasive, yet largely hidden force in everyone's life. The person most influenced by a particular cultural perspective is the person most likely to be unaware of its influence.

The authority of culture is so powerful that it becomes the main influence on people's lives, as pointed out by Groothuis above. Culture is also able to relegate people to different places in society, in which men and women occupy different positions. Although women have a place in culture, that same culture imposes many restrictions on them. This is reflected in the cultural songs, proverbs and narratives, which have had a considerable impact upon the shaping of an African woman. In essence, these cultural sayings and utterances have contributed a great deal, mostly negatively, to the lives of African women historically and are even being perpetuated today through language that is used as a powerful vehicle that transports culture from one generation to the next.

This researcher concurs with Oduyoye (2007:2-8) that cultural traditions that are harming women, need to be reviewed and revised, especially when the language of culture incites violence against women, the subduing and marginalising of women and the denial of women's individual potential. Cultural traditions also lead to the harmful idolising of marriage, which results in women being regarded as inferior human beings. As a result of culture, early marriages are solemnised that have a negative effect on the self-



development of women, rendering them subservient to the power of men. It is interesting to note that culture often rests on an ideology that keeps women married at all cost. The powerful myths that are propagated through idioms and proverbs need to be demystified by women's search for affirming and liberating definitions of *vhusadzi* (womanhood), as this thesis wishes to prove.

The Vhavenda culture possesses positive elements that endow both women and men with humanity. However, the Vhavenda culture also contains negative elements that discriminate against one part of humanity, usually female. This is similar to the situation in other South African cultures such as the Sotho culture (see Masenya 2004; 1996) and the Afrikaans culture (see Landman 1994). In most cases, women do not benefit from that which people defend as culture; on the contrary, they can be regarded as the victims of culture. Therefore, there is a need to assume a critical stance towards issues pertaining to culture, so that all humanity will be able to embrace their culture unreservedly. As indicated above, it is not an easy task to engage with cultural issues. Indeed, culture is like a "double-edged" sword and cuts through the one who embraces it as much as the one who is critical of it.

Accordingly, this study's aim is to identify and describe the religious and cultural discourses that have an impact on the development of Vhavenda women in the ministry, the aim of this being to liberate African women, more specifically *Vhavenda* women, to become leaders in the church by challenging the religious and cultural discourses that keep them captive. By finding their strength and place in the church, these women can continue to point the way even for other women who feel the call of God, challenging the misinterpretation of the Scriptures and cultural norms that continue to disadvantage women.

### **1.2.2 Determining the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the present roles played by Vhavenda women in the church**

In the second place, this study aims at exposing the effects of religious and cultural discourses on the roles played by women in the ministry. The issue of ordaining women for ministry has created endless arguments among men and women in the church. Women leadership in the church is confounded by arguments about the proper roles women

should play. Some argue for, and others against women's ordination and both sides have convincing arguments to support their viewpoints.

Amoah (1995:2)'s view of what the church should be, guides us in this regard:

The church is seen as the community of women and men who believe in God the creator and giver of abundant life, integrity and respect to all. The church as an institution cannot escape criticism when its action goes against this fundamental law of enhancing and preserving the equality and integrity of all creatures. In other words, both the church's activities and its structural organisation should evince this principle of essential unity and equality.

Amoah supports and defends the leadership of women in the church. She campaigns against the silence of women who are in the majority in the "lower" structures of many churches. Amoah also recommends that the impact of the ordained women in Africa should be explored, and that they should become aware of their roles and the factors that hinder or promote their effectiveness. She therefore advises that the church should encourage and allow women to fulfil their God-given callings and responsibilities. Uchem (2001:157) asserts that this has not happened in the church because of certain vested interests in power structures: "Historically, the conclusions, which have been reached by the people who hold more power, have always been disastrous for the corresponding party with less or no power."

The above scenario that reflects the *status-quo* indicates that those with and in power (the powerful) in the church tend to rule the lives of those with no or less power (the powerless). Consequently, this has determined the roles that women play in churches. This phenomenon is revealed in the religious and cultural discourses that have had a negative effect on the leadership development of women in the ministry. Therefore, the second aim of this thesis is to investigate and lay bare this issue in detail.

### **1.2.3 Presenting a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective of the empowerment of women in ministry**

Thirdly, this study intends to present a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) for Vhavenda-South African women who are still marginalized within the church parameters, to empower them to stand up and be counted in the leadership structures of their churches. Women

should be able to assert themselves and offer resistance regarding negative cultural and religious constraints that affect them. An empowerment perspective or approach will help women to challenge the religious and cultural discourses that impact on their lives negatively and deny them access roles as leaders in the church.

A *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach was adopted in this study that is relevant in the African-South-African context. This approach aimed at empowering women by deconstructing the negative elements of religion, patriarchal discourses and cultural discourses, thereby re-constructing the positive elements, which are relevant in a country where many women are adherents of the church, albeit in silent roles, in terms of which they are expected to be preservers of culture. Importantly, a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach contends that the African culture, more specifically the Vhavenda culture, does affirm women as leaders.

After identifying and determining the impact of cultural and religious discourses, this perspective (approach) will empower women in the following manner:

- Powerful discourses that are taken for granted, but render the lives of women powerless will be deconstructed. Deconstruction is described by Landman (2007:111) as taking apart; overturning, confusing and displacing discourses, which are generally accepted by society but only, serve the interest of the powerful. Uchem (2001:123) writes that deconstruction seeks to disrupt hierarchical oppositions such as speech and writing, truth and lie, being and non-being, male and female in which one term is valued and the other denigrated and upon which texts depends. She continues to say that deconstruction tends to focus on close readings of the texts, to uncover what has been left out, ignored or silenced by the text. The researcher concurs with both of the above authors that deconstruction is crucial and leads to finding new ways of affirming women's leadership in the church. This method was used in this study to analyse and examine the religious and cultural discourses with respect to women.
- A re-construction of positive discourses as a means of empowering women and making the lives of women safe will be encouraged through deconstructing the negative discourses. Religious as well as cultural discourses that empower women

will be suggested as ways to encourage leadership development of women in the ministry.

As a study centred on women's leadership in the church, the researcher encouraged the respondents through the questionnaire and interviews, to suggest ways of empowering women with regard to leadership positions, namely by means of those aspects that can help them to build their confidence and shape their lives, so that they can develop their leadership potential.

### **1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Vhavenda Christian (especially Pentecostal) women are still denied - or restricted in - leadership roles in the church because of the impact of cultural and religious discourses on Venda society. Background to this problem has been discussed in the above. The position of women in the church today is influenced by the perceptions, which people have, either from a cultural or religious perspective. The African women are struggling with several injustices today. They have to deal with serious issues pertaining to institutionalised sexism, patriarchy, racism and other biases that block their access not only to land and to resources that can lead to a better livelihood, but also to leadership roles. LenkaBula (2006:93) captures the dehumanising effects of these injustices as follows:

African women and their community are alienated from conducting meaningful lives, and their ability to exchange their knowledge, resources and even services is often halted. It is therefore clear that the above constitute threats to life which African women seek to be liberated.

It is evident that African women theologians have tried to address this problem. Mbuy-Beya (2001:201), for instance, has asserted that the priesthood of women is a difficult topic to address in the Roman Catholic Church and this is even more the case in Africa. Whenever the issue of ordaining women is raised, it leads to arguments and long discussions that result in misunderstandings and church divisions. Both those inside and outside the church, use the scriptural and the cultural arguments to explain that women

are not supposed to be leaders. Even those who have never set foot in the church argue that women are not created to be leaders as it is not part of their culture.

Recent studies from all over the world on matters concerning women and the church (see Ringe 1998; Bassler 1998; Maloney 1994; Tanzer 1994; West 2004; Oduyoye 2001; Kanyoro 2001) show that the two most important and oppressive aspects that impact negatively on women leadership development are biblical interpretation and culture.

This study addresses the research problem by focussing on these two problem areas:

### **1.3.1 Biblical interpretation as problem discourse**

The Christian religion has played a pivotal role in the subordination not only of women in Africa, but also of Vhavenda women in South Africa specifically. Although a profile of Vhavenda women's position *vis-à-vis* the church – with “church” used here in a generic sense - is given later, a preliminary view is given here to highlight the research problem, especially with regard to the Biblical passages that are used to subordinate women. The Holy Scriptures, which are regarded by the women in question as the Word of God, are used to place limitations on women.

It is important to point out that there are many unwritten codes in religion that impose restrictions on women and that bar them from leadership positions in the church. What is more problematic, the Bible is used to enforce these codes. Male-dominated leadership in the church plays a major role in the life of the church – and this continues to remain unchallenged because the Bible is used to support and entrench the system of patriarchy. It is significant to note that the church continues to be male-dominated in almost all of its leadership positions, with the possible exception of leading the children's church mostly referred to as Sunday school. There is a strong resistance against women being in leadership positions, and all this is justified by the Bible. There is a continuous invisible wall inside the church that prevents women from using their God-given gifts and achieving their full potential. This is accompanied by a general lack of empowerment of the women themselves – simply because they are unable to use the Bible as a resource for their own empowerment. It is this lack of empowerment that forms part of the research

problem and is addressed by this study, by looking anew at the Biblical passages that are used to harm women.

This study focusses, firstly, on the controversial biblical passages that give rise to negative attitudes on the leadership of women in the church. In chapter two, firstly, the creation story is examined. Secondly, this study deals with Paul's theology on women, as it is based on texts in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and 1 Timothy. Thirdly, the researcher looks at how Jesus viewed women in His ministry.

The works of feminist, womanist and African women theologians are employed for this task. Eventually, as will be reported in chapter three, varieties of views were elicited through questionnaires and interviews. This helped to obtain a broader understanding of what other perspectives have already contributed to similar studies.

### **1.3.2 Culture as problem discourse**

As a *mu Venda*<sup>4</sup> Christian woman having grown up and having spent most of her life in the Pentecostal movement and having served as an associate pastor, the researcher has become aware of the pervading negative attitude towards women who are called by God and towards those who are already serving in leadership positions in the church. She has consequently come to the realisation that some if not most churches in Venda have the same attitudes toward women to a certain extent. This culture of oppression is visible in structures (such as community and church governing structures) both inside and outside the church, where women are only tolerated for their functionality. Inside the church, women's work has been taken for granted as if there is nothing they can offer to the body of Christ apart from the chores they perform. The reasons that are given to subordinate women in the church are not different from those given in societies and structures outside the church – and these reasons are invariably based on culture.

The “black” churches were strong supporters of the struggle against apartheid and were at the forefront of the struggle when political liberation was at stake. Both men and women in the church laid their lives on the line in their fight against the system of apartheid. It

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<sup>4</sup> *Muvenda*-is a person who is originally a Venda.

was and is still maintained that it was not God's will for black people to be oppressed by whites. Both men and women fought for everyone's freedom and South Africa has been living with the process of change in the new dispensation of democracy for more than 15 years. The same churches that stood up against the political order of the day are now unwilling to allow women stand on a platform or in the pulpit, and continue to declare that it is not the will of God for women to be leaders. This raises questions such as what is meant by the will of God, and whether the will of God includes liberating only a part of humanity, and not all humanity.

Therefore, this study addresses the cultural discourses that target women in the church.

#### **1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study aims at addressing the following research questions:

- Can the religious and cultural discourses that impact on the leadership of Vhavenda Christian women in ministry (especially Pentecostal churches) be identified, determined and described? What roles do people's religious and cultural perceptions play in the understanding of the leadership of women in the church?
- What roles are Vhavenda women playing in the church, and are these roles influenced by the impact of religion and culture on women's lives?
- How can the negative elements/perceptions of religious and cultural discourses that impact on the leadership of women in the church be deconstructed? Can positive discourses be re-constructed to serve as a tool for the empowerment of women in leadership positions in the church?
- In addition, can an African South-African approach serve as encouragement and empowerment for women who are in church leadership as well as those who aspire to be in church leadership?

## 1.5 RESEARCH POPULATION

This study was conducted with two related research populations. The first population consisted of respondents to a questionnaire whose responses are dealt with in chapter three. In addition, the responses of the second research population on the interview are described and analysed in chapter three as well. These respondents were interviewed by this researcher on the issues regarding perceptions towards women in leadership positions.

The respondents to both the questionnaire and the interviews were mainly South African born Venda speaking people. Between 2004 and 2007, the questionnaires were administered and the interviews were conducted. The total number of respondents for both the questionnaire and interviews were ninety-seven (97). Sixty-four (64) respondents responded to the questionnaires, and forty-three (43) responded to the interviews, of which ten (10) of those had already answered the questionnaire. The criteria for choosing the respondents to both the questionnaire and interviews were based on the research aims, which are (as indicated above) to:

- Identify and describe the impact of Christian religious discourses and the African South-African cultural discourses on the leadership of women in the ministry,
- Determine the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the roles played by Vhavenda women in church leadership,
- Present a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) of empowerment to women in the said ministry.

About seventy percent (70%) of these respondents and interviewees were women who were active in a variety of Pentecostal churches in Venda. Most of them were unemployed and had little or no theological training. These women served in the church, but mostly in the un-ordained ministries (on either the church board or other sub-committees).

The majority of these women came from rural areas and were faithful members of the church. It is anticipated that this study will benefit them as it aims at presenting an



approach, which will serve as an encouragement to their development of their leadership in the ministry.

A more exact profile of the respondents and interviewees of these two research populations are now given in terms of race and settlement, gender, economic status, theological training, leadership and ordination status, and age:

### **1.5.1 Race and settlement**

As was said above, people who were selected for information gathering (by means of semi-structured questionnaires and interviews) were men and women from Venda. Venda is located at the northern region of the Limpopo Province near South Africa's border with Zimbabwe. On the history of the Vhavenda, Khorommbi (1996:16-17) describes the Vhavenda as people who have descended from the north of Africa and journeyed down to Zimbabwe where they are still having chiefs and subjects. Some of them have then migrated from Zimbabwe and crossed the Limpopo River, and following the Nzhelele River, discovered an ideal place for their new home in the Soutpansberg Mountains. This place they called Dzata, and it still is the largest Shona-Venda settlement south of the Limpopo. The vast majority of people living here are Blacks with a few whites residing in the town of Louis Trichardt ("Makhado") or in the farms.

In short, all the people involved in this research were South African Venda people, living mainly in rural areas.

### **1.5.2 Gender**

Almost three quarters of the respondents and interviewees were women;

- Sixty-seven were women
- Thirty were men.

### **1.5.3 Economic status**

More than half of the respondents and interviewees were not formally employed and a few were on pension:

- Forty-nine (49) were employed.
- Eight (8) were on pension.
- Of those employed, thirty five (35) were domestic workers or worked for the government.
- Thirteen (13) were working full-time for the church.
- Twenty-seven (27) were unemployed.

### **1.5.4 Theological training**

More than half of the respondents did not have any formal theological training. Those who had received training did not receive advanced training, as they either had certificates or undergraduate degree. In this regard:

- Fifty-three (53) had not undergone any formal theological training at all.
- Forty-four (44) had little training and some had an undergraduate degree.

### **1.5.5 Religion**

Almost all the respondents belonged to the Christian faith and only a few did not attend church:

- Eighty-nine (89) belonged to the Christian faith (included were those from the mainline churches, as well as Independent churches and mainly the Pentecostal churches e.g Assemblies of God.)
- Five (5) belonged to the African Traditional Religion

- Three (3) did not belong to a church/or just indicated that they had no church affiliations.

### **1.5.6 Leadership/ordination status**

Most of the respondents in this study were not ordained in leadership positions in the church and they mostly served in one of the structures as deemed fit by that specific church:

- Nineteen (19) were in the ordained leadership of the church.
- Forty-seven (47) were in the lay-ministry of the church.
- Thirty-one (31) were ordinary members.

### **1.5.7 Age**

The ages of the respondents ranged between 20 and 84, most of them were below the pension age and a few were still teenagers:

- Seven (7) were teenagers.
- Eighty-two (82) were between 24 and 60.
- Eight (8) were between 60 and 84.

## **1.6 BACKGROUND TERMINOLOGY**

### **1.6.1 The title**

The present study is about the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership of women in the ministry, presented from a womanhood perspective within an African context. Although this topic falls within the field of Systematic Theology; this is an interdisciplinary study and draws on other disciplines such as Gender Studies, with a special focus on Feminist Theology and Ecclesiology.

## 1.6.2 Religion and ministry

With regard to religion, the researcher is mainly referring to the Christian religion, with a particular focus on the Pentecostal churches and on Christian biblical texts that are mostly quoted to motivate the exclusion of women from leadership positions. The word “ministry” will be used interchangeably with the the word “church”, but it is chosen because of the way it is understood in the Pentecostal churches.

## 1.6.3 Culture

Culture, in this context refers to the *Vhavenda* culture. This culture has been chosen as the context for this thesis for the following reasons:

- As a *mu Venda* woman, born within the culture, this researcher has realised that there is a need to deal with specific issues that affect her and other *vhavenda* women on a daily basis in our lives.
- The Vhavenda culture is a very strong culture and as such, it has many taboos and restrictions. It is important to note that Vhavenda culture does not draw a distinction between culture and religion. The impact of culture and religion on Venda Christians is especially strong, making this a good reason for choosing this culture for this thesis.
- The Vhavenda are people who believe in the language of the proverbs that delineate roles for both men and women. In this regard Khuba (1985:4), remarks that “(p)roverbs in *Luvenda* can also be seen to be reflecting the thought and behaviour of the Vhavenda, for the majority or almost all of these proverbs deal with their social life”. Khuba also states that these proverbs shape the way Vhavenda think as a society and that most cultural aspects are transmitted through them. Therefore, this makes the Vhavenda culture relevant for this thesis.

#### **1.6.4 Leadership and ordination**

Leadership in this context refers to those who fall within the five-fold ministry as stipulated in the book of Ephesians 4:11; “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers” (The Holy Bible: New International Version (NIV), 1998). However, “leadership” in this thesis is not restricted to this five-fold ministry, but also refers to other structures of leadership in the church such as the church-board, as well as other positions of power in the church.

Ordination is a form of ritual that is practised in the church for investing a person with authority in the office of leadership, such as in the five-fold ministries as explained above. This is done through the laying on of hands by somebody who is already ordained and who holds a higher ministerial position than the one ordained. Here ordination will specifically refer to women who have been ordained as “pastors” within the Pentecostal circles and also in some Christian organisations. Women, who are pastors, are regarded as ordained or should first go through the process of ordination in order for them to be regarded as ordained ministers for the ministry.

Njoroge (2008:179-200) emphasises the need for a life-giving and empowering leadership style in contrast with the current patriarchal leadership style in the church, which is disempowering in its essence. She discusses a need for this type of leadership especially in this age characterised by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. She encourages this leadership style because church leadership in tropical Africa is in the hands of ill-prepared men and only a handful of women, who have caused havoc in the lives of many—thus denying people the chance to reach their full human capacity. She contends that there is a need for new ways of leadership such as: empowering ways of leadership in the area of pastoral care, a leadership style that transforms the way pastoral ministers are trained radically and a nurturing empowering leadership style that is like that of Jesus.

Dreyer (2002:43-61) discusses leadership from the pastoral perspective of friendship which she says can bring healing to the church structures that have become entangled in power games. She remarks that this type of leadership exhibits a pastoral rather than a power-oriented approach to leadership. Dreyer (2002:58) explains this clearly in the following way:

Leadership unashamedly based on the recognition of human weakness, frailty, vulnerability and tragedy will refrain from coercive power, judgement and punishment. It will be pastoral in approach, intent upon healing of and hope for human broken. Where coercive power and paternalistic authoritarianism are repulsive to women who have so long been on the receiving end, the female half of humanity could gladly participate in this kind of leadership and empowerment of people.

The researcher concurs with both Dreyer and Njoroge that there is a need for a new perspective or approach regarding leadership in the church that will help to transform the patriarchal nature of the church so that it includes women. In essence, the prevailing power struggles in the church are disempowering for women. Dreyer (2002:47) asserts that women are not socialised to be leaders and the church has contributed not only to the disempowerment of women, but also to their exclusion from leadership positions in the church.

Although this study does not deny that women are ordained as pastors in churches, the question may be asked whether women in the church are encouraged to participate in leadership positions. One of the aims of this study was to find out if the development of leadership in the ministry is encouraged. If this is the case, is the practice enhancing both ordained and non-ordained women in the church? That is specifically what this study sought to find out.

### **1.6.5 Discourse**

Discourse, as defined by Landman, is a concept that refers to grand narratives that rule people's lives (2007:1). When she reflects on narrative counselling, Landman (2007:132) describes the faces of religious discourses as shared by her and her counselees in their problem-saturated stories as follows:

- Religious discourses, as problem discourses, constitute themselves in binary oppositions, such as good versus evil, western versus traditional, Christian versus demonic, powerful versus powerless.

- Religious discourses reveal themselves in four forms, that is, as power discourses, body discourses, identity discourses, and otherness discourses.

Landman (2007:1) argues further that religion rests on only four discourses, namely: power is hierarchical; bodies are controlled; religious identity has priority over cultural and social identities and the otherness of religion leads to salvation and healing. She continues by saying that the faces of religious discourses are simple, although they are hidden behind a variety of dogmas, but their effects are complicated, powerful and harmful. If religious discourses hide behind dogmas, then they can shape the lives of people consciously or unconsciously, the way people do things and behave in various societies can also be determined and deconstructed through examining the controlling discourses in those particular contexts.

This thesis uses the term “discourse” in the sense of a grand narrative controlling people’s lives. Furthermore, it looks specifically at the way in which religious discourses keep women captive in harmful discourses that prevent them from becoming leaders in the church.

## **1.7 MOTIVATION FOR THE VALIDITY OF THIS STUDY**

This study aimed at identifying and describing the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership roles of women in the church. Five factors have contributed to the researcher’s initiation of this scientific theological research:

- **Firstly, she is a muvenda woman located within the Venda context**

As a young woman, she grew up and lived among the Vhavenda people of South Africa. Vhavenda people are known as people who are strongly rooted in their cultural and religious beliefs (though it is not easy to differentiate between religion and culture in Africa (see Mbiti 1969). In this culture, (that is mostly rural), it is difficult to speak about the concept of ‘equality,’ more especially between men and women (see Makoro 2007). The researcher agrees with Makoro on the stubbornness of culture even after the demise of the colonial and apartheid eras. However, there has been a growing understanding of

the concept of 'equality' after South Africa improved the status of women through the constitution and policies that defend women empowerment, equality and leadership.

- **Secondly, she is called to the ministry**

The researcher was still a teenager when she received the call to go into the ministry. However, she grew up in a community where she had never heard of any woman who was a pastor. Consequently, it was not an easy task for her to explain what she was talking about to her parents. Fortunately, her pastor understood when she explained to him what she believed God wanted to do through her life. In contrast, some of her friends looked at her with disbelief. Nevertheless, a Christian brother wrote her a letter in which he encouraged her to "be strong and [to] be like a man." She still regards it as a powerful statement even after more than 20 years, yet she wonders if she has managed to live up to the advice to be like "a man."

- **Thirdly, she received one-sided training at a Bible College**

The training that she received from the Bible College concentrated mainly on pastoral duties and failed to focus on the empowerment of women in the church leadership. This type of training does not provide men and women entering the ministry with the proper tools for handling the perceptions people have regarding women in ministry.

- **Fourthly, she experienced discrimination from church leaders**

A further motivation for this study is her own personal experiences as a woman serving in the ministry of her church. In addition, serving as a female chaplain in the police made her realise that women leadership is one aspect that still needs urgent attention in this area as well as in the church. Therefore, in this study, that is based on first-hand experience, she reflects on her experiences and observations, which reveal that some people and church leaders have negative perceptions regarding women.



- **In the fifth place, there is a scarcity of theological resources on women leadership (especially Pentecostal)**

Women leadership issues in churches in Venda have not been researched scientifically, and this study aims at making a contribution to this field. The unavailability of theological research based on Venda women's experiences, is indicative that there is a need for this study. The largest contribution to the running of the church in Venda is made by and through women, but not much has been recorded concerning the effort that women have invested in the ministry. These women have and are still making progress in their efforts to ensure that God's work continues unabated in spite of all the odds. However, although women believe in the church, the church does not say much about them.

In addition, data concerning the characteristics of gender and their relationship to women church leadership are scarce. Accordingly, this study concentrates on theological and gender issues that address matters pertaining to both the church and the culture. The religious and cultural milieus in Venda, as described above, have led to the lack of leadership development of women in the ministry. Therefore, the varying views regarding women's leadership roles in the ministry and the situation that led to the lack of leadership development in the church would suggest that the time is ripe for identifying and evaluating these issues.

As a young female minister, the researcher has become aware of the importance of women's matters pertaining to gender discrimination in Africa and more particularly, in South Africa-and also aware of the fact that churches are reluctant to address these issues. In fact, it appears that the churches seem to think that if they engage in these issues they will be conforming to the standards of the "world." The researcher's experience in this regard indicates that there is a need for further research on this topic. Her involvement with other women at the seminary and in her denomination, as well as in other fellowships, over a period of twenty-two years, forms the background to this study.

According to the researcher's observations, some - if not all, churches tend to confine women to women's ministries only, where women come together by themselves to share in studying the scriptures, praying and raising funds. It appears that women are

frequently only made leaders of other women and not leaders of the whole church. This study seeks to expose this dilemma and reflect on the reality of the situation. Furthermore, this study strives to correct the misperceptions that entrench this unacceptable situation.

There is still a great need for revising previous beliefs and writing about women issues from women's perspectives. Women's inclusion in leadership positions, both in the church and in their cultural settings needs to be addressed in broad terms. Too many documents have been written about African women without involving the African women themselves. When you read these documents as an African woman, you will be surprised to find that most of what is written there does not reflect what is happening in reality. Therefore, the time has come for African women to reclaim their voices and redefine themselves in order to know who they really are and to take ownership of their own experiences. In an attempt to encourage African women to become aware of who they are, Oduyoye (1995:86) contends that:

It is dangerous to wave the flag of innocent docility over all Africa's women. Western women unaware of the mythic forestiers that inhibit the African woman's subconscious, have not been sensitive enough in their bid to globalise the oppression of women. In their zeal to speak for women from the third world, they have often focused on cultural manifestations they have not sufficiently understood and they have thereby alienated the very people they set out to include.

- **Lastly, the researcher wants to contribute to women's theological studies**

The intention of the researcher in identifying and evaluating women's experiences in the leadership of the Pentecostal churches is to embrace a theology of experience, written from the perspective of her own experiences as well as the experiences of other African women. Therefore, the intention is not to generalise the findings to all women everywhere. Nevertheless, the results of this study should not only benefit the women who are the main focus of this study, Vhavenda women, but should be beneficial to African people on a broader base. This is possible because this study deals with the experiences of women in the church, with which other women elsewhere might be able to identify.

## **1.8 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Because of the extensive amount of literature that has been produced on women's ordination, this will not be an overview of all the relevant works written in the field. Therefore, this study will rather focus on issues that are of specific interest to the thesis at hand.

### **1.8.1 Feminist theology**

#### **1.8.1.1 *General overview***

Feminist theology has become a global movement as women with different histories and cultures challenge the patriarchal teachings and practices of the church and give their own interpretation of their faith in understanding of God (Kwok 2002:23). Although each feminist theology is unique, feminist theologies have the commitment to reflect on their common faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ in terms of women's experience (see Clifford 2001:30). According to Clifford, feminist theology is able to express women's experience of God and their interpretation of Christian sources through a variety of scholarly methods. Clifford argues further that a simplistic interpretation of the Bible has shaped christianity's thinking about women and has resulted in their exclusion from church leadership.

The word "feminist" is suspect as a general designation, because its use is associated with the dominant perspectives of white, middle class, western women (Russell & Clarkson 1996: xiii). In addition, western feminists do indeed have the tendency to define "feminism" as a form of theological liberation accessible to all women. In this regard, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (1985:4) defines feminist theology as a critical theology of liberation, which explains how androcentric language, theological frameworks and theological scholarship function to sustain and perpetrate patriarchal structures in society and the church. She continues by indicating that feminist theology seeks to unmask the oppressive function of such a patriarchal theology by exploring women's experiences of oppression and discrimination in society and in religion. Therefore, in their definition of "feminist theology," inadvertently, western women theologians often deal injudiciously

with western experiences as the standard for women's experiences of hope, love and faith in the struggle for liberation and wholeness.

Notwithstanding what was said above, feminist theologians have made invaluable contributions to the fields of the interpretation of the scriptures and the history of misogyny in the church especially. Rosemary Ruether (1998:273), for instance, notes that nineteenth-century Christian feminism developed after the classical Christian paradigm had defined women in terms of being created to be dominated, while feminism declares that women and men are created as equals and denounces the male domination of women as a sin.

In addition, feminist theologians have contributed extensively to the field of women's ordination. According to Kantzer (1994: vii), few issues have produced more heat and less light than the role of women in the home, church, and society. In fact, the role of women in the church creates the greatest dissension amongst committed evangelicals. Churches, denominations and Christian organisations have even been ripped apart over the issue of ordaining women for the pulpit ministry (House 1990:11). House argues that Christian women who desire to serve the Lord are confused and confounded by contradictory arguments about the proper role of women in the church. She states further that literature does not shed much light on why women constitute a small percentage of the leadership population in churches, and why there is a lack of female role models in the upper ministerial slots of the church.

Having established its own method, feminist theology has, of course, evolved from its previous position of trying to be the standard of all women's theologies. Ruether (1998:254,259) acknowledges that the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians has become the major vehicle for the exchange and development of African Christian women's theological work. She points to the fact that African women bravely endeavour to do their work from a post-colonial point of view, challenging their context that is still very much shaped by colonial experiences and ongoing neo-colonial relations with the western world. She also remarks that African feminist liberation theologians claim the sovereign right to evaluate all the cultural patterns they have received from traditional African cultures.

Feminist theology, as discussed by Ruether (1998), classically develops into three distinct steps: Feminists begin with a critique of the past---a “recovery of the dangerous memory of women’s oppression” by the male patriarchal church and culture. The second step seeks alternative biblical and extra-biblical traditions that support “women’s personhood, her equality in the image of God, her equality redeems ability, her participation in prophecy, teaching and leadership.” In a final step, feminists set forth their own unique method of theology, which includes the re-visioning of Christian categories.

Finally, it needs to be noted in this overview, that feminist theology still intends to complete a number of tasks. In addition, it has moved from the initial stance of *epistemological privilege*, which allows only women to do research and reflect on women’s issues, to a position where partnership between men and women in theology and church is encouraged (see Isherwood 2001:23). More importantly, Isherwood has already asked the relevant question in 2001, “what, then do women and men, interested in equality, equity, liberation and feminist values, aim for?” According to her, the answer is when men and women enact the “Love your neighbour” command of the church, using imaginative methods to change their way of participating in church leadership structures, and by putting the history of misogyny behind them.

### ***1.8.1.2 Feminist theologians and ordination***

Over the last three decades, feminist theologians have engaged actively in issues pertaining to women, the church, sacraments, and worship – and the struggle is far from over (Ross, 2002:224). The issue of women’s ordination has been the focus of feminist theological attention within both traditions namely; those that continue to ordain only men and those that do ordain women.

Firstly, feminist theologians deal with the non-ordination of women. They point to the fact that the issue of women’s ordination worldwide is dealt with as an issue of Scriptural interpretation. Ross (2002:230) summarises this in terms of the position of the Roman Catholic Church as follows:

Feminist theologians argue that biblical interpretations that relegate women to the background of apostolic ministry fail to consider the patriarchal situation of

church and society at the time the New Testament narratives were written; moreover, they take a more literalist approach to the issues than other biblical examples (e.g. holding all goods in common, rejection of violence, the calling of married Jewish men).

The persistence of feminist theologians on the issue of women's non-ordination makes it impossible to put it aside. The Catholic and Orthodox churches still deny to ordain women despite the rhetoric about the equality of all and a formal and public apology for the way women were treated throughout history ( see Isherwood & McEwan 2001:39). Isherwood & McEwan say that the church does not aim at inclusion, but at exclusion; whereas women want to move from exclusion to inclusion.

Addressing the issue of women and the sacrament of priestly ordination, Clifford (2002:140-148) refers to the era of the second wave of feminism when discussions regarding the ordination of women began to occur in different churches such as the Roman Catholic, Protestant Episcopal and Anglican Communion churches. She addressed the issue of ordination of women in these different churches as a long held tradition. Clifford (2002:140-148) cited the declaration that was issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) to explain why the Roman Catholic Church leadership did not consider itself authorised to admit women to priestly ordination, she listed the following three arguments:

- The argument regarding tradition – that the history of Roman Catholic church shows no evidence on the basis of women' ordination.
- The argument regarding the sacred scriptures that the New Testament provides no evidence that Jesus considered any women for the priesthood, and the apostles, all those who were ordained by Christ, were men.
- The argument regarding religious symbols signifies that the priest acts in the role of Christ to the point of being his very image, therefore it is required that the priest be male.

The issue of ordination is a growing source of frustration among many Roman Catholic women, because not all of them support the priestly ordination of women. Clifford (2002:

140-148) contends that this frustration is causing some of these women to leave the Catholic Church to join Christian denominations where they can follow their call.

Ordination has been an issue in the church that has not yet been completely resolved, because some support it, while others oppose it. In this regard, Clifford points out that not all Catholic feminists support the priestly ordination of women. She asserts that this is the case because these feminists believe that the goal of attaining full partnership in the church will not be achieved by ordaining women priests and that the hierarchical distinction between ordained priests and the laity exacerbates the existing problems.

The church needs to be relevant to the experiences of women while still remain faithful to its calling as the church. On this note, Clifford suggests that the guidance of the Holy Spirit should be sought continually and they should be “testing the spirits.” Currently, through the “testing of the spirits’ many Christian feminists are seeking to follow their calling and are working towards the transformation of the Christian churches through what they believe to be an authentic biblical vision of ministry for women.

Secondly, feminist theologians also deal with the problems experienced by ordained women. Russell (1993:50-54) mentions two specific problems in this regard. The first is that the gift of the ministry has been set apart from ordination and that has had disastrous effects on the church, causing class divisions. Russell contends that this causes frustration on the part of women clergy and they recognise that there is a need to transform the church structures that divide the clergy from the laity. Secondly, Russell states that the women clergy are confronted by tensions that are not only sexist in nature, but they have to deal with the practice of ministry that evolved from the old patriarchal models. One of the tensions discussed, is the tension of being a female body in the ordained ministry. Russell (1993: 52) comments as follows:

In a church that has had a dualistic view of sexuality and spirituality, even to have women in leadership confronts the myth that identifies women with sexuality and body and men with spirit and intellect. Women are embodied pastors. They bring their sexuality with them, and they make it clear that sexuality and spirituality go together as both women and men are embodied persons before God and in the world. By office, women who are ordained are granted power to function as clergy, but as female persons, they are traditionally denied access to the power of sacred masculinity that resides in the clerical ordination.

The preceding scholars have devised a feminist theology that is a liberation theology addressing patriarchal theology and women's experiences regarding oppression as its core problems. To some extent, this school of theology influences this study. During her studies of feminist struggles, the researcher became aware of her own struggles. Nevertheless, it should be noted that feminist theology differs in terms of the context of Vhavenda women as will be explained next.

Feminist theology lacks a critique regarding the core struggles with which Vhavenda women have to contend on a daily basis, such as sexism, racism and social classism. This researcher has observed that even though colonialism and apartheid have ended in South Africa, the effect of the evils of race and class distinctions between whites and blacks is still present. Furthermore, the need is felt for one to become relevant to one's context. It appears that feminist theology is lacking with respect to the aspects touched on in this paragraph.

After reading what Masenya (1996; 2001; 2005) has written on Bosadi biblical hermeneutics, the researcher feels inspired to interpret her own reality in terms of religion (the Bible) and culture. When African women speak of the African culture, they are speaking about what the researcher refers to as their "mother tongue," which is not likely to be the case in feminist circles.

## **1.8.2 Womanist theology**

### ***1.8.2.1 General overview***

An African American poet and novelist Alice Walker re-coined the term "womanist;" that is grounded in the African American context. According to Williams (1995:114-115), the term "womanist" originated among the African Americans for the following reasons given by her:

- There was tension between how African-American women defined women's experiences and how they thought their experiences was defined.
- Some black women had reservations about the primary cause of oppression as defined by white feminists.



- Many African-American women became womanist theologians because they needed their own theological voice to affirm different cultural foundations for identical assertions made by both feminists and black women who later became womanists.

Grant (1989:209) mentions factors, which are not applicable to white women and which shape the lives of African–American women: racism, sexism and classism. Grant argues that to ignore any aspect of this experience is to deny the holistic and integrated reality of black womanhood. In the context of Black women’s experience, Grant (1989:198) mentions three dimensions of how the oppressive practices of slavery were continued even after legal slavery was abolished:

Physical brutality toward blacks was continued; the immediate relationship between white women and black women did not change; white women were still oppressors and Black women were still the oppressed, and black women were still treated as property.

It is against the background of these dynamics that black women feel it would be meaningless to engage in theological studies without considering their unique experience, that Grant (1989:198) calls “the particular within the particular.”

### ***1.8.2.2 Womanist theologians and ordination***

Womanist theologians also have their own struggle with the issue of women’s ordination against the background of their particular context. Williams (1995:116) states that black female theologians recognise the qualitative difference between the experience of black women and that of black men even though they both experienced racial oppression in the United States. She declares that this is the case because of the surrogacy roles women have been forced to fill from the time of slavery to this day.

Williams further states that the African-American denominational churches have been places where black women have sought emotional relief as well as for decidedly theological reasons. According to Williams, womanist theology is a prophetic voice reminding African-American denominational churches of their mission to seek justice and voice for all people, of which black women are the overwhelming majority in the congregations. She adds that there are multitudes of sins against black women in the

African-American denominational churches. Williams (1993:214-215) mentions one of those sins as sexism, which denies black women equal opportunity in the churches' major leadership roles. She continues by saying that black women in the church should realise that they need to stand-up for themselves. Williams (1993:214-215) asserts that:

When black women accept the realization that far too many black men and white men in power agree on the subordination of black women, perhaps they will begin a serious women's movement within the denominational churches- a movement to free women's minds and lives of the androcentric indoctrination and the exploitative emotional commitments that cause many women to be tools of their own oppression and that of other women.

