

Calvinism and South African women: a short historical overview

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Abstract

For the past three-and-a-half centuries, Christian women in South Africa have chosen for pietistic expressions of their faith, even when their teachers or husbands were committed to dogmatic Calvinism. This article traces the history of female piety in South Africa from its Calvinist introduction by Maria Quevellerius, the wife of Jan van Riebeeck. It tells the history of women in South Africa, both black and white, who were exposed to the sin-soul-salvation model of belief imposed upon them by missionaries, and who read pietistic literature from countries abroad. Three types of female piety are evident in South Africa today: firstly in black women healers; secondly in women attending the Worthy Women conferences where they openly assume subordinate roles vis-à-vis their husbands; and thirdly in women who accept the decision by the 2009 Synod of the ultra-Calvinist Reformed Churches in South Africa not to allow women to become elders or pastors. This article examines the historically relevant question of the influence of Calvinism on these three forms of female piety, and seeks reasons for the apparent absence of Calvinist loyalties amongst South African women. While Calvinism regulates the fate of (especially white) women in South Africa as regards their formal recognition as elders and pastors, women themselves seem to feel comfortable within the worship patterns of pietism and revivalism which, in the final instance, are as sexist as was local Calvinism.

Introduction

“Local Calvinism was as sexist as it was racist.” These words appear on the back cover of a book, *The piety of Afrikaans women* (Landman 1994), published in the same year that South Africa held its first democratic elections.

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This article explores both the history behind and consequences of this statement, and will therefore consist of two parts. In the first part, the history of local Calvinism and its influence on the lives of local women – both black and white – will be described in broad terms. To look at Calvinism from an historical point of view is particularly appropriate in 2009, a year commemorating the birth of John Calvin 500 years ago; and we will evaluate his legacy, especially during colonial times.

The second part of this article looks at the 15 years subsequent to the writing of the above statement to determine whether that aspect of Calvinism that was used to colonise the minds of men has been exposed and its influence broken. An inevitable question that arises is whether Calvinism is part of the future of South Africa's church life, or whether it remains a stubborn remnant of its colonial past.

Calvinism from Maria van Riebeeck to Marie du Toit

Maria Quevellerius van Riebeeck, Krotoa and orthodox Calvinism

The first generation of women converts in South Africa were not converted by the prayer – or any religious actions leading from it – that was read publicly by Jan van Riebeeck after having set foot on African soil on Sunday 7 April 1652, the first day of the new moon. In fact, the *Journal of Jan van Riebeeck* (Thom (ed.) 1954) which details his stay at the Cape reveals little concern for the people, and apparently more concern for the sheep. The journal tells of daily bartering for sheep with the local Khoekhoe, and the harsh and savage punishment that slaves received for stealing sheep: sheep seemed to be of more value than human beings, a principle that runs counter to many Calvinist principles.

The first generation of “Calvinist” converts at the Cape were Khoekhoe, and they were female. We have the story of one such female convert. But this is only half a story, referred to briefly in Van Riebeeck's *Journal*. Krotoa (1642–1674) was taught the rudiments of Christianity through the Calvinism of Maria Quevellerius, the *huisvrouw van Jan van Riebeeck* (Mees 1952), as the woman of the house was responsible for the religious education of her house workers.

What type of religion did Maria Quevellerius bring with her from Rotterdam in the Netherlands to the Cape in Africa? What did she tell Krotoa about God and about being religious? Maria's father, Abraham Quevellerius, was a Reformed minister in Rotterdam. He was known to be a strict follower of orthodox Calvinism, especially as far as the teaching of predestination was concerned. And, according to her biographer Mees (1952), there is no reason to believe that the young Maria entertained ideas independent from Calvinist orthodoxy.

