CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Women, Religion and Leadership in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

This volume builds on Volume I and it continues to focus on women, religion and leadership in Zimbabwe. While the first volume engages with thematic areas where women's leadership is either located or absent, this volume intends to make a discursive analysis of women's leadership in various Christian traditions in Zimbabwe, namely Protestantism, African

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Initiated Churches (AICs) as well as Pentecostalism. Such an analysis is crucial in exposing religious attitudes towards women's leadership within and outside religious institutions. In this case, religion is considered a key variable in determining women's leadership in many other spaces such as the home, religious institutions and many other places where decisions are made (Klingorova & Havlicek, 2015; Schnabel et al., 2018). We argue in this volume that religion is central in gendering space, both abstract and physical (See Chitando et al., 2022). Hence, it is appealed to in processes both to include and to exclude women in certain spaces, leadership included. Gender inequality is exacerbated by religion(s) because "religions as social institutions are gendered in different ways" (Schnabel et al., 2018: 83). Klingorova and Havlicek (2015: 9) argue that "the relation between religion and gender equality can be explained by the assertion that societies with higher religiosity accept the authority of religious teachers, who advocate a patriarchal organisation of society." We, therefore, argue in this volume that such attitudes do not only need to be interrogated but challenged to the extent that religion/s need to be accommodative of women's leadership. We envisage that gender inclusive religious policies enable women to be present and effectively take part when decisions that affect their lives are being taken.

Scholarship on religion and gender has demonstrated that religions are gendered institutions, and that different religions have different norms and expectations for distinct ways of accomplishing the same purpose, that is, promoting gendered religious values, expressing gendered religious identities, differentiating between women and men in context specific ways (Schnabel et al., 2018: 83; see also Koburtay et al., 2022; Manyonganise, 2021; Seguino, 2011). Gender norms and stereotypes are embedded in religious doctrines that shape the everyday lives of religious adherents. Within the Zimbabwean context, most religious traditions are hierarchical in nature with men occupying the higher offices. Seguino (2011:1308) notes that in hierarchical structures, a dominant factor in

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shaping gender attitudes is the views held by those at the top of the religious structure at any given point in time. In most cases, women in Zimbabwe have occupied less powerful positions in religions that make Zimbabwe's religious landscape. This is true of religions that use sacred texts as sources of authority. The Christian Bible and the Islamic Koran have been utilised in ways that ensure the subordination of women as well as their exclusion from leadership positions. Zimbabwe's religious turf is largely dominated by African Indigenous Religion(s) and Christianity. Classens (2012: 149) alludes to the "way biblical texts play a key role in forming and sustaining a worldview where the males in society are privileged and thus in power." Klingorova and Havlicek (2015) note that even in cases where the sacred text of a particular religion may advocate equality between men and women, the facts on the ground show that such texts are not given much attention. There is, therefore, discrepancies between what is expected and what is being done. Even then, the use of the Bible in informing gender relations is not homogenous across the different Christian traditions in Zimbabwe. It is only prudent to examine the position of women in these traditions. However, before doing this, there may be need to theorise the discourse on women and religious leadership.

Women and Religious Leadership in Zimbabwe

Women's religious leadership remains controversial in most religions of the world. Scholarship on African Indigenous Religions and gender have noted how the religious space was/is empowering to women as it allows them to subvert patriarchy and exercise agency which they may not be able to do outside of the religious spaces (Cheater, 1986). In this case, "religious roles in traditional belief systems, therefore, afforded and continue to afford exceptional women, who refuse to conform to the standard female 'social personality', an escape route into individualised positions of power as well as authority, based on traditional religion" (Cheater, 1986: 69). Writing on the Punu of Congo-Brazaville, Plancke (2011) argues that for women, spirit possession expresses aspects of domination, agency and self-realisation. From her point of view, these aspects are manifest in most Bantu cultures where women exercise leadership in religion and at times beyond the religious space. In the first volume, we alluded to the Shona woman legend, Mbuya Nehanda as priestess in Shona religion, which empowered her to function as leader in the

political realm as well. The Shona-Ndebele Uprisings (1896–1897) are a case in point. Beyond spirit possession, however, most women were treated as second-class citizens due to cultural beliefs and practices. We make this argument cognisant of how some African gender scholars have tried to dismiss the existence of unequal gender relations in pre-colonial Africa, hence, proffering that gender in Africa was a colonial invention (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 1997). We may run the risk of cultural nationalism if we deny that gender was a crucial social organising tool in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. We also use Mbuya Nehanda's example while being aware of the criticisms that some scholars have brought forward. For example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) rejects the notion that Mbuya Nehanda can be representative of pre-colonial African women. Her persistent presence in Zimbabwe's history is because "she was considered different from other women" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2005: 76). He further argues that