One of the challenges of womanist theology is to address the class issue in the church. Black women recognise that the style of leadership and basic structures of the church still resemble and ensure the continuation of the privileged class. This aspect cannot be left behind as this would not address the experiences of black women and as Grant (1989:210) puts it, "the daily struggles of poor Black women must serve as a gauge for the verification of the claims of womanist theology."

It is clear that womanist theology fundamentally challenges oppression in terms of racism, sexism and classism. On the one hand, there is a considerable resemblance between the context of womanists and that of African-South African women, so that one can easily feel at home within this approach. On the other hand, African women have their own unique experience of African culture and its oppressive elements, which is absent in womanist theology. Consequently, the relationship between womanist theology and the African-South African theology that will be proposed in this study will be one of mutuality as well as distance.

### **1.8.3 African women theologians**

#### **1.8.3.1 *General overview***

With regard to the contributions of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a leading African woman theologian, a few important insights deserve to be considered. Oduyoye (2001:22) describes theology as an expression of faith in response to experience. She indicates that the primary context of women's theology is that of a Christian theology in Africa that

reflects the experiences of both women and men; both lay people and the ordained; teachers and preachers; poets and sculptors. In addition, she points out that this theology includes the whole of life as its context.

However, Oduyoye also refers to the classic elements in African culture that need to be reflected upon because they do not make a similar impact on the lives of both men and women. She asserts that there is a need for what she calls a “woman’s culture” within the general cultural experience of Africans. Oduyoye, then, was a major role player in establishing the *Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, hereafter referred to as the “Circle,” to reflect theologically on the impact of religion and culture on the lives of African women. The Circle has contributed a great deal to addressing theological issues pertaining to women. According to Musa Dube (2001:11), the Circle describes the following as its main focus:

A “circle of women” describes those who are seated together, who are connected and who seek to keep the interconnectedness of life. It signifies life as a continuous flowing force, which must continue to be nurtured by all and at all times. A circle of women pursuing theology together in different African contexts is an approach that insists that African women are also part of the life force in creation: they are in the circle of creation. It is an approach that pays attention to all that denies the fulfilment of women’s lives and the assertion that African women are part of the circle of life. It is a circle for it seeks to ensure that power flows from all and to all among those who are in the circle of life.

Women of the Circle are committed to ensuring that their many unrecorded experiences, perspective and reflections in different fields of theology and ethics become visible in bookstores and in libraries. They do this through inviting all those who care about African affairs to engage with them in critical listening and conversation as they creatively articulate the many oppressed voices of children, youth, women and men. These women feel that those who interpret scriptures should also take the perspective of the rural African woman into cognisance. Dube (2001:11) remarks that:

African biblical hermeneutics interested in the experiences and hopes of African women must take seriously a reading strategy that takes into account the text’s silent characters- a reading strategy that “reads between the lines” using women’s experience as a resource. The reading of those who live on the periphery of power is very different from that of those in power. For those who live in the margins, the focus in the narrative would be the unnamed persons and the silent characters of

the narrative. There is identification with the other and a struggle to find God's word in such a situation.

Bernadette Mbuy-Beya (2001:184) focusses on the Roman Catholic Church and the activities of both women and men in the church in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She documents how African women have been living their experiences of God and how they have expressed this experience at various ecumenical meetings. She makes a call upon "the consciences of all the churches of Africa to bring about a radical change of mentality and a redefinition of the man-woman relationship in the church."

Furthermore, Mbuy Beya furthermore recommends that African women should take up their places and positions in the churches without waiting for others to invite them and urges that the churches should spare no effort in preaching against all forms of exploitation frequently directed against women and children. She believes that the Spirit of the Lord is upon the women, so no one should quench this Spirit that resides in women.

### ***1.8.3.2 African women theologians and ordination***

For the church in Africa, the ordination of women in leadership roles in the church continues to be a complex issue. When Oduyoye (2001:80-84) addresses the issue of women and the church, she contends that the church is still divided against itself. She mentions further that nowhere in Africa do we find churches in which the unity of the church is seriously pursued when it comes to the unity of humanity and certainly not regarding gender unity; nowhere in Africa are men and women treated as equals in the church. In addition, she points out that the church's attitude to and teachings about women are an indication of what the church is, as opposed to what the situation is in the church as opposed to what it claims.

Oduyoye states further that these attitudes of the churches regarding women are not only found among men but also among women, because women have internalised this low opinion about themselves to a large extent, so that they become accomplices in the suppression of their own gender.

Different contributors in Phiri (2002) to the “Circle” tell the stories of women of faith, whose stories continue to shape our lives. These are the stories of the powerful women of Africa who played crucial roles in the Christian heritage that Africa has come to own. Some of these women tell of their difficulties in accessing theological training, while others tell of their experiences and difficulties with exercising their gifts in ministries in their different churches. Others recount their crucial roles in different disputes on theological training and how they stood together in solidarity in the struggle against inequality in the sexual hierarchy. These women continued to claim the Bible in the African context, reminding the church of biblical heroines who built their faith and trust by working for God. The courageous spirits of these women in the midst of all the struggles inspire both the young and the old to become that which God has intended them to be.

Among these women of faith, Phiri (2002;119) tells the story of Reverend Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa in the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa, who was called to the ministry at the age of twenty-seven and ordained at seventy three. Mbanjwa went to the theological school where she was the only woman in her class. At that time, no women ministers were being accepted into the ministry and so she had to become a Christian education worker. Subsequently, she experienced sexism both in the church and in society. In the church, some even reminded her that women were not permitted to be in higher positions than men were. However, she refused to be thwarted either by the male dominated church or by the African culture. She submitted an application for ordination three times in a challenge to the *status quo*. With reference to the attitude of men towards women ordination, this is what Phiri (2002:133) maintains that:

What I mean is that some men are undermining the ordination of women. They do not want to see Black women in ministry. May I tell you of what one of the ministers said when we were at the meeting? He stood up and said ‘I really don’t know what is wrong with the women. They asked to be ordained and that was given to them. Now they ask to be representatives of women organization at the Central Committee. I don’t know what is wrong with women. They just want to take the church away from us.

The question of men not knowing what is wrong with women who want to be ordained for ministry is problematic for African women theologians who are in pursuit of justice

and women empowerment in the church and society. It is of particular significance to this study that the Bible was used against the ordination of Mbanjwa. Biblical texts that are used in arguments against women's ordination force African women theologians to commit to women's liberation in an attempt to find the proper interpretation of these texts. Stories such as these serve to encourage other marginalised women to press on in their struggle for their affirmation.

It is regrettable that it is still necessary to put the blame for the oppression of women on the Church in the twenty-first century (Makoro 2007:65). She observes that there are challenges to the leadership of women in the churches, such as the fact that churches still hold the view that women should not take up positions of power in the church. This is so because of their doctrinal viewpoint and the patriarchal nature of the church management. Makoro (2007:59-60) mentions some of the barriers that prevent women from assuming leadership positions in the church as follows:

- The doctrinal barrier – the teaching that women should not lead the church.
- The economic barrier – when women want to further their studies, they are barred by financial constraints, as some families are still hesitant to educate girls and women.
- The female barrier – there is frequently an absence or lack of support from other women in the church committees.

According to Makoro, the problem with being undermined and the invisible resistance of churches to the ordination of women contributes to discouraging women from joining the ministry. She also argues that the pace at which the Church is creating a healthy environment for women to take up ministry is slow. She therefore suggests that women should face this situation of resistance if changes are to happen.

Furthermore, it is not that women do not theologise and articulate their faith and the struggle to comprehend the divine aspects in their lives; instead, it is that women's voices are not heard, heeded to or taken seriously (Njoroge 2005:34). According to her, the denial of women's full participation in the church is based on the misuse and misinterpretation of the Bible, a practice that victimises both black and white women. In this regard, Njoroge (2005:34) remarks:

In other words, African women have named the “evil” and “injustices” that hinder half of humanity’s full participation in God’s mission in the church and in the society. It is no secret that even in this country (USA) theologizing and theological education and leadership in the church and participation in decision-making organs of ecclesial institutions has been the preserve of men over the centuries. Even today there are people who cannot comprehend that women are equally endowed with theological mind and leadership qualities, especially if they happen to be black women.

The question of the exclusion of women from the church goes beyond the issue of gender; it has to do with the interpretation and association of authority and power within the ordained ministry (Njoroge, 2000:68). Njoroge emphasises the need to re-read and reinterpret the Bible from different perspectives.

Uchem (2001:134-156), a missionary sister and lecturer at the Graduate Theological Foundation in Indiana, writes about women’s subordination in the church and also shares her personal experience. She relates that she grew up in the Igbo culture where she never experienced discrimination against girls in favour of boys with regard to education; consequently, she also had no personal experience of her spirit being crushed through this discrimination. She was surprised when one of her friends told her of her experience of being denied secondary education in favour of her brothers, so she had to pay her own way through school. This was not the case with her because she says she had never experienced being discriminated against because she was a woman.

Consequently, Uchem never struggled with the question of leadership being reserved for boys only as an undergraduate student. It was much later in life, in what she calls the larger church context where she first became aware of negativity and prejudice against women. She discloses, “It was in church matters that I felt hurt for the first time on account of my ‘woman-ness.’” It is regrettable that the church that women expect to be a place where God resides, should exhibit this kind of attitude toward women. In the researcher’s view, the church should have been more welcoming than it has been.

Uchem’s experiences because of her colour and her gender revealed to her that the Bible and its interpretation have been and continue to be used to legitimatise a male -centred

world and this has served to maintain the subordination of women in the church, family and society.

Feminists, womanists and African women theologians have common ground regarding the oppression of women. The difference, however, lies in the methodological approach differences in contexts. The perspective of African women theologians is based on their belief that the African culture has influenced interpretations of the Bible, also with regard to the issue of women ordination in the church. To some extent, it is true that the Biblical interpretation endorses oppressive cultural discourses.

#### **1.8.4 *Bosadi* (womanhood) and other South African theological perspectives**

In the above section, an overview of feminist, womanist and African women theologies and their views on women ordination has been presented. It has become apparent that the discourses that impact on the ordination of women and their leadership roles in the church are based either directly or indirectly on the misinterpretation of the Bible. In this section, before moving onto the *bosadi* (womanhood) perspective, we shall briefly listen to the voices of South African theologians on the interpretation of the Bible and culture in relation to women in the church. Although these scholars did not write from a womanhood perspective, with the exception of Masenya, their works and insights help to motivate this researcher to develop a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective.

In the first place, there are the views of LenkaBula (2008). The concern and search for gender justice in the church and society in Africa have advanced the development of women's theologies in Africa (LenkaBula, 2008:2). LenkaBula comments that the question of women's full participation in the *ecclesia* in most African churches continues to be a highly emotionally charged and contentious issue even today. She states further that the Church' tends to justify its refusal of women's participation in the Church by resorting to theological arguments and biblical texts. She contends that these churches do this through the literal interpretation of biblical texts that are life denying and promote violence against women; while others resort to regressive aspects of African culture that discriminate against women. LenkaBula (2008:7) expresses her opinion as follows:



The marginalisation of women in the church and in church history has painfully demonstrated the ways in which the church participates or colludes with structures of violence and discrimination when it denies women's ministry. It also demonstrates how churches colluded with unjust systems that create and develop hierarchies of oppression, which feed on injustices such as gender injustice.

The researcher concurs with what LenkaBula asserts concerning the contradicting messages that the church is sending to women, namely, on the equality of women in the Gospel; and the silence of women in the church. It is the aim of this study to address the impact of religious discourses such as these on the leadership of women in the church. Indeed, LenkaBula spreads a message of hope, when she looks at the promise of the prophet Joel in Joel 2:28; the Pentecost and the gospels.

LenkaBula (2005:103-116) writes from the perspective of justice and reconciliation as a black South African woman social ethicist within the context of South Africa. She calls for the entrenchment of justice and reconciliation in South Africa after the experience of democracy and the issues of forgiveness and healing of the nation as emphasised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The legacies of apartheid are still prevalent though living in a democracy. This is so because of fewer changes in the area of economic and social justice. In her view, justice and reconciliation are supposed to be the central nerves of the church, but instead the church is still limited regarding this mission because of it being one-sided; thereby downplaying the role of economic justice. On this note, she calls for the Church to show its solidarity with the poor and marginalised, who are largely women.

According to LenkaBula (2008), the church is not doing enough when it comes to its commitment to the justice that needs to be meted out to women. LenkaBula (2008:2-7) is not only concerned about economic justice, but also about gender justice in the church. She argues that the African culture and the misinterpretation of the Bible in the church deny women the opportunity of taking up positions of leadership in the church. LenkaBula's preoccupation with issues of poverty, culture, Bible and justice as they affect the lives of black South African women are relevant to this research as it also engages these issues in the lives of Vhavenda women in the church.

Christina Landman (2008) also writes about the injustices that the church inflicts on women through supporting patriarchal discourses. In her view, these discourses that expose women to abuse are extremely powerful because they are not affected in spite of the fact that the laws of the country have changed. This is the situation because these harmful discourses are supported by the deep structure of societal experience where such discourses rule. She points out further that these discourses draw their power from the majority of the community that believe in the truthfulness of those discourses as it also regulates the lives of people who believe in it. She identifies the patriarchal discourses that bestow various identities on women, such as the identity of sin, the identity of acceptance, the identity of forced belonging and the identity of failure. Therefore, she suggests that these harmful discourses should be addressed through the social construction theory as a theory that assumes that the lives of people are constructed through social and religious discourses. Landman's deconstruction of harmful discourses as they affect the lives of women is relevant to this study as it also engages the deconstruction of harmful discourses that affects women in the church.

Landman (2002:85-98) tells the stories of abused South African women who used the Old Testament language to communicate their painful experiences. These women used these references in their search for understanding their own predicament of abuse and how they should react to abuse as women of faith. She asserts that though South Africa has a woman-friendly constitution, women's bodies are still controlled by powerful cultural and religious discourses. She also contends that stories of the Old Testament women were influenced by discourses "languaged" by the Old Testament concept of God and women. She describes religious discourses as discourses that are socially constructed. As a means of finding an alternative to the abuse of women, she suggests the "relinguaging" of these discourses. She then looks at other possible languages that women can use to free themselves from abusive social construction discourses. Landman's "relinguaging" of women's experiences will prove helpful for this study, as a new language is useful to serve as an alternative to communicating the experiences of Vhavenda women in the Church.

Nadar (2004:354-367), reflects on the aspects of oppression which Pentecostal women experience. She argues that the way in which the Bible is read and interpreted, together with a limited understanding of spiritual matters are factors contributing to the oppression

of women in the church. She adds that women's voices need to be heard regarding those matters that are oppressive to them in addition to those aspects that are liberating. She contends that the roles that women are playing in the church are still problematic, because these women's domestic roles are transposed into the church (such as making tea, and being in charge of the Sunday school). Her concern is that women are rarely found in leadership positions in the church.

Nadar (2004) points out that the impact of discriminatory cultural ideas and Christian scripture on the lives of these women makes it difficult for them to take up leadership positions. When dealing with the Pentecostal perceptions of the Bible and the way it (the Bible) is used to discriminate against women, she suggests that a holistic and liberating understanding of the work of the Spirit is important in terms of the emancipation of women. Nadar's concerns regarding the marginalisation of Indian women in leadership positions in the Pentecostal church are also relevant for this thesis as it seeks to challenge the marginalisation of Vhavenda women in leadership positions in the Church. The insights of Nadar are helpful in terms of deconstructing the oppressive cultural discourses that feed the Christian scriptures. This also is helpful in finding alternatives regarding women empowerment in the church.

Haddad (1998:5-18), writes from the perspective of theologies of survival in the South African context. Her main focus is on the shift that theology has undergone, from being a liberation theology to transformation theology. Her argument is based on transforming attitudes towards race, gender, culture and class. She focusses on the experiences of African women who just manage to survive everyday and articulates their theologies. According to her, the lives of ordinary African women are characterised by resistance and silence. In her view, this silence makes it easy for the African women's experiences to be taken for granted. Instead of speaking for these African women, the need is there for African women to be heard and this will help to shape the discourses, thereby changing the structures of oppression on women's lives.

When she reflects on her reading of the Bible with women in poor and marginalised community in South Africa Sibeko and Haddad (1997:83-92) notes:

- Firstly, when these women are given an opportunity in a safe space they are able to break the silence;
- Secondly, they had the capacity to express themselves against the practices in the church and culture
- Thirdly, the women indicated incipient signs of insurrection.

It is in their daily struggles for survival that God intervenes to help black women to find “a way out of no way.” For the purposes of the present study, Haddad’s theology will prove useful, as it will serve as a tool for African women to speak for and about themselves. Consequently, it will empower them to be in a position to articulate their experiences regarding culture and religion when they learn to name their experiences and express themselves properly.

Importantly, Baloyi (2007), a male reverend of the Reformed Church, also focusses on the problems caused by the patriarchal set-up, which deny women their rights in the Church as well as in society. Baloyi has studied biblical passages that illustrate how women and men are expected to relate to one another and that also provide guidelines on how they can be equal participants in the kingdom of God, taking into cognisance the biblical message on the view of women. Baloyi’s (2007:263) stance on women leadership issues in the church is similar to those held by both LenkaBula and Makoro and he rightly defends women as follows:

Women must also take their stand and fight against male dominance in all spheres of life because that is unchristian. The last lesson is that those churches that still dominate women and think that only men can run things in the church, must also look for some possible ways to involve women in leadership of their church, not only because women deserve it, but because their churches will not enjoy prosperity as women move out to the churches which will recognize them as responsible human beings.

Both of the above-mentioned theologians are very helpful to this study in their unique contributions to women issues. This is the case because one is able to see how cultural and religious discourses can become harmful to the lives of women, and also how deconstruction of these discourses can be helpful in promoting new references pertaining to the leadership of women. This helps women find both the words and the proper language to express themselves as well as the skills required to negotiate with culture and religion to make them women-friendly. This leads to the need to seek for an approach that

is suitable to address the discourses harmful to the lives of women, namely the *bosadi* (womanhood) approach.

The *bosadi* approach was embraced by Masenya (1996) in her research on Proverbs 31:10-31 from a South African contextual perspective. More specifically, Masenya focusses her approach on the ‘*bosadi*/womanhood’ concept since the word “*bosadi*” describes what it means to be a woman in the Northern Sotho culture.

In reaction to Masenya’s re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31, Sakenfeld (2003:124-125), retells this text by including different voices of North American readers; to some this text serves as a source of encouragement, yet to others it is too good to be true. Women, whose life experiences are different, view this text differently. According to her, Masenya offers and incorporates new interpretative horizons through her re-reading of this passage. Significantly, Masenya’s interpretation of this poem offers new insights to the world of interpretation as she was able to develop a comparison between the woman of Proverbs with the women from the Northern Sotho culture, thereby showing the strengths and limitations which did not exist in the Western culture.

Importantly, in her thesis, Masenya (1996) develops a *bosadi* approach, which she asserts resembles enculturation hermeneutics. Furthermore, Masenya comments that enculturation hermeneutics designates an approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to make an African (or any socio-cultural) context the subject of interpretation. This means that the conceptual framework, its methodology and the personal input of the interpreter are consciously informed by the world-view of and the life experience within that culture. According to Masenya, a *bosadi* approach is committed to take the African context of African Bible readers seriously; and highlights the significance of women readers and their context. Masenya calls this approach an appropriate African woman’s liberationist reading of the biblical text in a South African context, which also covers global concerns (2005:746).

The *bosadi* approach analyses the biblical texts and its context, identifying those elements that are oppressive and impeding the liberation of women. On the other hand, it promotes those elements that are liberative to women. As she re-reads Proverbs 31:10-31 in a Northern Sotho context, Masenya is able to point both the liberative and oppressive

aspects out of the text. Masenya argues that the text was liberative for its original readers because it elevates the significance of the family and paints a picture of an independent powerful woman who can hold her own in the world of men. Masenya is of the opinion that the text is liberative for Africans because it reveals that their holistic outlook on life is similar to that of the Israelites. In addition, this, according to her, helps Africans to realise that the Bible has sections that are close to their own culture.

On the other hand, Masenya points out that the text displays aspects that are problematic. Firstly, this text can be seen to relate to the elite class only, consequently, it will not appeal to the majority of many poor African women in the country. Secondly, the text accepts the separation between the womanly sphere of the family and the more significant (public) sphere of men. Thirdly; the text portrays an ideal family as one that consists of a male and a female, children and servants, a type of “ideal family” to which many African women do not have access. In fact, many families are single-parented, while some families are polygamous, while others have no hope of ever having servants or even of dressing like the woman of proverbs 31:10-31..

Masenya (2005:745) describes a *bosadi* approach as a biblical hermeneutic, which is not only a comparative analysis between the biblical text and the African culture:

(The *bosadi* approach) critiques both cultures and texts not only in terms of gender concerns. It also includes issues of class, ‘woman-as-strange’ and ‘African-as-strange’ in their own territory.

Masenya argues that the *bosadi* concept does not accept the idea of the Bible as the word of God uncritically and in an attempt to resuscitate the African culture, it does not idolise it. In short, Masenya (1996:182)’s *bosadi* approach focusses on the African-ness of an African woman in South Africa. Hence, her definition of a woman:

A *mosadi* (woman) is a female African person who, though conscious of the corporeal mentality of Africans and also respecting it, can stand on her own affirming her full humanity as a creature in God’s image. As an independent person, she may choose to get involved with a male partner in a marriage relationship but that does not mean that she loses her full humanness and independence to her male partner. She must therefore not be defined in terms of her male partner.

Masenya criticises the oppressive elements of the African culture through a *bosadi* approach. She chose the genre of Northern Sotho proverbs that portrayed both negative and positive elements regarding women to reveal how they are viewed and treated in their relationships with men.

How does this approach assist and guide the present study? This extremely important question needs to be addressed. This approach presents a rich variety of concepts on the deconstruction of religious and cultural discourses as they are socially constructed. This is done through the deconstruction of powerful discourses that have a negative impact on the lives of African women. Masenya's *bosadi* approach gives a voice to women who are Bible readers, and whose lives are shaped by different interpretations of the Bible. With this voice, women can construct alternative discourses by shifting these oppressive discourses.

There are similarities as well as differences between what Masenya presented regarding the *bosadi* approach and what this study will present. The most obvious similarity is that the word *bosadi* is Northern Sotho; while *vhusadzi* is a word in Tshivenda. The *bosadi* approach challenges the patriarchy, race, gender and classism. Importantly, it challenges the oppressive elements of Christian religion (its sacred texts), while it elevates the liberatory texts. In addition, it challenges sexist and racist structures for the affirmation of the well-being of African South African women. However, as this study's point of departure is women leadership in the church, the *vhusadzi* approach is basically the *bosadi* approach, which in this context, describes Venda women's leadership roles in the church. This is the main difference; in effect, it offers the Venda Christian woman the tools for deconstructing the faces of both cultural and religious discourses that are harmful to women's lives. The *vhusadzi* approach will make use of similar insights and strategies as laid bare by Masenya, while focussing on developing this approach in terms of its relation to God (or teachings about God), the person of Christ (Christology), the Holy Spirit, the church and women's leadership roles in the church. Furthermore, this study will seek to make suggestions for changing the oppressive nature of the language used by the church.

## **1.9 METHODOLOGY USED FOR THIS STUDY**

### **1.9.1 The philosophical framework**

This study aimed at identifying and describing the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership development of women in the ministry from an African South- African Venda woman's perspective. In order to realise this aim, the philosophical framework of this study includes the social construction theory and post-structural theory. The relevance of these theories to this study will be explained below:

#### ***1.9.1.1 Social construction theory***

The insights of Gergen (2002:6-12) will be employed in this study. Gergen describes five premises to construction theory of which two of them are more relevant to this study as it deals with religious and cultural discourses. The first premise is as follows: "the terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are socially derived products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people". Consequently, this is useful to this study as discourses that govern people's lives are socially constructed, and therefore, they can be deconstructed. In a study on the effects of religious discourses on the mental health of believers, Landman (2007:32) indicates by means of case studies how people's thinking and doing are controlled by socio-religious discourses, thereby subscribing to the above definition of social construction theory.

Even though Oduyoye (2001: 30) does not define herself as a social constructionist, she confirms its theory when she indicates that the process of socialisation is one of informal learning through participating in the community; in addition, it comes through the observance of rewards and sanctions. This is done through admonitions and warnings backed by stories and examples, where all are witnesses to what happens to deviants.

In short, then, the perceptions that people have are socially constructed and socialisation plays a vital role in influencing people to know what they know and to be the way they



are. For Africans, perceptions of *vhusadzi*/womanhood are socially constructed. A woman is a real woman if she is able to live up to the standards set by society; if she fails to meet these standards, she is regarded as a deviant and, not a real woman.

The second premise that this study find important as Gergen describes it is: “language derives its major significance form the way in which it is embedded within patterns of relationship.” This premise according to the researcher is important in the understanding that religious and cultural discourses can be deconstructed. Gergen (2002:12) argues that, the social construction theory explains that meanings are generated, in either sustained or disrupted ways; in addition, they are enclosed in discourses. Landman (2007:31ff.) describes a discourse as a grand narrative, a story, believed by the majority of people, which influences their behaviour.

Gergen (2002:17) explains that a narrative, as a rhetorical device by means of which a relationship can be created simultaneously to create a sense of relationship among events, imparts directionality to them, imbues them with moral significance and comes to understand them as temporarily located. These narratives, as Gergen describes them, are embedded within society through different stories that ultimately form culture.

Culture, then, is the breeding ground for perceptions on womanhood. In addition, it is only through the sharing of alternative stories on women’s dignity and leadership qualities, that women can liberate themselves and construct new meaning for themselves as cultural beings and start participating differently in the societies in which they are embedded.

Social construction theory, then, is the means for analysing society and its culture, in order to lay the discourses bare that maintain the oppression of women. Social construction theory unmasks the ideological biases that have been used by society and its culture to validate the domination of women.

Of what relevance, then, is the social construction theory to this study?

- The social construction theory enables the researcher to identify and describe the impact of religious discourses as discourses of power that impact negatively on the leadership development of women in the ministry in churches in Venda. This theory

empowers the researcher to describe religious discourses as power discourses that control the lives of women.

- As informed by this theory, this study questions the discourses that are capable of taking people's lives captive by means of church dogmas as well as the interpretation of the scriptures that marginalise the lives of women.
- The social construction theory enables one to find ways of addressing these ill-practices in a manner that will deconstruct the underlying discourses. Deconstruction as a way of empowerment will be addressed in chapter four with the re-construction of biblical stories of women from an African South-African context.

### ***1.9.1.2 Post structural theory***

Chris Weedon (1997:12) defines the feminist post-structural theory as a theory that analyses the patriarchal structures of society and the positions that women occupy within them and which addresses forms of social organisation and the social meanings and values, which guarantee or contest them. This is the theory of the relationship between language, subjectivity, social organisation and power. This will help us understand why women tolerate social relations that subordinate their interests to those of men.

The post-structural theory can assist this study in its attempt to understand ways in which women have been excluded systematically from the ordained ministries of the church. It can also enable this study to address the questions of how race, class, gender and culture might be transformed, because women who fall short of certain ideals set by the culture are encouraged to feel like social outcasts in that society. This encourages and leads women to judge themselves in terms of the same standards that others use against them because they have been conditioned to think in a particular way.

In this regard, Chris Weedon (1997:179) notes the following:

The need for narratives that are non-universalizing, do not have foundationalist status and allow for cultural and historical specificity is clear from "Third world" appropriations of poststructuralist theory. 'Third World feminism', as it has

developed in the United States, brings together women from the so-called 'Third World' and minority peoples and peoples of color living in 'first world' countries. It has a dual focus: deconstructing the Eurocentricism of much writing about women in the 'Third World' and giving adequate representation to the concerns of 'Third World' women.

Weedon (1997:179) regards the feminist post-structuralist theory as a theory that addresses social relations in their social contexts and does not claim universal status; while it does not deny its universal significance. This makes the aspect of experience very important, because to deal justly with issues such as culture, one has to experience it and know how it affects oneself.

According to McDowell and Pringle (1992:12), the post-structuralist theory postulates that reality cannot be known independently of language and discourse. It is through language that one can make sense of reality and language does not simply describe reality, it actively orders it. This is similar to what Chris Weedon (1997:21) refers to in his description of the post- structuralist theory, namely, that language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisations and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. This aspect is vital to this research because the post-structuralist theory provides the researcher with tools to analyse the ways in which Venda women have been typecast by the language of patriarchy, both in society and in the Church.

Oduyoye (2001:3) confirms post-structural view on the role that language plays in society when she asserts that the African culture is replete with language that enables the community to diminish the humanity of women. According to her, language is capable of either taking people captive or giving them freedom, as she describes it as an institution that mirrors the dominant values of society and patterns the way people should conduct their daily routines.

It is important to note that language is more than the words that are spoken, because behind them lies a deep truth and meaning – here called discourses - which are more than the obvious. According to Scott (1997:759), language is defined as:

...not only as referring to simply words or even a vocabulary and set of grammatical rules but, rather, a meaning constituting system: that is, any system-

strictly verbal or other- through which meaning is constructed and cultural practices organized and by which, accordingly people represent and understand their world, including who they are and how they relate to others.

In addition, Scott argues that the post-structuralist theory helps find ways to analyse specific “texts,” not only documents and books, but also utterances of any kind and in any medium, including cultural practices, in terms of specific historical and contextual meanings, specifically the discourses that control the lives of people.

Furthermore, Scott describes the post-structuralist theory as a theory that analyses the functions of patriarchy in all its manifestations, namely, its ideological, institutional and organisational aspects, not only for continuity but also for changes over time. It allows people to think in terms of plurality and diversity rather than of unity and universals. It also breaks the conceptual hold, at least, of the long-held traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities.

This study utilised the post-structuralist theory as a theory that analyses the usage of language in shaping peoples’ lives in terms of their understanding of who they are and how to socialise with each other. In this study, this theory also reveals that, not only can texts and books be analysed, institutions of traditional power can also be analysed. This is a tool that assists with the questioning of the taboos and biases of culture that make women tolerate social constraints that render their lives powerless in contrast with those of men.

In short, in the social construction theory, this researcher finds a means of exposing the faces of the socio-religious discourses that are used with reference to women in Venda. Furthermore, this researcher is empowered and informed by the post-structuralist theory to analyse societal practices, such as language, power, male preferences and culture, that feed the discourses that impact on women’s leadership roles in church.

The post-structuralist theory also provides this researcher with the tools to deconstruct the dominant discourses that oppress women. In this regard, cultural hermeneutics is now examined as a post-structuralist theory with the aim of exposing and deconstructing

cultural practices that feed oppressive socio-religious discourses and reconstruct the discourses that empower women in terms of their leadership positions in the church.

### **1.9.1.3 *Kanyoro and cultural hermeneutics***

Cultural hermeneutics, as a methodological perspective, is well documented in the work of Musimbi A. Kanyoro (2002) who recounts stories of a group of women in the remote rural village, and guides them in the process of reconstructing their stories as stories about women's dignity. She sees a need in the theological paradigm for considering this new aspect of feminist analysis, which has been introduced to theology mainly in studies of African women. Kanyoro indicates further that this is an important first step towards creating an African women's liberation theology because it poses questions about the welfare and status of women in Africa within the (discursive) framework of culture.

Importantly, cultural hermeneutics analyses and interprets how culture conditions people's understanding of gender. Furthermore, cultural hermeneutics, furthermore, exposes how culture affects people's lives and how it is maintained in society. Cultural hermeneutics is especially useful for this study in that it reads the Bible in terms of both the harmful and healing roles played by culture in religion. In short, cultural hermeneutics displace patriarchal readings of the Holy Scriptures with women-friendly interpretations without alienating women from their cultures (see Landman 2002:96).

Kanyoro (2002) presents cultural hermeneutics as a key to reading the Bible in Africa. She argues that the culture of the reader in Africa has more influence on the ways that biblical text is understood and used in communities, than the historical culture of the text against which it was written. She also argues that the Bible was written under the influence of culture and that it is something that needs to be analysed, brought to light, and used for the benefit of women in Africa and not as a means of oppressing them.

This is an important tool for the present research because, as we have seen above and as we will argue even more strongly at a later stage, biblical interpretation from a male point of view, is still one of the most powerful feeding grounds for patriarchal discourses in the church today. On the other hand, cultural hermeneutics as a means of exposing harmful

cultural readings of the Bible and deconstructing them in terms of healthy (cultural) readings is a further aim of this research.

To use Masenya (2003:113)'s metaphor, in the church, women find themselves trapped between two authorities, namely, the authority of the Holy Scriptures and that of culture. It is important to point out that the presupposition of this study is that women are denied leadership positions in the church for the same cultural reasons they are denied leadership in society—and that the Bible is used to support this exclusion in a very subversive way. Elizabeth Amoah (1995: 3) exhibits a similar understanding when she asserts that in many African churches of western missionary origin, in contrast with the African instituted churches, the ordination of women tends to be merely decorative, as if women are ordained to satisfy some emergent trend.

African people place such high value on culture that when people say something is cultural, it begins to mean that it is beyond critique, beyond question and beyond transformation (see Oduyoye 2001). As the present research is based on the Vhavenda culture as one of the African cultures, it becomes imperative for me as the researcher whose ministry is definitely shaped by this culture, to look at some of the elements within this culture, which are oppressive.

Regarding issues of culture, this researcher will concentrate on two things. Firstly, this researcher will look at the language of culture in terms of how it colours the readers' understanding of the Bible, the church and society and how it is used in patriarchal discourses. Secondly, the researcher will look at the language of culture used on a daily basis that contributes to the understanding of African women. It would be injudicious to ignore the meaning and ideological use of oral wisdom that is a source of cultural norms shaping acceptable social roles and practices for the Vhavenda people. This language includes folktales, the language of proverbs and the rites of passage. These are some of the structures and institutions established to shape African women's experiences, taboos, initiations, marriage, *lobola* (*lumalo* in Tshivenda), widowhood and polygamy. These are rich experiences that support the theological view of an African woman, which does not exist in white feminist theology.

The researcher concurs with Oduyoye (1995:73)'s remarks that:

It is the woman who sleeps by the fire of gender discrimination in the modern sectors of our economy, and it is the woman in the home who knows how hot the fire is. If women are prepared to show their pain openly and to articulate their vision for a more just and a more participatory and inclusive society, then perhaps we can begin to reshape the attitudes of society as a whole.

Finally, in terms of her philosophical framework, the researcher is going to combine the social construction theory, the post-structuralist theory, cultural hermeneutics on the Bible and culture to work from an African South-African perspective, as will be explained in the next subsection.

#### ***1.9.1.4 An African South-African context- A vhusadzi (womanhood) perspective***

In the above section, it was indicated how the social construction and post-structuralist theories will assist this researcher with examining the faces of socio-religious discourses in terms of the way they impact on the lives of Venda women in the church. In the process, those discourses are deconstructed and in turn, discourses that empower women in the leadership of the church are also reconstructed.

In terms of reconstructing these discourses, the works of African women theologians provide a rich variety for reconstruction. However, the researcher is going to use the insights and concepts by Nadar (2004), Haddad (1998), LenkaBula (2005, 2008), Landman (2002) with a particular focus on Masenya (1996, 2004). Although these scholars with the exception of Masenya, did not write from a womanhood perspective, their works and insights contribute to helping this researcher develop a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective. An overview of the *bosadi* approach will suffice:

- **Masenya and the *bosadi* approach**

In the researcher's view, a significant approach/framework to an analysis of the development of women in leadership positions within an African Vhavenda Pentecostal setting can best be done through the work-approach propounded by the African-South African biblical scholar, Madipoane Masenya (2004, 2005), the *bosadi* (womanhood) approach (see 1.8.4 above for more details regarding this approach). Apart from the basic

three elements which usually typify the African-American womanist theological and biblical hermeneutical frameworks (see section 1.8 above), Masenya's framework also includes the element of the African culture as an important element to be engaged with in the efforts to decolonise, "deracialise" and "depatriarchalise" religious discourses which impact negatively on African women's lives. Her approach offers tools for restoring African-South African women's dignity, and influences this study in the following manner:

- To engage critically with the patriarchal Pentecostal church's *status quo* with a view to investigating how affirming it is to the issue of the leadership of the Vhavenda women.
- To check the extent to which the legacies of the colonial and apartheid government continue to play a role in the policies and practices of the church with regard to the leadership of women.
- To engage critically with the role that the African culture has played and continues to play in the marginalisation and non-affirmation of women with regard to the issue of leadership.
- To engage critically with the role of religion, in particular, the Christian religion and its sacred texts in both the marginalisation and affirmation of women in leadership.

- **The similarities between the *bosadi* and the *vhusadzi* approach**

Similar to the *bosadi* approach with its global concerns, the *vhusadzi* approach is also basically emerging as an attempt to make Africa and her concerns the main hermeneutical focus in its interaction with biblical texts (see theological discourses in the case of the *vhusadzi* approach). Importantly, it makes an additional contribution to Western-oriented hermeneutic frameworks such as feminism and womanism (see Masenya 2004; 2005), in addition, the *vhusadzi* approach will also endeavour to place issues affecting the Vhavenda women within this global framework. The impact, for example, of globalisation, which is so evident among others, the negative impact of America tele-evangelism on our various African settings will also be brought to bear with the concerns raised about women's discourses addressed in this research.



Over and above the issues of colonialism, apartheid, racism; gender, classism and culture addressed by Masenya's *bosadi* approach, the *vhusadzi* approach will make a further contribution. The *vhusadzi* approach will engage the following factors, among others: a modification on gender will be enhanced by an engagement with the challenges facing single women; xenophobia, ethnicity and the impact of the post-apartheid political scenario with its attractive agenda regarding the affirmation of women (see LenkaBula 2008).

For the purpose of this study, the *vhusadzi* approach will be employed to address the following aspects: *vhusadzi* and the African culture, *vhusadzi* and the concept of God, *vhusadzi* and the person of Christ, *vhusadzi* and the Holy Spirit, *vhusadzi* and the church, *vhusadzi* and the ordination of women. It is hoped that as these themes which are typical of many a Pentecostal church setting in our African contexts, are approached through a *vhusadzi* lens, African women in general and the Vhavenda women in particular will be enabled to claim and reclaim their rightful places in leadership positions in the church.

