

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF PASTORAL THEOLOGY

**POOR REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN
POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING BODIES : A CHALLENGE TO THE
CHURCH**
(With reference to Kenya)

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STUDENTS' DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has never been submitted for any academic credit to any other institution by anyone else. All sources of information used in this essay are fully cited.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of under representation and participation of women at top levels of political decision-making bodies is a fact nearly everywhere in the world. By decision-making bodies I mean the government under either an executive president or prime minister. Other bodies are those such as parliaments, senates, cabinets of ministers and diplomatic offices. Members of those bodies are the most influential people in deciding how things should go in their countries and between their countries and the international community. They represent the rest of the population, which entrusts them with a responsibility to govern and make decisions for the interest of all people whom they represent.

When we look at the composition of such bodies, we quickly notice male predominance and either total or a nearly total absence of women. Decisions made by those bodies are mainly made from a male perspective with almost no regard for the interests of women. That is not right, because men and women share equal dignity and status with equal rights in the societies. When one group is undermined and excluded from taking part in making decisions which affect it, is that justifiable?

In many societies, women are denied their natural rights and are subjected to oppression and exploitation. That kind of relationship has been taken for granted by both men and women without questioning it. Right from childhood men and

women see each other in terms of superior and inferior. Some activities and duties have been distributed according to gender, even if what has been assigned to one gender group can be better done by the opposite gender group.

The Word of God challenges us to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote justice and equality in all aspects of life. Love was the main theme in the teaching of Jesus. That is what he ordered his followers to strive for and try to spread. It is a duty of the church to ensure that the plan of God and the mission of Christ are fulfilled. It has to ensure that justice is done to each and every human person in the world. The exclusion of women or their poor participation in decision making is a justice issue. It goes against the Christian values which the Church stands for. That calls for measures to be taken to redress the situation. That is why the title of this work says that "**Poor Representation and Participation of Women in Political Decision-Making Bodies : A Challenge to the Church**". By the Church I mean especially the Roman Catholic Church, but also all those who call themselves Christians and believers.

The privilege of doing my theology studies in Kenya made me realise that Kenyan women are no exception from those of other parts of the world. I followed the events of the 1997 general elections in which many women took part. However, quite a few of them won seats in the parliament for instance. I listened to their complaints, I read comments by political analysts and talked with some voters. All

that I learned inspired me to know more about women's concerns. I also attended a seminar course on the topic at Tangaza College and finally I decided to write my long essay on it. My experience in Kenyan politics is short but quite rich. Due to the rich experience I have had, I decided to write my paper with a reference to the Kenyan reality.

The paper is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter deals with the analysis of the problem, making a kind of survey. The aim is to find out the intensity and the extent of the problem around the world and in Kenya in particular. The question to be asked is, what prevents women from taking part in political decision-making bodies? We shall also examine whether there is any significance in having women politicians or not.

Chapter Two will try to make us aware of how the problem poses a challenge to the Christian faith. It will also show us how God views people and their problems and what the role of the church is and liturgical celebrations regarding the human situations.

Chapter Three will try to offer some pastoral suggestions and possible solutions. An attempt will be made to give suggestions with concrete ways of going about them. This will be followed by a general conclusion. That will include an assessment of the situation and highlight some indicators or signs of hope for solving the problem, hence a brighter future.

CHAPTER 1

POOR PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS : A GLOBAL REALITY.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In general it is true that women's participation in politics and their representation in the highest political decision-making bodies is quite minimal. Numerical figures show that women who take part at the topmost levels of decision-making globally are not more than ten per cent. For example, it is said that in 1990 only 3.5 per cent of women were cabinet ministers in different countries around the world. At the same time the number of women who were heads of state in the whole world was only 7, while 93 countries never had any woman among members of parliament. ¹

In 1994 the percentage of women legislators in the world was 10.5, while only 6.1 per cent of women were cabinet ministers in different countries. Despite significant development on Human Rights and an effort to work for social justice, and despite democratic changes taking place all over the world, even the so-called 'most democratic countries in the world', like USA and United Kingdom had not reached a sufficiently high number of women represented at the highest levels of political decision-making. However, Scandinavian countries have been doing well

¹ Okumba Miruka, "Gender & Politics", In: *Delusions on Social Construction of Gender*, Wanjiku M. Kabira et al. eds, 1994 (Nairobi: FEMNET), p. 21.

in general.²

1.1 Women political representation by country between 1991 and 1994

1.1.1 In 1991 Sweden was leading with the highest number of 38 per cent of women representation.³ By 1997 the figure had reached 40.4 per cent of women parliamentarians.⁴

1.1.2 Norway had 36 per cent of women representation. In 1994, the country had a female Prime Minister with 37 percent women among Cabinet ministers, and 39 per cent women parliamentarians.⁵

1.1.3 The United States of America had 5.8 per cent in 1994. There were 11 per cent in the Congress and 7 per cent in the senate.⁶

1.1.4 The United Kingdom had only 6.4 per cent of women in the parliament in 1994.⁷ By 1997, during the premiership of Mr Tony Blair the number of

² *The Advancement of women - Notes for speakers*, Department of Public Information, United Nations, p. 74. Maria Nzomo, "Engendering Democratization in Kenya : A Political Perspective", *In* : Kabira Wanjiku et al, Democratic Change in Africa - Women perspective (Nairobi : A.IIWORD, 1993), p.9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Rosemary Okello. "Women aspirants and hurdles ahead", *In* : The Sunday Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, October 19, 1997) (Lifestyle), p. 7.