This article argues that “lay” Calvinism – as it was received and eventually practised locally – rested on three apparently conflicting pillars. One is the notion that sin is something that the believer must take personal responsibility for. Two is that the soul is the site of personal connection with God. And three – in apparent contradiction – is that salvation is predestined. While the laity left the issue of predestination undisputed, they adhere specifically to the practical demands of keeping the soul unblemished which, as we all know, incorporated strict rules for women as far as status, behaviour and dress code were concerned.

Krotoa was 10 years old when the Van Riebeecks came to the Cape. Within two years she became an interpreter and cultural broker to Jan van Riebeeck, and wore Dutch clothes. Furthermore, she was prepared for baptism, which only happened a week before the Van Riebeecks left the Cape in 1662.

How did Krotoa receive the lay form of sin-soul-salvation Calvinism? As she herself had not written down anything, we are left to speculation based on our deductions from Jan Van Riebeeck’s *Journal* that she led a double life which, eventually, led to her mental deterioration.

Krotoa probably would have had no problem in identifying with a fatherly, creator God, a Satan and a resurrected One, since these were present in the Khoekhoe pantheon in the forms of the great Tsui//Goab, the evil//Gaunab and Heitsi Eibib who was resurrected daily (Shapera 1930; 1960). However, for Krotoa sin was not personal guilt and responsibility, but a betrayal of the clan’s cultural wholeness. Soul was a concept foreign to the local Khoekhoe, who made no distinction between body and soul. To be a body, for Krotoa, meant engaging in communal dancing and celebration. And salvation was not the soul predestined for eternal life, but the body as a site of initiation. When she was 14, Krotoa requested leave of absence to visit her sister’s kraal, where she underwent initiation (Landman 1998:8–14). She returned to her Dutch dress code, however, and was baptised six years later.

Jan van Riebeeck’s successor, Zacharias Wagenaer, despised Krotoa. Krotoa had now lost the confidence of the Khoekhoe because of her Christian baptism and was therefore no longer functional to the Dutch. She married a white man, the Danish surgeon Pieter van Meerhoff, in 1665. This did not please Wagenaer, who was embarrassed that a marriage between people of different classes and races took on a Christian form. He sent Van Meerhoff off to supervise Robben Island which was then already a prison. The couple stayed on Robben Island for three years with their three children, Pieterella, Salomon and Jacobus. Physically removed from her Khoekhoe family and without Dutch employment, Krotoa started drinking heavily. When her husband died on a trip to Mauritius, she lost control of herself and was brought to the mainland where she was given a cottage. Here she started partying recklessly with some dubious characters and neglected her children.

This behaviour was an embarrassment to both her Khoekhoe heritage and her Christian faith. Her children were taken away from her and she was sent back to Robben Island as a prisoner where she died on 29 July 1674 at the age of 32. In his diary Wagenaer expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that she was given a Christian burial.

With such an ambivalent introduction of Calvinism into female piety, one should be surprised that there was even a second generation of women converts locally. For this, however, the first missionaries should receive the credit.

George Schmidt, Vehettge Tikkuie and the sin-soul-salvation model

The men who came to South Africa as missionaries suffered for their faith in their home countries. George Schmidt (1709–1785) was no exception. He was incarcerated for his faith in Moravia, found a spiritual home with the Moravian Brothers at Herrnhut in Germany, and came to South Africa as a missionary in 1737. His first convert was the Khoekhoe woman Vehettge Tikkuie.

The Moravians were not Calvinists and showed greater affinity to Lutheranism. From a missionary perspective, their teachings were similar to the sin-soul-salvation model to which the first generation converts were exposed. For George Schmidt – as can be deduced from his *Tagebuch* (Bredenkamp & Hattingh 1981) – sin is described in terms of a strong detachment from the values expressed in the Bible. Soul is defined according to a strong fear of hell and damnation. Schmidt himself recorded his words to Vehettge Tikkuie: “I have come to save your soul from your body and from hell.” Salvation is presented in terms of a strong dependency on Christ’s salvation through prayer and a body-restrictive lifestyle. Again Schmidt recorded these words to Vehettge: “I have come to show you the way to heaven.”