## **1.9.2 The methodological framework**

### **1.9.2.1 A qualitative and quantitative research method**

- **A general overview**

Data for this study were generated quantitatively as well as qualitatively from a variety of sources, namely interviews, questionnaire, observation and literature. More accurately, it can be stated that a qualitative approach eliciting descriptive data through various methods, was used to suit the purpose of the study. Under the qualitative approach, it is understood that this approach is aimed at answering "questions about the nature of phenomena with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view" (Leedy 1997: 104). Thus, respondents are given questions, which they answer and describe on their own and in their own time, writing what they understand about the said topics/issues. The respondent's point of view is important in this regard, whether it favours the researcher or not, as long as the respondent does not answer what he/she thinks the researcher wants. In addition, the qualitative approach

usually has to do with people and their activities and is concerned with variables that cannot be quantified in terms of an interval or ratio level (Walliman 2005:322).

Furthermore, the quantitative approach has certain distinguishing features, such as, the use of precise measurements and the use of quantities expressed as numbers capable of being analysed by statistical or computational methods (see Walliman 2005). Walliman points out that the moment one starts counting *how many* and measuring *how much*, that signifies that a quantitative approach has been used. This study employed both these approaches as it used questionnaires to gather information/data in the form of words, and also used presented data in the form of numbers or percentages to indicate varying perceptions of respondents on the subject.

Leedy (1997) asserts that interviews include a series of closed form questions with probes designed to obtain additional, clarifying information. Interviews were conducted face- to - face; while no interviews were conducted telephonically. This was done to increase interaction between the researcher and the respondents (Goddard & Melville 2001:49). Interviews were also used to obtain information from those respondents who could neither read nor write. The respondents were followed up at their homes, working places and churches. This was done to ensure that the respondent would be more relaxed and not tempted to favour the researcher with his/her response; furthermore, no respondent was called in or invited for an interview to the home of the researcher. Various descriptive methods of data collection aimed at eliciting information were used to help the researcher realise the following research aims: firstly, to identify and describe the impact of Christian religious discourses and African South-African cultural discourses on the leadership development of women; secondly, to determine the present roles played by women in the ministry; and thirdly, to present a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach regarding the empowerment of women.

- **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire used in this research was divided into three main parts in order to gather information to realise the research aims as listed above. The three sections are as follows:

- The first section sought to determine the roles that women play in the ministry of their churches. This section also gathered information on the churches' perceptions of the roles women should play in their ministries.
- The second section was about the impact that religion and culture have on perceptions of women in the ministry. The questions asked here aimed at finding out what religion and culture say about women and what impact it has on the involvement of women in the ministry.
- Lastly, the questionnaire addresses the issue pertaining to the road to empowerment; this will help with presenting ways of empowerment to women in the church.

Most of the ninety (90) questionnaires administered were given by hand; while the rest were sent by post. Sixty-four (64) questionnaires were returned, three quarters of which were from women; whereas the rest were from men. The numbers of returned questionnaires in relation to those sent out were deemed to be sufficient for the purpose of this study.

Twenty-six (26) questionnaires were not returned and the respondents who did not return them were followed up. Subsequently, the respondents identified, acted in a variety of ways. One of them, perhaps because the researcher knew him, just laughed and said, 'Women's issues?', and he never returned the questionnaire. A few indicated that they did not have the time needed for completing them. The rest (both men and women) were reminded to return the questionnaire, but it looked as if they had just decided to forget about them.

All the women and men who responded to the questionnaire were black South Africans. The ages of women varied between 18 and 85; whereas the ages of the men were between 32 and 66 (see Research population, section 1.8). The returned questionnaires were dated from April 2004 to November 2008.

The researcher used a purposive sampling method to choose the respondents, which means that the researcher selected what she thought was a typical sample (Walliman 2005:279). Pastors, pastors' wives, lay leaders (serving on boards and committees, and those serving in women's ministry and also in children's ministry) were selected on the basis that they played leadership roles in the church and were well familiar with the leadership issues. Those who were in the church but did not serve in any structure of the church were selected with the express purpose of obtaining their views regarding issues pertaining to women leadership in the church. Even non-churchgoers were selected to obtain their views and to enrich this study concerning women leadership. In short, all the above respondents were chosen in accordance with the researcher's philosophical framework (see section 1.9.1), to be able to identify the religious and cultural discourses through the social construction theory as well as through the post structuralist theory that keeps women from participating fully in the ministry.

- **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with forty-three (43) respondents. Subsequently, some of the people who responded to the questionnaires were also interviewed. Almost twenty-five percent (25%) were selected from those who answered the questionnaires. The reason for involving twenty-five (25%) of the respondents who had answered the questionnaire in the interviews was to obtain greater clarity and more information concerning their answers. The information they provided in the questionnaires indicated that further information could be gained regarding their experiences. Of those who were interviewed, nineteen (19) were women and twenty-four (24) were men. Included in these numbers were eight (8) respondents who were not adherents of the Christian religion. Five (5) respondents came from African traditional religion backgrounds and three (3) neither attended church nor came from African traditional religious backgrounds. This was done in order to include and listen to the voices of those that were neutral regarding church matters and to compare their views with those who were members of the church.

## **1.10 DELIMITATION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Leedy (1997:59) noted that what the researcher is not going to do is noted in the delimitation, because the researcher can very easily be tempted to present interesting information that lies beyond the precincts of the problem. Therefore, the delimitation of this study concerns the boundaries of the problem, the individuals to be studied and the setting of the study. This study is concerned with the religio-cultural impact on the leadership development of women in the ministry. It provides detailed descriptions of the situations that exist with regard to women. In addition, this study also considers the perceptions women have of themselves in terms of leadership as well as the perceptions of others in relation to women leadership in the ministry.

Limitations of this study, on the other hand, include the bias of the researcher. The researcher is committed in this study and to the Vhavenda women as the beneficiaries of her research. Consequently, she does not generalise the findings of the study to include all women and their experiences. However, this researcher endeavours to promote the leadership of women in similar environments with her research findings. Therefore, the study maintains that there is a need to increase the understanding of specific women, in this case, the Vhavenda women and their experiences in order to interpret these women's experiences justly and to invite other women to benefit from these research findings.

### **1.11 POSTULATION OF HYPOTHESIS**

The hypothesis of this study is as follows:

- The impact of religion and culture on the leadership development of women in the ministry can be identified and described through the insights of the social construction theory. Significantly, harmful religious and cultural discourses in this regard can be addressed and redressed by means of the *vhusadzi* approach.
- The roles that women play in the church are influenced by the religious and cultural discourses as perceptions that people hold. These roles are not God-given but socially constructed, and can be redefined by rereading the Bible and re-visiting culture.
- An African South-African approach to religion and culture can empower women by deconstructing disempowering religious and cultural discourses and by co-

constructing positive discourses through the insights of the post-structuralist theory as well as contextual African women theologies.

## **1.12 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

Chapter one introduces the research problem of this study. In addition, the aims for undertaking the study are stated, the research population is presented, and the methods and philosophies employed to research the topic are explained. Furthermore, a literary review of work done by feminist, womanist and African women theologians is given, and the unique contribution of this researcher is profiled. Lastly, a hypothesis is also postulated.

Chapter two identifies the religious and cultural discourses that impact on the leadership roles of women in ministry. Texts from the scriptures that are used to deny women leadership development in the church, arguments on the creation story, Paul's theology, and Jesus' attitude towards women were explored and their impact addressed. Importantly, this chapter captured the voices of women by approaching women's issues from women's perspectives.

Chapter three focusses on the questionnaire and the interviews, the findings derived from them and the evaluation of the findings. The findings relate specifically to the validity of the claim that religion and culture at present impact negatively on the leadership development of women in ministry. The questionnaire and interviews also expose the roles that women are playing in the church, as well as the ways that women can be encouraged and empowered. This chapter recorded and interpreted the data from both types of sources, and the findings are well tabulated.

Chapter four introduces an African South-African approach towards women's ministry. This approach is called a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach which is a liberationist approach towards the issues of culture and religion within an African context (with a specific focus on South Africa). This approach was employed, first, to analyse the negative elements of culture critically that impact on the lives of women in the church,

and secondly, to liberate religion itself, consciously using scriptural texts toward encouraging and empowering women for leadership development in the ministry.

Chapter five concludes the thesis by making suggestions regarding the empowerment of women, through ways that are centred and focus on developing women in the leadership positions in the church. Finally are the research findings that validate the hypothesis of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DISCOURSES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter one introduced the research problem, presented the aims, methods and philosophies employed to research the topic, in addition, the work done by feminist theology, womanist theology and African women theology was reviewed. Against the background described in chapter one of this study, that this chapter aims at looking into religion and culture as problem discourses from the perspectives of women. In this chapter, religious and cultural discourses controlling women's lives will begin to become apparent as this chapter captures the voices of women's theologies approaching women's issues from women's perspectives. The work of women is valuable to this study, both as a point of departure and also as an instrument of insight and motivation for the present research.

The works of feminist theologians and African women theologians were looked at regarding the following concerns: the way they view the Bible, especially in the context of biblical passages considered to deal with restrictions and qualifications for not ordaining women in church leadership. The present researcher understands that women's studies on the Bible should not be limited to passages on women only, because it would be a serious omission not to grasp at the opportunity to understand how women lived as they reflected on the scriptures in Biblical times.

For the sake of this particular context and the aim of this research, which is to identify religious discourses and cultural discourses that impact on women's leadership development, passages that concentrate on women's issues are examined. Accordingly, this study concentrates on the following aspects:

- Firstly, it examines the arguments on the creation story.
- Secondly, the researcher examines Paul's theology on women's issues and some perceptions of the New Testament's teaching on women and the ministry.



- Thirdly, the attitude of Jesus is examined to view how he perceived women.
- Fourthly, women's ordination in the church is explored.
- Lastly, issues pertaining to culture are appraised in terms of what other perspectives have already contributed to these issues.

## **2.2 THE BIBLE FROM WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES**

### **2.2.1 Feminist theologians and the Bible**

Ringe (1998) refers to the Bible as a book that continues to shape human lives, communities and cultures. In this regard, Ringe points out that the Bible needs to be read through the multiple lenses of women's experiences in not only ancient but also modern religious and cultural contents. She pronounces that there is a need to understand the contents and also ask questions about the authors and what they wrote about. She alludes to the fact that although the Bible does not address every issue of concern to women of this or any other time, biblical authors, including women characters, introduce issues of special concern to women's lives. Importantly, she declares that women's lives are enriched, sustained and empowered in communities that affirm that, within the Bible one encounters not only the divine will for human life and behaviour, but also the very presence of God. On the other hand, the Bible seems to be on their side and on the other hand, it is portrayed as if it is against them. In addition, she asserts that women find inspiration in other biblical women who were blessed and receive encouragement from those who were in the ministry of the Lord. Against all odds and in spite of all the frustrations, women persevere in their quest for fulfilment of their calling in the church.

Ringe (1998:3) describes the frustration experienced by women when they read about and hear of other biblical women who were portrayed as being incapable of speaking for themselves as follows:

At the same time, women reading the Bible have found themselves on alien and even hostile turf. Rarely, if ever, do women in the Bible get to speak for themselves. Rather, they are portrayed from the perspective of male authors and in the context of religious communities where authority finally came to be vested in men and where men's experience was the norm.

Ringe (1998) concludes that the ways in which women have experienced the power of the Bible, both as individuals and also as members of different religious, social, and ethnic communities have led to a variety of approaches to the task of interpretation. She observes that women do this in order to find their own stance against the patriarchal values embodied in the Bible. It is true that the Bible shaped the lives of people then, as it continues to shape the lives of people today. Ringe refers to women with power who are still able to persist against all odds and still find inspiration in other women in the Bible. Ringe's concerns with regard to the role that the Bible plays in the marginalisation of women in the church are also relevant for this thesis as it also engages and challenge the religious discourses that marginalise women and hinders their leadership development in the church.

Schüssler-Fiorenza (1994:1) focusses on the importance of interpreting the Bible, because scripture and its authority have been and continue to be used against women struggling for emancipation. She contends that texts that speak negatively about women are either mistranslated and misinterpreted relics from the past, or are not true at all because they contradict the principles of reason and science. She argues that the lives of women are governed by patriarchal interpretations of the Bible. Schussler-Fiorenza (1985:127) understands patriarchy not only in terms of ideological dualism or as an androcentric world construction regarding language but also as a social, economic and political system of graded subjugations and oppressions. Furthermore, she views a patriarchal society as one in which women are bound by a system of male privilege and domination, where the impoverished Third World women constitute the bottom of the oppressive patriarchal pyramid. In addition, Schüssler-Fiorenza holds the view that as long as a societal and religious patriarchy exists, women are not "liberated" and must struggle for survival and self-determination.

Misinterpretation of the Bible as stated by Schüssler-Fiorenza poses a considerable threat to women's liberation and their struggle for emancipation. However, she acknowledges the fact that the Bible can still be used as a resource to empower women's lives. The misinterpretation of the Bible feeds on the harmful biblical discourses that weigh heavily on the leadership development of women in the church. It is this situation in which African women, more especially Vhavenda women, find themselves, where they are faced with a challenge that undermines their need for emancipation on a daily basis.

Indeed, harmful biblical discourses take their toll on women and also pose a threat to those women who aspire to be leaders in the church.

Fiorenza (1985:128) argues that feminist theology must articulate its advocacy position not as an option for the oppressed, but as the self-identification of women both in a patriarchal society and also in religion, since all women are socialised to identify with men. Importantly, she also holds the view that a feminist biblical interpretation as a political task must challenge the scriptural authority of patriarchal texts and explore how the Bible is used as a weapon against women in the struggle against liberation. In addition, it must explore whether and how the Bible can become a resource in this struggle. Schussler-Fiorenza refers to the socialisation of women to identify with men as a challenge that needs to be challenged. It is true that women's attitudes and behaviour are rooted in the way that the Bible is interpreted for them, but that does not in any way exclude the possibility of them finding ways of addressing this *status quo*. Schüssler-Fiorenza's concerns about the misinterpretation of the Bible and the marginalisation of women are also relevant to this study as it also seeks to challenge the marginalisation of Vhavenda women in the church.

Isherwood and McEwan (2001) hold the view that feminist theology asks questions about those aspects that religion regards as sacred in order to arrive at the causes of the exclusion of women in church history and theological writings. According to them, feminist theology has adopted the feminist "hermeneutics of suspicion and remembrance" that enables women to engage in the critical construction of religious meaning from the standpoint of women's experiences of dehumanisation and oppression (2001:55). A hermeneutics of suspicion is a consciousness-raising activity that requires one to take the influence of culturally determined gender roles and attitudes on the Bible into account (Isherwood & McEwan 2001:55). On the other hand, they declare that a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance reclaims the past suffering of women as well as all subjugated people and calls for solidarity with all persons past and present who struggle for human dignity. Isherwood and McEwan (2001:64) make the following pronouncement in this regard:

As already noted, feminist hermeneutics is possible because the Bible and the history of its interpretation are more than a product of patriarchy. The Bible has

long functioned to inspire and authorize women and men in their daily lives. Biblical interpretation can, and many reconstructionist feminists would perhaps add the word “should,” serve as a resource for the construction of religious meaning and empowerment.

Significantly, feminist theology has made a contribution because of its determination to promote the full humanity of women. Reflecting on all these aspects, Isherwood and McEwan, reach certain conclusions regarding feminist theology. They state that it

- Developed hermeneutical disciplines and ethical disciplines.
- Pushed for ordination.
- Gave women a sense of the wholesomeness of the body.
- Recovered information on women in history that was either unknown or greatly misinterpreted.

This work done by Isherwood and McEwan is helpful for this study as their insights on women’s ordination serve as an alternative possibility to the experiences of Vhavenda women in the church. Ruether (1985: 3-10) asserts that the subjugation and invisibility of women in Christian tradition is a form of violence that denies them not only equality, but their very humanity as well. Furthermore, she contends that the situation in which women find themselves, is influenced by patriarchal violence. She illustrates this point by showing how the patriarchal culture has signified that women’s experience is non-important, which in turn, encourages violence against and abuse of women. Ruether (1985:4) notes the following:

Women in patriarchal culture are surrounded by messages that negate or trivialize their existence. Their bodily sexual presence is regarded as a dangerous threat to male purity and, at the same time, as a justification for constant verbal and physical abuse. They experience their bodies as constantly vulnerable to assault because they “cause” it by their sexual presence. Similarly, women find their own viewpoints and judgements of events trivialized, and this trivialization is justified on the grounds that women are inherently stupid, uninformed, lacking in authority, and incapable of forming significant understandings. Thus, they are alienated from their own minds, from being able to trust their own perceptions.

Women’s experience as a key to hermeneutics or the theory of interpretation is also adopted by this researcher to refer to the experience of women becoming critically aware of the falsifying and alienating experiences imposed upon them as women by a male-

dominated culture (Ruether 1985:114). In addition, Ruether views women's experience as a grace event, which allows them to analyse and challenge the andocentric interpretations of who and what they are. Furthermore, she describes women's experience as an interpretative key for feminist theology; consequently, this approach implies a conversion experience through which women get in touch with, name and judge their experiences of sexism in a patriarchal society.

Importantly, both Ruether (1985) and Ringe (1998) viewed the Bible as a book that is composed of cultures that are predominantly patriarchal. Indeed, it is significant that the patriarchal nature of biblical material that dominates women needs interpretation. This sexist interpretation has a strong influence on the way women are defined in patriarchal cultures, thereby causing women a great deal of harm. Feminist theologians' concerns with regard to their approach to the Bible as a book that is predominantly cultural will prove helpful to this study as it also seeks to challenge the marginalisation of women in the church. This will be helpful in finding alternatives to communicate the experiences of Vhavenda women in the church. It will also help to shift the problem discourses that are modelled by sexist interpretation of the Bible and would close the space between the inequalities of men and women in the church and in the societies.

Feminist theologians expose the following problem discourses feeding church hierarchy. The researcher has chosen to name a few that affect women's leadership development in the church as this study engages them from the perspective of Vhavenda women.

- Women cannot lead the church.
- Women have to be silent in the church.
- Women have to be controlled.
- Women are irrational and are not reliable.
- Women cannot be priests.
- There should always be male leadership in the church.
- Men are superior to women and women are inferior to men.
- Man was created first before a woman and it is a woman who sinned.
- Women brought sin into the world.

- Men are unequal to women in creation.
- Women are inferior.

### **2.2.2 African women theologians and the Bible**

Kanyoro (2002:18-22) states that the Bible forms the basis of and informs the African Christian of what he/she can validate or not validate in his/her culture. She pronounces that the Bible should be read through cultural eyes. Regarding this argument, she asserts that it is because of the influence that the culture of the reader in Africa has on the way biblical texts are understood. She continues by commenting that the Bible was written in a patriarchal culture, very much like our African culture, where male values were exalted and female values despised (2002:91). On this note, she argues that the culture of the reader in Africa has more influence on the way the biblical text is understood and used than the historical facts about the text (2002:10).

The problematic cultural discourses that Kanyoro discusses, which influence the way women are treated in society and in the church and feed the perceptions that people have on women in the leadership of the church are the following:

- It is fine for a woman to be married while still young.
- My parents arranged my marriage.
- No equality between men and women.
- Men will always be men, they can have sexual relations with anyone if they so wish.
- There is something wrong with a woman who gives birth to girls only and that is why she is given humiliating names.
- A woman who is barren was loose and had abortions before marriage.
- A woman has no right to property.
- Having a child out of wedlock is a disgrace to the family.
- A husband can have two or more wives.

Oduyoye (2001) discusses the discourses that are harmful to the lives of women in the church. Her main concern is with the way the Bible is used to endorse violence against women. In addition, Oduyoye (2001:11-12) continues by commenting that the church's

teaching and history have done no better as both have followed the cultures of the periods and places of their origins, thus putting women under the power of God through men and assuming that men are naturally violent and unjust towards women. She summarises a few of the dominant biblical discourses feeding the marginalisation of women in the church as endorsed by myth of origins and misinterpretation of the Bible:

- Women are inferior to men because they are created from men.
- Women are subject to men.
- Men take it as a divine entitlement to lord it over their wives.
- Women are the weaker vessels.
- Men are naturally violent and unjust towards women.
- Men are incapable of self-control.
- Men are stronger and superior to women.
- A woman is a piece of property and a minor that needs guidance, supervision and discipline from men.
- Man is the moral keeper of a woman.

Oduyoye (2001:17) proposes the deconstruction of mentalities as a way to shift the harmful discourses feeding the biblical hierarchy. Furthermore, she contends that the re-examining of the harmful discourses will bring about equality and a culture of non-violence. On this topic, she declares, “there is the culture that enables and the culture that debases; it is up to all people of faith to find the spiritual resources to be with those who are struggling to overcome violence.”

In addition, Oduyoye discusses images of Christ, which are dear to African women: Christ is the liberator, who liberates people from the triple burdens of racism, poverty and marginalisation; Christ is also seen as a saviour- a life-giver, He is not only making announcements, but also brings and lives good news. Regarding the Christ who saves, Oduyoye (2001:57) comments as follows:

On a continent where physical suffering seems endemic, a suffering Christ is a more attractive figure, for that Christ can be a companion. To the African mind, however, all suffering has to be like birth pangs: it has to lead to birth; it has to lead to a new beginning, so women create for themselves a Jesus who will mid-

wife the birth of the new. In a continent where hunger, thirst and homelessness are the continuous experience of millions, Jesus of Nazareth is a comrade.

The researcher concurs with what Oduyoye states concerning the images of Christ, namely that women look up to Him for liberation, strength and life for them to realise what it means to be a free human being. If Christ is able to liberate women from whatever their circumstances, then women embrace Him with both hands. Women are ready to receive the new life from the life-giver, Jesus Christ.

Uchem (2001:206) argues that the meaning of Christ's salvation in the lives of women needs to be re-examined. Both Uchem and Oduyoye agree that the salvific life of Jesus is not enough if women are still marginalised. In addition, Uchem outlines the reasons why there is a need for re-examination of what Jesus' life has accomplished. She comments that many still justify women's subordination on the grounds of tradition, culture and a literal reading of the Bible. Furthermore, she argues that the maleness of Jesus has been used to rationalise women's exclusion from ritual and political leadership in the Catholic Church and in the Igbo culture. Uchem (2001:208) concludes by the following:

Because of the resurrection, we can no longer evoke the symbol of the maleness of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, as a basis for discriminating against women. Neither can we appeal to the maleness of the 'twelve' of Christ, which as Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza points out, is a distinct group among the apostles. The resurrection of Jesus is the decisive event in the Christian story, and baptism is our means of participating in Jesus' transcendence of sex and ethnic limitation.

Hinga (1992:190) discusses the images of Christ in Africa and their implications for women. Firstly, she sees Christ as the personal saviour and personal friend of those who believe in him. Africans perceive Christ as somebody who accepts them and who is a friend of the lonely, healer of those who are spiritually or physically sick. It is this concept that African women have about Christ that is the most popular because of the following reasons: African women need such a personal friend the most, the one who take the women's side which is the side of the oppressed, so that He can become meaningful to them in terms of understanding their context. Indeed, women find themselves in a unique situation that needs Christ to help them to bear their grief, loneliness and suffering in a comforting manner.



The second popular image of Christ among the Africans as discussed by Hinga, is the one she calls blending Christology with pneumatology, which is the most popular image in the independent churches. On this topic, she says that Christ is seen as the embodiment of the Spirit, the power of God, who also empowers those who follow Him. Indeed, this concept also attracts many women followers because they find this image of Christ useful due to the fact that he becomes the voice to the voiceless, the power to the powerless. When the Spirit of God fills women, they receive the power to undertake and accomplish the work that God has laid in their hearts. Indeed, Christ gives women the power to do mighty works and gives them the voice to speak for themselves. Spirit filled women become instruments in the hands of the Almighty to uproot all the evils of oppression and plant the spirit of unity in the body of Christ. Women are able to stand in solidarity and speak in one voice against everything that contradicts the scriptures in favour of one part of humanity. In order for the whole humanity to come to the same understanding that males and females are created equal by God, women should continue to address this issue.

Another image of Christ as discussed by Hinga is the one of Christ as an iconoclastic prophet. Jesus stands out in the scriptures as a critique of the *status quo*, particularly when it engenders social injustices and the marginalisation of some in society. This prophetic ministry of Christ is regarded by many as still important today. This prophetic ministry encourages women to prophesy in their own situation with hope. This is the hope that empowers women not to give up on the church and its practices. Regarding their own power to prophesy, they are able to envisage a brighter future even if it is still at a distance. This is the hope that makes them persist, as they feel as though they are already in their promised land (the place where they will be able to be and become what God intends for them in this life).

Remarking on the maleness of Christ, Abbey (2001:152) says that Christ in most pictures in Africa is not only masculine; He is white, with blond hair and blue eyes. According to Abbey, God is incarnated in the male form not to show that God is male, but rather in order to change society's attitude towards the oppressed –the poor, the sick and women– through His own attitude towards them. She continues to believe that when Christ laid down His life, He was actually acting as a woman.

Edet (1992:37) addresses the revolutionary issue that Jesus brought to Christianity and African women's rituals. According to her, Jesus did not torture, segregate or demand that women should participate in purification rites. In fact, Edet foresees that if these rituals are continued in their traditional forms, then the Word has no chance of being good news to African women in certain aspects of their lives. She argues that:

...the church should be interested in women's rituals as a means of understanding the mentality of African women, because rituals show us that the true person, the spiritual person, is not given, is not a result of a natural process; rather, she is "made", in accordance with models revealed by divine beings and preserved in myths and rituals.

Edet appeals to the churches to recognise that women are both part of the People of God and also of the body of Christ.

According to Edet, women's range of movements are restricted and reduced by human sinfulness, which has created structures in which some people have domination over others. For this reason, she proclaims that women should be responsible for moving forward and should reaffirm the revelation in terms of their liberation and having been created in the image of God, accords them an equal status with men. Therefore, men and women should be united in the community of all who believe in Christ and women should behave like sensitive and thinking individuals who have received the message of salvation and who can effectively proclaim that message to all humanity.

Dube (Njoroge & Dube 2001:3-9) recounts the story involving two females: one, a young girl, another, an adult woman in Mark 5. This was the story of Jesus called to the house of Jairus to heal a little girl who was at the point of death. While Jesus was on His way to Jairus's house, an unnamed woman who had been suffering from bleeding for a period of twelve years delayed Him. This woman was not even discouraged upon seeing that Jesus was in the crowd, for she was determined to be healed. The woman touched the clothes of Jesus, after which she was instantly healed. While Jesus was still busy enquiring, "who touched my clothes? (Mark 5:30), a report came that the daughter of Jairus was dead. Jesus encouraged Jairus to have faith and they continued to his house, where Jesus took the hand of the dead girl saying, "Thalitha Cum," which means "little girl, get up!" Miraculously, she then rose up. There are a few ways in which this story relates to Jesus

and an African woman; according to Dube, the woman and the young girl had been freed to explore and pursue the professions of their choice. Therefore, this is empowering for African women who are nameless, without professions and associated with illness in their societies.

Furthermore, Dube points out that Jesus' readiness to travel to Jairus' house to bid the little girl to rise is an assurance to African women theologians that He supports their quest for self-empowerment and the redistribution of power. Dube encourages African women to touch Jesus and to approach other places of power, thus asserting their right to be treated with dignity. She urges women who are as sick as the little girl in many houses and are at the point of death, to struggle to touch the garments of power and to redirect and redistribute that power.

Musopole (1992:198) asserts that Christianity in Africa sends out the message that there is a dominant sex and a subservient sex (1992:198). She regards the myth of creation found in Genesis 2:18 to be central to this culture of domination and subordination and according to her, the Bible continues to announce that a woman stole the fruit that God had told them not to eat (Genesis 3:6-7), and since then, the woman has been called a sinner. In addition, Musopole notes that most preachers and missionaries told Malawian men that women are sinners. Consequently, women feel a need to read and study the Bible and find its meaning for themselves.

Musopole (1992), as the Bible Studies leader and preacher in the Presbyterian church of Central Africa (1983-1986), felt the need to study and discuss women in the Bible with other women. What they discovered was that God dealt with women through divine-human communication that focussed on acts of love and protection; indeed, God has called women to positions of leadership and given them the Holy Spirit and he continues to do so even today.

African women's daily activities are affected by the way they understand the Bible as they view it as the authoritative and infallible word of God and it is difficult task to separate the authority of culture and of religion. Now that women have agreed to live by the Bible, it becomes an enormous task to make a distinction between their lifestyles and what the culture demands. African women theologians deal with the same issues as

feminist theologians as mentioned above. The way that African women theologians read the Bible is different from the way feminist theologians read, the former read the Bible through cultural eyes.

### 2.2.3 South African women theologians and the Bible

The church is mostly silent on gender justice issues, including the violence meted out to women (Haddad 2003:149-159). While addressing the issue of gender violence, HIV and AIDS and the South African church, Haddad is concerned about the unequal power relations that exist between men and women, about which the church is silent. She points out that this dilemma is perpetuated by the external constraints exercised by the church. She states further that rural women are severely constrained in terms of challenging oppression in the church. Speaking of calling the church to account, Haddad (2003:162) points out that:

An engendered theology requires a critical social analysis of the patriarchal nature of theology whether traditional, contextual, or liberationist. It needs to be cautious and critical in its use of the Bible as both a source of oppression and liberation for women. Furthermore, it needs to take seriously voices of women both in communities and the academy and be willing to seek out new approaches and categories that reflect the current crises facing our country.

Masenya (1996) writes about an African woman's liberation perspective in the South African context while interpreting Proverbs 31:10-31. Writing from the view point of the South African woman's context, Masenya is able to differentiate between what feminism and womanism addresses respectively. Importantly, Masenya proposes a *bosadi* (womanhood) perspective, an approach that is relevant to African women's liberation perspective.

According to Masenya, a *bosadi* perspective investigates what ideal womanhood should be for an African-South African woman Bible reader. This approach includes the following:

- A critique of the oppressive elements of African culture manifested in women's lives, while reviving aspects that uplift the status of women.

- A critique of the oppressive elements of the Bible, while highlighting the liberative elements, Masenya contends that although the Bible is a product of patriarchal cultures, it does contain liberative elements, if read from a woman's liberation perspective.
- The interplay of post-apartheid racism, sexism, classism, and African culture as significant factors in the context of an African-South African woman, factors that in one way or another shape her reading of the Bible.

The researcher agrees with Masenya when she contends that though black women form the vast majority of the membership of the church, men interpret the Bible to them. They cannot be ordained as ministers according to the traditional views of the natural inferiority of women and their tendency to be impure (through natural bodily emissions). It is however, encouraging to recognise the change, which is taking place because of increasing pressure from women, who are no longer willing to be judged or viewed through the eyes of men, and through women empowerment emphasised by the present post-apartheid government's constitution.

Masenya (2005:748-749) acknowledges the role that the Bible continues to play in the lives of African –South African women in their struggle for liberation and survival. In agreement with what she states is the positive role that the Bible plays in the lives of African – South African women, Masenya (2005:748) asserts:

African–South African women continue in faith, to experience the power of the risen Christ confirmed in their everyday lives. It is the power that enables them to cast out demons, to heal the sick and to proclaim liberation to those who are in bondage. These women are humbled by the belief in the Christ who identifies with those at the margins of society: the poor, women, Gentiles, et cetera.

The women mentioned in the Bible are excellent examples of the negative influence religion can have on women's lives and the miseries that patriarchal religion can cause (Landman 2001:84). Landman argues that if there is anything that is a source of oppression of women, it is the patriarchal nature of the Bible. She suggests that South-African women theologians today can change the status of women, unlike those women in the Bible who had no voices.

LenkaBula (2008:2) points out that the churches that have contested the basis for allowing women's participation in all spheres of ecclesial life have tended to justify their stance by appealing to theology and referring to the Bible. She declares that this is done through life-denying texts that advance violence and are used to justify the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the church. LenkaBula (2008:7) expresses her viewpoint in this way:

The contradictions that are embedded in the Bible and in particular in Pauline theology have, in many instances, resulted in conflicting views and contestations between what is and what should be done in the church in relation to women's ministry. It is interesting, however, that despite of other biblical texts that supports the full participation of men irrespective of their social position in the Bible ( such as Joel 2:28), there are still those who hold on to women's exclusion from full participation in the ministry on the basis of the Word of God.

South African women theologians are also contributing to the argument that the misinterpretation of the Bible and the position of women in the Bible are the main contributing factors regarding the exclusion of women in the leadership roles of the church. The church and society are continually challenged regarding their stance concerning women ordination and leadership roles in the church. Importantly, in the pursuit of liberation and justice, different theologies and ideologies have been developed to address the *status quo*, hence the need for the development of the *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective to transform the discrimination of Vhavenda women in the leadership roles in the church.

The way the Bible is viewed by women from the above perspectives is an indication that the approach and the context of interpretation of the Bible are crucial factors in its impact on the lives of women. From the above women's perspectives on the Bible, it is clear that the misunderstanding concerning the ordination of women is the result of what is called the patriarchal nature of the Bible and its sexist interpretation.

To sum up what was said above, regarding African -South African women theologians, and the problem biblical discourses with which African women are battling in their daily lives, is that powerful discourses of control do a lot of harm in the lives of women and

hold the power to place people according to ranks, status or class. A few examples of these powerful discourses will suffice as others are already mentioned above:

- A well known powerful religious discourse is “God created men to control women.”.
- Another discourse that is also very dangerous is “men are stronger and thus superior to women.”
- Related to the above-mentioned discourse is “women are inferior and subject to men.”

In whatever way possible, African- South African women want to obey the scriptures, but they also want to raise an awareness of the impact of these powerful discourses that cause a lot of harm in their lives. A way of achieving this would be by engaging the Bible in order to find alternative discourses that encourage partnerships between men and women in the church.

It is true that the Bible has also served as an empowering tool to women, but when applied to life’s experiences, it is seldom viewed in this manner. For this reason, this researcher deems it fit to look at some of the most powerful texts of the New Testament that are strongly used to subordinate women. There are many texts from the Bible that are mostly quoted and used as weapons against women, but for the sake of this study, the following are looked at:

- The creation story.
- 1 Corinthians 11: 3-10.
- 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35.
- 1 Timothy 2: 8-15.
- Ephesians 5:22-24.

### **2.3 THE CREATION STORY**

In this section, the creation story is going to be looked at and reinterpreted from the perspectives of women as one of the problem texts from the Bible that feed the discourses that hinder the leadership development of women.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis1: 27).

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”...So the Lord God caused man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man’ (Genesis 2: 18, 21-22).

### **2.3.1 Feminist theologians and the creation story**

Niditch (1998) discusses the first creation account when God created male and female in his image, that God created them without establishing relative rank or worth of genders, but indicated that humankind is found in two varieties, male and female and this humanity in its complementarity is a reflection of the deity. In addition, Niditch (1998:16) supports the idea that the second creation account has been more influential than the first one in Genesis 1:27 in shaping and justifying attitudes toward the treatment of women when she states that Jewish and Christian traditions postdating the Hebrew Bible and a long history of Western scholarship have viewed a woman’s creation in Genesis 2 as secondary and derivative-evidence of her lower status.

The second creation account contains the most powerful verse that is used to oppress women and it is especially used during church marriage ceremonies. It is used to indicate that women are created to be the helpmates of men and are created in the second place to fulfil this purpose.

According to Zikmund (1985:22), the fact that woman was created in the second place, out of Adam, was treated as evidence that she was inferior to man and in the minds of many, she was not only different from him, she was subordinate and evil. On this note Zikmund (1985:23) adds that:

Sometimes a hierarchical interpretation of woman’s fallen or secondary place in creation and redemption was defined positively. Women were different. Out of weakness and sinfulness women showed forth the amazing power of God’s grace. If God could save women, God would surely save men. In her secondary status, woman played a special role in God’s creation.



In summary, the above-mentioned feminist theologians, expose the impact that religious discourses have on the lives of women. The discourses that emerge clearly in their writings are:

- The most popular one is because a woman was created second to a man, therefore, “a woman is inferior”
- Another discourse is that “a woman is weak.”
- Another discourse which is powerful is “a woman is sinful and evil.”

These powerful religious discourses have a negative impact on the lives of women. In the church, women are denied leadership positions mainly because of the impact of these controlling religious discourses.

### **2.3.2 African women theologians and the creation story**

Regarding the account of the first creation story in Genesis 1, Eboh<sup>5</sup> thinks if this version can be adopted in practical terms, most problems encountered today in society would be greatly reduced. She states further that:

There would be no male chauvinism; no women liberation movements; and no feminists extremists would take lesbianism as a way of asserting their total independence from men; certain obnoxious widowhood practices would cease; divorce would be reduced to barest minimum; women would play their motherly natural roles of love and affection in the family without any more feelings of marginalization.

She argues that there will be mutual respect based on gender equality in homes, and children brought up in this harmonious atmosphere would be responsible, godly and considerate; society at large would be transformed.

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<sup>5</sup>Eboh M Pauline, Theological sources of male domination: An ethical appraisal- Unpublished paper.p.5

Christians use Genesis 1 (one) as a text that indicates humans as created in the image of God. For those who use the scripture to subordinate women, this verse is not useful because they think women were not created equally with men. They prefer to use the second creation story. This is done because the argument is that “if a woman was created from man, then men and women are not equal.” This powerful discourse persisted for many generations of the church and is still upheld without being challenged in the lives of many today.

Eboh (Unpublished paper: 6) supports this idea as follows:

It is on this second version of creation that those who uphold the superiority of the male folk base their argument. According to them being made from man’s rib, woman was made from man and for man. Supposing the doctrine of the rib is correct, Is it not significant that the Lord God took a rib from man’s side, and not a bone from either his head or his feet? This implies that God intended that man and woman should walk side by side as partners in progress. If woman were originally meant to be under man’s feet, the bone in question would have been either the tibia or the fibula, but not the rib. Jesus highlighted God’s intention further when he said that at the beginning God made human beings both male and female so that a man should leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall become one flesh- identity in difference.