> Her inclusion was part and parcel of the 'great women' as an antidote to the 'great men' of conventional historiography. Nehanda is herself suffering as a historical figure from 'masculinisation' using male standards to measure and judge her activities.
>
> She has never been studied as a woman in her own right. If she was not a spirit medium, she could be suffering from invisibility together with her fellow Zimbabwean pre-colonial sisters.

In Ndlovu-Gatsheni's analysis, Nehanda derived her authority from religion without which she would not have been recognised in history as a historical figure. Other scholars like Anne-Marie Gallagher, Cathy Lubelska and Louise Ryan cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni take note of the tendency among early historians to add key women to men's history. Some of "the accounts that try to present pre-colonial African women as having wielded power tend to glorify individual African female rulers without detailed analyses of the specific historic circumstances under which they lived" (Becker, 1998: 259) cited in Geisler (2004: 18). Hence, Geisler (2004: 259) argues that such accounts uplift outstanding cases over the majority of women who must be postulated to have had much less authority and political power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) raises critical issues about women's invisibility in history itself. However, we argue that women's visibility in history is closely tied to their roles in leadership in the various facets of societal life, religious leadership included. The cherry

picking of a few women in history does not (re)present a Zimbabwean society that is gender sensitive and gender inclusive. It should actually nudge scholars to question the absence of the majority of women from authoritative positions in the public sphere. Such analysis needs to extend from African traditional religious spaces to include other religions such as Christianity and so-called minor religions in Zimbabwe, namely Islam, Judaism, Baha'i Faith, etc. For example, AIRs and Christianity have been accomplices in advocating for the subordination of women and their exclusion from leadership not only in religious institutions but also in homes and national institutions. King (1995) alludes to this fact when she argues that the study of the status of women in religion also reflects the status of women in society as a whole. Volume I has already alluded to the way religion has influenced the genderedness of the political space in Zimbabwe. Since in Zimbabwe the majority of Zimbabweans confess to be Christians, it becomes imperative to analyse the attitudes derived from this religion towards women.

Attitudes Towards Women's Leadership in Christianity in Zimbabwe

Focusing on Christianity, feminist and womanist scholars have critiqued the inferior position of women within. Christianity is categorised as a gender-traditional religion (Burke, 2012: 123). Burke (2012) further argues that it promotes the belief that men and women were created to fulfil different and complementary roles that tend to privilege the status of men. In concurrence, Pui-lan (2000) argues that though women constitute the majority in churches, they are marginalised in the power structure of the church and the life of the congregation. She argues that "colonial and patriarchal denominational polity reinforced by indigenous biases and taboos against women has consigned them to second class membership in the faith community" (2000: 98). In her 2005 publication, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, Pui-lan critiques some of the intellectual projects which for her make the crucial connection between religion and colonialism, but have left out the gender dimension. She also notes that some scholars who have investigated the relationship between gender and colonialism have not taken note of the role of religion in sustaining colonial ideologies. In the light of this, she argues

> Given [the] complex history of what counted as Holy scripture, the Bible cannot be naively seen as a religious text reflecting the faith of the Hebrew people and early Christians. Instead, it must also be seen as a political text written, collected, and redacted by male colonial elites in their attempts to rewrite and reconcile with history and to reconceptualise both individual and collective identities under the shadow of empires. A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible needs to investigate the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power differentials between the colonisers and the decolonised, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over spheres where these elites could exercise control. (2005: 8)

While Pui-lan was writing on the Asian context, her observations are also evident in the African context in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Specifically focusing on Africa, Oduyoye (1997/8: 500) posits that

> Since in the church in Africa, men and the clergy presume to speak for God, and to demand the obedience of women, it is not easy to experience God as empowering and liberating when one is in the church's ambit. Women experience God as the one who orders their subordination, who requires them to serve and never be served. God is the one who made them women, with a body deemed to be the locus of sin and impurity. God is experienced as source of women's oppression and Jesus as the author of exclusion of women from sacramental roles in the church. This is the God the Christian tradition wants women to love and obey.