How did Vehettge Tikkuie receive this sin-soul-salvation version of Christianity? Again, deductions need to be made from Khoekhoe life at the time. Vehettge suffered in understanding dancing and drinking to be sin, since the women were responsible for brewing beer in the kraals. Also, the soul was a foreign concept to somebody who could hardly understand how covering your body in full was a prerequisite for salvation. And as far as salvation was concerned, heaven and hell were places unknown to Vehettge in whose culture men died and became ancestor spirits: pleasing them was salvation.

Like Krotoa, Vehettge experienced tension because of the clashing of cultures and religions. She often brought back her Bible to Schmidt and was accused of deserting her Christian calling every weekend for drinking and dancing in the kraal.

However, history proves that the Moravians were one of the non-Calvinist traditions in South Africa that indeed effected the empowerment of women, albeit within their missionary sin-soul-salvation approach (Landman 1995:361–374). This is already visible in the second generation of women converts produced by the Moravians. In 1744 George Schmidt went back to Europe after an outcry from the white Calvinist establishment in the Cape who objected to him baptising the Khoekhoe without being an ordained pastor. However, Schmidt was succeeded 50 years later by three Moravian missionaries, Hendrik Marsveld (1745–1822), Daniël Schwinn (b 1750) and Christian Kühnel (1762–1813). In 1804 the missionary station in Baviaans-kloof was named *Genadendal*. It is here that the missionaries established a safe haven for Khoekhoe women who were abused by the farmers or by their partners. The emphasis was on literacy and human dignity.

The missionaries baptised their first convert, a woman – Hanna, the daughter of Kibido – on 19 July 1793, and according to *The Genadendal Diaries* (Bredekamp & Plüddemann 1992:167ff) Hanna's conversion was complete. She handed over both her beads and her soul to her new faith. Benigna (Rosetta) from Groenekloof (Mamre), another of the eventual seven missionary stations established by the Moravians, testified to the same value according to a delightful publication from 1873, *Benigna van Groenekloof of Mamre, een verhaal voor de Christen Kleurlinge van Zuid-Afrika door een hunner leeraars*. At Groenekloof, Benigna experienced dignity in building her own house and decorating it with a garden. Here she could practise her faith (*ongehinderd haar sielsbelange kan behartig*) while becoming literate and strong in her beliefs in an afterlife.

Today, women are leaders in the Moravian church and some are elected as President. Here special reference should be made to Angeline Swart who previously headed the seminary of this church.

The joyless piety of Catharina Allegonda van Lier

While the Calvinist tradition was perpetuated at the Cape by Helperus Ritzema van Lier (Hanekom 1959), its pietistic and revivalist slant can best be seen in the diary left by his sister Catharina Allegonda van Lier (1768–1801). She came with her brother to the Cape in 1786, with the books of the English revivalists in her suitcase, being particularly strongly influenced by John Newton (d. 1807), who was the author of the well-known song “Amazing Grace”. While at the Cape, Catharina got engaged to JJ Kicherer, who after her death at the age of 32 published her diary under the title *Dagboek, Gemeenzame Brieven en Eensame Overdenkingen* (diary, letters and lonely meditations, 1804).

As can be deduced from the title of her diary, Catharina's piety was not a joyous one. She fixated on her own sin, continuously battered her own

soul, and saw salvation in reviving the grace of God which never seemed to be enough to save her from her depression. And yet, this type of self-afflicting piety proved to be popular amongst readers at the Cape, with the diary being reprinted locally four times in 50 years. Overseas, however, it was a failure.

Dutch piety and its mystic turn

Maria Quevellerius brought orthodox Calvinism to South Africa, and Catharina Allegonda van Lier testified to the tendency amongst women locally to reject orthodoxy in favour of a piety of inside experience. The Cape Colony, furthermore, did not experience the Enlightenment, and were also targeted by the leftover books of the Dutch pietists, which books were shipped to the Cape from the early 1800s when Europe lost interest in pietism. Here, as can be deduced from their diaries, women started reading these books and applied their self-afflicting piety to their lives.