According to Eboh (unpublished paper), before marriage women think they are marrying their best friends, only to find that those best friends have changed from friends to lords. In the process, men regard their women as their subordinates. She proposes that if the first creation account was correct, the second account, which is the anthropomorphic view or creation by work, should be de-emphasised. She suggests that there should be a situation in which the independence of the genders is equal, their dependence mutual and their obligation reciprocal, that is where equal opportunities will prevail for both men and women.

On behalf of her beloved women of Africa, Oduyoye (1990:4) confronts the misinterpretation of Genesis 2 in her long struggle with patriarchy and colonialism in the following way:

The literary form of Genesis 2 has been the occasion of many interpretations that have destroyed the partnership of man and woman as the image and likeness of God. If the church is the body of Christ or the people of God, then all the

members of the body work toward the betterment of the whole body. All are necessary and the dysfunction of one organ incapacitates the whole body.

The creation account causes heated arguments when it comes to hierarchy in the order of creation. Some think that because man was created first, then he is superior and because a woman was created from man, then she is inferior. In addition, Oduyoye (1990:4) challenges certain church practices:

The present malaise in the church might be due to the fact that it has refused to allow women to function normally in the church but has reduced them to all-purpose workers, for example, fund-raisers and rally-organizers. As such the feminine image of God is overshadowed and is not utilized by the church or by humanity in most cases. This is the situation that prompts the special attention we wish to call to women's lives in the midst of Africa's realities.

This argument presents a special kind of challenge to the body of Christ. Oduyoye (2007:8) calls this second creation story a "spare-rib" myth, and this is how she puts it:

Christians have held on to the 'spare-rib' myth of the making of a woman and used its disempowering interpretations to do untold violence to the humanity of women. They have savoured and swallowed the forbidden apple myth of the origin of sin and disobedience in human nature.

Oduyoye (2007:8) states that the "spare-rib myth" and "apple myth" does not contribute to improving women's humanity, instead it entrenches the *status quo* in a way that men cannot be held accountable for the pain they inflict on women.

Nakawombe (1996:45) points out that from the beginning, there was a distinction inherent in the idea of man, the human personality was found in either a male or female form. Thus, both man and woman shoulder the joint responsibility. She states further that Genesis 1 gives no reason to doubt that both males and females are created in the image of God.

Furthermore, Nakawombe (1996) argues that although the woman is taken from the man, he played no part in her creation, nor did he even witness it. She feels that alleging that a woman is inferior because she was made from his substance, questions his innate superiority, for he was made from the dust of the ground. She thinks that gender stereotypes have become institutionalised within broader society and the church. She

argues that the myth of the helpless woman in need of protection and direction together with a distorted theology of self- denial have kept many women in a subordinate state, and to some extent, have rendered some satisfied to be there.

The first creation account indicates that both male and female were created in the image of God and given similar responsibilities concerning the creation. Therefore, in God's eyes, both man and woman occupied the same status. The fact that man was the first one mentioned does not mean that he is superior to a woman.

The researcher supports Assemblies of God (USA) Position paper (2004) that asserts that the word *ezer* (helper) is never used in the Hebrew Bible with a subordinate meaning. It is used seventeen times, and refers to God as the helper. Instead of being created as a subordinate, Eve was created to be a "suitable" (*kenegdo*) helper, or one "corresponding to" Adam. This paper also argues that physical differences and distinctive biological functions are obvious; but it is only by implication, that gender distinctions can be made to suggest leadership limitations.

Based on what has been said above concerning the two creation stories in the book of Genesis, it is clear that these women are contending that religious discourses are disempowering women in terms of their status as leaders. In effect, these discourses can be summarised in the following manner:

- Women are not equal to men
- Women are inferior to men.
- Women should be silent in the church

These discourses need to be de-constructed in order to find an alternative for women's inferiority and men's superiority. This study will concentrate on dispelling this perceptions concerning women in chapter 4 from a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective.

## **2.4 NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES ON WOMEN**

### **2.4.1 Feminist theologians' views on the New Testament scriptures on women**

#### **2.4.1.1 I Corinthians 11: 3-10**

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head-it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. (Bible: New International Version)

This text suggests that both men and women were praying and prophesying in the church, with their heads uncovered. In this regard, Paul objects when women pray with their heads uncovered. Assuming that the purpose of worship is to magnify God's glory, Paul argues that the prophesying man as God's image and glory does not need to cover his head, whereas the prophesying woman as man's glory must be covered, lest God's glory be overshadowed by man's in worship (Wire 1994:177). Here, Wire argues that the women in the Corinthian church were particularly powerful regarding their praying and prophesying and some men saw this as a competition between expressing God's glory when they prayed or prophesied and their own glory, which they saw reflected in the women prophets' uncovered heads.

Bassler (1998: 416) asserts that Paul presents the implications of the issue touching both women and men in a balanced way, but concedes that it is unmistakably clear that this view is problematic for women and not men. Therefore, she suggests that there should be knowledge of the cultural context of this text in order to evaluate the precise meaning of the women's actions, whether the Jewish or Greek customs regarding veiling, prevailed in the church or whether the veiling practices applied to a public or private space. Those above questions are some with which she was battling.

Men are also praying in this church, but seemingly, there was no problem with the fact that their heads were uncovered. This shows that for men it was acceptable behaviour for them not to cover their heads. Women were also praying with uncovered heads like the men, but for them this behaviour was wrong.

The reason given for this discrimination against women is that Christ is the head of every man and the man is the head of a woman, while God is the head of Christ (11: 3; NIV). Regarding the word “head,” Bassler argues that here it means “source” and not rank or authority. Bassler suggests that concerning the relationship between men and women, Paul is basing his argument on the story of the creation of Eve from Adam’s ribs in Genesis 2 and not the specific relationship between husband and wife. Bassler indicates that if Paul is not suggesting a hierarchical relationship between man and woman, he does clearly suggest that the man is closer to the godhead than the woman. (11:3). “1 Cor. 11:3 “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (The Holy Bible:NIV, 1998).

Bassler notes that Paul does not deny that women are created in God’s image, but neither does he affirm it. According to Bassler, the silence of Paul in this regard is significant. When Paul states that a woman is (only) the reflection of man, he is referring to her derivative and secondary status and then he confirms this by insisting with emphatic parallelism that a woman was created from and for the sake of man, and not *vice versa* (11: 8-9).

According to Bassler (1998:417), Paul is not arguing against women praying and prophesying. The issue he is addressing is related to the dress code in terms of how to dress in the church. Seemingly, it was a well-known practice in those days. Bassler (1998:417) explains this as follows:

It is the veils that are at issue here, but veils are a highly symbolic article of dress. All the participants in this ecclesial drama were acutely aware of this. It is perhaps not surprising then that it was not the uncontested assumption of functional equality that prevailed in the later church, but the message of secondary, derivative status conveyed by the firmly re-imposed veils.

The questions that Bassler poses about the cultural context of women's actions concerning head covering seem to be answered when she indicates that people in that church were acutely aware of this drama. If this was a cultural practice as Bassler suggests, did women then have any problem with it or do women now have a problem with this practice? It is difficult to find out how women felt about this matter and whether they responded positively or negatively. Either women's views were not recorded or it was not important to hear their perspective. The question may rightly be asked: does their silence have any effect on Christian practices concerning women today?

#### **2.4.1.2 I Corinthians 14: 34-35**

1 Corinthians chapter 11 reports that women were engaged in praying and prophesying. The inclusion of these verses in the text of Paul's letter is particularly unfortunate, for their strong wording affects the way the rest of Paul's comments on women are interpreted (Bassler 1998: 418). How could women exercise their gifts of prophesying and praying without speaking?

In this regard, Bassler (1998:418-419) makes a number of comments regarding this dilemma, namely that:

- The praying and prophesying described in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 were done in the home, while silence was imposed on women in the church.
- Prophesying is a normal practice on the church, while prayer can also be exercised in the home. However, nothing in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 suggested a domestic setting.
- Some see a contrast between inspired speech in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, which Paul permits, and inspired chatter in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, which he does not.
- Others assume that Paul applies the command of silence to married women, while granting the holy, unmarried in 1 Corinthians 7: 34 the right to participate actively and vocally in worship.

The silence of women in the church denies women the chance to become pastors and to preach because it will be impossible for them to hold such positions when they are silent. The fact that the author of 1 Corinthians chapter 14 spends so much time and effort on pressing for the silence of women suggests that the actual and accepted practice entailed that women were active and vocal and that the author was attempting to change this

behaviour (Dewey 1998:446). Dewey contends that the author is asking women to behave in such a way that they give no offence to the men in power and that they should conform to the values of the dominant pagan culture. One way of deconstructing this passage, is suggested by Dewey who argues that the author refers to the creation story as a justification of women's subordination; Adam was created first and then Eve. More importantly, it was Eve, not Adam who was deceived. Indeed, the creation story found in Genesis 2: 15, is still used to justify male supremacy regarding the order of creation.

To counteract this argument, Dewey (1998) argues that Christians are a new creation in which sin is overcome and in which there are no males or females (Galatians 3: 28). Furthermore, she indicates that for Paul, while the subordination of woman to man was part of the old order of creation it was not part of the new creation in Christ and contradicts the assumptions of Paul and other early Christians. Significantly, Dewey does not believe Paul to be the author. She views this passage as an interpolation (a later addition). Dewey (1998:447) asserts that injunction for silence in church is not a command from Paul valid for all the time; rather, it is the view of an author (not Paul) or one Christian group on how they would like to see women behave.

In contrast with Dewey who does not support the view that Paul is the author, Wire (1994:186) contends that Paul is very much the author of this passage that silences women in the church. Wire (1994:186) contends that those who think that Paul could not be so inconsistent try unsuccessfully to show that he was dealing with different women (all women/ married women) or different types of rhetoric (prophesying/ teaching) or different settings (small gatherings/ full churches). According to Wire, there are serious issues that are often overlooked; such as the likely possibility that Paul develops his argument as the letter proceeds, increasing restrictions on women's worship participation until he feels able to demand their silence. The other problem is the fact that Paul has already identified women's prophesying and praying as controversial in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Another reason is that Paul's rule about women's silence in worship fits the immediate context well, being no different in form from the preceding two rules about those who speak in tongues and prophesy in 1 Corinthians 14:26-35.



Importantly, the two or three sentences silencing women have been found to be so offensive in our time that many scholars argue that they were not written by Paul or are peripheral to his argument in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 or 36 Wire 1994:186. Dewey remarks that this passage has been used in churches throughout the centuries to forbid the religious leadership of women and to insist that the only permissible role for a woman is that of wife and mother. According to 1 Timothy 2:15, women are supposed to achieve salvation by means of childbearing. What would happen if a woman is unable to bear children, would this mean that she was not going to be saved? This poses a problem regarding the New Testament teaching on salvation, because the New Testament does not make any distinctions concerning gender.

Importantly, Dewey (1998:447) supports the idea of finding an alternative to this argument. She states that:

- The New Testament witnesses to a variety of lifestyles for women and to their prominent leadership positions in churches (see I Corinthians 7; 11; Romans 16). This passage is only one of several New Testament views on women.
- There is no reason why its prescriptions should be binding while other New Testament views are not binding. Indeed, perhaps alternatives to this passage have a greater claim on Christians.

Wire (1994:186) contends that many scholars who concede that a copyist moved these verses to the chapter's end, nonetheless try to argue that Paul could not have written these two or more verses or that he did not mean what they say, because they do not fit into Paul's argument. Furthermore, she argues that those who assert that Paul could not be so inconsistent in this letter as to allow women to prophesy with covered heads and then forbid them to speak, try to prove that he was dealing in each case with different women. Indeed, 1 Corinthians chapter 11verse 15 is addressed to all women attending a small gathering who were prophesying. In addition, 1 Corinthians chapter 14: 34 addressed married women on the topic of teaching in the full church; therefore, it is meant for an entirely different setting from that mentioned in 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

### 2.4.1.3 1 Timothy 2:8-15

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.” (The Holy Bible: New King James Version (NKJV), 1984).

Maloney (1994:361) asserts that the pastoral letters- 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy and Titus- are the most revealing because nowhere else does one find so much concentrated attention devoted to women’s roles in early Christian communities. Here, almost alone in the Christian New Testament writings, women actually take centre stage from time to time, however, the feminist criticism revealed in these letters makes them both frustrating and depressing for the Christian woman who reads them (Maloney 1994:361). Maloney maintains that it is an error to approach these texts assuming that their point of view, however extreme and their expression, however shrill, are authoritative because they are divinely “inspired.” Maloney(1994:361) contends that:

How is it possible to approach the Pastoral letters in a way that will, without doing violence to them, render them productive for insight rather than destructive in practice? There is no point in making another attempt to put the best face on them, as if their intent were benevolent and only we as readers were at fault in our perceptions. There is no doubt that the author of these letters had an agenda, and that agenda didn’t include fostering the advancement of women, whatever their class or rank, nor of slaves, male or female. The point of view is andocentric and patriarchal almost to the point of absurdity, and there precisely, is the chink in the armor.

Maloney prefers to take up the position, however, that no text that is destructive of the human and personal worth of women (or anyone) can be the revealed word of God. Concerning the Pastorals, she assumes that the author was addressing women in communities that were well organised, where women who preached, taught, prophesied, travelled, presided at worship, were powerful, intelligent and active leaders in their local communities.

#### **2.4.1.4 Ephesians 5: 22-27**

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (The Holy Bible:NIV, 1998).

Throughout history, the household codes and other key biblical texts have played a foremost role in silencing or marginalising women in the church. (Tanzer 1994:325). Based on what Tanzer has said, women in churches interpret this text in many different ways. The ministry of some women is limited because of the misunderstanding of these kinds of passage and the underestimation of the way in which they are used against them. The headship of the man has been interpreted differently in different contexts, which has done more harm than good in the lives of women.

Johnson (1998:430) points out that, according to both the Greco-Roman and Jewish ethicists, the head of the household was expected to perform all three superior roles of husband, father and master. Importantly, the performance of each role was informed by recommended responsibilities. Johnson considers this household code to be synonymous with cultural values, which are in line with the views of several Christian writers from the second and later generations who interpret the hierarchical duties of household members in terms of their own Christian perspectives. Johnson finds no logic in the argument when this teaching is compared to the relation that Christ has to the church. She points that the logic of this text collapses for these reasons: Christ died for the church and husbands do not die for their wives, Christ's love is self-giving whereas a husband's love is self-loving and husbands cannot be their wives' saviour. Without a doubt, based on the logic of this text, husbands do not qualify to be placed in the position of Christ. Notwithstanding the lack of logic driving this argument, the teaching that a man is the head has become the dominant teaching in the church. It needs to be noted that the message of this text can be read in terms of its socio- historical context and not only from a patriarchal perspective.

## 2.4.2 African women theologians and The New Testament scriptures on women

### 2.4.2.1 Ephesians 5:22-27

According to Masenya (2003), Ephesians 5 is preoccupied with male concerns. She feels that men find the biblical texts appealing as long as their interpretations help to endorse and entrench the *status quo*. In addition, she finds the literalistic reading of this text problematic because it entrenches patriarchal control in a marriage relationship. She also maintains that the women-unfriendly interpretation of the Bible paves the way for the control of women's bodies. Masenya (2003:19) rightly asserts that:

What is usually highlighted in the interpretation of Ephesians 5 is the subordinate position of women *vis-à-vis* the headship of men as though that was part of the original preoccupation of this text. This would not have been the case as the early readers of this text knew that the patriarchal *status quo* of the Greco-Roman era dictated that husbands should be heads of families and wives should be their subordinates.

Based on what Masenya is saying, the literalistic reading of this text has contributed in silencing women. Christian men hold the view that to be a "head" means to rule the lives of women with undemarcated power and unquestionable authority. This kind of reading is succeeding in creating the view that women are inferior.

Assuming that it is true that "headship" means "rulership," and that women are supposed to be objects, then in the context of Ephesians chapter 5, a husband would be the head of his own wife and not of other men's wives. According to this assumption, the understanding is that a husband is the head in terms of a family set-up and not in the church. Importantly, in the church, men and women are both part of one body whose Head is Christ. If men still want to have the old boss mentality regarding their headship, they should exercise their authority at home and not in the church.

Similarly, if wives have to submit to their husbands in the same way as the church does to Christ, namely voluntarily and willingly, then it should be by choice and because they want to. The church responds this way because of its love for Christ and not because any kind of force is exerted. Unfortunately, husbands are not ready yet to exhibit or practice this kind of sacrificial love, yet they expect women to sacrifice themselves.

It is not surprising to find the text used during wedding celebrations, more especially the texts teaching the newly-weds how to conduct themselves after marriage. This is a common practice in the black Pentecostal churches that teach those who are getting married what is expected of them. The welcoming will mostly focus on how wives should submit to their husbands in all matters, as they are the heads of the families. Scriptures such as Ephesians 5:22-27, would be quoted to support this teaching. Some women who hear this will respond by clapping their hands, nodding their heads and ululating, while others will support this kind of statement by saying “amen.”

The kinds of teachings that empower men to such an extent that they feel entitled to demand submission from their wives even when they are doing wrong does not do justice to women. This renders the woman powerless because the husband will be able to refer to what was said (sometimes, even by a woman for that matter), during the wedding ceremony. A woman who does not submit to her husband is shunned in the African-South African Pentecostal church setting. Moreover, it is seen as a major problem in her marriage if she is already being ostracised because of not submitting to her husband. In addition, if a husband abandons his wife for another woman, she is blamed, for men’s actions are blamed on women.

Regarding this kind of a dilemma, Masenya (2003:125-126) points out the need for a re-evaluation of this text from a women friendly perspective that exposes patriarchy in both the African culture and the church. In addition, the church should revisit the androcentric interpretations of the Bible critically by replacing them with empowering life-giving ones.

Okure (2001) views this text as part of the household code, which is based on an unredeemed culture that takes the gospel for granted that conveys the good news of Christ. Okure points out that the author of this text uses subjective language when the concept of ‘subjection’ is only emphasised in terms of a wife submitting to the husband. She adds that the analogy of the husband and Christ “does not hold water” as it is not addressed within the gospel perspectives. According to her, the author uses the cultural household code of his day to promote the subjugation of women to men. When deconstructing this text, Okure suggests that it should be discarded as it promotes the oppression and dehumanisation of women. In addition, man also suffers as a result of

this practice as he benefits from something that serves to make him both inhuman and un-Christly. She pronounces that love is what should govern both of them, which is the message of Christian teaching that the Bible spreads, and it is this genuine love that can sustain the marriage. In short, this is how she deconstructs the text:

- Both husband and wife suffer from the teaching of this text.
- Both husband and wife form one body in Christ.
- Both husband and wife should love one another with genuine love.
- It is not God's will for wives to contribute to their own self-destruction by subjecting themselves to inhuman treatment based on the false belief that it is God's requirement from them.
- Each partner should treat the other with the dignity and reverence that one owes to Christ.

## **2.5 THE BIBLE AND WOMEN'S ORDINATION**

The Bible has been and is still used to serve as a strong basis for the arguments used opposing women's ordination. This raises questions on what the Bible is really saying about women, whether it is true that it denies women the opportunity to be ordained or whether it does not say anything about ordination. "Because of its religious and cultural authority, the Bible has been one of the most important means by which woman's place in society has been defined" (Newsom & Ringe 1998: xix). Even ordinary people, who never set foot in the church, quote from the Bible when they want to discuss the nature of relationship between man and woman. On the issue of a text being insensitive to women's experience and questioning its authority, Zikmund maintains:

Today many biblical scholars believe that the specific context of interpretation matters. It is important to uncover the ancient circumstances that produced the text. It is also necessary to value the ways in which people of color, the poor, the aging, and women approach the Bible. These unique contexts enhance understanding and shape interpretation. In this current biblical study, it is almost as important to examine the contemporary situation of the reader, as it is to know the particular milieu that produced a text many centuries earlier (1985:22).

"The exclusion of women from full participation in the church has to a large extent been promoted by the contradictory and sometimes ambiguous messages from the Bible,

particularly some of Paul's teachings" (LenkaBula 2008:7). She comments as follows on Paul's contradictory messages:

On the one hand, Paul teaches that women should submit themselves to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24) and that they should be excluded from the authoritative roles in the church (1 Timothy 2:11). Yet, on the other hand, he affirms the importance of women's ministry and their support to the work of God (Romans 16:1-3, 6 and 12) as "fellow workers," as prophets and as people who have laboured alongside him in the gospel (2008:7).

Lenkabula asserts that the contradictions embedded in Pauline theology result in the church not knowing what to do in relation to women's ministry. Indeed, the uncomfortable truth is that women in the Bible were not treated as humans in their own time and their current visibility can be fully attributed not to Bible authors, but to the efforts of their twentieth century sisters (Landman 2001:83). Landman states that women should be able to do something about the *status quo* concerning women, if ever women are to be treated as human beings.

## **2.6 WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH**

### **2.6.1 Women and church practices**

Becker (1996:29-33) looks closely into the problems encountered by the staff of the Advent and Protestant churches respectively during an interview. She found that women are entering and assuming leadership positions in the church in great numbers but are struggling to remain there. At the centre of this exodus of women from the church leadership is the need to know why there is such a lack of leadership development on their side. Becker notes:

- Women in leadership positions must make compromises.
- Women get mixed messages from the church.
- In the patriarchal environment of the denominations, theology and language work against women.
- Issues of invisibility are the most common traps for women.
- Women in leadership positions burn out quickly. This is so because women work very hard and they cannot count on being rewarded for doing so. In fact, they may be punished for working hard and doing well, because their success makes men

uncomfortable. A contributing factor is that family concerns are still seen as primarily theirs and the family responsibilities are not shared equally by men.

Becker also postulates that the leadership styles of women were misunderstood and rendered ineffective, because people were more used to men than women. Based on her findings, it appears that women's leadership styles are expected to be the same as those of men. On the other hand, the church gives women a different message, namely, that they are completely accepted in the leadership of the church, however, the church remains a fundamentally male hierarchy.

Russell (1993:50) points out the ways in which the church structured the gifts of ministry so that some are set apart by ordination, served the need of the church for ordered leadership, but it has had disastrous effects in by producing class divisions between the "upper-class" clergy and the "lower-class" laity. Furthermore, Russell emphasises that the clerical structures of the church continue to reinforce the hierarchical and domination structures that she calls "status inconsistency." Russell comments that this is the case in spite of the fact that women are "upper-class" clergy, they cannot measure up to the role of sacred masculinity as women so they remain "third class" members because of their gender.

Russell (1993:52) lists three tensions found by Barbara Brown Zikmund regarding the current interpretations of ordination that are revealed in the recounts of those women who managed to find pastoral positions. The first is the tension caused by their need to function as clergy in a particular context while being asked to conform to the universal norm of what a clergyperson should do and be in a denomination. The second tension is between the emphasis on sacred rites associated particularly with the sacrament of communion and the ministry of the word, for ordination was done for the purpose of preaching and teaching, but now the offering of the Eucharist has come to signify the privilege of ordination in Protestants, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches. The third tension between the office and person of the ordained minister is increased in particular by the presence of women, because in terms of their office, women who are ordained, are granted the power to function as clergy, but as women, they have traditionally been denied access to the power of sacred masculinity that resides in clerical ordination.



The marginalisation of women in the church and in church history has demonstrated the ways in which the church participates in or colludes with structures of violence and discrimination when it excludes the women's ministry (LenkaBula 2008:7). Furthermore, LenkaBula asserts that the denial of the right of women to participate fully in the ministry is an insult to God who has created all human beings in His image. She states that the stance of the church, namely its refusal to allow women's participation is justified by appealing to theology and referring to the Bible. She argues that this is done by means of a literal interpretation of some biblical texts that are in fact, life – denying texts; in the process some churches depend on certain aspects of culture as well as the racialised patriarchal theology in South Africa to justify their position.

### **2.6.2 Women and church leadership**

Women in the churches are mainly engaged in teaching children and they are given this task because it is deemed less important than teaching the whole congregation. The male viewpoint of associating women with children, is still regarded a normal practice in many denominations. The reason is that children are viewed as non-problematic and easy to handle, consequently, there is no need for exercising power over them and pondering difficult decisions when working with them.

In some churches, women are given the task of leading other women. This task of a woman leading other women is very important considering the fact that a woman can understand issues pertaining to themselves better than men can. Surprisingly, women spend most of their times when they get together by speaking about and discussing men. Significantly, they fail to address equality issues regarding men; instead, they share ideas concerning how they can be good partners to their husbands. Scriptures like Ephesians 5:22-28, are usually cited to designate women's position in relation to that of men. In addition, women also teach each other to submit to their husbands, in the same understanding of what they have been taught.

It is also surprising to find a woman leader encouraging other women to endure domestic violence and remain silent in the church. Consequently, the question can be asked: is the church a building or does it consist of people? Those in leadership positions of the church, namely men, seem to welcome these teachings because they exalt men to a

situation where women are nothing and ironically, it is women who do this. The fact that women themselves propagate this message makes it an extremely challenging task to address this situation effectively. Women seldom see the importance of addressing their own issues and of interacting with their experiences in order to find their own identities. One of the reasons might be that women are not confident enough to be able to stand, understand who they are and be able to interrogate the harmful discourses that are disempowering.

### **2.6.3 Women redefining leadership**

Given the notion that women have not been afforded a fair chance to participate in leadership, calls for a thorough scrutiny on the question of leadership. Therefore, there is a need to redefine the concept of 'leadership' in such a way that it will encompass all people, irrespective of gender and social standing. Consequently, this definition should not be gender- biased but should view leadership as a role that is based on the potential of an individual rather than on cultural and traditional roles.'

The Assemblies of God (AGO) published a position paper (2003), which contributes to the redefining of the leadership role of women in the ministry. In this publication it is stated that:

In the early days of most revivals, when spiritual fervour is high and the Lord's return is expected at any time, there is often a place for, and acceptance of, the anointed ministry of women. Over time, however, concerns about organization and line of authority begin to emerge, and the group moves toward a more structured ministry. As institutional concerns come to the forefront, the spiritual leadership of women is accepted less readily, and church leadership becomes predominantly male. The experience of the Assemblies of God has been no exception to this progression (Assemblies of God (AGO) 2003).

The predominance of males in leadership positions has been discussed earlier on in this thesis. The above quote reveals another unbalanced definition of leadership. It is through these misguided concepts that the society, even the church community for that matter regarded leadership to be a male responsibility only. The Assemblies of God position paper further mentions that:

Twentieth century practice among Pentecostal around the world reveals evidence of a genuine struggle to apply biblical truth in various cultural contexts. In some settings, female spiritual leadership is readily accepted; in other, though women may have limited ministry, leadership posts are withheld from them. At times, there is inconsistency between the leadership a female missionary has at home and that which she has on the field, or between her opportunities and those of a national female. Indeed, culture has influence the extent of leadership a woman has been allowed to share. The church must always be sensitive to cultural concerns, but it must look to Scripture for the truth that applies to all times and cultures.

In a quest to redefine leadership, Russell (1993:31) states that the experience of new freedom leads to new responsibility for Christian women. In addition, Russell asserts that spiritual freedom comes with responsibility. Leadership is about taking responsibility for those tasks one has to fulfil. This presupposes that those man and women who are deemed fit in terms of leadership qualities, should be given the right to exercise this gift, based on their ability to assume responsibility for what they are doing.

Walligo (2002:93) writes about Bishop Kiwanuka who believed that the economic and political empowerment of women should begin with their social development for leadership. Expatiating on this statement, Walligo argues that people need to understand leadership as a practice that comes through empowerment. In addition, he explains that every leader, men included, can only be successful leaders when they are empowered. Therefore, when leadership is viewed within this context, then women can make good leaders when they too, are empowered.

Furthermore, Walligo (2002:93-94) raises an interesting issue with regard to leadership. He declares, “For a human community to be complete, it must have both males and females.” Consequently, the principle that includes both males and females in decision-making in the community is often ignored. Another aspect that needs attention in redefining leadership is the issue of decision-making. Thus, those who are drawn into the sphere of leadership should be skilled in decision-making to a certain extent.

## **2.7 AFRICAN WOMEN AND THE EXPERIENCE OF CULTURE**

Not only do people create culture, they are, in a sense, created by culture themselves, as it influences the ideas and actions of all humans in society in turn (Groothuis1994: 150). In

this regard, Groothuis describes culture as an outgrowth of our humanness, a consequence of our createdness and our creativity and a system of human behaviour that has developed in interaction with the worldviews of certain members of a particular society at a particular time in history.

Oduyoye (2007:17) asserts that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a distinction between culture and religion in Africa. Significantly, the African Christian often walks with one foot in the African religion and culture and the other in the church and Western culture (Kanyoro 2001:13). In addition, Kanyoro comments that it is part of their cultural and religions to undergo certain rituals during the birth of a child, the naming of a child, circumcision, puberty, marriage, drought and after the harvest. Importantly, to African people, culture is more important than the word culture itself. Oduyoye (2007:3) points out that there is a culture that debases and a culture that enables as follows:

There are many sayings about women the wisdom of which is questionable as they do not lead to harmonious living and development of an individual's potential. These sayings aimed at subduing or marginalizing women constitute verbal violence. They target the intelligent of women, spreading unexamined assumptions about women's capacity for cognition.

### **2.7.1 African women and rituals**

In all African ethnic groups, one finds rituals that mark the peak moments in people's lives, for example, rituals that mark one's birth, naming, initiation into adulthood, marriage and death (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1992:40). According to Nasimiyu-Wasike (1992:40), these rites change one's position in society, since there are status distinctions in every society and each human individual is continually busy moving from one position to another during the course of his or her life. According to Edet (1992:25), women's rituals in Africa fall under ritual ideology, which aims at controlling, in a conservative way, the behaviour, the mood, the sentiment and the values of women for the sake of the community as a whole.

However, Edet considers rituals to possess both negative and positive aspects that not only promote but also hinder women's growth and development. This applies to childbirth rituals that she feels impart ritual impurity and guilt to the act of bringing forth

new life. In addition, it deprives the women of the nutritious meals they need after giving birth and it is harmful to her health, furthermore; the imposed segregation deprives women of the right of free movement and of the ability to seek medical or other needed help. Moreover, these rites create a sense of inferiority and self-depreciation; in fact, they subjugate women and deprive them of their self-worth. On the other hand, Edet (1992) also recognises the positive side of childbirth ritual, which she says is an occasion characterised by thanksgiving, joy and celebration, which gives the mother a sense of accomplishment and inclusiveness. Edet (1992:25) describes the rites of childbirth regarding women in the following manner:

The mystery of giving birth is the woman's discovery that she is on that plane of life, which amounts to a religious experience untranslatable in terms of masculine experience. It is not the natural phenomenon of giving birth that constitutes the mystery, but the revelation of the feminine sacredness that is the mystic unity between life, woman, nature and the divinity. This revelation is of a transpersonal order and is therefore expressed in symbols and actualised in rites. The young mother becomes conscious of a sanctity that emerges from the innermost depth of her being, and this consciousness, obscure though it may be, is experienced in symbols. It is in realizing and living this sacredness that a woman finds the spiritual meaning of her own existence; she feels that life is both real and sanctified.

Significantly, Edet describes the experience of giving birth as a religious experience and this is because it bestows a spiritual meaning on a woman's existence and she feels that life is something precious and hallowed. Accordingly, most of the rituals performed during this time focus on women

In general, African societies have more rituals for women than for men; perhaps this reflects their view of the greater spiritual strength of women (Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1992: 16). Oduyoye & Kanyoro argue that though these rituals enforce societal norms and ethics, they also reflect the status of women in society and the relationships that exist between men and women and the fact that many of these rituals are aimed at curtailing the strength of women unless it benefits men. In this regard, Oduyoye cites examples illustrating the status of women in the rituals, such as when men fail to complete the tasks or exhibit failure in other areas; this is blamed on women, for instance, on the wife's unfaithfulness or on the ritual impurity occasioned by contact with women or on women's lack of sexual fidelity.

Rituals also serve to determine the positions of people in the community. There are those who are denied certain roles intimating that they are less important than certain other people (see Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1992:19). They remark that in most of the rituals, women tend to be spectators, as they are deemed to be the ones who need to be purified through the ritual that is performed or they tend to be just there to add value to those who are the real benefactors by dancing and singing. This is a sign that “through its provisions for ritual, religion operates in the human community as a determiner of power, influence, domination and oppression” (Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1992:19). In addition, Oduyoye asserts:

This complex system of rituals makes a powerful statement to women about their self-worth and self-esteem. It is often an arena of intense passion, especially of fear, and hence an arena within which those in a weak position can with very little effort be made to give up their autonomy. If women more often than men find themselves in weaker roles in religion and ritual, they will require more attention if they are to be enabled and empowered toward full participation according to their innate abilities and acquired skills.

The responsibilities of women in rituals are very limited. In those rituals we think women are supposed to be more responsible and take the initiative, rituals such as the naming of a child and rituals surrounding widowhood, women still play a secondary role. When some rituals are performed, it is only when one asks “for whose benefit” does one realise that it has nothing to do with women themselves, but primarily only with men. A brief examination of these issues can enhance the understanding of important rituals and women in Africa and reveal to what extent these rituals are often accepted uncritically. For this reason, the ritual of birthing of a child and widowhood will be discussed in order to cast some light on this issue.

### ***2.7.1.1 The birthing of a child***

In African societies, the birth of a child is a process, which begins before the child’s arrival in this world and continues long after that (Mbiti 1969:110). Mbiti remarks that the birth of a child is a big event and that is not only remembered in terms of a particular date. It is rather the beginning of the process by means of which society transforms a

child into a social being, in which the community protects the child, feeds it, brings it up, educates it and incorporates it in many other ways into the wider community.

Among other African societies, the fact that a woman is about to give birth, will be given special treatment by the members of her household and even by the extended family and by members of her community. During pregnancy, certain social regulations are observed, as is the case among the Vhavenda tribes, where expectant mothers are forbidden to eat foods such as eggs to prevent her from experiencing a difficult birth.

Invariably, cultural practices were upheld to enhance the wellbeing of society, even if some members of the society did reap more benefits than others, and some were even completely marginalised' (Kanyoro 2002:60). According to Kanyoro, the rituals and creeds served to identify members of the community, and were the threads that connected people and gave them hope and affirmed their heritage. She argues that not all factors that are considered to be good for everyone in the community are understood by everyone and not everyone benefits from them. On the contrary, some are judged by them and some experience suffering and oppression under this very same system.

Furthermore, Kanyoro (2002:60-70) shares her personal experience after the birth of her son. Although she wanted to choose a name for her son herself, her father-in-law named the baby after himself in place of the one that Kanyoro had chosen. The father-in-law expressed his satisfaction with the boy being named after him, by declaring that he was ready to die because he would continue to live through his grandson. It is important to note that this naming system serves to preserve the family genealogies orally and also to maintain the moral cohesion in a society. According to Kanyoro, she has learned much from this ritual; for instance, she felt part of her new community in a way that she had not experienced before. From that time onwards, her name disappeared and she was only referred to as the mother of her son. In addition, she was now permitted to address her father-in-law and have discussions with him. Being included and accepted by the community was a good experience for her. Nevertheless, this experience that included the birthing and naming of her children, which Kanyoro found so liberating, did not protect her from the injustices that are done in the name of and under the authority of culture. Indeed, it needs to be reiterated that cultural aspects regarded as good by some people in

the community, because they benefit from them, are harmful to other members of the community.

Kanyoro (2002:70) reflects on her experience from which she learnt that a woman without a child is regarded as inferior and insignificant. In addition, she came to realise that without a child, the community suffers, just as the individual without a child suffers because she has not fulfilled the expectations of the community and the birth of a boy child is celebrated more than when a girl child is born. Regarding this personal experience Kanyoro (2002:70) makes the following comment:

To be negligent to the injustices that the culture does to barrenness is to accept injustice. The refusal of the culture to accept and accommodate single life is an injustice also. Not to recognise that it is women who are the targets of this injustice is to be insensitive to gender justice. What is required of cultural hermeneutics is to sift the good aspects of culture and religion and affirm them, knowing that there is room to reject what is bad.

In some African societies, marriage is not fully recognised or consummated until the wife has given birth to a child (Mbiti 1969:110). According to Mbiti, a first pregnancy therefore, becomes the final seal of marriage and a sign of the complete integration of the woman into her husband's family and kinship circle. We can just imagine how those married women feel who have never given birth to a child, no matter whether they were virgins when they were married or not. Despite the fact that her own family and that of her husband celebrate the fact that one was a virgin before marriage, that no longer counts if she fails to conceive and bear a child. Mbiti (1969:10) gives the following characterisation of a woman who fails to bear a child:

- She is an unhappy woman.
- Her failure to bear children is worse than committing genocide.
- She has become the dead end of human life.
- Nobody will be there to remember her after her death.
- She bears a scar that nobody can erase.
- She and her own relatives will suffer because of her barrenness.
- Her childlessness is the cause of own personal shame and humiliation for which there is no source of comfort in traditional life.



The pain that is suffered by a woman without a child is unbearable. In this regard, women who have the experience of giving birth sometimes exacerbate this emotional pain, by not being sensitive when cultural celebrations are held in their honour and do not care what the same experience means to the barren woman. The negative attitude exhibited by the community towards women who cannot bear children, causes considerable pain to such women. The fact that she is powerless to change the situation makes matters even worse, coupled with the realisation that she is held responsible for not bearing children, which renders her unimportant in the eyes of the community. The marriage of her husband to another woman who can bear children on her behalf, leads to even further humiliation. Furthermore, the pain that she will suffer when this other woman gives birth to a child makes it imperative for women to begin to reflect on these extremely crucial and urgent cultural issues.

Oduyoye (2007:17) speaks of the violence that is perpetrated against women in the name of culture. She refers specifically to the kind of violence that arises from the assumptions that the sexuality of women belongs to men. She remarks that women who have to spend the period ranging from puberty to menopause bearing and rearing children cannot contribute effectively to other meaningful aspects of life. In this regard, Oduyoye (2007:3) argues as follows:

The violence of exclusion over generations is what has put women on the margins of intellectually demanding professions and other activities. The presence in these fields of the new women who have had the opportunity is an indication of the injustice of being ruled by unexamined clichés.