Scholarship on religion and gender focusing specifically on Zimbabwe has shown how the different Christian traditions within have in one way or the other reinforced the otherisation of women as well as their continued marginalisation from leadership positions. Chagonda-Banda (2014) deals with gender inequality in the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. She argues that the *Rumano* booklet, which is used during the women's Thursday meetings (*China Chemadzimai*), continues to project women as home-makers and house wives. The domestication of women was reinforced by missionary Christianity as it valorised Victorian notions of domesticity in those areas which were colonised by the British, Zimbabwe included. It is important to note that the concept of women's meetings was started by the Methodist Church, but eventually adopted by most protestant churches in Zimbabwe. It, therefore, follows that in most protestant churches in Zimbabwe, women continue

to be taught to focus on being good mothers and wives. In an on-going research (Manyonganise, 2023) engaged women in Protestant churches in order to understand their attitudes towards women's religious leadership. It was interesting to note that even in those churches where women can now be ordained as pastors, a separate parallel hierarchy of power and authority made up of men exists to the extent that the women pastors have to subordinate themselves to this hierarchy. Most women interviewed alluded to the fact that the ordination of women in these churches act as smokescreens for fake women's empowerment yet real power remains in the hands of men. Writing on AICs, Mapuranga (2013a) argues that women in these churches continue to linger on the margins in as far as leadership positions are concerned. This is despite the fact that earlier studies had argued that the religious space of AICs was empowering to women. Scholarship on African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has also shown the pervasiveness of patriarchy within this tradition (Manyonganise, 2021; Mapuranga, 2018).

A book edited by Hendricks et al. (2012) titled *Men in the Pulpit, Women in the Pew? Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa* captures the reality of the church in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Religious patriarchal ideologies from both African and biblical cultures have shaped negative attitudes towards women's religious leadership. Mombo and Joziasse (2012: 184) argue

> In a patriarchal system, gender roles are specifically defined and valued differently, which means that men are socialised to be public figures, while the women are socialised to be in the domestic sphere. When this is applied in the church, the men are ordained and allowed to use the pulpit while women remain in the pews.

This analysis is instructive of the experiences of women across the Christian traditions in Zimbabwe. This may also be applicable to other religions found in the country. The emphasis placed on silence and submission has allowed men to find justification to exclude women from leadership positions in the church more specifically. The appropriation of Pauline passages which emphasise women's silence in church and subordination to their husbands has been central in excluding women from religious leadership in churches. To this, Machingura (2013: 234) avers that "the Bible has been variously used to ridicule, stereotype, demean, vulgarise, demonise, manipulate and fight against women's empowerment." Hence,

African Women Theologians argue that the churches' teachings have promoted women's oppression to the extent that even women oppose the ordination of women (Longwe, 2019: 16). Hence, in Pui-lan's analysis, the misogynist teachings in both the Christian and indigenous traditions deny women equal opportunities to serve and lead (2000: 100). For her, many female parishioners feel more comfortable with men as their pastors and some are against women's ordination because they have internalised the churches' teachings of male superiority. Thus, from Ellison's perspective,

> In patriarchal Christian theology, the male is the presumed centre, the defining norm, and the exclusive representative of the human. He alone bears fully the divine image. The female, defined as secondary and subordinate, occupies an auxiliary place in relation to (and in service to) the male, but never occupies the centre or represents humanity in her own right. (2001: 49)

This often results in the trivialisation of women's concerns. Ellison (2001: 48) argues that patriarchal Christianity sacrifices women's powerlessness and subordination as morally good. Hence, Harrison (1985: 4–5) cited in Ellison (2001: 48) is of the view that we are still a long way before "Christianity acknowledges adequately its complicity in breeding and perpetuating the hatred and fear of the real, full, lived-world power of female persons." However, Ellison (2001) is of the view that such attitudes can only be maintained depending on the compliance of women and men to the norms and ideological assumptions of patriarchal Christianity about gender. For Ellison, it is possible for women to breakdown patriarchy by stopping to comply and conform to patriarchal norms which can enable them to display autonomous self-direction. In other words, women can exercise agency in negotiating, subverting and resisting patriarchy in Christian circles. We turn to this theme below.