⁵ *The Advancement of women - Notes for speakers*, Department of Public Information, United Nations, p. 75.

⁶ *Ibid.* Maria Nzomo. "Engendering Democratization in Kenya : A Political Perspective", *In* : Kabira Wanjiku et al, Democratic Change in Africa - Women perspective (Nairobi : A.IIWORD, 1993), p.9.

⁷ *Ibid.*

female legislators reached 20 per cent.

1.1.5 In France, women politicians who are cabinet ministers in the current government are 8 out of a total number of 26 in the house.⁸

1.1.6 India had 40, or 7.3 per cent of women who were elected to the lower house by 1996.⁹

1.1.7 South Africa is leading among African states with the highest number of women representation in politics with 25 per cent.¹⁰

1.1.8 Namibia is the second with 18.1 per cent.¹¹

1.1.9 Tanzania has 17.5 per cent.¹²

1.1.10 Uganda has 15 per cent. By 1998 Uganda had 18.5 per cent representation of women in the parliament.¹³

1.1.11 Zimbabwe has 14.7 per cent.¹⁴

1.1.12 Kenya has only 3 per cent representation of women in politics.¹⁵ However

⁸ Cigu Mwangi, "Elections : "Where did women go wrong ?", *In : The Sunday Nation* (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 11, 1998), (Lifestyle), p. 6.

⁹ Maria Nzomo, "Engendering democratization in Kenya : A political perspective " *In : Democratic Change in Africa - women perspective* (Nairobi : AAIFORD, 1993), p. 10 . Rosemar Okello, *Op. Cit.* p. 6. Tony Lawrence, " Indian Women Still gegged ", *In : Daily Nation* (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, February 27, 1998), p. 11.

¹⁰ Rosemary Okello, *Op. Cit.* p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

by the end of 1998, the number of women members of parliament was 7.¹⁶

That is a partial general picture of the reality of women representation at higher political levels of decision-making in the world. The picture that we gather from such facts, gives us a reason for not wondering when we do not hear many female names among world political leaders, especially among parliamentarians, Cabinet ministers, Prime Ministers and Presidents of different countries. With the exception of extremely few countries, where women are well represented, and where they take key political decision-making positions, how can one wonder when women are denied their rights, when they are unfairly treated and oppressed? I don't think men can address women's issues in the same way as women. Men certainly do not feel the same way about women's concerns as women do. Therefore, gender inequality at higher levels of political decision-making bodies, cannot bring about equal treatment of both men and women.

Despite poor representation and participation of women in political decision-making structures, a few women have proved to be capable of political leadership in different countries.

1.2 Some top women politicians

Among the few women who participate at the top levels of politics some

¹⁶ *Jeremiah Mwakisha. " Kenya failed to act on Beijing ", In : Daily Nation No. 11637 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, May 1, 1998), p. 18.*

either have been or are prime ministers or presidents. Those who have been prime ministers in their own countries include : the late Agatha Uwilingiyimana of Rwanda, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Edith Cresson in France, Eugenia Charles in Dominica, Golda Meir of Israel, Gro Harlem Bruntland in Norway, Hanna Suchocka of Poland, Indira Gandhi of India, Kazimiera Danute-Prunskiene of Lithuania, Khaleda Kim Campell of Canada, Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo of Portugal, Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom, Milka Planinc of Yugoslavia, Siramavo Bandranaike of Sri Lanka and Tansu Ciller of Turkey.¹⁷

Those who have ever been Presidents in their countries are : Chandrika Bandranaike Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka, Corazon Aquino of Philippines, Ertha Pascal Troillot of Haiti, Isabel Peron of Argentina, Lidia Geiler of Bolivia, Mary Robinson in Ireland, Vigdis Finnboga Dottir of Iceland and Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua.¹⁸

1.3 Kenyan women and politics

The participation of Kenyan women and their representation in high political decision-making structures is quite poor. However, Kenyan women have been active in politics since the 1920s and the time of the Mau Mau struggle. Women are

⁷ *The Advancement of Women - Notes for Speakers, Department of Public Information (United Nations. 1995), p. 78.*

¹⁸ *The Advancement of women - Notes for speakers, Department of Public Information (United Nations. 1995), pp. 74 - 78.*

said to have contributed a lot to the struggle for independence, which brought about tremendous changes in the lives of the people. Although women were a force behind Kenyan independence, none of them took part in the parliament before 1968. In 1974 there were only two female parliamentarians. One of the two female members of parliament was appointed as an assistant minister up till 1991. Such a political position was the highest ever to be held by a Kenyan woman; all the rest were taken up by men. The 1992-97 parliament had only 0.5 per cent women representation of all members. On the other hand, women who held the highest position in the civil service were about 9 per cent only¹⁹.