The researcher concurs with Oduyoye when she says that in order to overcome violence, we need to examine all the aspects of our lives together – the social organisations we have created, the laws we have made, the philosophies and also, the religious beliefs and practices (2007:16).

### ***2.7.1.2 Female genital mutilation***

Akintunde (2007:88-108) views female genital mutilation as a harmful cultural practice for all women. She calls it a “socio-cultural gang against womanhood.” She contends that

men contribute to perpetuating this practice in the name of culture. In this regard, Akintunde (2007:101-103) addresses the following harmful cultural discourses based on female genital mutilation *inter alia*:

- Uncircumcised women harbour evil spirits.
- It prevents early pregnancy and complications during delivery.
- It preserves family honour.
- It enhances the sexual pleasure of a man.
- The head of a baby boy may not touch the clitoris, as it will die.
- If an uncircumcised mother delivers a baby girl, she will die.
- The clitoris is like a penis and girls should not have a penis.
- An uncircumcised girl is regarded as a slave.
- A woman should be infibulated and the vagina sutured to ensure she does not run after men when her husband is away.
- It is our tradition.
- It helps to preserve virginity, that is, it enhances a woman's chastity, honour and the necessary sexual sensitivity. In most African communities, virginity is an asset. Thus a virgin's parents collect more dowry.

Akintunde points out that female circumcision is used as a form of oppression and suppression of women employed by men to further their own means. She continues by adding that this is nothing less than a form of violence perpetrated against women aimed at subjugating women in the name of culture. She addresses the need for deconstruction of the above-mentioned harmful cultural discourses by offering the following pronouncements and suggestions:

- We call for the eradication of cultural aspects that inhibit the development of a positive identity of women and their participation in society.
- This is violence to women and is the manifestation of oppressive patriarchal values.

### 2.7.1.3 Lobola

Goxo (1997:81) addresses the issue of women being regarded as property in African marriages, which is a form of ownership. It is interesting to note that Goxo asserts that when Xhosa men choose a wife and pay *lobola* (bride-wealth) for her, this can lead to her being regarded as a commodity; they even speak of “buying” a woman. She says a man is free to choose as many women as he can, as this is an indication that he is a real man. In turn, the women who are chosen are expected to appreciate and be grateful for the fact that she has been chosen above others, therefore, she should show her gratitude through her obedience and considerateness. In fact, she should realise that he has done her a favour by choosing to marry her. No matter what happens to this woman, and this includes if she is disciplined in any way whatsoever, is expected to be stoical, uncomplaining and long-suffering. She may not speak of what has happened to her to anybody because *kuyanyamazelwa emzini* (one must be tolerant in a marriage homestead).

In support of what Goxo is saying about the meaning of paying *lobola*, Oduyoye (1995:136)<sup>6</sup> comments that during the initiation of marriage among the *Asante* people, it is inappropriate to call the exchange of nuptial gifts and services that takes place at several stages between the two families, a thank offering. Significantly, in the event of the dissolution of the marriage, these gifts have to be returned. Oduyoye contends that this is a cultural practice that dehumanises a woman, placing her in bond to culture (Oduyoye 1995:136). She adds that the practice is carried out by the father of the man giving the gift to the father of the woman, whereas it is never given to a woman. Furthermore, Oduyoye remarks that if this wife dies, the dead wife’s sister usually becomes her replacement and no more gifts are given. For this reason, she says that in effect, this form of marriage inevitably leads to the subordination of women in marriage.

Regarding the differentiation concerning the privileges of men and women, Masenya (2003:118,121-122) points out that, in a patriarchal culture, the man as the initiator of marriage, is expected to pay *lobola* to the girl’s family to obtain full control over her as his wife and also over her body. Masenya also refers to the similarities between the

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<sup>6</sup> See Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa-African women and patriarchy* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1995)

Jewish post-exilic culture and the Northern Sotho African culture regarding the control of the bodies of married women. Speaking from her background as a Northern Sotho African woman, she remarks that one of the similarities between both cultures is that the husband unilaterally controls the sexuality of married women because of the system of dowry (*lobola*) as it is used in both cultures. Masenya looks at *lobola* in a Northern Sotho context, and declares that the system of *lobola* can be regarded as a double-edged sword for women:

- On one hand, a woman for whom *lobola* has been “paid” tends to be respected by the community.
- On the other hand, the system helps to reinforce the patriarchal authority structure where the new household (particularly, the in-laws) may treat her in whatever way they wish. Masenya argues that for many women for whom *lobola* is paid today, there is this understanding that they have been bought.

### **2.7.2 African women and the language of proverbs**

People recall history and analyse culture in order to understand how we got where we are and to see where we are heading; however, where we actually go depends on what we decide to do or else we cease to be morally responsible agents (Oduyoye 1995:73). According to Oduyoye, proverbs are able to prescribe what a woman is. In dealing with the language of proverbs, Oduyoye is also able to distinguish between proverbs that dehumanise people and those that assert the dignity of all human beings. She recommends that the positive proverbs should be used to counteract the sexist maxims and to promote mutuality and reciprocity in community relations.

Oduyoye (1995:55) describes proverbs as short, popular, often used pronouncements that use plain language to express some practical truth based on experience or observations, and they restate themes that appear in ethical and moral teaching. People refer to what is said by proverbs for they are meant to convey a message to the recipient. If a person knows the language that certain people speak, but does not know their idiomatic expressions and proverbs, that person will be a stranger to the language. Indeed, proverbs are rich in meaning and teachings and while they can be constructive, they can also be destructive. ‘If handled properly, “proverbs serve as a source of community wisdom and

socialization, creating and reinforcing the image of an undifferentiated mass of humanity called “woman” and constituting a justification for her ascribed roles’ (Oduyoye 1995:60).

Proverbs also teach that men have to perform certain roles, while there are other roles that apply only to women. The characteristics and roles of women as experienced in society are not necessarily related to their biological nature; rather, they are the dictates of society and women learn to live with them (Oduyoye 1995:61). Society prescribes what is proper for a woman as well as what is not proper. People do what is proper and remain confined within the constrictions of what is proper. If one decides to step-out of the confinement, society is not ready to accept you.

According to Oduyoye (1995), proverbs that are used against women in terms of gender socialisation have had a number of negative consequences. They:

- Have resulted in high illiteracy rates.
- Are instrumental in creating lower educational levels and attainment for women in contrast with men;
- Are used as deterrents enjoining women not to attempt to reach the same heights with men;
- Teach women to be dependent on men:
- Have succeeded in fostering unnecessary dependency relations that leave “the thinking” to men and buttress the myth that women are ordained to perform supplementary roles, roles which are almost always subordinate or inferior;
- Have distorted the quality of human relations, and
- Continue to deny the parity between women and men, or to accept female and male as equivalent expressions of being human.

Masenya (2003:116-1170) uses the language of the proverbs from the Northern Sotho South African setting in addressing the issues pertaining to African cultural notions of womanhood. Masenya uses proverbs to illustrate that a married woman’s body and her sexuality no longer belong to her, but to her husband who married her, whereas the husband’s sexuality and his body belongs to him alone and can be shared with other

women outside marriage. In contrast, the fact that these proverbs reveal that women are expected to remain faithful to their husbands, serves as an indication that African proverbs play a vital role in shaping the lives of men and women. Consequently, it can be stated that proverbs are able to define the ideal state of womanhood from a cultural setting.

The powerful cultural discourses in this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- A woman who cannot bear children is a witch.
- A woman's sexuality belongs to a man.
- Uncircumcised women are ill-mannered.
- A woman should always be obedient to men because the man has paid lobola for her.
- A woman is subordinate to man as he is the head.
- A married woman is under the control of her husband.
- A woman cannot lead.

## **2.8 SUMMARY**

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the faces of religious and cultural discourses from the perspectives of women. Reflecting on the whole process in this chapter, religious discourses, which constitute themselves in binary oppositions as harmful discourses have been explored and described by feminist, African and South African women theologians who have different approaches as feminists read the Bible with “cultural eyes.”

Cultural discourses that are also problem discourses were also uncovered. These problem discourses revealed that they are used together with the religious discourses in the church to oppress women and deny them leadership opportunities in the church. Examples of these are:

- A woman cannot lead.
- A woman is subordinate to man as he is the head.

Both the religious and cultural discourses fed by the patriarchal nature of the church and the sexist interpretation of the Bible have impacted on the lives of women thereby undermining their leadership positions in the church.

## CHAPTER 3

### VIEWS OF MEN AND WOMEN ON THE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The aims of this study as stated in chapter one are threefold. The first aim is to identify and describe the impact that Christian religious discourses and African South-African cultural discourses have on the leadership development of women in the ministry. This will entail finding out whether there are religious and cultural perceptions that have an impact on the decisions churches are making that are working against the ordination of women in the ministry. In addition, it will be investigated whether culture plays a role in the church's argument against the ordination of women and whether the Bible has any influence on the decisions made by churches.

The second aim of this study is to determine the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the roles played by Vhavenda women in the ministry. In other words, which roles do women play in the church? Furthermore, what is the church saying about the roles women are playing and what are the women themselves saying, do they feel they are carrying out their ultimate purpose in life and are they fulfilling the church mission?

The third aim of this study is to develop a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective or approach to empowerment for women and other African women who are marginalised within the church parameters, so that they can be in a position to refuse to accept the religious and cultural constraints imposed on them. This was done by listening to the voices of women themselves and the intention was to see whether women knew what they wanted or whether they were not certain of what they wanted so that they could help themselves and others who might need that kind of help.

A qualitative approach with descriptive methods of data collection was utilised to realise the aims of this study. Data were collected through questionnaire, interviews and observations. The questionnaire was structured to answer the aims of this study and was divided into three parts. It was structured to elicit the following information:



- The impact of religion and culture on women in the church and the roles that women were playing.
- The road towards empowerment.
- What women said about themselves regarding the issues mentioned above that had a considerable effect on them.

Admittedly, the questionnaires and interviews were limited to the aims of this study and to that which the researcher deemed necessary to accomplish this purpose. However, they did present a rich collection of information on the experiences of women and issues about which the church is not yet ready to talk. Other women with similar experiences for both empowerment and reference can use these experiences and the voices of women.

### **3.2 QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEWS**

Men and women have different views regarding the leadership of women in the ministry. For this reason, both individual and group interviews were conducted to obtain the relevant information on the subject from different people. Data were generated through the usage of a questionnaire with tabulated questions that only concentrated on this study. In both the questionnaires and interviews, questions were structured in a simple and straightforward manner to avoid misunderstandings and avoid including misleading questions that could confuse the respondents.

Questionnaires were based on the set of questions set out in the introduction of this chapter. The questions were structured so that individuals could express their views freely, as they were permitted to make comments on the issues that interested them and were of concern to them.

In addition, interviews were conducted employing a set of both structured and unstructured questions. The unstructured questions were utilised to obtain follow-up information on responses that needed to be clarified or explained further.

### **3.2.1 The questionnaires**

Ninety (90) questionnaires were sent out, of which thirty (30) were posted to individuals; while sixty (60) were delivered by hand. Sixty-four (64) questionnaires were returned by forty-eight (48) women and sixteen (16) men. This number was deemed to be sufficient for the purpose of this study. All the women and men who responded to the questionnaires were black. The ages of the women varied between 24 and 74 years; while the ages of the men ranged between 32 and 66 years. The questionnaires were dated from April 2004 to November 2007. The sample of women who responded consisted of pastors, pastors' wives, members of the church not holding any leadership positions and church members holding leadership positions.

Twenty-six questionnaires were not returned. Some of the people who did not return the questionnaires were followed up and varying responses were received. One of the respondents who knew the researcher personally, laughingly referred to "these issues of women," but never returned the questionnaire. Others did not return the questionnaires because they claimed that they did not have the time. Certain others (both men and women) had to be reminded about returning the questionnaire as they had forgotten about it. For more information about the way the questionnaires were administered in this study, see paragraph 1.9.2.1.

### **3.2.2 The interviews**

Some of the people who completed the questionnaires were also interviewed. The interviews that lasted between one and three hours, attempted to cover all the issues raised in the questionnaires, as well as to fill in the remaining gaps in the information needed for this study. Some questions were structured in such a way that respondents were able to share both their own personal experiences as well as the knowledge they had of the subject under discussion. Of the thirty three (33) people interviewed, nineteen (19) of were women; while fourteen (14) were men. In addition, twenty-six (26) of the thirty-three (33) people interviewed belonged to the Pentecostal movements; whereas seven (7) were from other denominations. Amongst the women interviewed, some were leaders in their churches; while others expressed much interest in issues regarding women in

leadership positions and some were merely members of the church. Three of the women interviewed, were not church members; neither did they belong to any denomination. The reason why these three women were interviewed was to hear the voices of those who were not involved in church practices and to ascertain their views on women in leadership positions.

### **3.3 PERCEPTIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN ON THE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

#### **3.3.1 Views of men on women as pastors**

Seventy-five percent (75%) of the men who responded to the questionnaires were also involved in the interviews. They had varying opinions about the issues pertaining to the effect of religion and culture on women. Some felt it was a too sensitive issue to discuss, as it affected what was happening in the churches at the time, while others felt that the time was ripe to deal with the matter. One respondent remarked that women should be satisfied with what the government was doing for them and made comments such as, “What do women want now?”

While capturing the responses of the respondents regarding the roles played by women in the ministry, the general feeling was that resolving the issue of ordaining women was long overdue. One man expressed his opinion in the following manner: “I think God is raising and using women in our area in things that men were not used to that extent.” This man went on to explain his statement, “I mean it is a woman in this area who began to broadcast her ministry through a television station.”

Twenty percent (20%) of the men who responded to this question indicated that women were members of different committees in the church and preached occasionally at services, but mostly not during Sunday services. One pastor stated that the role of women was to pray for the pastor and for the church and to act as advisors to leaders. This pastor explained that the reason for his viewpoint was that in his culture, women were not supposed to lead; they were supposed to stay at home and take care of their children and teach them from the scriptures because that is how they would be saved. He explained further that his culture dictated that women had to depend upon their husbands as their leaders; women had to be led and given direction. Furthermore, the pastor added that

women's role was supportive, both at home and in the church. For him the responsibility of a woman was to ensure that her husband was taken care of and that he received the support he needed from his wife. He stated that in the church, it was the woman who should influence her husband to love the church. According to him, there were texts in the scriptures that prohibited women from leading such as 1 Timothy 2: 11-15.

Thirty five percent (35%) of the men said that the issue regarding the impact of culture on women in the ministry was "killing" the ministry of women. One of the men whose response confirmed the negative impact that culture has on women, stated that the ratio of women to men in the ministry is three to ten, which reflects the slow development of women in the ministry. In terms of the ratio of women in the ministry, most men concur that the ratio of women is still very low in contrast with that of men and this is an indication that the development of women in the ministry is a cause for concern. When asked to indicate how many women they knew were in the ministry, some of them could not even name five women.

In addition, there were several negative comments regarding determining the roles played by women in the ministry, one of the men, a pastor, said that women in his church were allowed to become organisers of women's work and to participate in the church committees. It is interesting to note that his church board was composed of both men and women, but women were only elected when there were not enough men to serve on the board or when those men who were there did not meet the standards of the church. In addition, regarding the issue whether women were being mentored for leadership, his response was "yes," but only to a certain extent, such as being elected as organisers. "In this church, women are leading, but only to a limited level as long as there is a need or when the pastor of the church deems it fit." In this regard, it was clear from the responses received, that there are still certain positions that women could not occupy, such as pastoral work.

It was evident that in this particular church, women could only be leaders of other women and could only become members of the church board in terms of the conditions mentioned above. In fact, they could only fulfil what can be called "stand-by" duties. If a man decided to join the church, then the woman who was in a certain position because there had not been enough men, would be requested to stand aside to give the man his rightful position. In that particular church, women who were leaders were in those positions because of chance circumstances; notwithstanding this fact, these women had

an extremely low chance of becoming pastors. In this regard, it would be extremely problematic if a woman were called to pastor the church. This was revealed by the pastor's statement that women could lead anywhere in the church but not as far as pastoral duties were concerned. Though a woman could feel that she was called, she was restricted to leading a specified group of people. Women in this church could be mentored to become organisers of the church's activities in which they would not be able to participate fully themselves. In practice then, those women were responsible for organising and putting everything into place so that the male pastors could take over the reins; while they (the women) had to take a back seat to sit back as spectators. Ironically, they were supposed to derive satisfaction from the fact that they were permitted to do something in their church.

Regarding the issue of women, being more gifted than men, three men expressed the opinion that men were sometimes intimidated by women who appeared to be over-confident. Women were regarded as soft and weak and when they exhibited a certain measure of strength and power in their ministry, some men felt threatened because they feared that the church was being taken over by women. In contrast, the other nine men felt there was nothing wrong if women were accomplished leaders as what they did was for the glory of the Lord. They felt that they did not have any problem with men being gifted, why should they have a problem with gifted women. In fact, they indicated that they were aware of many women who had received more gifts from God than men had received. Therefore, because women testified that they had been called by God, as this is essential before entering the ministry, these men felt that they could not stand in opposition to God's calling. If men can enter the ministry because they feel called to do so, the same must apply to women.

Ten percent (10%) of the men indicated that people could also see that God called these particular women, but because that was not a popular view, they would rather join the rest who asserted that women could not lead and, therefore could not be called by God. Importantly, some felt that was the case because things had always been that way. Undeniably, people are aware that women are ordained in the ministry; but have never actually come face-to-face with the reality of having a woman pastor in their churches. When this reality starts to confront them, they are quick to assert that it is not proper for women to take the lead. Being faced with the reality of a pregnant woman standing before the church preaching or baptising is very different from theorising about woman in leadership positions in the church.

Both of these men (who represented ten percent (10%) of the men in the study), alleged that those who opposed the ordination of women used religion and culture to keep them out of such leadership positions. According to these men, some were naive and misguided, because they quoted the scriptures, which they thought were relevant because they lacked a proper perspective of the issues at stake. Other reasons cited were that God ordained that women should be silent in church and furthermore, according to them, there were no clear indications from the scriptures that women were pastoring churches during biblical times, and what is more, their culture did not allow women to lead. Some of these men contended that an example was needed of a woman who pastored a church in biblical times.

In contrast, forty percent of the men argued that if culture did not allow women to lead, could it allow the government to put women in leadership positions of leadership today? They said that if culture was silent when women were leading our country, it should also be silent when women were leading the church. They also thought that because women had been chiefs and were still leaders in the traditional structures, culture should not be used to bar women from church leadership positions.

Another issue raised was the perceived incompetence of women portrayed in the media. Accordingly, women were seen as people lacking in leadership skills. Furthermore, they were regarded as easily intimidated concerning decision-making and when they took a decision, they failed to abide by the decision that they had taken. Even those who were in leadership positions were always led by men under their leadership. Men alleged that those men served under women were placed there strategically to cover up for women's in-capabilities. It was also claimed that women easily changed their decisions under pressure of the majority. Therefore, men have to serve with women in leadership positions to intimidate other men who might want to take advantage of the women's incompetency. Significantly, five percent (5%) of the men suggested that there should be no democracy in the church but a theocracy. They said that if what was happening in the world guided the church, then there would be a problem as the church was supposed to be "the light and salt of the world."

In response to the above argument, one of the respondents said that the issue of indecisiveness was a reality that also affected men, and although some women exhibited this trait, the generalisation that all women were indecisive was false. Furthermore, he argued that men who failed in this respect had both men and women around them to support them to do what they could not do themselves and nobody criticised them for their shortcomings.

In another response regarding the roles of women in the church, the respondent indicated that women should aim “to support the vision of the church and to advise leadership and some are placed in authority if they are spiritually grown up.” The above perception is indicative to a certain extent, of how women’s roles are viewed. Women, as it is understood from the above statement, are seen as mere supporters or helpers. The general cultural trend within the church has always been to perceive women as subordinate to men in terms of leadership positions where they assumed the roles of guards or supporters. This perspective clearly questions both the capability and ability of women as they are always seen to be inadequate.

One challenging aspect regarding the respondents was the measure used to determine the eligibility of women to be leaders. According to their responses, women were placed in leadership positions based on their spiritual maturity. Even though the respondent did not narrate the specific methodology utilised in determining women’s eligibility for leadership, one deduces that women always found it hard to climb the leadership ladder in the ministry because they were evaluated in terms of the traditional perception of whether they were capable or not. This viewpoint raises serious concerns regarding the criteria used in measuring maturity against both men and women.

However, the responses of the respondents revealed that there were signs of a shift from excluding women from leadership positions and that the composition of the church board was changing as more women were being elected to them. Nevertheless, it was clear that men were always dominant on most of those church boards. It will be interesting to surmise whether these inclusions come about as a compromise or as a legitimate move. One respondent explained, “the church board is composed of men and women if men are not enough or do not qualify.” It appears that the inclusion of women on the church board was merely a compromise. If we look critically at the above comment, we can surmise that regardless of their potential, intellect, ability and availability, women are largely involved in most leadership structures as a compromise (if there are not enough men or do not qualify for the leadership positions).

The role women should play in the church was the core issue discussed with regard to women’s leadership development. Some respondents believed that women should be included in all the structures of the church. Although others agreed that women should play a role or that they had a role to play, as long as it was limited to certain areas of responsibility. Regarding the role women should play in church; one respondent asserted that they should be involved in “leading Sunday school, youth and mothers services.”

This research also sought to determine the intensity and involvement of the church as far as mentorship was concerned. Most responses if not all, indicated that women were being mentored for leadership in their churches. The researcher's general observation regarding this response is that most people do not understand what the concept of 'mentorship' entails. This could also lead to the conclusion that a lack of understanding concerning the concept 'mentorship,' suggests that it is not implemented or is implemented to a lesser degree. However, their failure to understand this concept can be justified since this concept is new in the leadership field.

Most respondents agreed that religion and culture had an effect on the perception of women in ministry. Some respondents indicated that their culture prescribed that women were supposed to take care of their children at home. Regarding this issue, one pastor declared: "if a woman goes far from home to look for a job, the family structure deteriorates, but if a man does the same, a family is able to continue as usual." Women were undermined and discriminated against on the grounds of cultural beliefs and practices. All those who responded to the questionnaire were Venda speaking, and were therefore, all familiar with the Vhavenda culture. The common response regarding the impact of culture on women was that the respondents all agreed that women were not allowed to lead men in terms of the cultural perspective; however, it was fine if they led other women like themselves.

Furthermore the above mentioned pastor added the following comment: "women are not supposed to lead in our culture," and he quoted a Venda proverb that says, "*khuhu ya phambo a I imbi mutsho.*" The literal translation of this proverb is, "*a hen does not crow to announce a new day.*" This is generally understood to mean that it is taboo for a woman to propose love to a man. Though these practices within the culture cannot be debated, the notion that the proverb stresses the advantage that men have over woman once again and the fact that a man is a naturally born leader. There was no way according to this pastor, that the culture was ready for women to lead men, if they did so, then they were repudiating their culture and by implication going against nature itself.

Another "saying" referred to by one respondent says, "*Munna ndi thoho, musadzi o da nga kholomo.*" This translates as follows, "*man is the head, a woman came through cattle (referring to lobola).*" This also has some serious implications for the perceptions of women in the ministry. The proverb relates to marriage roles, the understanding that man is the head of the family and that woman were acquired through cattle. The impression



created by the fact that woman were purchased with cattle simply meant that she had nothing to say or contribute to the decision-making process. This family setup cannot be ignored, as this has an effect on the role of the woman in the church. It is interesting to note that women were not supposed to be part of the decision-making processes in the home, if there was anything that concerned them, they would be duly informed, as the pastor explained.

It is important to point out that historical cultural practices and beliefs have an impact on the church even today. In this regard, one of the respondents remarked, “in some denominations, women are not allowed to baptise, preach, bless children and be on the church board.” McKenzie (1996:22) concurs with the views expressed by this respondent as she highlights the struggle of women in their quest for recognition and acceptance in the church:

Yes, but... there were women, both in the pew and the pulpit, who also exercised prophetic and pastoral leadership. These women served, for the most part, without benefit of official denominational support: without ordination, appointments, elections or titles. Yet they founded denominations, started churches, led Bible studies, preached, pastured, evangelised, and served at the head of ‘women-only organizations such as missionary societies and parachurch organisations.

The scriptures have frequently been used to justify the exclusion of woman in ministry leadership and other roles. I Timothy 2:11-15 that was discussed in chapter two of this investigation has been used and over used for this purpose. Use has also been made of scriptures that support women in ministry, for example, Romans 16:1 and 3, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea...Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus...” (The Holy Bible:English Standard Version, 2001:1144).

### **3.3.2 Views of women on women as pastors**

More than eighty percent (80%) of the women approached in this study, agreed that women should be ordained for the ministry and they also felt that men and women should work together as partners in the ministry. In the minority were the respondents that felt it was not the will of God that women should be church leaders, as they contended that the Bible stated clearly that there were no female apostles in the time of Jesus nor in the church as it was not the practice in those times. One of the women who was not in favour

of the idea of the ordination of women, declared that women lacked decision-making skills, that they did not stand by their convictions and that they were easily deceived and tended to be swayed by the majority opinion or by the views of men.

### ***3.3.2.1 Women supporting women's ordination***

Those women who were in leadership positions (those who believed they had a calling in their lives to assume a ministerial role in the church) felt that God had called them to be in the ministry. Therefore, they felt that they did not call themselves to the ministry nor were they emulating what was happening in the government where women were appointed as cabinet ministers and in other important posts. They asserted that they had been in the ministry before democracy was born in this country. Their involvement in the ministry should not be viewed as being in the ministry so that they can represent women in general. Accordingly, women felt strongly that they did not want to be there to make up the numbers or balance out the ratio of women to men; they wanted to be there because they felt they had been mandated by God to fulfil the will of God in and through their lives.

For the most part, those participants who felt that women should be leaders and should be in partnerships with men in the ministry, indicated that if women claimed that they had been called just as men claimed that they had been called, then they should receive equal treatment. Therefore, the church should find a way of accepting women in leadership positions. Furthermore, they should be able to find ways of working together because they are both called to do the same work. It is important to note that the respondents stated that women that were becoming church leaders should not meet with negativity when they wanted men to collaborate with them, because they were entering a field that had previously been closed to them. The fact that women collaborate with men, is a sign that women are not using violent measures to achieve recognition. One of these women observed that in almost all the churches with which she was familiar, most of the adherents were women; in fact, some of the churches only had female members with no male members at all. According to her, in reality, the church is the domain of women. Ironically, although women have been in the church all this time, the church does not want them.

Forty-five percent (45%) of the women who were in favour of women in leadership positions expressed the opinion that the refusal by the church to ordain women could not be justified by the arguments discussed above. The same Jesus they cited had a close relationship with women and He defended them. They argued that most of the ministries that were currently flourishing were those that were led by women or those that

recognised the leadership of women. They felt that women had been part of the church since its inception; therefore, it was an injustice that their contributions had not received any recognition.

Ninety- five percent (95%) of the women expressed the view that it was right for women to be on a church board on which both men and women served. In most churches, where women were selected to be on church boards, they fully endorsed that practice and felt that it should be continued as there were issues concerning women about which the church would need to make decisions that required their input and insight. Therefore, if women were represented on the church boards, they would be able to speak for themselves concerning matters that affected them.

### ***3.3.2.2 Women against women's ordination***

Fifteen percent (15%) of the women that said that it was not the will of God that women should lead, cited some of the scriptures previously dealt with in this study; such as 1 Timothy 2:8-15. These women stated that the actions of women contradicted what the Bible decreed regarding ordination. They also thought the fact that Jesus had no women disciples, an issue which he, himself addressed indicated that He did not intend women to be in leadership positions. Amongst the respondents, there was one person who did not attend any church that asserted that women should allow themselves to remain women and should rather take care of their homes. When asked specifically about the issue of women leadership, some of the other respondents replied that they preferred to be pastored by men instead of women for various reasons. They argued that women:

- Were not able to handle pressure.
- Were not able to deal with pressure.
- Shouted at people or members of the church easily when under pressure,
- Were unpredictable (today they are happy; tomorrow one cannot say what went wrong).
- Spoke badly about each other.
- Undermined each other.
- Were easily irritated and could not take a stand about matters (meaning they could not think for themselves).

Those women, who did not support the ordaining of women, also thought that women could not lead because they were incapable of making rational decisions. One woman stated that women easily changed their minds when they were under pressure or influenced by men. Consequently, because some women lacked this decisive quality,

other women thought that they could not be leaders. Consequently, this type of woman was not deemed fit to lead because no one was sure of where she would take the church.

### **3.4 THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DISCOURSES ON WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

When asked their opinion on the impact of culture and religion on women in the ministry, it became clear that some of the women still held the idea that culture had a negative impact on the involvement of women in ministry. They thought that some women suffered from feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem because of the way culture regarded women. In the ministry, some women still battled with feelings of inferiority; consequently, they were intimidated by men. In their culture, decisions were usually taken only by men in the absence of women, as was the case in the family set-up. This state of affairs affected both men and women. One woman referred to culture and religion as follows, “these two kill the ministry of women,” She stated further that this inequality was also evident in the ratio of men to women in the ministry. This woman announced that there were women in the church who were capable, but their duties were only geared at supporting the pastor. She added that women were in the church to support the pastor with their money and their prayers. She concluded by saying that this had a negative effect on the growth of the church.

Women felt that church doctrines and church constitutions also played a large role in excluding them from being on the pulpit. Another woman said that in the church where she was fellowshipping, the roles of women were to discipline the children, preach, dress responsibly and pray for the church and the pastor. When asked specifically what she thought women should do in the church, she replied that they should be part of the management and should clean the church and organise functions. “In some churches, women are not allowed to preach or to lead a church,” this woman spoke as if she was not referring to her own church, however, during the conversation the researcher realised that she was actually referring to the church of which she was a member. She informed the researcher that on Sundays if the pastor did not arrive, the congregation would wait for him to arrive (especially if there were no other males present). The researcher asked her what happened in the event of the pastor not arriving and if there were no other males in the church, her reply was as follows: “Yes, it has happened, I remember that time, we were just women and there was nothing we could do, so we went home.” These women could not have a church service because no males were present that day. Ironically, they had everything they needed to have a church service such as Bibles, songbooks and offerings. The only element they lacked was a man to lead them. Their decision to leave

was in keeping with the church's customs and norms; otherwise, they could face disciplinary measures from the church, which might lead to their excommunication.

However, in some of the churches where women were permitted to be pastors, it seemed to be in name only and not in practice. This was because it was hard to find any of these women ever preaching. One woman, a student at a Bible college, said that she only preached when the pastor was not there and apparently, it was very rare because the pastor made it a point to be at church every Sunday, if not, somebody else would be asked to come and preach.

Most women believed that the scriptures supported the idea of women being pastors. Some referred to women in the Bible who were used by God in different environments, such as Deborah, Esther, Ruth and Priscilla. This was in contrast with the views of other respondents who reported that there were no woman pastors in their churches. Landman (2001:84) comments that, 'The women mentioned in the Bible are excellent examples of the negative influence religion can have on women's lives and the miseries patriarchal religion can cause. According to Landman, the common denominator shared by the women of today and the women of the Bible is oppression, because they were depicted as people who were not aware of their oppression.

In other instances, women also quoted the scriptures such as 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 and 1 Corinthians, used by both men and women to exclude women from pastoring. Some women agreed that certain people were using these verses under the mistaken idea that they were doing justice to the scriptures; whereas some felt that although they were not certain of the truth; they rather supported the scriptures that excluded women from the ministry.

### **3.5 DETERMINING THE ROLES PLAYED BY WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

In both the questionnaires and the interviews, respondents were asked questions based on personal experiences concerning issues of women in the ministry and the roles that women played. The intention was to see whether men and women were able to see what women were doing in the church and to ascertain what types of roles women were playing and how they viewed themselves.

One respondent, a traditional leader and a long time pastor who had pastored many churches in different areas, expressed his views privately because he did not want his name mentioned for fear of excommunication from the church. He remarked:

*Khuhu ya phambo a I imbi mutsho.* Venda culture prohibits women from getting involved in leadership. Women leadership in the church came recently and this was not the practice in the past. Women are expected to submit to the leadership of man. This cultural practice affects the church. In one of our churches, the pastor left the church and the church was without a pastor for a long time. On Sundays, women would gather in the church. Unfortunately, only women were there in the gathering. Since they were not allowed to lead, they had to ask some boys nearby to read the scriptures for them. These women could read themselves, but their understanding is that as women they cannot take the lead. For many years the *status quo* remained. I visited the church one day as I was passing by, I introduced myself to them. They highlighted their need for a male leader in the church.

In the church the respondent attends, the denomination is silent about women becoming ministers. No biblical proof can be found of a woman ever becoming a minister in biblical history as Jesus only called males to become his disciples. Furthermore, Paul indicated that women should learn in silence. Since that has been instituted in the church, no one has ever challenged this view because this view is so deeply entrenched in church dogma. Not surprisingly, women do not hold any official offices in the church therefore; they can neither be called to the ministry nor sent to serve the Lord. Consequently, they have the same status as the youth in the church; therefore, there are no capable women in church leadership positions. Personally, the researcher has identified women who could serve successfully in specific church positions. When she tried to take the initiative to talk to these women about leadership, they were surprised and wondered what she was bringing into the church for they were not used to it and they did not even want it or were not ready to question it or challenge the accepted customs. The cultural background and historical setup of the church has influenced this view.

The word “*musadzi*” also has the connotation that a *musadzi* (a woman) is somebody who does not have a backbone. This is evident in the mistrust people have of women. Men have more freedom to do whatever they like and they are at liberty to marry when and whomever they wish. In contrast, women are regarded as the property of the man as she is purchased through the payment of *lobola*.

In addition, the respondent said that widowhood has a number of challenges for women. Culturally, it is maintained that to a certain extent the woman should protect the husband by making sure that nothing goes wrong with the man. There is also the perception that women are suspected if their husbands died. This is another form of injustice inflicted on women. In addition, women were expected to take care of the elderly, especially the husband. In the past, if both the husband and wife were old, the wife would look for another woman, called the *lufarathonga*- the one who holds a walking stick. Consequently, *Lufarathonga* (the young wife), would be the one who took care of the man. Widows were not allowed to express their feelings when they lost their husbands. Neither was she involved in the funeral arrangements of her husband. The family would inform her only when it was necessary. She was not trusted out of fear that she would get married to another man, especially if she was still young. Culturally, the arrangements for the funeral would be done by the *vho-makhadzi* (aunt) and *vho-malume* (uncle). The purpose of the exclusion of the widow was meant to allow her time to mourn for her husband. The day after the burial, the widow would undergo a cultural practice called '*u luvhedza*.' During this process, she was taken for a bath to remove all misfortune and shadows. Her head was also shaved and after the burial and all the relevant cultural practices had been performed, she had to choose a man who normally came from her family to take care of the family.

Customarily, women are expected to stay at home. Accordingly, in terms of the Venda culture, it is abnormal for a woman to go to the reef (Johannesburg) to look for a job and leave her home in the care of her husband. This was not the practice, but it is changing with the times. Today, it is believed that a woman is capable of heading her family.

In general, men are negative about women becoming leaders in the church; whereas women feel they should be part of the leadership corps; this is also encouraged by the constitution of the country. However, this is contrary to the situation women have to face in the church today, because they risk humiliation and ostracisation if they dare to play an active role in the church. In addition, some women question the participation of woman in leadership positions; while others just accept the *status quo*. This is a clear indication that, in general, people are not ready to accept the leadership of women. In the words of one of the respondents:

I feel that these issues should be addressed at workshops; where the views regarding God's grace in terms of men and women should be discussed. Ways should be found to involve women in leadership that are line with what God's will It is my belief that culture was made by God, and most cultures do not recognise women as they should be.

Another female respondent who was a traditional leader (*vhamusanda*), expressed the view that both men and women were equal before God and should therefore be treated the same; for no role was reserved for males or females only. She was a woman and a traditional leader and felt she performed her role well. This is what she said:

No, I don't feel threatened. I have told myself that I treat everybody as a person regardless of his or her gender. Challenges that are there include being tested on your integrity as a woman. This happens on a continuous basis. As a leader of many people, I always look at dealing with the problems people are having rather than look at individuals. This helps in helping change the perception of people.

Concerning women in leadership positions in the church, the respondent has observed that women are successful because of their commitment. In addition, women are able to remain patient no matter the situation and this makes them successful leaders. The researcher concedes that although there are aspects that need the attention of men, women should not think too little of themselves.

Regarding women empowerment, churches should allow women to fulfil their potential by becoming ministers as they have much to offer because of the invaluable experience they have. There is a need for integrated leadership in the church, which should definitely also involve women who have a better understanding of children than men have and they can also make good youth leaders as the youth are more likely to open up and share their problems with women than men. This researcher is unequivocally in favour of women becoming ministers.

In the past, because of cultural customs and beliefs, women were not treated well. They did not have any say and they were not allowed to be leaders. In the history of Venda, there were only two women who were chiefs. Usually, when a woman was supposed to take over the reign, she was deprived of this right because of her gender; consequently, women were marginalised and prevented from becoming leaders. In the event of a family, the respondent said if only females were born, it was regarded as a major disadvantage to that family. Furthermore, a woman did not have a final say in decision-making, as mentioned before. Not surprisingly, the word "*musadzi*," that means a person is without value and of no importance is applied to women.

The respondent's advice to other women in the church is that if they are elected or appointed to serve in a leadership position, they should not think too little of themselves. She has always believed that there is nothing that a woman cannot do. Men are just as



liable to fail as women are. Woman should know that God wants them to be in leadership positions. She believes strongly in the leadership of women, as she has been a leader for the past thirty years. People respect a woman if she understands herself, if she fulfils her role and if she respects those, she is leading. This researcher asserts that the men that she is leading view her as a leader and not as a woman. As her subordinates, they have confidence in her and always consult her about difficult issues. Furthermore, she has no problem with accepting the leadership of another female minister. To her, it makes no difference whether the pastor is a man or a woman.