One such woman was Hester Venter (fl. 1852) who read Bernardus Smijtegel's (1665–1739) *Het gekrookte riet* when she was living with her husband and ten children on a border farm amidst experiences of unsafety and loneliness. She bought the book while she was on a visit to Cape Town and eventually found that the book addressed her spiritual needs: she grew to believe that by shedding her personal sins she could be saved from her dangerous circumstances.

Also, this type of piety allowed Hester Venter to fall in love with Jesus. This may be a local version of Dutch piety, but it brought Venter into a mystic union with Jesus, who found salvation by kissing him, and caring for his wounds like a mother (Venter 1852:142).

The sin-soul-salvation model, with its mystic turn, was deported out of the Cape Colony by Susanna Smit (1799–1863), the wife of the missionary Erasmus Smit, who, according to her own diary (unpublished manuscript, Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg), packed books of the Dutch pietists in her *wakis* (wagon chest). With a fear of hell, and amidst physical and emotional deprivation, Smit reached out to the suffering Jesus who needed a mother, and longed for Jesus who “visited” her as a sensitive bridegroom.

English liberalism losing the battle for the local woman's soul

As we have seen above, black women who before had been unfamiliar with the concepts of sin, soul and salvation, by 1800 believed that they possessed personalised souls and that they were involved with a personal Saviour. They also came to believe that both sin and soul had gender, and that women's bodies were potential sites of battle between good and evil.

During the 1800s there were from the side of English-speaking missionaries (at least), three contenders for the souls of black women. Those were the Methodists or rather the London Missionary Society, the Church of England and the Liberals. All of these traditions were Reformed but had problematic roots in and connections with Calvinism.

Firstly, then, there were the missionaries from the Methodist tradition of which the Moffats are the most well-known. In 1826 Mary Moffat (1795–1871) found a Tswana girl under a stone and raised her. And again, the answer to how MaMary raised Segatisho probably lies within the sin-soul-salvation approach. Although coming from a pietist, non-orthodox background, MaMary raised Segatisho to believe in a God who was interested in her personal soul, who communicated through His saving Son, and who expected her to fear hell in all of her personal behaviour (Dickson 1974). This, again, was very different from the Tswana culture that searched for and found God in the weather, the sun and the moon, that heard God speaking through the hail and the wind, and feared, above all, the wrath of ancestors who had been neglected.

At the age of 13 then, in 1839, Segatisho was taken to England as an example of the perfect product of the missionary enterprise. She had a soul, a concept of what sin was, and she was saved. Methodism originated as a reaction against orthodox Calvinism; it took on the sin-soul-salvation face of local missionary practice, which included the subordination of the female body; and yet today local Methodism is women-empowering through the Manyano (Christian women ministries) and the ordination of women since 1960. The Methodist Church was one of the first churches to ordain women in South Africa, thereby setting itself apart from the Afrikaans-speaking Calvinists to whom women's ordination came late or not at all.

Secondly, the Church of England mission schools educated black girls who survived the wars for land between the British and the local blacks. Princess Emma (b. 1842) was one such girl who then became the first black woman in South Africa to write a letter in English. In 1860 she wrote a letter to Bishop Robert Gray who originally secured her education when she, as a Xhosa princess, amidst the British-Xhosa wars and after the Nongqawuse famine of 1857, was handed over to the British for education. In the school Emma was not only taught how to read and write. Coming from a culture that made no distinction between sacred and profane, she was now told that all people were sinful, that a woman was to cover her body in realms of material, not to work on the lands scantily dressed, and to understand that salvation lay within one's personal relationship with God. However, Emma became "un-marriageable" because of her Christian education, and in 1869 (at the age of 26) became the tenth wife of Stokwe Ndela, a minor Mqwati Chief (Hodgson 1987).