Religious Women's Agency: Negotiating, Subverting and Resisting Patriarchy

Scholarship on religion and gender, while noting the marginalisation of women in religions, has contested the view that casts women as victims without the power or agency to change the narrative. Focus has now been shifting to ways in which women in religions are negotiating, subverting

and resisting patriarchy in the religions of the world. For Burke (2012: 123), studying women's agency is interesting in that 'agency is defined through intention and autonomy, yet these characteristics are not typically used to describe religious women. We theorise the concept of agency cognisant of the challenges it poses in both feminist and womanist studies particularly as scholars try to delineate women's actions as either complying with or resisting patriarchy. Le Roux (2019) cautions us to be careful not to interpret religious women's actions through the binaries of complicity or agency while disregarding the religious meaning that the women attach to their actions. It is in the light of this that in order to understand their agency, scholars have focused on women's experiences, thereby shifting from trying to understand women through the eyes of the men who dominate them. In this case, the concept of agency gives voice to women. In an article titled, *Can the Subaltern Speak*? Spivak (1988) doubted the possibility of the subaltern to speak in a society dominated by narratives of the powerful. However, many scholars have responded to Spivak and have challenged her thesis on the silencing of the subaltern. Responses to Spivak have contended that the subaltern have always spoken but the dominant have chosen not to listen. This is true of religious institutions generally around the world and particularly in Zimbabwe. In her study of African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, Mapuranga (2013b) notes how women Pentecostal leaders bargain with patriarchy instead of directly challenging it. However, in 2018, she took note of the fact that the same women had started to be proactive by creating ministries within ministries. For example, she notes how women who are wives of founders of Pentecostal movements had begun to form women's ministries with their husbands' churches. For her, this is agency because these women are refusing to continue lingering under the shadows of their husbands. While agreeing with Mapuranga, Manyonganise (2021) notes that there are some women who have chosen to totally break away from this tradition. Using Memory Matimbire the founder of the Ndadhinhiwa (I am fed up) prayer group, she shows how Matimbire has challenged, subverted and resisted patriarchy. A discussion of some of her sermons revealed the militancy with which she leads her ministry, a characteristic which is deemed to be masculine in Shona culture. Such ministries have brought visibility to women's religious leadership. In African Initiated Churches (AICs), Mai Chaza's Guta Ra Jehovah is the epitome of women religious agency. There are many women in these churches who have also founded their own movements

as a way of breaking away from the suffocating patriarchal control in male-led movements. In the next section, we provide a summary of the chapters making up this volume.

Section A: Women's Visibility in Positions of Leadership

Chapter 2, by the title, "Women's Transformative Leadership and Africa's Holistic Development: The Role of the Churches," is authored by Isabel A. Phiri and Ezra Chitando. The authors of this chapter restate the fact that even though the general picture being painted globally is to associate leadership with men, the reality on the ground is that women have played, and continue to play, significant leadership roles. It is against this backdrop that the chapter critiques the ideology of patriarchy which is bent on undermining women's leadership roles in society, while overplaying men's leadership roles. The chapter also examines the role of the churches in promoting African women's transformative leadership. It concludes by proffering ways in which the churches can tap into African women's transformative leadership in addressing the continent's holistic development.

Chapter 3, by Silindiwe Zvingowanisei, carries the title, "Visibility and Leadership Opportunities for Muslim Women in Zimbabwe." The main argument proffered herein is that more than forty years after attaining political independence, women leadership remains a critical challenge in almost all the major religions found in Zimbabwe, particularly in Islam. The chapter makes use of liberal feminism as its theoretical framework in a bid to explore the extent to which Muslim women are involved in Islam's critical leadership structures. Zvingowanisei begins by investigating the visibility and leadership opportunities for women during the time of Muhammad. She then proceeds to explore the same pertaining to Muslim women in Zimbabwe. Throughout the chapter, Zvingowanisei contends that in terms of leadership opportunities, Muslim women in Zimbabwe are relegated to the realm of insignificance except in cases where they lead other women such as the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation. She also illustrates how the selective use of some of the Quranic scriptures, the institution of patriarchy and culture are the cardinal reasons why Muslim women are subjugated. In sync with Zimbabwe's National Gender Policy, 2017, the chapter envisions striking a balance between men and women in terms of leadership in Islam. It also foregrounds the point that although Muslim women participate in leading other women

and children, there is need for a robust implementation of gender redress instruments to achieve equity in Islam's leadership structures where all the influential positions are occupied by men.