It needs to be emphasised that mentorship is extremely important. The respondent does not tell herself that she is a (*vhamusanda*), namely, a traditional leader. She believes in the value of having a mentor as well as in the value of mentoring other women. She always encourages the training of young people and sometimes even invites them to attend meetings at the kraal. This type of exposure can also contribute to exposing them to leadership situations. In addition, various structures are in place in the community that contribute to the development of the nation.

Women themselves are able to tell stories about the different types of roles they play in the church. Importantly, they believe that they are engaged in the work of God and that God has mandated them to fulfil their different tasks. For the sake of this study, a few experiences of women and the roles that they play in different positions in the church are recounted.

One woman who was a leader of a congregation in an organisational church shared her experiences of her past in this manner:

I was a member together with my husband in a church that does not allow women to be pastors. In my former church, I used to be free and sometimes I would lead other women in the church during women gatherings. In this new church, I did not have the freedom to do what I was doing before. The only thing to do was going to church and listening to the male preacher and thereafter the church would be out without any active participation on my part. Some of the members who knew me before were very much concerned and one decided to engage me in the work of preaching. He decided that, because it was wrong in the church for a woman to preach, and then because the function was going to be held inside the hall, which is not a church building, then there wouldn't be any problems. I agreed to go and preach there in the hall and everything went well according to me. It was only after the meeting that I received the message that the church was affected by what had happened. Some of the people who were complaining were women, saying how could she be allowed to preach the word of God when it is not the tradition of this church to do things that way, we ourselves we have been in the church for a long time, but we do not do those kinds of things, why do we have to do a new thing now because of this woman who has just come?

The above mentioned woman felt she suffered considerably as she could not be silent like the rest of the women in the church. In her heart, she decided not to give up and continued to organise women conferences and invite different speakers to encourage the women, but that was not well received. The restrictions imposed on her made her decide to quit the church and ultimately she founded a new congregation by herself. As if that was not enough, she continued to feel restricted because there were certain roles she still could not play, such as baptising members, blessing babies, serving Holy Communion and burying the dead, for these services were reserved for the pastor, consequently, she had to call a male pastor to come and perform these services. Her experience serves as an indication that the struggle against injustices for women is not over yet.

When this woman responded to the question of the impact that religion has on the development of women in leadership positions, she responded by saying that although religion was one of the problems, the biggest problem women had was with men. She asserted that most men did not support women who wanted to be pastors because when they saw a women standing in front of them preaching, what they saw was not a pastor, but a beautiful woman with a good shape who could be a good wife. According to her, men were not afraid of anything except their own weakness. She stressed that men were the ones who were weak rather than women.

A female member of one of the churches said that she had been fellowshipping in the church for a long time but the only role women were allowed to play was to sit in a Sunday service and listen to the leader of the church. The only active role women were playing was teaching the youth and children. Even though they taught those groups of people, they were not called overseers or pastors for no female may be referred to by that title. If it happened that a woman in that church felt the call of God in her life that was not something that was encouraged in the church. The church was not going to allow that to happen there. The only thing that a woman could do was to leave the church and join congregations where they encouraged women to be pastors or else start a new ministry altogether as is commonly done today. According to this member, no women were called to the ministry in that specific church and therefore they were not affected by the issue of women leaders.

She continued to explain that if no male person was available to preach at a Sunday morning service (which had never happened since she started attending that church), they would just sit there waiting until somebody arrived as no woman would ever dare get up and lead the service since this was not the tradition of the church. If it happened that a

woman got up to lead the service, everybody would leave the church, since that was not what they had been taught to do.

It is important to note that she blamed culture for inflicting a large amount of injustice on women in many instances. She added that women were not involved with decision making in the family and the way in which matters were resolved in the family undermined the status of women. The in-laws tended to concentrate on their son and spoke about a woman in her absence, taking binding decisions on her behalf without her having any say in the matter. She challenged the cultural saying that reinforced the many assumptions that underlie the denial of leadership positions to women today, such as “*khuhu ya phambo a i imbi mutsho*” (a hen does not crow to indicate that it is a new day), according to her this is akin to saying that women cannot lead. She contended that the full truth has not been told about what really happened between the cock and the hen for a long time. What actually happens is that before the cock crows, it is the hen that utters sounds to indicate that morning has come and the cock will never crow unless the hen alerts him first that it is daybreak. In addition, according to her this is an indication that if the one that initiates the action is regarded as a leader, in this instance, the leader has been and will always be a hen.

According to her, the only problem was that people were not ready to accept the fact that it all started with the hen and it was still hen that began to indicate to the cock that it was dawn. Despite the warning sounds of the hen, many people are not ready to listen to and recognise the reality of that which happens before the cock. To them the cock takes the lead in announcing a new day. She appealed to all those who were inclined to confirm her findings to do so as she knew that they would get the shock of their lives. This woman who had been farming with chickens for a long time claimed that she knew what she was talking about. Every time, people referred to this proverb in her presence, she knew that what they were saying was not true.

A male pastor, whose wife was his associate in the church, openly announced how God was using his wife in the church. He indicated that initially, his wife would not even participate in any leadership activities because of the fear of what people would say. Sometimes he suggested that she should handle the welcoming of people in the church; but she refused and even threatened to stop attending church if he kept on insisting that she should take an active role in church affairs. However, when this woman responded to the call of God, nothing could stop her. She decided to resign from her job and became a full-time pastor (previously, she had been a teacher by profession). There was no doubt in her husband’s mind that this woman was called by God as it was clear that He was using her. In fact, her husband was convinced that the way the church was growing was not

because of his efforts but because of her. He also revealed that during Sunday services, he decided to step down and permitted his wife to take over.

This man of God confessed that in the beginning, his relationship with his wife was not in line with the way he had been raised as a child. He had believed so implicitly in the man being the head of the woman that he took it to the extreme. He never believed that a woman could do anything to change his mind about the role of women, let alone his own wife. As, God was clearly working through women today women could no longer be prevented from doing the work of God. He also contended that God was calling women in our time to achieve something that had never been done before and that was to shut the mouths of those who still held the view that women were inferior.

One woman pastor who answered the questionnaire, shared her experiences after accepting the call of God in her life some years before. After that, she worked for God by witnessing about Jesus Christ to many people who were saved and are now members of the church. She is now serving as an evangelist and an apostle in the church. She has established many churches, which are prospering. Though she had progressed that far in the ministry, she still experienced the negative attitudes of men who thought that a woman could not be a leader. These attitudes were even evident in the men to whom she preached and who were saved. After spending some time in the church and reading a few verses, those men were of the opinion that a woman could not be a pastor. If she had not been the founder of that organisation, the men of that church would easily have decided to remove her and replace her with a male pastor. This pastor is still pastoring the same church today and those who think a woman cannot become a pastor are leaving to join churches that are pastored by males or begin their own churches. This woman pastor has influenced other women to respond to the call of God. She is ready to support those who are new in the field and who are not yet experienced so that they do not quit the ministry because of undue pressure.

The types of religious discourses revealed by the responses to both the questionnaires and the interviews are as follows:

- Women are inferior and subordinate to men.
- Women cannot lead the church.
- Women are not equal to men.
- Women lack leadership skills.
- Women cannot be trusted.
- Women are not dependable.
- Women are not decisive.

The types of cultural discourses that were shared by the respondents are:

- Women are inferior and subordinate (one of the respondents even asked why women should be treated differently, because they are treated similarly in almost all the cultures of the world).
- Women are not equal to men (in terms of roles, women are supposed to be home and child minders). In addition, women endure all sorts of abuse in order to save their marriages.
- Women cannot lead they are not born to lead and they are not strong enough to lead.

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the researcher has attempted to identify and describe the religious and cultural perceptions that men and women hold concerning the ordination of women in the church. This chapter has indicated that religious and cultural discourses have a negative impact on the lives of women. The discourse that “women are inferior and subordinate” is a factor that contributes to the low status of women in the church.

Men and women had different perceptions of the issue of women in the ministry. Regarding the issue of religion and culture, the men involved in this study were generally of the opinion that it was not appropriate for women to be leaders. Although a low percentage of women stated that women were not equipped to be leaders in the church; a higher percentage of women contended that women could be leaders and specifically leaders in the church. Significantly, both men and women referred to the scriptures and to culture in order to bar women from leadership positions in the church. They alleged that scriptures prohibited women from becoming leaders in the church and were quick to cite scriptures supporting their views. In addition, they felt that it was against their culture for women to lead. Only a few respondents contended that culture was made by people, therefore it could be altered.

There are still doubts in the minds of people concerning the capacity of women to be leaders or pastors. Some of those doubts are based on the physiological make-up of women; for instance, that it is not a good thing for a woman to stand before people when she is pregnant or menstruating (it is surprising how people can tell when a woman is menstruating or having her periods). In addition, women are referred to as weaker vessels and not stable in decision-making and tend to try too hard to be like men. .

The majority of women interviewed or who filled in the questionnaires, professed that they felt they were called to ministerial positions and were also convinced that they had received a gift for their specific calling. Some of the women indicated that they refused to be silenced. Those who felt that their churches were denying them the chance to become leaders, did not hesitate to leave the church and establish new churches themselves in order to do and become that which God had laid in their hearts to become. Those who were unable to leave, still found ways and strategies to address the problem and in most cases, women did not relinquish their dreams and hopes. In fact, they refused to be silenced, be it by religion or by culture.

Women have to prove unequivocally that they are really called by God and that they are doing what they are doing because it is God's calling for them. Those women, who fail to convince others that God has called them, are subjected to rejection, isolation, frustration and doubt. These women spend a considerable amount of time trying to prove themselves first and when they finally get to do what they are supposed to do, it is sometimes too late.

It has to be noted here that the pain that has been caused by silencing women's voices in the church is considerable. The faithful followers of the church that make up the majority of the members of the church, are without a voice and are ostensibly without a gift, a talent, the call of God and cannot be sent. Some women refused to accept that God could also work through them or other women because they feared being labelled bad women who wanted to be like men, who did not adhere to and observe their culture and the scriptures and who were, most of all, an embarrassment to their own people and more especially to their own husbands.

This study finds that culture plays a significant role in influencing the perceptions of the leadership of women in the ministry. In addition, the way that people read and interpret the scriptures, also has an impact on women leadership. Consequently, the researcher deems it fit to strive to introduce a theology that addresses the pain of these women when dealing with the impact of religion and culture on women leadership. In chapter 4 of this study, the *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach is introduced to address the struggle of women regarding their ordination.

## CHAPTER 4

### A *VHUSADZI* (WOMANHOOD) PERSPECTIVE.

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the previous chapters, the religious and cultural discourses that have a negative effect on the leadership development of women were identified and described. In chapter two, the religious and cultural discourses were identified and studied as informed by the different views of women on the issue of women leadership in the church. Religious and cultural discourses were identified as discourses that influence and impact negatively on the lives of people (women). These discourses were described according to the different faces of religious discourses as informed by Landman (2007:133-217).

Chapter three explained that a sample of ninety-seven (97) people was used to identify and describe the impact of religious and cultural discourses, which confirmed the need for this chapter. The findings of the questionnaire and the interviews showed the different faces of religious and cultural discourses as powerful problem discourses that impact negatively on the lives of women.

In this chapter, the *vhusadzi*/womanhood approach is introduced and described. The *vhusadzi* approach will serve as an empowering approach in contrast with the problem discourses found in the previous chapters. The *vhusadzi* approach will do that through engaging itself with the work of deconstructing the problem discourses and thus reconstructing the discourses that empower women on leadership. This will be done through consciously using the scripture texts that encourage and empower women on leadership. Importantly, the *vhusadzi* approach will do this in terms of the questionnaire and interviews; the works on feminist theology, womanist theology, African women theologians, the Bosadi perspective and the Bible. This chapter takes cognisance of the insights of social construction theory and post- structuralist theory as described in chapter one of this study.

Now, in order to provide the proper background to the *vhusadzi* approach, an overview of a *bosadi* approach, which is a woman's liberationist approach to the reading of the Bible in an African context in South Africa, will suffice (cf. Masenya 1996, 2004). The *bosadi*

approach has been developed by Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele as a response to the distorted image of womanhood due to the African-South African history of colonialism and apartheid. Masenya (2004:156) explains a *bosadi* approach more clearly when she says:

This is an approach that is committed to the African-ness of an African woman in South Africa. It thus critically analyses her context, and challenges and resists the oppressive elements of the African culture, while at the same time it embraces and harnesses the liberative and empowering aspects of this culture particularly as they relate to women.

Masenya employed a *bosadi* approach to re-read Proverbs 31:10-31 in an African-South African context, thus analysing the biblical text and its context, identifying those elements that are oppressive and are working against the liberation of women. It promotes those elements that are liberative to women. As she re-reads Proverbs 31:10-31 in a Northern Sotho context, she is able to point to both the liberative and oppressive aspects of the text. Masenya argues that the text was liberative to its original readers because it elevates the significance of the family and paints a picture of an independent powerful woman who can hold her own in the world of men. Masenya thinks that the text is liberative for Africans, because it reveals that their holistic outlook on life is similar to that of the Israelites. Therefore, this, according to her, helps Africans to realise that the Bible has sections that are close to their culture (see paragraph 1.9.1.4).

The rich collections of Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele's *bosadi* approach in biblical sciences with particular focus on the Old Testament caught the interest of the present researcher with reference to applying its principles in systematic theology. This approach presents us with a rich variety of concepts related to the deconstruction of religious and cultural discourses as they are socially constructed. Masenya's *bosadi* approach gives a voice to women who are Bible readers and whose lives are shaped by different interpretations of the Bible. With this voice, women can construct alternative discourses by shifting these oppressive discourses (see chapter one).

There are similarities as well as differences between what Masenya presented on this approach and what this study is presenting. The most obvious similarity is that the *bosadi* approach, which is known as such in Northern Sotho, is known as the *vhusadzi* approach in Tshivenda. *Bosadi* approach's agenda is to challenge problematic issues pertaining to



concepts such as 'patriarchy', 'race', 'gender' and 'classism'. It challenges the oppressive elements of patriarchal religion (cf its sacred texts) and elevates the liberatory ones. In addition, it challenges sexist and racist structures with a view to the affirmation of the well-being of African South African women. However, as this study's point of departure is women leadership in the church, the *vhusadzi* approach, which is the Venda counterpart of the *bosadi* approach, provides descriptions of Venda women's leadership in the church. These serve as the main difference, thereby offering a *mu Venda* Christian woman the tools to deconstruct the faces of both cultural and religious discourses that are harmful to women's lives. The *vhusadzi* approach will make use of similar insights and strategies as laid bare by Masenya. It will also focus on developing this approach in its relation to God (or teachings about God), the person of Christ (Christology), the Holy Spirit, the church and women's leadership in the church and make suggestions in the process that will reshape the perceptions about church leadership regarding its oppressive nature.

On this note, it is proper to mention that a *vhusadzi* approach as an endeavour to find an African South-African voice to challenge the religious and cultural problem discourses on Vhavenda women, does not claim total liberation of these women, but does contribute positively to the proper treatment of women in the church.

#### **4.2 The *vhusadzi* perspective or approach**

When analysing the story of Ruth, Kanyoro (2001:37-38) highlights the differences between feminist and womanist theologians' interpretation of the story compared to the experiences of African women. According to Kanyoro, in terms of the feminist and womanist theologians' interpretation, it is evident that African women's experiences are currently missing from the recorded experiences on which it is based. The second difference is that feminist and inculturation frameworks do not analyse women's experiences in culture and by that, it does not include the African women's reality. Kanyoro contends that African women differ significantly from Western feminist and womanist theologians, because the latter's hermeneutics are highly dependent on individual experiences and are void of the experiences of communal life in Africa. She argues that African women have to make a decision concerning these issues, because

neither feminist, womanist nor inculturation theology offers a liberating theology for African women.

Womanist theology exhibits many similarities to the African women's liberation framework in the sense that we are all Africans and our framework must be African-oriented; we experience multiple forms of oppression such as racism, sexism and classism (Masenya 1996:153). Although Masenya (1996:153-154) notes certain similarities, she is also aware of the differences that prevented her from embracing their perspective because of the following differences in contexts (in summary):

- African-American's experience of slavery is different from the South African's experience of colonialism and apartheid.
- "Womanism" is a term that is originally and uniquely African- American and has been coined to respond to that specific context.

The researcher concludes that it is in the area of this kind of thinking, that the experience of African-South African Vhavenda women is different from other women's experiences elsewhere. It is also because of this difference that African women around the globe are able to define their own experience in terms of their own African reality.

Against the background of this difference, the researcher acknowledges and embraces the *vhusadzi/bosadi*/womanhood approach, which is local, but with global concerns. Therefore, the researcher is focussing on the experiences of women against a South African Venda context. This perspective does not aim at replacing or criticising what the feminist and womanist approaches address, but aims to address those issues that make a black African South African woman who she is.

Importantly, this approach resuscitates and recaptures the reality of a black African South-African *mu Venda* woman through deconstructing the problematic religious and cultural discourses critically, while constructing the positive ones at the same time. It was not long before women realised that the common gender oppression does not necessarily put all women on a par with one another (Kanyoro 2001:76). It is unjust for women not to accept the differences between them. Differences in the form of race, social locations and

status, bear witness to different experiences. In different social locations, women should come to a common understanding that we are all fighting for liberation, but we also view the struggle differently, hence our point of departure is determined by the angle from which we look at it or the place where we are standing.

Kanyoro (2001:76) points the dangers out of failing to admit the differences and pretending that all women are the same. It can lead to false liberation and such liberalism poses other problems; some women become invisible in the process; individuals may reveal an inability to face hard issues, agreeing on issues for the sake of political correctness; coupled with this is the danger of patronising others or appropriating the other's identity. All these negative consequences can be attributed to the failure to have and maintain a common understanding that our differences do not imply enmity, but unity in diversity. In fact, Kanyoro encourages women to celebrate these differences: "to celebrate the tremendous power that can be manifested when the Spirit of God descends upon us, allowing the combination of age, wisdom and hope to gather in one place and to speak to the world."

In addition, Kanyoro remarks that every people should look for its own way of speaking about God and of generating new symbols, concepts and models that are congenial to express their religious vision. For the purpose of this study, the *vhusadzi*/womanhood approach is employed in this study to address issues related to culture and religion that have been found to be problematic to women in chapters two and three. The *vhusadzi* approach will examine the Pentecostal church's *status quo* critically with a view to investigating how affirming it is to the issue of the leadership of the Vhavenda women. Thereby it will discuss the role of religion critically, in particular, the Christian religion and its sacred texts and culture in both the marginalisation and affirmation of women in leadership positions in the church.

Over and above the issues pertaining to colonialism, apartheid, racism, gender, classism and culture addressed by Masenya's *bosadi* approach, the *vhusadzi* approach will make a further contribution by engaging the following factors among others:

- A new perspective on gender issues will be attained by an engagement with the challenges facing single women;

- Xenophobia and the impact of the post-apartheid political scenario with its attractive agenda regarding the affirmation of women and the favourable South African constitution (cf LenkaBula, 2005; 2006; 2008 & paragraph 1.9.1.4).

In summary, the *vhusadzi* approach will be employed to address the following aspects:

- The *vhusadzi* approach and the African culture,
- The *vhusadzi* approach and God the creator,
- The *vhusadzi* approach and the person of Christ,
- The *vhusadzi* approach and the Holy Spirit,
- The *vhusadzi* approach and the church practices

It is hoped that as these themes, which typify many a Pentecostal church setting in our African contexts, if approached through a *vhusadzi* lens, African women in general and the *vhavenda* women in particular, will be enabled to claim and reclaim their rightful space in the leadership agenda of the church.

### **4.3 The *vhusadzi* approach and the African culture**

#### **4.3.1 The *vhusadzi* approach: Deconstructing the problematic cultural discourses**

In this section, the problem cultural discourses that the *vhusadzi* approach will address are those that are mentioned in chapter two (see paragraph 2.7.2) and chapter three as reflected in the questionnaire and interviews, which are:

- A woman is inferior to a man, as a man is the head of the family.
- A woman cannot lead.
- A woman's sexuality belongs to a man.
- A married woman should be controlled by her husband.
- Uncircumcised women are ill mannered.
- A woman who cannot bear children is not fully a woman.

In the Venda South African setting, there are cultural discourses, which have a negative effect on the people's behaviour and their everyday activities. Discourses of oppression

and subordination are among the subtlest of all the discourses that are power-based discourses. Significantly, Landman<sup>7</sup> refers to these discourses as the most dangerous of all discourses; that render people powerless and make them powerless to act in a moral way. The faces of such discourses are many, but for the purposes of this study, only a few are mentioned.

The African culture presents many positive elements, which African people are encouraged to embrace. These are cultural practices that bring the humaneness back in people. There are times when people sit together and talk about how things used to be and express the wish to retreat into the past. This is because African people treasure the culture so much that nothing should ever be done to jeopardise it. Furthermore, women are searching for ways to make their culture as woman-friendly as possible.

In this section, the *vhusadzi* approach will be used to confront these discourses in terms of the following sub-sections: the image of women in the Venda context, certain African proverbs, female circumcision, widowhood rituals and the significance of the family.

#### **4.3.1.1 The *vhusadzi* approach and the image of women in Venda and other African proverbs**

According to Oduyoye (1995:55), proverbs can be described as short, popular, often-used sentences that use plain language to express some practical truths that are based on personal experience or observations. The proverbs in the following selection all have an impact on women.

In this section, the *vhusadzi* approach will be employed to deconstruct the following proverbs that are examples of problematic discourses regarding power as already discussed in chapters two and three:

- *Khuhu ya phambo a i imbi mutsho*, which literally means that a hen does not crow to announce that the day has dawned. It is the cock that crows. The above saying is problematic because it suggests that it is only the cock that crows and that a hen

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<sup>7</sup> Landman C (2003). Moral management: The political role of religion in South Africa. Inaugural lecture: University of South Africa. 11 March 2003.

cannot challenge it. In effect, this saying implies that women cannot be leaders. This is similar to the Northern Sotho saying, namely ‘tša *etwa ke ye tshadi pele, di wela ka leopeng*’ - meaning, ‘if the herd of cattle is led by a cow, it will fall into a donga (see Masenya 2004:137). Masenya rightly contends that: “The Northern Sotho mentality concerning women is clear from this proverb. Women cannot lead men, for women are ignorant and weak.”

In effect, the above saying is only a myth and an assumption that controls women’s lives regarding leadership issues. Leadership is informed by these kinds of assumptions as if leadership is only the birthright of men. Culturally, leadership is understood as a position that one qualifies to fill based on the sex with which one is born. A *vhusadzi* approach does not encourage myths and unfounded philosophies that control women’s lives and denies them leadership positions. Furthermore, a *vhusadzi* approach challenges this myth as it marginalises women and discourages them from assuming leadership roles. Oduyoye (2007:3) maintains that:

There are many sayings about women the wisdom of which is questionable as they do not lead to harmonious living and development of an individual’s potential. These sayings aimed at subduing or marginalizing women constitute verbal violence. They target the intelligence of women, spreading unexamined assumptions about women’s capacity for cognition.

The above saying also simply implies among other things that a woman does not propose to a man, but that is what a man does. The question may well be asked how a *vhusadzi* approach challenges this type of harmful discourse. If a woman were to propose to a man, that woman would be regarded as ill-mannered. If people propose out of love, this love should be felt by both the man and the woman. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with a woman expressing her feelings to a man first or when a man accepts a proposal from a woman.

- *Munna ndi ndou ha li muri muthihi fhedzi*, meaning a man is an elephant; he does not eat one tree. This suggests that a married man can have more than one wife, which may include the women that are known to the wife and/or concubines. This implies that an elephant is an animal that probably feeds on different types of trees. What is actually meant by this discourse is that a man is free to have as many sexual partners

as he can and not just one. Although a man controls the lives of his women, he himself cannot be controlled by anybody because he is as powerful as an elephant. In the African culture, as in many patriarchal cultures, a husband determines a married woman's identity (Masenya, 2003:116). Furthermore, Masenya informs the reader that the latter is expected to take control not only of the newly formed household, but also of his wife's body.

In the Vhavenda culture, a married woman's body belongs to her husband and may never be shared with any other man. As innocent as it may seem, this is never without dangerous lifelong repercussions for the one whose body is being controlled. If the husband finds out that his wife has been cheating, her infidelity is enough justification for him to punish or divorce her. However, the same does not apply to the wife. If she finds out that the husband has been cheating, she will be advised to persevere with the marriage because men are men and cannot be held accountable for what is believed to be their nature. What is so ironical is that the husband has sole control of his own body, and society even condones the notion that he can do as he pleases with both his body and the body of his wife. Even if the husband abandons his wife and lives permanently with other women, his wife still continues to wait for him in the hope that he will decide to return to her.

Even when the man who is a migrant labourer, leaves his house and wife behind and goes to work far away, the woman or the wife is still expected to accept his authority in his absence. It does not matter how long it takes him to return home, the woman remains his wife. In fact, the man can get married again or have a concubine where he works and have children as if this is a normal situation. This *status quo* remains unchallenged and the behaviour of a man in his marriage is never questioned. It is important to note that society does not question this viewpoint. It is only a small percentage of men who will label this practice as wrong; while the majority feel it is better not to express their views openly concerning the matter.

Without any exceptions, the woman or the wife is expected to be faithful to her husband no matter what; in fact, it appears that society has the stereotyped notion that a woman cannot live on her own, independent of marriage (Masenya, 2003:117). Masenya also remarks that in the African culture, it is regarded a fact that a woman only becomes a

complete person when she is married. With regard to this mind-set, Masenya (2003:118) feels that a man enjoys more privileges in marriage than a woman because he gains full control over his wife through paying *lobola*.

The Venda proverb cited above is similar to the Sotho proverb “*Monna ke thaka o a naba,*” which Masenya explains literally means a man is like a pumpkin plant, he spreads (Masenya 2003:116). It is also good to see that it has the same meaning as a Venda proverb, because according to Masenya, it means that a man is free to have as many concubines as he likes. It is also interesting to see how the Northern Sotho speaking people comfort a woman. According to Masenya, who quotes this proverb in terms of how it applies to women, namely, *ga se more, ga a fehlwe*. Literally it means she is not a tree, she cannot be eaten by a moth, and the underlying meaning of the proverb is that a woman must not be worried by her husband’s absence, one day he will return and find her still waiting for him (Masenya 2003:116-117).

It is interesting to note how men react when the old notions are challenged and when women begin to question the unquestionable. Significantly, in a programme on one of the local radio stations (Phalaphala FM) where this proverb was discussed by men and women, the men were eager to assert that they have always had the type of attitudes discussed in the previous sections. Consequently, they felt that people had no right to question this situation because they grew up in a society where these were the accepted beliefs. Some even go to the extent of saying that because their forefathers had more than one wife, that this was how God has meant it to be so. This was the view commonly held by most of the elderly women who contended that by accepting the situation, our mothers kept their families intact and stayed married. Women in different age groups supported what was being discussed; and some commented that men’s tendency to have multiple partners was not bad, as long as this practice was not taken to the extreme. Only a small percentage of the women held a different view, in that they asserted that no matter what society or the proverb said, it does not make it right. Upon hearing the proverb discussed from a different perspective, another woman reacted too by twisting the proverb around and declared that if a man is like an elephant and can eat as many trees as he wishes, then a woman is like a tree and she can be eaten by many elephants. In the Venda language, the proverb *munna ndi ndou ha li muri muthihi fhedzi* meaning a man is an elephant, he does not only eat one type of tree; this woman reacted to it by saying *musadzi ndi muri*



*ha liwi nga ndou nthihi fhedzi* meaning a woman is a tree; she cannot be eaten by one elephant.

It was interesting to hear women challenging the accepted prescriptions of culture and that customarily go both unnoticed and unchallenged. It was also surprising to analyse the responses of the men. Some thought it was a disgrace for a woman to speak like that in public, especially when the young people were listening to them, because that could teach the young people to reject their culture. This indicates that women are supposed to continue being the preservers of culture whether or not it is harmful to them; for the sake of paving the way for the future generation. It is true that women had put their own interests aside for a long time for the sake of others, but that did not mean that they were not able to differentiate between what was right and what was not right. It was a question of what was acceptable and that was not acceptable. Women's capability to lead has been put on hold because of cultural prescriptions irrespective of their potential and/or gifts. Regarding women's subordination, Uchem (2001:112) endorses this conviction:

Thus, it stereotypes men and women as leaders and followers irrespective of personal qualities or gifts of individual men and women. It also disregards actual family life situations, where the women and not the men have leadership qualities, or both partners have them.

On the same note, the fact that women responded by saying; *musadzi ndi muri ha liwi nga ndou nthihi*, does not mean that it should be condoned, because that acceptance can lead to the oppression of women to men. Both the issues pertaining to a man being regarded as an 'elephant' and a woman being regarded as 'the tree' respectively are two extreme cases, which are wrong and harmful. The mere fact that culture can be challenged will make people to think, rather than just accepting things the way they are because they have been like that from long ago. The issue of a man being an elephant and a woman being a tree is not taking people anywhere; it is causing a great deal of pain in the families leading to broken marriages that affects the community negatively.

The lifestyles of men and women are influenced by the way we interact in every day life and the way culture influences relationship structures in the society. Women, like men, may have reasons for doing what they do. For the sake of keeping the family life intact, culture has taught women not to be worried about their husband's behaviour. A woman has been taught through culture to be satisfied with the fact that she is married and has a

husband; therefore, what the husband does should never cause her concern. This expectation of the society regarding women is expressed in cultural sayings like: “*vhida la musadzi li vhuhadzi hawe*” meaning the grave of a woman is at her in-laws. This implies that women should never be buried at her birth home, but at the place where she is married. In addition, all women are expected to get married whether they want to or not or have personal reasons for not marrying. In effect, the community is not ready to accept an unmarried person and this applies to both a man and a woman. In fact, marriage is celebrated by everyone, young and old. However, the fact is that for a woman getting married and the idolisation of marriage at the expense of self- development denies her full womanhood. Oduyoye (2007:4) rightly observes:

The result of the idolization of the married state for women is that they lose their status as human beings with a will of their own. They live to do the will of their husbands. In patriarchal families in Africa, a wife is absorbed into her husband’s family as a means of production and reproduction. She has no place anywhere else.

The Vhavenda people have another strong belief that is held by the community, namely that even if you have managed to please society or have done what is expected of you by getting married, you should stay married as well. If you should get divorced or are no longer married for any other reason (excluding the death of a partner), you are called a *mbuyavhuhadzi*. This word means, “the one who has gone back from marriage.” However, the term “*mbuyavhuhadzi*” applies only to women and not to men, because it is a woman who gets married and goes to stay with her husband’s relatives. This term brings shame, not only to the one who is called by that name, but also to her mother, family and community. This shows that if a woman finds herself in a situation where she has to decide whether she should get divorced or not, she has to consider the many negative repercussions associated with such an act in her culture before taking such a decision.

The *vhusadzi* approach criticises the elements that are oppressive in the African culture, namely those aspects:

- That do not regard a woman as a human being.
- Which discriminate against women in whatever way.

- Which diminish the opportunities for women in life and in effect, render them second-class citizens in society.
- That practices that promote the unfair treatment of women.

Many proverbs and sayings about women are related to marriage and how women should conduct themselves in marriage. Proverbs such as *vhida la musadzi li vuhadzi* that means a woman should stay married and the only way she can escape from marriage is the death of her spouse. Importantly, the *vhusadzi* approach is committed to encouraging family life and the good treatment of both men and women and does not propagate marriage at the expense of women. The fact is that marriage is an institution to which both a man and a woman should be committed to make it work. Men and women should learn to treat each other as human beings both in everyday life and not less importantly, in marriage.

Significantly, by questioning the unquestionable and suggesting the alternatives, the *vhusadzi* approach has the potential to create a conducive environment for women to address issues that make them vulnerable to cultural discourses that dehumanise them, thereby finding alternatives to women's treatment. As a way of showing its commitment to the leadership of women, the *vhusadzi* approach challenges the stereotypes held by leaders and people who use the prescriptions of culture, thereby limiting women's potential.

#### ***4.3.1.2 The vhusadzi approach and female circumcision.***

Circumcision in most cultures is regarded as the most important factor in deciding whether one has reached manhood or womanhood. Before marriage, a woman must be subjected to circumcision ceremony without which she is not considered a woman (cf. Labeodan 2007:114). This also entails the custom where one receives education on the way to behave as an adult and how to socialise with the aim of building the moral fibre of the community. It needs to be noted that female circumcision is practised in many cultures in Africa, but the way it is done varies from one group of people to the other. In some tribes, it is often said that the practice is a means of decreasing sexual passion in the female, thereby preserving her virginity and providing protection against extra-marital

relations. It is also postulated that this practice is necessary for child-bearing in terms of it being an introduction to the pain of childbirth (Njoroge 2000:23).

Quoting from the *Memorandum on female circumcision*, Njoroge (2000:24-25) writes the following:

Female circumcision' as it exists among the Gikuyu, is an operation which varies in severity, some sections of the tribe practicing a more drastic form than others. The following is a generally accepted description of the 'Major Operation'. 'It involves the removal of not only the clitoris, but also the labia minora and half the labia majora, together with the surrounding tissues, resulting in the permanent mutilation affecting the woman's natural functions of micturition, menstruation and parturition, with disastrous results not only to the birth rate, but to the physique and vitality of the tribe.

This rite of passage is mostly associated with the singing of songs that emphasise how women value the moment. These songs indicate to the young women how they are expected to conduct themselves both before and after marriage. Undoubtedly, these songs have a detrimental effect on the lives of women. Mostly, women choose to concede to this cultural demand because of the negative discourses that are associated with those who do not comply, such as an uncircumcised girl being regarded as a slave, as someone harbouring evil spirits and as a man (see Akintunde 2007:101-102). Regarding the effect of this practice, Akintunde (2007:105) rightfully notes:

It is one of the means by which the society has brainwashed women to submissiveness with culture. It is a means by which women's bodies are prepared for exploitation by men, as it entails mutilation of organs.

Among the Vhavenda speaking people, female circumcision (*u fumba*) differs in various areas depending on the emphasis those people place on it. However, in general, young girls undergo circumcision (*musevetho*) for no apparent reason, because what is done is only to put some marks on the thigh of the little girl to indicate that she is circumcised; this is done by using a razor and fire. Those who have started to menstruate, have to go for a vaginal check-up that is done by elderly women who know what they are looking for as they are experienced in the field. Mostly after these ceremonies, a young woman will be married or wear a certain type of clothing indicating that she has already been chosen for marriage or that *lobola* has already been paid, though not in full, but some

monies would have been given to the parents of the young woman. A *vhusadzi* approach advocates that the practice of female circumcision needs to be revisited and be reviewed if it is still continuing as it abnegates the humanity of women. Furthermore, female circumcision is regarded as an act of violence against women. Oduyoye (2007:16) postulates that in order to overcome violence against women, there is a need to examine all aspects of life, namely, the social organisations we have created, the beliefs and the laws we have made.

#### ***4.3.1.3 The vhusadzi approach and widowhood rituals***

Uchem (2002:12) asserts that:

It is true that the problem of widows is a presenting problem, a systemic issue embedded in the larger issue of devaluation of women in general, the cultural subjugation of women to men that is the secondary status of women in our society and churches.

Women undergo a great deal of suffering after the death of their husbands. Orebiyi (2001:77) announces that after a woman loses her husband, she has to endure humiliating treatment, which is not the case with a man. Examples of the humiliation she experiences are:

- Some will be asked not to eat certain types of food.
- They have to remain indoors for a certain period so that they cannot see the sun or their shadows.
- They are not allowed to attend certain types of gatherings.
- They only wear black or navy- blue colours for the period of mourning.

Women undergo a great deal of humiliation as explained above in many different parts of the world. The experiences regarding widowhood that some Vhavenda women had are also humiliating, such as:

- They were not allowed to view the bodies of their husbands.
- They were not allowed to take a bath during the entire period of mourning.

- Some were not supposed to eat anything that was not mixed with some traditional herbs.
- On the day of burial, some were not even be allowed to attend the funeral ceremony.
- Some would go to the cemetery covered by a blanket from head to toe and even if they sat by the graveside, other women would make sure that they did not see anything that was happening there.

Ofei-Aboagye (2007:54-57) also mentions further hardships associated with widowhood such as the fact that widows have to sit with the corpse for a certain period of time, in addition, a widow is sometimes expected to have sexual intercourse with a stranger to transmit the pollution of death to that person. These types of practices are health hazards to women, more especially in today's life with the grim reality of the plight of HIV and AIDS. How would a woman take precautions against the possibility of contracting HIV infection when she is still preoccupied with the transmission of death to a stranger? For the sake of being loyal to the cultural demands, women expose themselves to the risk of contracting the virus. In effect, these practices make life unbearable for a widow.

Ironically, it is the women themselves who are the perpetrators of these pernicious practices. They also make life extremely difficult for those who do not wish to conform to these harmful practices. According to Labeodan (2007:119-120), the first set of people to make life unbearable for a widow are her fellow women, especially those from the husband's family.

The husband's family members do not accept the death of their son or brother easily. Normally, the wife is suspected of having caused the death of her husband and remains guilty as charged, so to speak. In fact, culturally, it is accepted that men do not die without their wives' involvement. On this note, Labeodan (2007:120) mentions the plight of a widow who was accused of having killed her husband had to prove her innocence by drinking the water used for washing the corpse or by crawling over her husband's corpse. These dehumanising practices take place at the hands of their fellow women. It is in terms of these kinds of dehumanising practices that women must come of age, confront themselves and also name women as one of the causes of oppression (Kanyoro 1995:23).

The *vhusadzi* approach upholds and promotes the cultural practices that bestow value and dignity on women's lives, however, it also calls the ones into question that have the potential to create cultural norms that dehumanise women and label them as second – class citizens. This is so because the culture is capable of inflicting violence on women and destroying their lives. As a crucial point of departure when challenging violence against women, African women need to rise and challenge themselves first and then those who promote and perpetuate these cultural practices that relegate women to inferior positions in the community. On this note, Kanyoro (1995:23) rightly observes:

Who enforce inhuman rituals on widows in Africa and Asia? Who are the excisors of the female? Who are the instigators of divorce or polygamy in the case of wives unable to give birth to children or specifically to male children? These are areas of women's violence against women.