Thirdly, and in reaction against this outdated European pietism – which in its missionary form resembled the sin-soul-salvation model of lay Calvinism – was the Liberal Theology of Frances Colenso (1816–1893) and her husband, John Colenso, the Anglican bishop of Natal. Frances Colenso (Rees 1958), her husband and daughters believed that religion was inherent to all people, and that this inner consciousness should be enlightened further with the knowledge of Christ’s saving nature, and not through scaring local people through instilling in them a fear of hell. Influenced by the Liberal Theology of FD Maurice (1805–1872), Frances Colenso placed less emphasis on the soul’s personal relationship with God and more on the salvation of one’s total being. This led to her fighting for the political rights of the Zulus, as can be deduced from the very charming but potent letters (*Colenso letters from Natal*) written by her to her friends in Europe (Rees 1958).

However, English liberalism did not win the battle for the black woman’s soul. It was a missionary and imperialist piety in its sin-soul-salvation form – partly inspired by Methodism and English colonialist theology, partly inspired by lay Calvinism – that won her soul. But this was not to last long. Eventually black women would liberate themselves from European piety and lay Calvinism to become African church leaders in their own right, as we shall see.

Marie du Toit, the only Afrikaner Calvinist feminist

Who won the battle for the local white woman’s soul?

While women in Europe obtained the parliamentary vote and started to be ordained in (Calvinist) churches in the first decades of the twentieth century, white Afrikaans-speaking women locally were kept firstly in concentration camps during the British–Boer war of 1899–1902, and secondly faced conditions of poverty and landlessness in the aftermath of the war. When in 1918 the Women’s Monument was erected for them in Bloemfontein, it was an all-male affair. Two men were commissioned to write the history of Afrikaner women for the inauguration of this monument, Willem Postma (1918) and Eric Stockenström (1921) who both applauded Afrikaner women for their Calvinist submissiveness to the nation and their husbands. In an ironic twist of the sin-soul-salvation model, Postma (1918:125) depicted the Afrikaner woman as one whose “soul is too pure for politics” and who did not follow in the secular footsteps of her Dutch sister who is fighting to vote in parliament and in church. Postma (1918:158) acknowledged the influence of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) on his thinking: the ultra-Calvinist Dutch statesman whose thinking was used locally to validate patriarchal politics both as far as race and gender were concerned.

In 1914 Kuyper published a book in the Netherlands, *De eerepositie der vrouw* (“Woman’s honorary position”) in which he tried to give a

romantic view on women's subordination. The "natural" place of a woman – a concept borrowed from Calvin's "natural law" – was in the family, under the head of the family (*gesinshoof*), who was to vote on behalf of the family. This book was aimed at undermining the Dutch women's suffrage movement, but women anyway obtained the vote in the Netherlands in 1918.

In South Africa, women were far from being allowed to vote, and Calvinist women were far from participating in the leadership of their churches. On the contrary, the leadership of the churches fell fully in the hands of Kuyperian Calvinism. In 1920 Prof JD du Toit – also known as the poet Totius – headed a "gender" commission of the *Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika*, which is the most ultra-Calvinist of all the Afrikaans-speaking Calvinist churches in South Africa. This commission recommended that women not be allowed to vote in the church, and also not in parliament. The recommendations were founded on Kuyper's book (1914) mentioned above, although Kuyper's "natural law" arguments against women voting were substantiated by Scriptural references, placing them in the realm of divine law. The recommendations were accepted by the Synod of the church and a copy was sent to parliament (*Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika 1920: Hande-linge van die Sinode*).