Chapter 4, authored by Simbarashe Munamati, is entitled "Women's Leadership Roles in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (1891–2020)." This chapter echoes a melodious chord to the discourse on women, religion and leadership by examining the extent to which Zimbabwean women participate in leadership positions in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ). To achieve this goal, he presents the history of the RCZ into two unique phases, that is, the pioneering (1891–1983) and the liberal (1984–2020) periods. Peering through the liberal feminism and theological lenses while applying the critical phenomenological and historical methodologies, the chapter discusses women's leadership roles in the RCZ. It provides a trajectory of women leadership trends in the RCZ at the congregation, presbytery and synod levels. While acknowledging the vast gender disparities which were pertaining, especially during the first historical phase, the chapter concludes by appraising a positive shift in women's participation in various leadership positions. According to him, this progressive shift has been made possible through the implementation of numerous gender redress instruments aimed at achieving gender equality between women and men in the church's leadership structures. As such, the chapter propounds for continued progress towards flattening the curve in gender disparities within one of the earliest denominations in the southern part of the country.

Chapter 5, "Gender Dynamics in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ) Leadership Hierarchy" is authored by Terence Mupangwa. Cognisant of the fact that the AFMZ is one of the oldest Pentecostal churches with such a wide following in Zimbabwe, she weaves a strand to the theme of women and leadership by assessing the gender dynamics in the AFMZ's leadership structures. It is her assertion that although the Zimbabwean government and other regional and international organisations have policies that advocate for and aim to achieve gender equality in all facets of life, however, faith-based institutions such as the AFMZ have not yet aligned their structures with such policies. The discussion in this chapter is based on an empirical study conducted in the AFMZ between September 2017 and February 2018. The theoretical framework adopted in this chapter is African women's theology which upholds gender equality in African faith communities. The key findings emerging from this empirical study are the basis of her contention that the

AFMZ is still far from achieving gender equality in its governance structures. Mupangwa lays bare how women are marginalised in the AFMZ governance structures despite all the efforts by the Zimbabwean government to achieve gender equality in both state and non-governmental organisations. The chapter concludes by recommending the inclusion of women in all activities of the church, especially in key leadership and decision-making structures. This conclusion is informed by the fact that women are capable of contributing positively to the growth of the AFMZ as agents of change.

Chapter 6, by Amos Muyambo, is entitled, "Women Leadership in the Guta Ra Jehovah Church: Towards the Construction of 'Soft Masculinities.'" It outlines the several lessons that can be drawn from one of the oldest and widely followed woman-founded African Indigenous Churches, the Guta Ra Jehovah. This is particularly in the light of how the Guta Ra Jehovah is playing a formidable role in addressing gender-based violence (GBV), which is one of the major social evils in Zimbabwe. The chapter also discusses how female leadership in the hands of Matenga (a title for the founder, Mai Chaza (born Theresa Nyamushanya)) is positively contributing towards the deconstruction of harmful masculinities. It illustrates how such initiatives have opened inroads towards creating soft masculinities that are more life giving and positive in gender relations in Zimbabwe. Muyambo places emphasis on how women's involvement has contributed towards solving societal challenges through inculcating positive humanity especially how they are moulding peaceful men. In conclusion, he analyses how female leadership in religion has contributed in formulating soft masculinities, ushering a ray of hope for the future.