Kanyoro also places the responsibility of ending and confronting violence against women on the women themselves. Undeniably, unless women become bold and confront these practices that have persisted unchallenged for many years, they will continue to exist.

#### **4.4 The *vhusadzi* approach: Deconstructing the problematic religious discourses**

In this section, the *vhusadzi* approach will be employed to deconstruct the problematic religious discourses that are very powerful and the most dangerous in terms of devaluing women's worth in the church. This deconstruction will be aligned to the religious discourses in chapter two (see paragraphs 2.2.1; 2.2.2, and 2.2.4.1) and chapter three (see paragraph 3.4) of this study. In short those discourses are:

- Women are inferior.
- Women cannot lead.
- Women have to be silent in the church.
- Women cannot be priests.
- Women have to be controlled.
- Women are irrational and not reliable.
- Women brought sin into the world.

These discourses will be deconstructed through the *vhusadzi* approach under the following sub-headings: the image of God as the creator, Christology, the Holy Spirit and Paul's most powerful statements on women.

#### **4.4.1 The *vhusadzi* approach and God the creator**

The *vhusadzi* approach will be employed in this section to present the image of God as God the creator and the God of love. It is hoped that these two images will assist in the deconstruction of some of the problematic religious discourses as a result of the misinterpretation of the creation accounts in the book of Genesis. The first and second account of the creation is addressed next.

##### **Genesis 1:26-27**

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (The Holy Bible: New International Version, 1984).

The book of Genesis begins with the story of God who created the heavens and the earth. He also created the sun, the moon, the stars, the animals and the plants before He created human beings. The climax of His creation was the creation of human beings. When He created human beings, He created them male and female in His image. After creating them, He blessed them both so that they could take dominion over the earth. According to the first creation account, male and female are created equal, both in the image of God and both with the responsibility of taking charge of the earth.

It was not God's purpose that a man and a woman should control each other. They were meant to control the earth and everything on it. They were supposed to be partners who would complement each other, be in mutual agreement and have mutual respect for each other. As partners, they needed each other to enjoy life together, to share the joys and sorrows of life and to be fully human. The *vhusadzi* approach helps women to realise that it is God who created them in His image and gave them the potential to be leaders in the church as well. It is this awareness that will deconstruct the patriarchal constructed



interpretations concerning the roles women should play in the church. The *vhusadzi* approach purposefully makes this affirmation of the leadership of women in search of alternatives for a new understanding of the roles of vhavenda women in the church.

### **Genesis 2: 18-24**

18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." 19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (The Holy Bible: New International Version, 1984).

The second account of creation is normally interpreted to mean women are inferior to men. Uchem (2001:180) makes the following observation regarding this problematic discourse:

For centuries, Christians have taken this story quite literally and acted upon conclusions based on a faulty, literal and uncritical interpretation. Many till today have continued to use it to justify their claims to men's superiority over women, as their God-given right; that the man was created first and woman, second; as proof that woman is inferior and subordinate to man ontologically.

Women's perspectives on the second account of the creation showed that the discourse that "women are inferior to men" is problematic with regard to the roles that women should play in the church (see paragraph 2.2.4). It is this creation story that is used to support the denial of the potential of women to hold leadership positions in the church. Therefore, as women, we should find ourselves engaging with this text. According to the *vhusadzi* approach engaging with this text, the literal interpretation of this text is criticised for being male-centred and incapable of defining women in terms of their humanness, womanhood and leadership potential. The *vhusadzi* approach emphasises that

anyone can be a leader irrespective of the order of creation and that a woman can lead as well as a man can lead. This kind of affirmation regarding women leadership through the *vhusadzi* approach, values women for who they are, namely that they are created in God's image and are complete human beings, irrespective of whether they were taken out of a man and/or created in the second place.

The word "helper" is also seen as somebody who is of a lesser status to the one who is being helped. In reality, the one helped is seen to be in a superior position. However, in a South African setting where blacks were helping on the farms and in the houses of whites and regarded as inferior, this interpretation is not implausible. When a black middle-aged man worked in a white person's garden and was called a garden boy, it was an indication of his status in the eyes of society. On the other hand, especially today, if one asks in a democratic set-up if blacks are inferior to whites, one will get a different response, namely that both blacks and whites are equal. Currently, this word "helper" is not used in the same way as it was used during apartheid era, when the black people were called helpers to the white bosses in apartheid South Africa. On the contrary, to be a helper is to be a mutual partner who complements the other partner. Regarding the meaning of the word "helper" Nasimiyu-Wasike (2002:178) concludes that, "To be a helper is to be a helpmate, a complement, a mutual partner and fundamentally to be equal. To help does not mean to be subordinate to the one helped."

God is called a helper, in Psalm 54:4 in the Bible (The Holy Bible: NKJV, 1984): "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is with those who uphold my life." Again, the Holy Spirit is also called a helper in John 14: 16 (NKJV): "And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever (The Holy Bible: NKJV, 1984)." These two verses show that God and the Holy Spirit are both called "helpers," as they help human beings. Now, can we rightfully say that because they are helpers, therefore they are inferior to human beings? Our answer cannot be "yes," because their roles have nothing to do with their status and with who they are. Having said all this, one can rightfully say that a woman is not inferior to a man on this basis. There is no other reason for assuming that a woman is inferior to man in the first and the second accounts of the creation stories. Indeed, it is through the patriarchal misinterpretations of these accounts that women are relegated to an inferior position and this excludes them from holding leadership positions in the church.

#### **4.4.2 The *vhusadzi* approach and Christology**

In this section, the discussion will focus on what Christ's salvation means to women and the significance of Christ's treatment of women.

##### ***4.4.2.1 The vhusadzi approach and Christ's salvation***

When the birth of Jesus was announced to a woman, it never dawned on her that this was the beginning of a radical change in the history of humankind. Jesus came as the saviour of all humankind, in other words, as the saviour of all men and women. Importantly, He treated them both as equals. Regarding women, Jesus' treatment of them is seen as revolutionary because of the lower status that women occupied in Jewish culture. His coming to this earth began a journey of salvation, not only spiritually, but also physically, socially, psychologically, culturally and religiously. "How will this happen?" This was the question in Mary's mind.

The question above can be answered through what Jesus' life accomplished. Indeed, Jesus' life brought about chiefly human salvation through His stance of solidarity with and compassion for those pronounced unworthy by religion and culture (Uchem 2001:206). The story of salvation has more to it than what the churches normally emphasise, namely that Christ came to save us from our sins. To an African South-African *muvevenda* woman, what does it mean to be saved? As women who are confronted by the cultural and religious discourses of the Christian religion and its sacred texts that continue to marginalise women regarding their status in terms of the leadership of the church, it is imperative that salvation should encompass every aspect of their lives.

Jesus' salvation has a greater meaning than the church understands and is willing to admit. It provides a way out of women's struggle against issues of race, gender, class, culture and religion. This salvation means women are now free to be human and to feel safe to be women. This is echoed in the words of Landman (1999:87):

How, then, does Christ save us from hurting and being hurt? A liberative piety emphasises that Christ has already saved us by giving us a new life and thus by

empowering us to change the attitude as well as the structures which inflict hurt on people, such as hierarchies in which men dominate women, and power games in which people of different races dominate others.

Jesus' salvation symbolises "good news" for women who are hurting, marginalised, facing issues pertaining to sexism, classism, race, patriarchy and other alienating discourses that deny them leadership positions in the church. For women, "good news" means experiencing deliverance from all the ills that deprive them of their full womanhood. The words of LenkaBula (2005:115) concerning the meaning of good news for women make sense in this regard:

The churches will need to demonstrate their solidarity to the poor and marginalized. The poor in South Africa are largely women. Women, particularly black women, have to a large extent been alienated from education, including theological education, from the means to support themselves and their families (meaningful employment), and from meaningful life.

The *vhusadzi* approach advocates that the power of Jesus' salvation is an important resource in the struggles of African women. When they experience the power of salvation that is available to them, it transforms them and their struggles, to enable them to live meaningful lives and to assume leadership roles in the church. Regarding this power, Masenya (2005:748) notes:

African-South African women continue in faith, to experience the power of the risen Christ confirmed in their everyday lives. It is the power that enables them to cast out demons, to heal the sick and to proclaim liberation to those who are in bondage.

Through the *vhusadzi* approach, which is life affirming, with its commitment to the deconstruction of religious and cultural discourses that are life –denying, women can begin to experience meaningful lives. Jesus' salvation, when approached from the *vhusadzi* perspective combined with the insights of social construction and post-structuralist theories, holds the potential for full inclusion of African South-African Vhavenda women in leadership positions in the church and for women to experience full womanhood.

#### **4.4.2.2 *The vhusadzi approach and the ministry of Christ***

The life of Jesus and His treatment of women were both radical and revolutionary. In His lifetime, Christ violated many Jewish laws regulating women's lives. His treatment of women was very different from the way religious leaders treated them. In fact, Jesus' actions contrasted with the culture of His day; He treated women as valuable individuals with dignity. His attitude toward women was shocking and unexpected even for the people who walked and ate with Him, His disciples. On this note, Thiessen (1990:52-64) mentions the kind of culture Jesus was challenging:

- Women in the first century Israel were defined by their roles – as bearers of children.
- Jewish literature tended to characterise women as unclean, sexual temptresses.
- Intellectual initiatives on the part of women were not encouraged in Rabbinic Judaism.

Now turning to the narratives in the scriptures, an example of a woman of faith and how Jesus treated her will be discussed:

#### **Luke 8: 42-48 (The Holy Bible:NIV, 1998)**

... As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. 45. 'Who touched me?' Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you'. 46. But Jesus said, 'Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me'. 47. Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. 48. Then he said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.

What happened in this incident is that Jesus was called to Jarius' house, a synagogue ruler whose daughter was sick. The crowd that was following Jesus was pressing and crushing Him. In her heart, the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years decided that if she could only touch the hem of his garment, she could be made whole.

In this study, the bleeding woman who is recorded here is without a name, she is only identified by the description of her condition. Regarding this woman, Dube (2001:3-9) notes the following:

- Both women (the young girl, and the bleeding woman) were cured by a man.
- Both of these women are nameless.
- Both are associated with sickness.
- Both have the number twelve in common.
- Both are not identified by any professional role.

Dube further supports the argument that Jesus behaved differently towards both of these women from the way other men behaved towards women. He was different because He valued the lives of women. Furthermore, He did not take them for granted or regard them as sexual objects. Hence, Dube encourages African women to be free and to pursue the professions of their choice. It is in terms of this freedom for African South-African Vhavenda women that the *vhusadzi* approach has the potential to encourage women to exercise their leadership roles in the church.

The bleeding woman did something that violated the protocol of the day. According to the Jewish ceremonial law (Leviticus 15:19-30), she was regarded as unclean and everything that she touched would be unclean. She decided to take a step informed by uncompromising, unwavering faith, which is the faith that African women need to be free from marginalisation and oppression from culture and religion.

The bleeding woman was desperate and determined to be healed. She was very desperate because she had already tried other resources to find freedom, but they had all failed her. Eventually, everything she had ever accumulated for herself and her household was gone. She went and touched the clothes of Jesus and her bleeding stopped immediately. Realising that the power had gone out of Him, Jesus stood and asked, “Who touched me?” v. 45? Regarding the next verse, Adam Clarke’s commentary has this to say:

## Luke 8:46

And Jesus said, somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.

Of the many that touched him, this woman and none else received this divine virtue and why? It is because she came in faith. Faith alone attracts and receives the energetic influence of God at all times. There would be more miracles, at least of spiritual healing, were there more faith among those who are called believers (Clarke 2003).

One of the disciples responded in amazement because there were many people who were pressing against Him. Jesus would not give up even when He saw that no one was coming forward. Finally, the woman who had been healed came forward, terrified because of what she had done and she identified herself, telling Jesus about her condition and what had happened after she had touched Him. Surprisingly, Jesus was not angry with her or with what she had done. Instead of Jesus rebuking her, He addressed her in intimate language by referring to her as “daughter,” commending her for her faith and allowed her to go in peace. If today’s faith does not take to task the exclusion of women from leadership positions in the church, then it is no faith at all. In addition, if this faith cannot respond to the dehumanising conditions of humankind and life’s everyday experiences, then, that kind of faith is non-existent and powerless to change African women’s life threatening conditions. LenkaBula (2006:94) states that:

Women have also named their threat to life, ecological justices, economic globalization and the attendant geopolitical dominance. Further, they have identified patriarchal dominance and exploitation, racism, xenophobia, discrimination based on caste, ethnicity and other related and violent intolerance as processes and systems for which they require change and transformation.

Now turning to the story of this woman and journeying through it from a *vhusadzi* perspective, it will be divided into the following sub-sections:

- The *vhusadzi* approach journeying with the power of a woman.
- The *vhusadzi* approach journeying with the experience of the bleeding woman.
- The *vhusadzi* approach journeying with the identity of a woman.
- The *vhusadzi approach journeying* with a woman as a human being.

- The *vhusadzi* approach embracing a woman's context.
- **The *vhusadzi* approach journeying with the power of a woman.**

The woman was very strong, medically speaking, if one loses blood for such a long period, it is very rare for her to be alive or even to be able to stand or walk. It is close to impossible that she would be alive after 12 long years of bleeding. It is not recorded how intense the bleeding and the intervals between the bleeding were, but nonetheless, it is likely that she lost a lot of blood. Burdened with so many restrictions, she did not allow her circumstances to destroy her, not even the disease that could kill her; neither could the Levitical law make her sit down and expect somebody to do things on her behalf. Nothing could deny her the right to access her freedom and what she regarded as rightly hers. How does the *vhusadzi* approach view the power and the strength of the bleeding woman? The *vhusadzi* approach commends women's initiative as part of their leadership skills employed to address their marginalisation in the leadership positions in the church. Importantly, the *vhusadzi* approach acknowledges that women have the power to change their situation in the church. If women rise up in solidarity and speak in one voice, nothing can deny them their God given purpose to hold leadership positions in the church.

- ***The vhusadzi approach and the bleeding woman's experience***

In the large crowd that was following Jesus to the house of Jairus, possibly each one of them had a different agenda. Imagining the nature of the crowd that followed Jesus can shed some light in this regard. There could have been those who were accompanying Jairus because, as a ruler, he would have an entourage that were there to give moral support to their leader. The disciples of Jesus were there because they went with him wherever He went. Other members of the crowd were those who were sent from Jairus' house to report the death of his daughter and amongst this group, there were those who were funeral undertakers to see if Jesus would rob them of their jobs by raising the dead back to life. There were also those who told the sick woman about Jesus, to witness for themselves how Jesus would respond to her condition.



Perhaps there were also the physicians that the sick woman had consulted; some were there to witness how much the woman still had to pay for the sickness they had not cured and some came to see this man who healed people without making them pay for His services. In addition, in the large crowd there were some people from the local bakeries as well as fishermen, who came to see who this was who handed out free fish and bread.

In the crowd, the bleeding woman was there for reasons of her own. Only matters beyond her control could have prevented her from following Jesus when He ministered in the synagogue. In fact she was:

- Restricted by ritual impurity laws.
- Marginalised in terms of being at places of worship.
- Cut-off from social activities.
- Confined to the back position where it was rare to be noticed.

Against all odds, this woman was able to push her way forward in spite of all the restrictions she had. She was not swayed from her course in the crowd, when others were pushing her to the right and others were pushing her to the left, she was able to assert herself and look ahead to where she was going to get what she needed. It is this strength that African women need to help them push forward and not look back, so that they can touch the Master.

- ***The vhusadzi approach: Journeying with the identity of a woman***

This unnamed woman was a woman without any recognition, because if one is without a name, one cannot be recognised, but taken for granted. For her, being taken for granted because of her gender was not good enough. The fact that this story will be read for centuries by nations makes it run the risk of losing its originality and reduce the effectiveness of the change that Jesus purposefully brought to womanhood. People without names do not matter and are non-important, hence their contribution can be forgotten easily. For instance, this woman was identified through a negative description, in terms of her sickness. She could be exploited by those in power and that is the reason why she had adopted so many names, because she lacked a real name. Jesus created a

positive atmosphere for this woman to become aware of her own identity. The Son of God could not be stopped from asking this woman to come forward. Everything else came to a standstill because Jesus knew what He was doing. It was a woman who interfered in the divine mission of Jesus going to Jairus' house to heal his sick daughter. Though trembling, the woman came forward and told Jesus what had made her touch Him and that she had been healed instantly. She was very vocal, nothing could silence her. Indeed, silence is the greatest enemy of an African woman as African women can hardly talk about themselves, their challenges and their solutions. In the family, when women speak, it is about men, in the community, it is also about men and in the church, during women's gatherings when they preach, it is about men. When are the African women going to talk about themselves and define themselves in their own terms instead of being defined by somebody who will limit and confine them?

In contrast with African women, the woman began with her description on a negative note as she described the problems she had with regard to her bleeding and concluded with her positive account of her healing. The Master gave her time and a listening ear to allow her say whatever she wanted to say without rushing her. Not that the daughter of Jairus was not important. The word "daughter" applied both to Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman who was addressed as daughter by Jesus. As mentioned before, in both cases, 12 years was significant; the one daughter was 12 years old, and the other daughter had suffered for 12 years. She never spoke about her husband, who could have abandoned her if she was married and she never spoke about her children, some of which might have included sons, but instead she talked about herself. Labeodan (2007:113) puts it well when she writes about the *status quo* of African women:

Most societies are patriarchal. As a result of this, women in most of these societies are to be seen and not to be heard. In these societies, there is so much suppression and oppression of women by men which is supported by the cultures and religions.

The woman spoke about her past as well as her present life in front of the crowd. The ruler of the synagogue was also there listening to a woman narrating a story about herself for the first time in front of the crowd. This woman violated the accepted protocol, she should have spoken to the priest or the ruler of the synagogue first at the very least; instead she went to Jesus by herself. She spoke before Peter, James and John so that they

could also witness the type of conversation that Jesus had with women, so that they could be helped regarding their suspicion (as in the conversation with the Samaritan woman). That day the entire crowd witnessed the way Jesus related to women.

Jesus called the woman “daughter” and not “woman.” The language He used symbolised the kind of relationship that existed between Him and her. For Jesus, this woman was more than just one of the women in the crowd; she was one of those who belonged with Him in a family as their relationship was like a father-child relationship. However, she was regarded as more than a child, she was called “daughter.” The language that Jesus used must have put this woman at ease so that she could stop trembling and listen to Him. She might have not believed that Jesus could refer to her as “daughter.” Jesus once used a similar phrase with reference to a disabled woman when He said that she was a “daughter of Abraham” in Luke 13:16: “Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

The above was the only instance when a woman was referred to as a “daughter of Abraham,” and this was by Jesus only. Abraham was known to have “sons” only until Jesus came into the scene. It is still strange that pastors refer to Christians in general today as “sons of God,” but the truth of the matter is that God also has daughters. For Jesus, it is important that women should be called “daughters” and not “sons.” If it is asserted that it should not matter if all the children of God are called “sons of God, undoubtedly, if the terminology is changed to”daughters of God,” it will definitely start to matter. Therefore, it is significant to use both “sons of God” and “daughters of God” in the church or rather to use the phrase “children of God” which is more inclusive.

After describing her experiences, she went on to describe her experience since coming into contact with Jesus. At that moment, she was no longer subjected to the restrictions she had experienced in the past, for they no longer affected her. Although she was still trembling, the bleeding that had lasted 12 years had stopped. Jesus commended her, declaring that, “your faith has healed you.” Significantly, He recognised the deeds of a woman as well as her actions, and most importantly, she was not condemned for what she did.

- ***The vhusadzi approach: Journeying with a woman as a human being***

If the members of the crowd were to be counted, the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years was not going to be in the records of all the people who were present because it was not the custom to count women and children, only the men would be counted. She was in the midst of men named Jarius, Peter, James and John. Unlike Jarius who was the ruler of the synagogue, this woman was without a profession with which she could be identified. It is not evident in the text if this woman was married or had children of her own. If she had a husband, she suffered from husband-wife isolation, furthermore, she could not enjoy sexual relations with her husband because of her physical condition and her sickness. She was unclean, and everything with which she came into contact became unclean.

- ***The vhusadzi approach: Embracing a woman's context***

A *mvenda* woman can understand to an extent the bleeding woman, as she identifies with her because the *mvenda* woman is also expected to be silent by her culture. In fact, in the *Vhavenda* culture, if a woman does not raise questions on the issues that affect her and is able to keep quiet, she is regarded as an honourable woman; whereas the woman who seems to be searching for answers and always asking questions is regarded as ill-disciplined and not regarded as the noble woman mentioned in Proverbs 31: 10-31. Imathiu (2001:30), labels this a code of silence and it is silence that is regarded as the greatest virtue in terms of patriarchal beliefs, colonialism and Western civilisation. Imathiu believes that oppressive practices depend on silencing the "others" coupled with the passive acceptance of the pain and oppression in women's lives as their lot.

The story of the bleeding woman offers a vivid example of a woman breaking the chains of paternalism. The bleeding woman was assertive in her action as a bold and determined woman. This was indeed a brave action because, this woman was used to living under oppression; she was also stigmatised as unclean, cut-off from human contact, probably denied sexual relation (intercourse) and severely restricted in her activities. After having relied on others for her needs, she took responsibility for her own life, identified her need and found someone who could truly help her in her struggle for wholeness.

The bleeding woman was told to go in peace; that was the peace of God that transcended all human understanding (Philippians 4:7). This was the peace that only God could provide. She was given what nobody-else could give her. In addition, she was given back her womanhood, so that she could go and become a woman again and what was more, enjoy being a woman. She was to enjoy her new life in which she no longer suffered from isolation, uncleanness, pain and shame. Moreover, she could enjoy company and close relationships again.

The message was loud and clear, that when she came into contact with people, she would experience what the researcher calls an unguilty touch. She was made clean and everything she touched was clean. She was to do things that she could not do before because of her condition. She was to do those things again that enabled her to have financial freedom; because she had money before that, she spent all of it in her search for health. She should go back and find financial balance in her life and be able to stand on her own and live her life having the things she had wanted and longed for all the time she was sick. She was also to go and become that which she had not been able to become before because of the shame. Importantly, she had no reason to experience shame any longer, so she could walk with her head held high and look forward to the future. She was to become that which she was born to become and nothing could hold her back any more.

The *vhusadzi* approach encourages women to stand up for what is rightfully theirs and to be counted in the leadership of the church. Women should also stand up and claim their freedom in the church. The power of the bleeding woman should encourage them to realise that they too, can challenge and eradicate the marginalisation of women in the church. Indeed, women are not in the church to be seen and not heard. In fact, women's voices and wisdom can transform the patriarchal nature of the church.

#### **4.4.3 The *vhusadzi* approach and the Holy Spirit**

In this section, the researcher will look at the experience of Pentecost and women's call to ministry in the light of the *vhusadzi* approach.

#### 4.4.3.1 *The vhusadzi approach and the experience of Pentecost*

When Jesus was ascending to heaven, He gave the instruction to His followers to go and wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What happened on the day of Pentecost according to the book of Acts 1:12-14 (The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible, 2003) was as follows:

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olive Grove, which is near Jerusalem – a Sabbath day’s journey away. When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

Now, according to the above text, the experience of Pentecost involved both women and men. It was not only the male disciples of Jesus who were there during the birth of the church, but there were women as well. When the day of Pentecost came, they were together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, that appeared like flames of fire, resting on each of them, and they began to speak in new tongues as the Spirit gave them the power of utterance. Importantly, the *vhusadzi* approach encourages women to speak of their own experiences regarding Pentecost, for it is when they begin to speak that they will find ways of breaking away from the patriarchal nature of the church. Following which, the church will become the church of the Holy Spirit where both women and men become partners in the leadership of the church. Unless women decide to speak about their experiences and not remain silent, the church will continue to be patriarchal in nature where women will not be free to become full humans. It is when women speak that they will be able to redefine, re-evaluate and transform the patriarchal nature of the church.

In the Pentecostal churches today, both men and women are still experiencing the baptism by the Holy Spirit. In this regard, there are a few aspects worth mentioning concerning the experience of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

- This experience involved both women and men.
- Individually, they were all given the power of speech.

- All were empowered to become witnesses.
- All were baptised, including the women.

Significantly, both men and women were speaking in other tongues. This baptism did not come as an inherited privilege and it was not gender specific. The Holy Spirit rested on people regardless of their sex, class, status, culture. God is no respecter of persons ( see Acts 10:34): “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons’ The Holy Bible: KJV, 1970). God rather operates according to His own divine will without any consultation with human beings.

In the Pentecostal churches today, women are mostly free to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is where they are free to pray, be emotional, dance, clap, speak in tongues and raise their voices to praise God. All the above mentioned aspects also apply to men too. It is in the Pentecostal churches with their Pentecostal understanding that women should have been encouraged all the more to become leaders in the sense of becoming pastors than in any other church. Instead the leadership development of women in the Pentecostal churches is still faced with challenges.

It is surprising that, notwithstanding the fact that it is rare to find African men being emotional, but in the church, everyone forgets himself/herself and allows the Spirit of God to take control. It is important to note that these emotions are interpreted as spiritual. When a person prays and preaches the loudest, speaks in tongues in an emotional way, these are regarded as the characteristics of a spiritual person and a powerful Christian. It is thought to be unspiritual if one is not emotional and loud. For instance, a preacher who does not have a loud voice, and does not preach as if he is reciting an emotional poem, is not considered spiritual. On this note, Nadar (2004:357) in her study of Indian women in the Full Gospel Church rightfully comments:

Emotionalism (loud wailing, “laughing in the Spirit”, etc) has become in recent years, a hallmark of Indian Pentecostalism....The emphasis, at present, is very much on emotionalism and the more emotional one is the more spiritual one is deemed to be – speaking in tongues and ecstatic outbursts are regarded as signs of a higher spiritual level.

It is important to note that, unlike men, women are highly gifted at being emotional and uttering loud prayers, but unfortunately, this does not benefit them in the church. On the contrary, they are instructed to remain silent.

The roles that Vhavenda women have played and continue to play in the Pentecostal church also vary from one denomination to another, but are connected to their understanding of what they think the Spirit wants them to do. These women are capable of doing whatever their leader (pastor) tells them to do, this is based on their belief that their pastor is a “man of God” who is directed and led by the Spirit. It is this type of belief that contributes to women being relegated to roles that are called women specific, such as being an usher – taking care of people welcoming them and showing them where to sit. Of course, there is nothing wrong with being an usher as long as it is not regarded as “domesticated” and deemed a woman’s role. Other roles like cleaning the church, preparing meals and serving tea should not remain the only roles that women are encouraged to perform in the church.

It is also expected of the pastor in the Pentecostal church to have a strong and healthy relationship with the Holy Spirit. When the pastor gives directions to the church saying that this is what the Spirit is telling them to do, the church listens without asking any questions. In the Pentecostal church, it is forbidden to question the operations of the Spirit. Furthermore, the way the scriptures are interpreted is in line with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Women in the Pentecostal church are still waiting for that time when texts that silence women will be interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When preachers interpret what the Spirit tells them, one will hear them saying, “I hear the Holy Spirit saying.” If preachers hear the Holy Spirit in specific texts giving them messages to give to the church, then they should hear what He is saying concerning 1 Corinthians 14:34-35:

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (The Holy Bible: NIV,1998)

They should also seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit concerning 1 Timothy 2:11-15:



Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control (The Holy Bible: NKJV,1984).

According to Nadar (2004:367), women can never be truly and fully emancipated as long as the spiritual aspect remains separated from the physical aspect and as long as there is no assurance of a more holistic and liberating understanding of the role of the Spirit within the Pentecostal framework of the work of the Spirit in interpretation. The *vhusadzi* perspective takes the insights of Nadar into cognisance that can prove helpful to women when they engage with these texts (like the ones quoted above); in deconstructing them, asking new questions about them, questions that were never asked for the fear of sinning against the church. This will bring about fresh answers, which will enable women to participate fully in the church, for it is not considered Pentecostal not to speak up. Through women's engagement with biblical texts that marginalise women regarding the leadership of the church, the church will realise that the Holy Spirit embodies the spirit of truth and love (see John 14:17; Galatians 5:22). Therefore, until the church hears what the "Spirit is saying" to churches, women can never be said to be truly emancipated.

The *vhusadzi* approach encourages the *vhavenda* women to speak about their Pentecostal experience and not to remain silence. It is only when women break the silence and begin to speak that they will experience their freedom to enter into the leadership of the church. Women should speak as they are carried along by the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes upon women and rests on them, He gives them the ability to speak, prophesy, and utter words of wisdom that build up the church of God. Why should women keep silent when they are endowed with power to speak? Who is given the mandate to speak on their behalf? Does it offend the Holy Spirit when women speak, prophesy and lead the church as they are carried along by the same Holy Spirit?

#### ***4.4.3.2 The vhusadzi approach and the call to ministry***

In the Pentecostal church, people who are in leadership positions in the church are those who claim to be called. Being called by God plays a very significant role in one becoming an ordained pastor. When a person is called, it is the pastor of that particular person together with the elders of the church who play a significant role in ensuring the

particular person is affirmed and is able to pursue his/her calling. However, it is also true that the responsibility for the calling lies with the one who is called. The desire to serve the Lord impels a person in such a way that whatever happens, he/she only wants to see the calling fulfilled. This is the same desire that women experience when they are called. In reality, women are not affirmed and reassured regarding their call even though they firmly believe that it is God who called them and has set them apart for the work of the church (see chapter three).

Mostly, when people say they are called, they are referring to being a leader in the church in the form of the five-fold ministries (spiritual gifts) as mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-12:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of the body of Christ (The Holy Bible: NKJV, 1984).

Pentecostal women, who are called by God, face certain challenges that make it difficult for them to be obedient to the voice of the Spirit. Those challenges range from the perceptions that people hold regarding women (see the chapter on the interviews and the questionnaires) and biblical interpretations that feed the problem religious discourses that relegate women to a lower status. These perceptions lead to unending debates on whether women are qualified by the Bible to occupy positions of leadership in the church or not. The role that “a call” plays for one to be considered is taken for granted because of the patriarchal nature of the church.

Women are today seeking innovative ways of ministering so that they can follow their calling. In order to remain true to their calling, some begin home church services during the week, whereas some decide to leave their churches and begin a new church altogether; so that they can have the freedom to minister and utilise their spiritual gifts for the ministry. On their own, with the help of other women who support them, they feel encouraged to preach leading both men and women being converted. They also pray for the sick and deliver people from demonic possession. In this way, they feel that they are serving the Lord by following their calling.

The question that remains is that, will a call alone be enough justification for entering the ministry for women? Significantly, eighty percent (80%) of the women discussed in chapter three who were part of this investigation, based their leadership in the church on their calls alone. This is because they did not have any formal theological training. This lack of formal theological training is a disadvantage for the women who are called. When they face challenges related to the spiritual basis of their call, they are unable to defend themselves. When the problem religious discourses are presented to them, they do not have the knowledge to justify their convictions.

#### **4.4.4 The *vhusadzi* approach and Paul's powerful statements regarding women**

The letters of Paul have been used in the church to deny women leadership positions in the church. It is because of these letters and their interpretations by people that leadership positions remain inaccessible to women today. The perceptions that people have of women and leadership in the church is not innocent, it continues to cause a lot of harm in women's lives. Those who believe that the leadership of women should be restricted in the church often quote Paul. In fact, the texts of Paul that are quoted most often are 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35. These two texts are extremely powerful and play a large role in determining the attitudes towards women regarding leadership positions in today's church.

##### **1 Timothy 2:11-15**

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (from The Holy Bible: NIV, 1998).

##### **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (The Holy Bible: NIV, 1998).

When Paul said women should learn in silence and submission; and that he did not permit a woman to teach, it appears that he did not foresee the difficulties it would cause the church. Based on the interpretation of these texts by the church women are denied the opportunity of becoming church leaders. On this note, Storkey (2002: xi) rightly comments:

Far too many churches seem committed to restricting women rather than releasing them into a fully Christian lifestyle. Rather than searching the Scriptures together to make sure that what the church practises is truly biblical, there is all too often a refusal to face the issues head-on, and a hope that they will simply go away.

The kind of biblical hermeneutics that the church is using concerning these texts leads to restrictions being imposed on women that deny them leadership positions in the church. This kind of interpretation that prohibits women from assuming leadership positions in the church, feeds the religious discourses that women cannot lead, that women are inferior and that women should remain silent in the church. As discussed in chapter two (see paragraph 2.2.4.2), the following valuable insights regarding these texts were developed by women after searching the Scriptures, namely:

- The silencing of women was not written by Paul.
- The texts do not fit into Paul's arguments.
- Paul was addressing an issue in Corinth itself.

The insights of West (2004:163) also prove helpful and relevant in dealing with these texts justly. He comments:

Every time we read 1 Timothy we are reminded by its formulaic beginning and ending that it is a letter written by a particular person to particular persons dealing with particular issues in a particular context. So the context of production is ever present, even if we do not always comprehend the details of that context.

The scholarly resources that West used in attempting to 'tame' 1 Timothy 2:8-15, were the socio-historical dimensions of the text, the literary dimensions of the biblical text and lastly, the methodological position of the text and the reader's expectations.

The questions that one can ask are whether these insights are able to silence the restrictions on women imposed by these texts? Are women not able to lead in the church and are women inferior to men in the scriptures? The damage caused by the misinterpretation of these texts remains unbearable. The power of these texts is also on the conscience of those women who are already leaders in the church, because together with those who ordained them, they cannot stand up and be able to defend the reason that influenced their decision in ordaining women to be leaders.

Many attempts have been made by scholars to deconstruct these texts so that the church can admit women to leadership positions in the church and fight their exclusion in the church in the process. On this note, LenkaBula (2006:96) remarks:

Central to doing theology is the commitment to exposing and transforming the sins of exclusion and marginalization of women and others, in the church and in society. This calls us to act and to transform the distortions of the message of God, or the acquiescence with scriptural texts or theological interpretation, which deny life, ecology and economic justice, that are often embedded on sermons, hermeneutics and interpretation of Scripture, ecclesiology and church tradition.

Furthermore, West (2004) also suggests that through what he calls decontextualisation and recontextualisation this text can be ‘tamed’ and women can participate fully in the church. In addition, West points out that by asking new questions that will make this text speak anew; the text will become living and active.

In an attempt to deconstruct the dangerous religious discourses mentioned above, in the earlier epistle of Paul to the Galatians 3:28, the following version is suggested:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This text suggests that there are no unequal distinctions between male and female in the sight of God. In a comparison of this text and 1 Timothy, West asks which one of the two needs to be prioritised and which one needs to be ignored and who makes the decision? In the previous chapter, the present researcher reflected on the perspectives of women on Paul’s powerful statements on women. Now, as an African *muwenda* woman in South Africa, how can one respond to the religious discourses that are problematic to women

leadership in the church? It is the message of this text that, when read properly in conjunction with the scholarly arguments mentioned above, the religious discourses that women cannot lead, that women are inferior and that women are to remain silent in the church can be changed to benefit both women and men through the *vhusadzi* approach. The *vhusadzi* approach holds that since men claim to be called by God and that justifies their leadership in the church; women as well should be well received in the same position on the same basis. The above problematic religious discourses can therefore be viewed as follows:

- Women are leaders together with men in the church.
- Men and women are equal in the sight of God.
- Both men and women can speak freely about their experience of God.

#### **4.4.5 The *vhusadzi* approach and church practices**

In this section, the challenges that face single women will be looked at from a *vhusadzi* perspective.

##### ***4.4.5.1 The *vhusadzi* approach and single women***

The term “single women” is used here to mean those women who are without husbands; these are women who have “never married,” the separated, the divorced and the widowed. Traditionally, single women have been stereocast as old maids who were unable to “get a man” and as modern city singles who did not want to marry a man (Gordon 1994:1). These stereotypes make women invisible because they are always identified with a man. Without a man, women are regarded as nonexistent. Now, it suffices to look at some reasons some women are single.

It is a fact that among the single women, there are those who remain single by choice. These women’s choices are continually challenged by cultural expectations. Historically, among the Vhavenda people, there is a certain age (though the age is not well specified) that one should not pass without getting married. This cultural expectation is not only aimed at women, but at men too, for culturally marriage is considered a “rite of passage” from childhood to adulthood. This is so because of the long held belief that a family is

significant in the continuation of humankind and it pleases the ancestors. When one passes that certain age without getting married, it is regarded as a disgrace to the family, the ethnic group, the community and to the ancestors. People would call them names such as cultural deviants because they are not conforming to the cultural standards of the group. Names like *mutshelukwa* (meaning the one who passed the age of getting married or getting a man to marry her). When “*o tshelukwa*” is said, it means that one’s situation is so serious that it calls for the family to be involved. Consequently, the family will be forced to arrange a marriage to satisfy the cultural demands. It is not well received or accepted among the Vhavenda that one can make a choice not to get married. They could also consult the traditional healers in order to find out why their child is not interested in marriage.

The fact that some have ‘never married,’ to some is because of a choice that they have made over time. These are the choices they stick to, no matter the demands of their culture and the pressures associated with it. Some of these choices are made because of the background and experiences that people go through. For those who grew up in polygamous homes where their father was married to more than one wife, this might have been a painful experience as that is where they have seen women downplaying other women in competing to gain acceptance from a man they call a husband. These choices are not simple to make, because one does not know if the same can happen to her as to her mother. However, the fear of subjugating oneself under such dehumanising conditions makes them rather stick to their choice. It is also surprising that there are even women who rather settle for a polygamous marriage as long as they can be married and feel protected. On this note, Uchem (2001:71) comments:

...there is a big difference between philosophy and actual life; and between what African men say about polygamy and what African women say about it.... It is true that women have been known to pay for the bride price of a co-wife.... What has not yet been examined is the social pressure of expectation, which has conditioned the Igbo women concerned to comply with the social requirements rather than honor their deepest and truest feelings as women and as human beings.