One woman, and one woman only, reacted to these claims. She was indeed the sister of JD du Toit, Maria Magdalena du Toit (1880–1931). She was unmarried and a teacher, but suffered from tuberculosis and died at the age of 51 – at the house of her brother in Potchefstroom. In 1921 she wrote a book, *Vrou en feminist*, this being the only book written in Afrikaans ever that contains the word "feminis(t)" in its title. In this book Marie du Toit answered to the Synod's decision by questioning what a natural lifestyle for a woman was. She found society's restrictions on women to be unnatural, and the church's limitations unbiblical since Jesus wanted women to be free human beings. Marie du Toit rejected men's right to decide for women whether they wanted to vote and participate in public life. Nobody can decide for a slave or a woman whether they want to be free. She recommended that men put themselves in women's place and experience the suffering of unfreedom (Du Toit 1921:68ff).

Marie du Toit furthermore rejected the Synod's argument that God had – by nature – given woman a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4) to prepare her for private life within the family. She stated that the differences between natural man and natural woman were minor, making numerous references to intellectually brilliant women throughout history, and quoting Jan Smuts who said that social legislation was in need of women's insight into social matters (Du Toit 1921:89ff).

Marie du Toit specifically reacted to the claim of the Synod that giving women the vote was foreign to the Calvinist character of the Afrikaans nation. She said that her reaction was not initiated by the *volksvreemde* ideas

of the French Revolution or the English suffragettes, as accused, and that Afrikaans women like her were not driven by an unchristian thirst for power. They simply wanted to address the needs of women. Women could think for themselves, she stated, and she bemoaned the fact that women in South Africa did not stand together (Du Toit 1921:93ff).

And now, almost 90 years later, the concern expressed by Marie du Toit that women in the Calvinist traditions in South Africa do not stand together has remained current and topical, when the Synod of the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA: Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika) decided on 1 July 2009 that women would not be allowed to become elders and ministers in this church – and no reaction from the women of this church ensued.

Synodal Calvinism in the fifty years from 1944 to 1994

The GKSA as a local ultra-Calvinist church is, of course, not the only Afrikaans-speaking Calvinist church in South Africa. It is by far the smallest to the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk which started ordaining women in 1979, and the large Dutch Reformed Church. The latter, entertaining a functional view of women, has since 1944 allowed women to assist men as deaconesses in the province of the Orange Free State. In 1966 the Mid-African Synod, which represented black members constituting mainly women, asked the General Synod to place the issue of women's ordination on their agenda. This issue was referred to a commission which only considered women's ordination as deacons. This commission, as well as the synods of 1970, 1974 and 1978, rejected the issue of women's ordination as deacons, which was only accepted in 1982 sixteen years after the original request by the Mid-African Synod (Landman 1991:134).

After another eight years, in 1990, the General Synod voted in favour of women being ordained as elders and ministers. Yet it took another five years before the first woman, Gretha Heymans, was ordained in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State. The "daughter" church of the DRMC, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (now the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa), decided in favour of women's ordination in 1986, but ordained its first woman minister, Mary-Ann Platjies, only a decade later in 1996.

The future of Calvinism seen from its history since 1994

With these dates we are well into post-1994 South Africa, and into the second part of this article. This second part uses the history described in the first part to gain a better understanding of current female religious behaviour in South

Africa, and to predict whether women and Calvinism have a future together in this country.

In this regard, three remarks will be made.

Firstly, recent revivalist tendencies amongst Afrikaans-speaking Calvinist women amidst their silence on the lack of women's leadership roles in the church can be explained historically. It was explained in the above that for centuries local women in the Dutch Calvinist tradition felt at ease mainly with pietist, revivalist and lay Calvinist expressions of religious experience in which one's personal sins are the personal responsibility of the soul, the salvation of which is dependent on one's personal relationship with one's Saviour. Through the centuries these women were made to believe that part of the salvation of the soul was the subordination of the female body to male rule, both in intimate spaces and in the church. From this it is, from a historical point of view, easy to explain why women flocked from this tradition to mass church movements that are women-specific, such as that of the 'Worthy Women' who held their first convention on 8 August 2009 in the Moreleta Park Dutch Reformed Church. During this meeting women were encouraged – as part of their salvation – to crown and anoint their husbands as kings of the household in order to become worthy women in God's eyes.