In Chapter 7, "Exploring the Status of Women in the Zion Christian Church Since 1913," Solomon Mukora discusses the history of women's contribution in the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), one of the major AICs in Zimbabwe, especially among the female folk. In terms of theoretical framework, the chapter adopts an interdisciplinary approach. It draws insights from the social history approach and intersectionality. According to Mukora, in religious institutions, such as the ZCC, women have mutated into a complex class whose attributes are no longer generalisable since they have confronted the multiple bottlenecks imposed by patriarchal designs to register themselves as critical players in the church. This is despite the subversion by their male counterparts. He explains that while the ZCC women's roles are usually subordinate to men, they are functional and have been an important vehicle in the development of

the church. He argues that the ZCC women in their various capacities, whether as subordinate, or otherwise, have continued to mutate in terms of their qualities in the society, with education being a significant agent in the way women perceive themselves. The chapter beams a spotlight on how the women's ancillary functions in midwifery, prophecy and as wives and mothers have been very critical in shaping the ideology of the church. Hence, it is his conviction that the ZCC women cannot be considered to be static, as they have continued to evolve their qualities responding to the trends of modernity as women consciousness through waves of feminism and womanism which continue to inform their class consciousness. The chapter concludes by restating the argument that women are critical in the historiography of the ZCC.

Section B: Women's Leadership in New Religious Movements and Cultural Traditions

The first two chapters in this section deliberate on the emergence of churches or ministries founded by women in Zimbabwe, starting from the pre-colonial era, moving up to the last forty years of independence while gazing into the future. Besides celebrating some of the women's success stories in religious leadership, these two chapters also reflect on some of the hurdles faced by women leading churches or ministries in Zimbabwe. Chapter 8 by Mpumelelo Moyo has the title, "The Emergence of Churches and Ministries Founded/led by Women in Zimbabwe." Herein, Moyo explores the rise of women to influential leadership positions in the church. He argues that more that forty years after independence, the church in Zimbabwe has not yet fully embraced women's leadership. In his view, although women are the backbone of the church, the harsh reality of the matter is that the church for many women comes across as both a liberator and an oppressor. According to Moyo, this is mainly because women's ministry and contribution are considered secondary and supplementary to that of men. Such a status quo is perceived as very ironic in this chapter, particularly in the light of the fact that the same women who dominate the pews in churches have been perpetually excluded from the churches' power structures. The chapter also illustrates how women access power and religious space through the exercise of spiritual healing, evangelism and leadership in the church. It also interrogates the unholy alliance between cultural and religious biases which have often been used as tools to justify women's silence, subordination as well as denying

them equal opportunities in church leadership. Moyo also acknowledges that African Initiated Churches and Pentecostal Churches have facilitated enlarged avenues for women's participation and leadership. Nevertheless, he concedes that women's participation is circumscribed by cultural, church and biblical controls. The chapter concludes by recommending the urgent need for embracing female leadership, particularly their spiritual role, the legal authority of their ministries, the challenges of patriarchy and the empowerment of women. The vantage point for proffering these recommendations is informed by the undeniable fact that women's contribution and leadership can awaken the Church in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 9, by Canisius Mwandayi, is entitled "Religio-cultural 'clamps' on female leadership in Zimbabwe: towards a liberating hermeneutic in mainline churches and African Initiated Churches (AICs)." Starting off from the ancient times up to the year 2020, the chapter retraces the course of life that has characterised the gendered contours surrounding leadership dynamics in Zimbabwe. It utilises the life course approach to human relations along gender lines. Specific focus revolves on women in Zimbabwe's mainline churches and African Initiated Churches (AICs). The undergirding argument raised by Mwandayi is that the biblical interpretation in churches should not be done in such a way that it promotes misogyny, hatred and patriarchal-based injustice. He, therefore, calls for a liberating hermeneutic which is tailored towards setting women free from the clutches of an androcentric world. In his view, such a hermeneutic is intended to usher in egalitarianism, particularly in gender-related issues, as well as to ignite hope and love for all regardless of gender.

In Chapter 10, by the title, "Zezuru Women's Leadership Roles in the Death Rites of Passage in Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Response," Sylvia C. Musasiwa and Yolanda Dreyer foreground women's leadership roles in the death and burial rituals among the Zezuru, a sub-group of the Shona in Zimbabwe. This chapter highlights some activities which are the preserve for women. The main argument proffered by the authors is that these activities reveal that despite the women's participatory leadership during the death rites of passage, their role is suppressed within the Zezuru culture. The authors also restate the fact that the significant role played by women during these important rites of passage does not seem to have received adequate attention in academic literature. With a particular focus on some practices which impact negatively on the widows within the Zezuru culture, the chapter proposes possible pastoral roles which

the church can offer to ensure that the rituals do not infract the widow's human rights.

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