For some single women, their careers come before their marriages. While growing up, they have been taught that your first husband is your education. To them getting married comes as a second choice, not a choice for which they will sacrifice everything. If one

grows up in a family where a mother is educated and has a career, the chances are that one will pursue a career and find oneself going very far in life. If one's career demands that one should leave home for a far place to further one's studies, it becomes simple, unlike if one is married. In the latter case, if a married woman tries to cope with her career demands, it can put a lot of strain on her marriage. Independence on the part of a single woman brings the advantage of being economically empowered. At the same time, in certain contexts, one cannot deny that there are also married women who are able to strike a balance between career and family, independence and interdependence.

For some, singlehood is not a result of choice, but because of circumstances. They grow up aspiring to get a man who will marry them and settle down with them as a family. For them, it was just unfortunate that their expectations were not fulfilled. Others found themselves going from one relationship to another in the hope of getting married. Today, they are left with children born out of wedlock, thinking that a man will marry them if they please him or by trapping him into marriage by having his children. In short, the reason mentioned above, indicates that one wants marriage at all costs.

For some, being single brought about social pressures, requirements and responsibilities with which they were unable to contend. Importantly, women are defined in terms of their roles in the family, as caregivers for the husband and the whole family, a mother, who is the bearer of children, especially sons. If it happens that women fail to live up to these requirements, especially the expectation of bearing children; she might have to face the trauma of getting divorced. In some cultures, such as the Vhavenda culture, if a woman is unable to bear children, she can be sent home and be replaced by her younger sister or any other woman who can do what she was unable to do.

Undoubtedly, for some women, being single has never been an easy situation. However, the number of single women is growing daily in the church. In fact, their numbers are increasing more than the number of single men in the church. This makes their chances of getting married in the church minimal. What the church teaches single women is that they should trust in the Lord. The Lord will provide for them and will provide the right man to marry them at the right time. The Pentecostal church is against marrying people of a different faith as this is called 'conforming to the standards of the world'. Importantly, there are many challenges that face single women, such as:



- Their place in the church.
- Not being taken seriously.
- Being regarded as a threat.
- Loneliness.
- Fleshly desires.
- Being called names.
- Leadership roles.

It suffices to look at each and every one of the above mentioned challenges as by so doing it will bring some light into single women's challenges:

- ***Single women and their place in the church***

The place of single women in the church is still compromised; what is more, they do not know where they fit into the church. They are not young people or mothers in the sense in which this is defined in the church. In the church, when a woman is married even before she is blessed with children, she is already called a mother. Though a single woman might have children, the term "mother" is not used in the same way as it is applied to other mothers in the church. The title of "mrs" is used for the mothers and they are known by their husbands' surnames. However, single women find that they do not fit into this category of people.

As some single women are past their prime, the youth do not expect them to be involved in their activities. Single women who are older are not really accepted by the mothers' group; find it difficult to cope in the church. This social exclusion makes it extremely difficult for them to remain in the church. Nevertheless, some decide to remain mainly because the church is their only source of hope and support.

The seating arrangements in the church also contribute to the plight of single women. Churches where people sit in age groups or as couples make it more difficult for single women to survive in the church. For those for whom singlehood is not a choice and who are still praying to get 'Mr Right', this set-up is not without a challenge for them as they

sit alone in the pews without a husband by their side. They come alone, sit alone and go back home alone.

- ***Single women in the church not taken seriously***

Most of the time, single women and their needs are not taken seriously by the church. Although the church may have different programmes for different ministries in the church, they tend to forget about the single women. Programmes in the church are meant to serve as support groups for people who are alike, where they will be free to share their common interests and struggles, advise each other and carry each other's burdens.

- ***Single women as a threat***

Not all the people in the church trust single women, especially the women; they think that single women are out to steal their husbands. They are always suspected of not living a holy life. Even some of the pastors' wives, do not trust that their husbands are safe in the company of single women.

Single women are also a threat to some men. Some men view them as too strait-laced and set in their ways and think they cannot cope in the company of men. The economic independence of a woman also makes her unattractive to some men because they think that she is too independent, controlling and bossy. There may be some truth in this allegation because if a single woman has been alone for a long time, she becomes independent and knows what she wants. Gordon (1994:170) notes: "If a woman has learned to cope on her own, it is difficult to alter that and share the coping with someone else." However, the opposite is also true, namely that single women can be good partners and easy to get along with.

- ***Single women and fleshly desires***

The phrase *fleshly desires* is used here in the sense that a woman is not able to control herself sexually and the desire to engage in sexual acts defeats the desire to stay sexually faithful. The Pentecostal church teaches that marriage is a divine institution, which needs

to be honoured by all. It is taught in the church that God expects a man and a woman to be joined together in holy matrimony. This condemns the practice of polygamy in the church, and therefore it cannot be a solution for the increasing number of single women in the church.

Importantly, the single women who choose marriage outside the church fall victims of stigmatisation. They are labelled as bad examples for other young people in the church. What is more, this practice may lead one to face church discipline, to be dismissed or be excommunicated and ultimately lose her only place of hope, the church. Therefore, out of loneliness and the need to gratify the desires of “the flesh,” some single women compromise their faith and get married; however, some come back to the church after being married because of their love for the church.

- ***Single women and the names they are called***

It does not matter how a person arrived at a state of singlehood, the fact is people are battling to accept that women can choose to remain single. In this regard, single women are labelled as:

- Incomplete.
- Unhappy.
- Defensive.
- Bossy.
- Lonely.
- Workaholics.
- Living to prove some point.
- Not making sense.
- Not normal.
- Someone with whom something has gone wrong.
- People who have a lot of freedom.
- Not well mannered.
- Not attractive.

- **Single women and leadership roles**

Leadership roles are still a problem for women in the church. For women who are single, it becomes twice as difficult. The fact that women are hindered from assuming leadership roles because of the male construction of a woman, being a single woman in a leadership position will be somewhat problematic, because a single woman will be at a disadvantage for two reasons, namely that she is a woman who is also single. Makoro (2007:65) notes: “it is clear that the experiences of women in assuming leadership illustrate the brutality of our patriarchal order as a hindrance for their development.” Makoro still blames the church for the status of women with regard to leadership positions in the church.

There are certain leadership roles that the church thinks a single woman cannot hold. At a gathering consisting of couples, single women are not expected to lead because they are believed to lack the relevant experience for a group of this kind. It is also viewed by the church as problematic for single women to lead the church because their independence is viewed as problematic. Some are afraid that they will not be good role models for the young couples as they are not married. Consequently, the leadership of single women in the church is compromised.

By way of concluding this discussion on the challenges facing single women, the researcher suggests that the *vhusadzi* perspective may offer a deconstruction of these discourses in the following manner:

- A woman is a complete human being whether married or single. The value of a woman should not be defined in terms of her attachment to a man, but rather in terms of her person. Both men and women have the right to stay single without being stereotyped.

The *vhusadzi* approach offers suggestions that single women should be viewed and valued as complete human beings, because that is what they really are, irrespective of whether they choose marriage or not. Furthermore, the *vhusadzi* approach advocates the full acceptance of single women as leaders in the church as encouraged by the scriptures that state that a single woman has undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:34). It may rightfully be asked whether single women should suffer continual marginalisation

because they are women and not attached to a man? Another question could be whether the value of a woman and her full humanity lies in marriage?

#### **4.4.5.2 The *vhusadzi* approach and xenophobia**

In South Africa, xenophobic attacks are becoming such a serious problem that the church dare not remain silent on this matter as humans' lives are at stake. The people who come from outside South Africa are mostly black people and come from the same African continent. The ones who are seen to be at the forefront of these violent attacks are also black South Africans. Most of these violent attacks are sparked by the accusations that South Africans level at foreigners. Some of those accusations are that foreigners are stealing others' jobs, that they easily commit crimes and those that are illegal immigrants, are not easily traced.

Another reason that might be making these attacks worse is the fact that South Africans do not regard themselves to be part of Africa. On this note, Masenya (2005:743) remarks:

What is even more disturbing is that this 'othering' of Africa and African peoples is more glaring among fellow African persons. The negative appellation '*makwerekwere*' to refer to fellow African persons from other parts of Africa has said it all.

Masenya argues further that this behaviour is prompted by hatred and reflects a denial of the role which some of them played regarding African-South African exiles during the apartheid era. All these attacks on the foreigners should be seen as evil and should be eradicated in South Africa. The attackers are undermining the freedom of this country and denigrating the value of human life.

The church should also respond to these evil attacks. In times like these, the church should show its commitment to loving God's people and unity. The message of the church should be vocal and audible in order to save lives. Furthermore, the church should not lose sight of the reality of problems, which people are facing, and it cannot turn a blind eye. This situation has to be confronted head-on with determination to enforce change for the good of all Africans.

*Ubuntu/vhuthu* can provide a solution to xenophobia. The word “*ubuntu*” is a Zulu word, which is *vhuthu* in the Venda version. These words mean humanness and imply a fundamental respect for human nature in general (Masenya 1996:157). In Zulu they say “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye (muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu*-I am because we are). This notion that highlights the communal mentality of Africans according to Masenya (1996:158), can prove helpful in bringing justice to foreigners. Furthermore, after rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African South Africa, Masenya (2004:156) rightly observes:

The caring nature of the Woman of Worth reminds one of the *ubuntu/botho* concepts of African culture. We have already noted that compassion and sensitivity to the less privileged, as well as justice and tolerance, rank among the most pertinent norms or values of African humanism.

This concept of ‘*ubuntu*’ encompasses the concepts of ‘righteousness,’ ‘peace,’ ‘respect’ and a ‘just society’ Kanyoro (2001:93), defines a just society as one where men and women are equally united in their struggle and in their reward (loss or gain, success or failure), a society characterised by the true partnership among men and women. This should remind South Africans of their struggle during the apartheid era that they should not forget about, so that they will be united in solidarity with those who are less privileged. This stance will enable African men and women to act in unison and stand together as part of a society united to promoting positive cultural discourses that will build a transformed people. Masenya (2004:141) points out that, “Being human to others means that you want them to experience their full worth as fellow human beings when you deal with them.” Treating other people as human beings will also help to enhance the partnership of women and men in leadership positions in the church. Men will be able to view women as fellow humans who are not created as their subordinates or inferior to them. No human being is superior to another human being in terms of race, class and gender. All kinds of domination, as well as the assumption of superior attitudes, and treating others as inhuman are evil. Importantly, the *vhusadzi* approach calls for the elimination of violence against all men and women and for the just treatment of women. As all human beings have been created equal, women and men are co-equal partners as far as the leadership of the church is considered. This idea is also endorsed by LenkaBula (2006:103) with reference to justice:

They also require us to undo or challenge the notions that humanity has been given dominion over other beings, including the earth. This will enable us to live, coexist, and nurture each other without the desire to exploit the earth and each other. It will also enable us to desist from marginalizing and dehumanizing each other.

With reference to the true partnership between men and women, the Venda expression *munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu* (which literally means one finger is not able to pick-up seeds or grains), a saying that highlights the communal mentality of society and it can also provide a good blueprint for the empowerment of women. In an attempt to address this injustice, the *vhusadzi* approach identifies xenophobia as a threat to human life and exhorts Africans to stand together and fight all the challenges that are facing this continent, such as wars, poverty, joblessness, gender stereotypes and HIV and AIDS. Africans' engagement with xenophobic attacks will ensure that the threats to human life are eradicated, that will also encourage the need for the proper treatment of women in leadership positions of the church. Moreover, Africa needs the skills of people who are not South Africans, so that this country can prosper. The exclusion of the talents and gifts of women prevents the church from adopting a holistic approach. On this note, Uchem (2001:170) rightly observes:

Most importantly, all restrictions excluding women from ritual and political leadership in the church and the Igbo culture will be lifted. When this is done, it will be an affirmation of women's equal and true humanity in deed, for actions speaks louder than words. In this way, the church can attain its full stature as the Body of Christ.

#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter has introduced a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach deconstructing the problematic cultural and religious discourses that have a negative impact on women's leadership in the church. This approach is part of an endeavour to find an African South-African voice in challenging the cultural and religious problem discourses that have a negative effect on the lives of Vhavenda women in the church. In this regard, the *vhusadzi* approach was able to resuscitate and recapture the reality of a black African South-African Muvenda woman in finding ways to speak about God and describing the

ecclesiastical struggles that deny women their full humanity. Accordingly, the *vhusadzi* approach has examined the Pentecostal church's *status quo* in a critical way to investigate to what extent women's leadership of Vhavenda women is affirmed. Furthermore, it engages critically with the role of religion, in particular, the Christian religion and its sacred texts on the one hand and culture on the other hand, in both the marginalisation and affirmation of women in leadership positions in the church.

In order to capture its identity, the *vhusadzi* approach focussed on women empowerment in terms of addressing church practices that pertain to dealing with the challenges facing single women in the church and xenophobia.

The *vhusadzi* approach was also employed to the deconstruction of problem cultural and religious discourses discussed in chapters two and three through its engagement with the following aspects, the African culture, God the creator, the person of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit and church practices. This scrutiny revealed that cultural and religious discourses impact negatively on women's leadership in the church (as revealed in chapters one and two). Consequently, the *vhusadzi* approach has proved to be a life-affirming approach, by critically seeking for alternatives to problem discourses that are harmful to women.



## **CHAPTER 5: THE ROAD FORWARD AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this concluding chapter, the researcher focusses on the road towards empowerment of women as a way of making suggestions to the development of women in the leadership of the church. This empowerment will be woman-centred in the sense that it will be focussing mainly on encouraging women on regarding leadership development in the ministry. The gap created by not involving women in the ministry or by not giving them enough room to practise their calling and gifting needs to be closed. This chapter aims at highlighting the fact that women should be capacitating women in the ministry in terms of the information and knowledge obtained from the questionnaires and interviews reported in chapter three as well as the summary of the research findings.

It remains the challenge of this concluding chapter to take women on the road to empowerment as is suggested in the questionnaires and stated in paragraph 3.6. The road towards empowerment of women will enable women to continue to deconstruct the problem religious and cultural discourses, which will be effective in terms of their empowerment in their leadership in the ministry. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the following; the first section will look at the leadership empowerment of women (based on responses to the questionnaires and interviews (see paragraph 3.6): the essence of formal training, mentorship for women development, women network and team building and lastly, women and the call of God to leadership in the church. The second section will look at the research findings.

### **5.2 LEADERSHIP EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

#### **5.2.1 Women and formal training as a form of empowerment**

Concerning the issue of formal training, chapter three revealed that seventy-five per cent (75%) of the women who are in the ministry and are leading women, lack this skill. Most women just responded to the call of God and went straight into the ministry without any formal training. The women suggested that there was a need for women to be trained in

the field of their ministry. Furthermore, these women also suggested that there should be courses that were designed with women leadership in mind, regarding:

- The way women understand leadership.
- Women's style of leadership.
- Women's struggles in leadership.
- Women's effectiveness in leadership.

In her discussion of the story of Mina Soga of South Africa who was a missionary in India, Njoroge (2001:248) also refers to the need that African women have for training:

These words reminds us that African women's quest and desire to be equipped for and included in the ministries of the church and ecumenical movement is not only a thing of the 1990s, when the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle) began to gather and mentor women to study theology, research, write and publish.

The researcher concurs with Njoroge that African women should heed the wake-up call and should not venture into the ministry without training, but should rather receive formal training so that they are well-equipped for their pastoral and leadership tasks. It is also important that they should be exposed to different types of fields that add value to their church work, such as gender studies and human behavioural sciences and ethics. Furthermore, Njoroge indicates that there is a need for ensuring that these theologies and ethics reach the classrooms of our theological institutions and that more women are engaged in teaching theology and other related fields.

### **5.2.2 Women and mentorship as a form of empowerment**

Regarding the issue of mentorship, seventy-five per cent (75%) of the women also suggested that there was a need for the development of mentorship programmes aimed specifically at women. The few that witnessed to having mentors were able to survive the pressures of the ministry. These women also thought that the mentors for female leaders need not necessarily be females only, as males could also serve as their mentors.

It is important to note that a mentor is someone with the experience and insight to become a source of inspiration that will be helpful in women's ministries. Mentoring as a process of helping somebody to succeed, can also do the following:

People can achieve the success they desire much more quickly and easily with help, support and encouragement of someone who has already attained that same or similar success. Your mentor can help you succeed faster and with fewer mistakes (SAPS Mentorship Guidelines: 4).

### **5.2.3 Women networking and team building as a form of empowerment**

Women suggested women networking with each other in the ministry as a way of building the leadership capacity of women. They suggested that there should be places where they could meet by themselves and discuss leadership issues that affected them, a place where they could share their failures, their defeats, their struggles, their challenges as well as their victories. They also suggested that these meetings could take the form of seminars and workshops.

One of the aspects that can help women to engage in teamwork with others is when they are able to recognise the similarities between their situations as well as the common challenges facing them. In this regard, Fiedler (2002:193) comments: "Against the negative views of some of the male members of the church, the majority of women have affirmed the pastoral role of their fellow women."

To develop women for effective leadership in the ministry, serious networking and mentorship need to be at the top of the agenda. Women should feature in the ministry as capable leaders successful in every way, be put in equal positions like their male counterparts. This calls for intensified networking and vigorous mentorship. Networking and mentorship in this study are suggested as the vehicle through which generations to come will not have to deal with the inequalities of our past.

Given the extent of the negative impact that religious and cultural discourses have on the leadership of women in the ministry as revealed in this study, there is a need for women to partner with other women and also to form partnerships with men. The word "partnership" in this context is used to depict the need for participation, sharing, and inclusive ministry in the understanding of the life of the church. Partnership in the

ministry takes cognisance of the fact that women are leaders in the church and that their leadership ought to be recognized by the church.

### **5.3 WOMEN AND THE CALL OF GOD FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH**

Well balanced woman leadership empowerment in the ministry will begin by validating God's call in a woman's life. This study has tried to emphasise the fact that the call of God does not recognise gender, colour or creed; neither is it masculine or feminine. There is, therefore, no ground to justify the exclusion of women on the basis of God's call in their lives. If the creator God of heaven can call men, then God can also call women.

The presence of women in the ministry can no longer be ignored nor can they be marginalised any longer. Women, by virtue of their presence and the roles they play need to be part of the development of the church. In Kanyoro and Njoroge, Potgieter (1996:16) rightly observes:

Women who formed the backbone of the Church in South Africa and who comprises more than 70 per cent of the church population, are usually absent from its decision-making bodies and hierarchies. After two thousand years since its inception, the Church is engaged in heated debates concerning the question of women's involvement or non-involvement in the first century Christian community.

The existence of the above debate cannot be ignored either, though much progress has been done in this regard. The focus of this chapter is to explore the possibility of a need for a woman-centred leadership development model in the ministry. This need emanates from the experience that women have had in the ministry in centuries past as revealed in this study as well. This shows that there is a need to restore the worth of women in terms of what they do.

Cunningham (2000:13-14) comments on the issues connected with recognising the worth of women, she states:

As I envision this, I see every little girl growing up knowing she is valued, she is in the image of God, and knowing that she can fulfill all the potential He has put within her. I see the Body of Christ recognizing leaders whom the Holy Spirit indicates, the ones whom He has gifted, anointed, and empowered without regard

to race, color, or gender. This generation will be one that simply asks, 'Who is it that God wants?' There will be total equality of opportunity, total quality of value, and a quickness to listen to and follow the ones the Holy Spirit sets apart.

Driven by the passion to see women have access to fair and unbiased participation in God's work, according to the researcher's view, Cunningham raises issues causing serious concern. It is imperative for the purpose of this study to detail these concerns by Cunningham. The researcher agrees with Cunningham regarding the need for women not to be taken for granted as they also wish to be valued as human beings. The desire by women to engage wholeheartedly in the ministry in answer to God's calling, is reinforced by the confidence placed in them. Women will only feel a sense of worth in the ministry when they realise that they are valued. Therefore, they should be valued not only because of their femininity, but because of the fact that the Spirit of God and God's divine call also rests upon them.

When value is placed upon women called by God, then their ministries, preaching and any aspect, in which they are involved, will most probably be of importance as well. If value is not placed on their calling, whatever they do will likely be viewed as merely mundane and immaterial. Thus, a positive perspective regarding women involved in the ministry is attainable when value is attached to their calling. Undoubtedly, these women of God will have a bigger impact on our world and change it for the better if value is attached to their ministry. Accordingly, their efforts and endeavours will not be in vain if their value is not ignored.

It is not only about their performance in the ministry, nor is it only about the way they are called, but it is about valuing their calling that will encourage and empower these women. How can their message be of importance if their calling is viewed by patriarchal society as being of no value in the first place? If some men in the ministry grapple with the idea of wanting to be valued, this applies even more so to women who have traditionally been marginalised? When value is placed on women as equal partners in the ministry, this can add value to who they are and what they do. Basically, no calling is better than others. Areas in the ministry may differ, but giving value is what makes the difference. Importantly, women need to be valued and accepted as being in the image of God. This

goal is not an easy one to achieve given the patriarchal nature of the society and the system that does not legitimate women's power.

According to Cunningham (2000), it is imperative that the notion should be accepted that women have been created in the image of God. Women have not been created in the image of man but in the image God. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (The Holy Bible:English Standard Version, 2001). The fact that women are creations of God should be a good enough reason to recognise them for what God has laid in their lives (see chapter four).

It is important to note that the image of God has a number of implications for both males and females. Being created in the image of God implies that God's will and purpose can be fulfilled through any of His creatures regardless of the gender of the person. The sovereignty of God to use His creatures cannot be limited on the grounds of gender. When duty calls, women can be at the forefront of the battle to fulfill God's will. Again, women created in the image of God, have the potential to operate through God's divine mandates within the spheres of their operations in the ministry. Cunningham (2000:14) comments:

This new generation will not be bound by traditions hindering women from obeying God's call the way my generation has. Instead, they will take a fresh look at the word of God, knowing that the Holy Spirit will never do anything that contradicts His Word. As this emerging generation studies the Bible free of cultural blinders, they will see that the Lord has always used both women and men to proclaim the Good News and to prophesy the Word of God to their generation.

Cunningham also highlights the fact that God uses women who have been chosen by the Holy Spirit. Thus, if the Holy Spirit calls these women to the ministry, there can be no other higher authority on earth that can deny the truth that God has called them. This viewpoint only validates the fact that women too can receive a calling.

The misinterpretation of the Bible has relegated women to an inferior position and this has done a disservice to the leadership potential of women in the church as the researcher has set out to highlight in this study. Although the Bible contains many positive

messages, the focus on texts of oppression and the patriarchal interpretation of the Bible have been used to the detriment of women in the church. Oduyoye (2007:11) remarks:

Christians love to highlight passages in which biblical culture forces women into subordinate roles. Sarah called Abraham lord; so women allow their husbands to lord it over them as men take it as their divine entitlement to lord it over their wives. Christians love all that place women on the margins of power and authority and are willing to ignore examples of equity and the common humanity that runs through the Bible.

Religious discourses in this study revealed themselves to be harmful in terms of the leadership development of women in the church. Scriptures such as 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; Ephesians 5:22-27; and Genesis 2:18-24 were studied in order to identify and describe the powerful religious discourses that continue to govern and shape the lives of women in the church. Women's perspectives also revealed that problem religious discourses that are strongly influenced by the patriarchal nature of the church, together with sexist interpretations of the Bible, have impacted on the lives of women; thereby undermining their leadership positions in the church.

The authority of the African culture has also been revealed in this study to be powerful and has been shown to have a considerable impact on the shaping of women's lives in the church. Although women have a place in culture, that same culture imposes many restrictions on them. This truth is articulated in the cultural songs, proverbs and narratives that have contributed negatively to womanhood. Similar to other South African cultures, such as the Northern Sotho culture (see Masenya 1996; 2004) and the Afrikaans culture (see Landman 1994), it is true that the Vhavenda culture possesses positive elements; however, there are also negative elements that discriminate against women. The following aspects of culture, amongst others, were dealt with in this study: women and rituals; the birthing of a child, *lobola* and the language of proverbs.

The *vhusadzi* approach has proved in this study to be a life-affirming approach by virtue of its commitment to deconstructing the religious and cultural discourses that are life-denying to women. This approach has been shown to have the potential to bring value and dignity into the lives of women by questioning the problem discourses that can create norms, which are harmful in women's lives. Therefore, problem religious and cultural

discourses, if deconstructed in terms of a *vhusadzi* approach, hold the potential to empower women regarding leadership positions in the church.

#### **5.4 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In the previous chapters, the religious and cultural discourses that impact negatively on the leadership development of women in the ministry were identified and described. In this study, various religious and cultural discourses have been identified as problem discourses that have a negative effect on the leadership development of women in the ministry. In chapter one, this study tabulated its aims as follows:

- To identify and describe the impact of Christian religious discourses and African Venda cultural discourses on the leadership development of women in the ministry.
- To determine the impact of these discourse on the present roles played by Vhavenda women in the ministry.
- To present a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective of empowerment to women in the ministry.

At the beginning of this study, the researcher postulated that the Vhavenda Christian women are denied or restricted regarding leadership roles in the church because of the impact of religious and cultural discourses. In addition, the presupposition of this study is that women are denied leadership roles in the church for the same cultural reasons they are denied leadership roles in society. Furthermore, the researcher holds the opinion that the patriarchal misinterpretation of scripture plays a major role in endorsing the male dominated leadership *status quo* in the church and to some extent; this influences the perceptions that people have of women's leadership roles in the church, which, in turn, influences their position.

In chapters one and two, this study contains a review of the literature on women's experience in the church from women's perspectives to address the above matters. This was done in terms of a study of feminist theology, womanist theology as well as African women theologians' perspectives. The review revealed that feminist theologians, womanist theologians and African women theologians have common ground regarding



the oppression of women. However, there are differences in their methodological approach due to their different contexts. For African women theologians, their common ground lies in their experience of the African culture and the way it influences their interpretation of the Bible. Chapter two revealed the nature of religious and cultural discourses from the perspective of women. In addition, the religious and cultural discourses that were identified as harmful discourses, were explored and analysed from feminist, African and South African women theologians' perspectives respectively. The ways of reading differ in terms of their respective contexts with regard to the feminist theologians and African women theologians, because the latter read the Bible with "cultural eyes."

Furthermore, cultural discourses that are also problem discourses, were examined. An analysis of these problem discourses revealed that they are used in the church together with religious discourses to oppress women and deny them the opportunity to be elected to leadership positions in the church. Both the religious and cultural discourses that are strongly influenced by the patriarchal nature of the church, together with sexist interpretations of the Bible, have impacted negatively on the lives of women; thereby undermining their leadership positions in the church.

The researcher also applied the philosophies and insights of the social construction theory, the post structuralist theory and cultural hermeneutics to research the topic. This enabled the researcher to reach the first aim of this study, which is "to identify and describe the impact of the Christian religious discourses and the African Venda cultural discourses on the leadership development of women in the ministry." Furthermore, this has enabled the researcher to validate the first part of the hypothesis, that is, "the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership of women in ministry can be identified and described through the insights of social construction theory."

In chapter three, the researcher attempted to identify and describe the religious and cultural perceptions that men and women have concerning the ordination of women in the church by means of questionnaire and interviews. Ninety-seven (97) respondents were selected for the questionnaires and interviews. Out of these, sixty-four (64) respondents completed the questionnaires; while forty-three (43) respondents were interviewed, ten

(10) of which also completed the questionnaires. The reason for including the ten respondents who had completed the questionnaires in the interviews was to obtain greater clarity and more information regarding their answers.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts in line with the aims of this study:

1. The impact of religion and culture on women in the church and the roles that women were playing.
2. The road towards empowerment.
3. Women's views about themselves regarding the issues mentioned above.

The interviews were structured in a simple manner to ensure that the respondents understood the questions (see addendum C). Both the questionnaires and interviews made the researcher more aware of the fact that women's leadership roles in the church still need serious attention.

This chapter has revealed that religious and cultural discourses have a negative impact on the lives of women. Importantly, the discourse that "women are inferior and subordinate" is a root factor that contributes to the low status of women in the church.

In addition, this chapter reflected on the fact that men and women had different perceptions of the issue pertaining to women in the ministry. Regarding the issue of religion and culture, the men involved in this study were generally of the opinion that it was not appropriate for women to be leaders. Although a small percentage of women stated that women were not equipped to be leaders in the church; a higher percentage of women contended that women could be leaders and specifically leaders in the church. Significantly, though, both men and women referred to both the scriptures and culture to justify the barring of women from leadership positions in the church. They alleged that scriptures prohibited women from becoming leaders in the church and were quick to cite scriptures supporting their views. In addition, they felt that it was against their culture for women to lead. Only thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents contended that culture was developed by humans, therefore it could be altered.

This study also revealed that culture plays a significant role in influencing the perceptions of the leadership roles of women in the church. In addition, the way that people read and interpret the scriptures also has an impact on women leadership. The questionnaires and interviews enabled the researcher to achieve the second aim of this research, which was “to determine the impact of religious and cultural discourses on the present roles played by Vhavenda women in the ministry.” This resulted in the validation of the second part of the hypothesis of this study, “the roles that women play in the church are influenced by the religious and cultural discourses as perceptions that people hold. These roles are not God-given, but socially constructed, and can be redefined by rereading the Bible and re-visiting culture.”

This study found that the leadership role of women in Pentecostal churches in Venda is faced with challenges, which include rereading the Bible from the following perspectives:

- Women in partnership with men.
- Validating women’s ordination in dialogue with the patriarchal interpretations of presumed Biblical prohibitions on women’s ordination.
- Rescoping cultural influences on church leadership roles, which are supported by Venda proverbs and rituals and reframing perceptions of women in ministry among church leaders and the laity.

Consequently, the researcher deemed it fit to strive to introduce a theology that addresses the pain of these women when dealing with the impact of religion and culture on women leadership. In chapter four of this study, the *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach is introduced to address the struggle of women regarding their leadership role in the church.

Importantly, in chapter four, the *vhusadzi* (womanhood) approach was introduced and the researcher set out to deconstruct the problem cultural and religious discourses that impact negatively on women’s leadership in the church. This approach has developed into an endeavour to find an African South-African voice in challenging the cultural and religious problem discourses that have a negative effect on the lives of Vhavenda women in the church. The *vhusadzi* approach was also employed to deconstruct problem cultural and religious discourses in chapters two and three through its engagement with the

following aspects: the African culture, God the creator, the person of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit and church practices. In short, this endeavour revealed that cultural and religious discourses impact negatively on women's leadership in the church.

In contrast with the religious discourses that discriminate against women and help to exclude women from leadership positions in the church based on the order of the creation; the *vhusadzi* perspective deconstructed those discourses by reconstructing new discourses (see paragraph 4.4). These are the following discourses, namely, that Vhavenda women can find affirmation in their new understanding that God created them in His own image, that they are equal partners with men and the fact that both sexes should have mutual respect for each other. Despite the prohibitions of Paul on women in the church, it can be stated categorically that women can participate fully in the leadership of the church in the knowledge that they can speak freely about their personal experience of Pentecost and of God. Furthermore, women can experience freedom by repositioning themselves through Jesus' salvation and by embracing what good news means to them.

Thus, the *vhusadzi* approach has proved to be a life-affirming and women-centred empowerment approach by deconstructing the cultural discourses that are harmful for women and impact negatively on their leadership aspirations in the church (see paragraph 4.3). In this regard, the *vhusadzi* approach engaged critically with negative elements from the African Vhavenda culture and discussed the limitations that it places on women through the language of proverbs, rituals and the rites of passage. The *vhusadzi* approach advocated the fair treatment of women and unlimited opportunities as full human beings. In this manner, the *vhusadzi* approach was able to resuscitate and recapture the reality of a black African South-African Muvenda woman in finding ways to speak about God and describing the ecclesiastical struggles and cultural constraints that deny women full humanity. Furthermore, the *vhusadzi* approach has examined the Pentecostal church's *status quo* critically with the view to investigating how affirming it is for the leadership role of Vhavenda women. In addition, it has analysed the role of religion critically, in particular, the Christian religion and its sacred texts and culture, in both the marginalisation and affirmation of women in leadership positions in the church. This enabled the researcher to reach the third aim of this research, namely "to present a *vhusadzi* (womanhood) perspective of empowerment to women in the ministry." This

validates the third part of the hypothesis that “an African South-African approach to religious and cultural discourses can empower women by deconstructing disempowering religious and cultural discourses and by co-constructing the positive ones through the insights of post structural theory as well as contextual African women theologians.”

## **5.5 UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION**

Finally, the most important question is, what is new that this study has contributed to the world of knowledge?

The unique contribution of this study is firstly, its focus on Pentecostal women in Venda. Pentecostal scholarship as it pertains to the affirmation of women in leadership is rare in South Africa. Secondly, a *vhusadzi* perspective is formulated which has never been done before in the literature. This perspective encompasses the experiences and expectations of the Vhavenda women in South Africa. Thirdly, a link is drawn between religion, culture and ministerial leadership with a gender focus that produces new knowledge on the relationship between religion and culture as it manifests itself in a Venda context. It also opens up the future for further research, inviting African women scholars to contextualise issues related to women’s ordination.

## **ADDENDUM A: QUESTIONNAIRE SCHEDULE**

### **ADDENDUM A**

#### **Letter of Introduction**

Date: .....

Dear Minister/Pastor

I am writing to ask that you participate in a research study that will begin this year. This study is entitled: The impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership development of women in the ministry: A vhusadzi (womanhood) perspective. I will briefly outline the proposal.

Research indicates that “in recent years few issues have produced more heat and less light than the role of women in the home, church, and society. It is the role of women in the church that creates the greatest disquiet on the part of committed evangelicals. Churches, denominations, and even Christian organisations have been split asunder over the issue of ordaining women for the pulpit ministry” (Kantzer, 1994, p. vii).

There is little research to indicate what leadership assumption the churches utilize in the leadership development of women in the ministry. This study will contribute information regarding these concepts and the leadership choices women leaders made over time.

The proposed research is a study project involving interviews, observations and a document review. The minister and the researcher will determine the exact timetable for each case at the time of the initial interview.

This research is an effort to comply with the requirements for a DTH (Doctor of Theology) at the University of South Africa (UNISA), and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my thesis committee, chaired by Prof. Christina Landman. I am an ordained minister and serve as an associate pastor in a local assembly and also serve in a government department as a chaplain. My interest in the topics surrounding leadership development of women has been longstanding and continues through my theses.

Please return the enclosed questionnaire to indicate your interest in participation in this research study. Depending on your response, I will be contacting you to confirm your answer. I hope that you will consider my request to focus on your obviously successful personal leadership efforts in my proposed dissertation this year.

Sincerely,

Pastor Lufuluvhi M. Mudimeli

**QUESTIONNAIRE: WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY**

**1. Roles played by women in the ministry**

- **What roles are women allowed to play in your church?**

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.....  
.....

- **How is your church board constituted?**

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.....

- **Which roles do you think should women play in your church?**

.....  
.....

- **Are there women in your church who are being mentored for leadership?**

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2. **What is the impact of religion and culture on perceptions of women in the ministry?**

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.....  
.....

• **How do you think culture affected the involvement of women in the ministry?**

.....  
.....  
.....

• **Can you name specific cultural practices or proverbs in this regard?**

.....  
.....  
.....

• **How did religion or church doctrine affect this involvement?**

.....  
.....  
.....

• **Do you think the scriptures support (or do not support) the involvement of women in church leadership?**

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.....





## For women ministers

- How did you manage to find yourself where you are today?

.....  
.....

- How was the situation in the past and how did you feel?

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.....  
.....

- How do you spend your time on your ministry?

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.....  
.....

- How are you being received as a female minister?

.....  
.....

- Are there situations that have impacted on your leadership both positively and negatively?

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.....  
.....

- **When and how did you know you wanted to be a minister?**

.....

.....

- **How do your ministry and personality mesh?**

.....

.....

- **Describe the things about your ministry that give you satisfaction.**

.....

.....

- **In your experience, is it easy for women to ascend the leadership ladder in your church denomination?**

.....

.....

- **What expectations do you have regarding yourself as a female minister/pastor?**

.....

.....

- **What kind of risks are you willing to take to see an idea through?**

.....

.....

- **How do you handle your male counterparts both in leadership situations and in the ministry?**

.....

.....

.....

## ADDENDUM B

### Standard Ethics Protocol

My name is Lufuluvhi Maria Mudimeli. I am conducting research for a thesis entitled *The impact of religious and cultural discourses on the leadership development of women in the ministry. A vhusadzi (womanhood) perspective*, which I am undertaking as a doctoral student in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies within the Department of Systematic Theology at the University Of South Africa (UNISA).

I can be contacted at 015 516 4300 or 084 376 2361 or by electronic mail at [showy@webmail.co.za](mailto:showy@webmail.co.za) should you have any questions.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you as a participant in this study you have several rights:

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.

- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time or discuss any given subject.
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.
- This interview will be kept strictly confidential.
- Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents.

\_\_\_\_\_(Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_(Print name)

\_\_\_\_\_(Date)

\*\*\*\*\*

## ADDENDUM C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- A. How did you manage to find yourself where you are today? How was the situation in the past ,how is it now and how did you feel?
- B. How is your boardconstituted? How do you spend your time in your ministry? How did you develop yourself to occupy this position?
- C. How was your reception as a female minister then and now?
- D. Are there situations that have impacted either positively or negatively on your leadership development?
- E. What advice can you give to a novice female minister aspiring to participate in the church leadership?
- F. When and how did you know you wanted to be a minister?
- G. How do your ministry and personality mesh?
- H. Describe the things about your ministry that give you satisfaction?
- I. Do you really feel women should be part of church leadership? How should they participate?
- J. How do you understand mentorship?
- K. Are there women in your church who are being mentored for leadership? How is this done and what programs are in place?
- L. In your experience, is it easy according for women to rise in the echelons of leadership in your church denomination?
- M. How do you think culture affected the involvement of women in the ministry? How did religion or church doctrine affect this involvement?
- N. Do you think the scriptures support the involvement of women in church leadership?
- O. What is your opinion of the ordination of women in the ministry?
- P. How do people perceive you? How does this perception affect you?
- Q. What expectations do you hold about yourself as a female minister/pastor?
- R. What kinds of risks are you willing to take to see an idea through?
- S. How do you handle your male counterparts both in terms of leadership and the ministry?
- T. Has there been a change in developing women for ministerial leadership?
- U. What changes need to happen to challenge and attract more women for leadership in the ministry?
- V. What issues would you like to add to this list?

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