The present silence of women in the Dutch Calvinist tradition on women's exclusion from female leadership in the church can also be explained historically. This has not only happened recently with the decision of the GKSA's Synod not to ordain women as elders and ministers. Büchner (2007:25) has indicated that today, almost 20 years after formally deciding to ordain women as elders and pastors, the Dutch Reformed Church which is the largest Calvinist church in South Africa, has ordained only approximately 120 women as pastors, which constitutes less than 3% of its pastors (Büchner 2007:25). She furthermore points out (Büchner 2008:235) that women from the Dutch Calvinist tradition in South Africa have – as was also described in the above – been silenced in public because of the "folk mother discourse" (*volksmoederdiskoers*) imprinted on them by the Kuyperian Calvinists of the early 1900s. This has made, and still makes, Calvinist women uncomfortable about speaking on matters of gender.

The second remark to be made here is on South African women who have shed – or missed – the Calvinist tradition and consequently taken on liberated roles as women. It has been shown in the above historical overview that the ecclesiastical traditions that eventually restored women to their rightful place in church were non-Calvinist, contra-Calvinist or ambiguously Calvinist, such as the Moravians and the Methodists. The local women who most convincingly distanced themselves from colonial Calvinism are, of course, the women leaders and healers in the African Independent Churches. Although the preaching of the African Independent Churches is based on the

notions of sin, soul and salvation, this teaching is cleansed of its embodiment in the exclusion of women from leadership roles.

The third remark concerns the future of South African women's journey with Calvinism. Johan van der Merwe, Professor in Church History at the University of Pretoria, recently remarked in *Kerkbode* of 7 August (2009:18) that South Africa was the last bastion to Calvin and Calvinism. And with churches of Dutch Calvinist origin in South Africa losing at least 5% of their members to charismatic churches annually, Calvinism in South Africa may well be on its way out. Why, then, do women still want to be part of this tradition which may not only be dying out, but also overtly or covertly excluding women from leadership roles?

Jane Dempsey Douglass in her book *Women, freedom and Calvin* (1985/1993:69), argues that Calvin theologically opened the door for women leadership in the church. However, in practice his theology was of little immediate consequence for the public functions of women in the church, and the subordinate position of women in the church was upheld for another 350 years. It should, however, be noted that although Calvin himself did not put pressure on the restoration of women to the office of pastor in the church, his theology allowed women the freedom to preach and to lead.

This, then, may be the challenge for and the future of South African women in the Calvinist tradition who feel called to the office of elder and pastor: to put Calvin's theology of freedom to women into practice in the church, and to undermine the local Calvinist history of women's oppression.

Conclusion

In the above a short historical overview was given of the Calvinistic road travelled by South African women of faith. It was described how the orthodox Calvinism of Maria Quevellerius van Riebeeck was transferred to local women in the form of a colonising "theology" of sin-soul-salvation. It was also indicated that this "theology" was gender-specific and aimed at controlling women's bodies through the promise of the salvation of their souls.

The above historical overview also included the gains and strains of local Christian traditions that were alternative to Calvinism. It was indicated that although these traditions – such as the Moravians – also used the sin-soul-salvation approach, with them it was cast in the empowerment of women through literacy and leadership. History seems to prove that local Calvinism, when profiled against non-Calvinist traditions, was leading the way in forming oppressive church practices and beliefs as far as women are concerned.

Finally, the above history points to women from Dutch Calvinist descent taking control over their spirituality by means of pietism and revi-

valism, while their lives as potential church leaders were – and still are – controlled by a women-restricting form of local Calvinism, especially in the GKSA.

Fifteen years after the dawn of democracy in South Africa, this colonising form of Calvinism is still having an adverse influence on the lives of women, keeping the views of Calvin himself on the freedom of women from being applied in local Calvinist churches.

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