In the 1992 - 97 parliament, which had a total of 8 women, 6 of them had won seats in the polls. Two women were appointed as Cabinet ministers in 1995, 32 years after independence.²⁰ During the 1997 general election about 500 candidates were women contesting parliamentary seats, while only 2 of them were presidential candidates. All the rest were for civic elections. Despite a good number of candidates for parliamentary seats, only 4 women won the elections but with three more appointed, the number is 7 out of a total number of 206.

The presidential election was not easy for the female candidates. Wangari Maathai failed even to win in her constituency, but Charity Ngilu put up a good

¹⁹ Maria Nzomo. *Op. Cit.* pp. 9 - 10.

²⁰ Joe Ombuor. "Women's empowerment now takes a bright turn". *In: Daily Nation* No. 11821 (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, December 12, 1998) (*Jamhuri Special*), p. 10.

fight and came out fifth in the list of all 15 candidates. Although Ngilu and Maathai lost the battle, their participation and performance, especially the performance of Ngilu, will be remembered for many years to come.²¹ The fact that both female candidates lost in the election, causes some people to wonder whether Kenyans and Africans in general are ready for a woman president.²²

1.4 Factors impeding women participation in politics

1.4.1 General factors

1.4.2 Patriarchal System :

This is defined as " a social system founded upon the control, rule, authority that the father of the family possess over all members of the family, the ownership of properties and all possessions. It is a masculine power structure which understands relationships in terms of superiority and inferiority, power and powerlessness, domination and subordination ".²³

The patriarchal system is predominant in many societies in which power and leadership is viewed as an area for men only. Women are seen as inferior, hence discouraged to take part in leadership positions. Because of such a system, women are affected psychologically and socially. They also believe in it and therefore take

²¹ *The Sunday Standard* No. 939, (Nairobi : *The Standard Ltd*, January 4, 1998), p. 1.

²² Kwendo Opanga. "The entry of Ngilu and Maathai into the race raises the question : Are Kenyans prepared for a woman leader ?," *In: Daily Nation*, (Nairobi : *Nation Newspapers Ltd*, December 7, 1997), p. 8.

²³ Dolores I. Gireeley. RSM "Patriarchy : A Global Reality ", *In: Where can we find Her - searching for Women's Identity in the New Church*, Marie - Eloise, Rosenblant, ed. (New Jersey : *Paulist Press*, 1991), p. 80.

back seats and let men rule and make decisions which affect the whole society.

1.4.3 Socialization :

It refers to " a social process through which the community and societal values, norms, beliefs, wisdom, philosophy, customs, skills and practices are learned, accepted and internalised, it is a process of learning what is " good or bad ". Essentially Socialization is based on gender and gender roles ".²⁴

During the process of socialization a child girl or women are told that leadership and politics are activities of men only. Therefore a woman is encouraged to allow herself to be led by men and cooperate in implementing decisions made by men. Even during this time of democratization, most women still think that men are the ones to rule and decide upon what a community or a country has to do.

1.4.4 Religious literature and Holy Books

The writings of some early prominent church figures, such as St Paul, St John Chrysostom and St Thomas Aquinas, contributed greatly to the poor image of women in society. The letter of St Paul to Timothy seems to deny women a right to take any leadership in the community. It also seems to require that women be submissive to men. (1 Timothy 2 : 13 - 14). St John Chrysostom and St Thomas

²⁴ Wangoi Njau. " Society and Socialization " In: *Delusions - Essays on Social Construction of Gender*. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira et al, eds, (Nairobi; FEMNET, 1994) p. 18. Walters Valerie E. J. & Gwen Mason. *Women in top management - the Sierra Leone case* (Nairobi . (A.I.P.M), 1995), pp. 13 - 15.

Aquinas seem to have supported such a degrading attitude towards women.²⁵ Today the same attitude is still predominant among oppressors of women who quote such sources to justify their biased attitudes against women. The church needs to take appropriate action to repair the damage caused by some of her early leaders. Of course this kind of attitude is against the official teaching of the church.

The Qur'an states the basic equality between man and woman by admitting the fact that both were created out of one person. (Qur'an 4 : 1). However the Qur'an also gives man power over a woman and attributes a lower status to a woman in many other areas, especially from the legal point of view. (Q 4, 34; Q 2, 228; Q 4, 11-12; Q 7, 127).²⁶

1.4.5 Education

Illiteracy and lower level of education are key factors hindering women from equal representation and participation in politics. It seems that in nearly all countries, there are more illiterate women than men and less women with a higher level of learning than men. It is said for instance that :

" of the world's nearly one billion illiterates, two thirds are women. Of 130 million children without access to primary education, more than 50 million

²⁵ *Luvinia Byrne, Women before God our own Spirituality* (Connecticut, 23rd Publications Mystic, 1988), pp. 10 - 11.

²⁶ *Luigi Lacunza Balda, ed., " Women in Islam mysticism " In : Encounter* (Documents for Muslim - Christian understanding), No. 158 (Rome : Pontificio Istituto di studi Arabici d'Islamistica, October 1993) pp. 5 - 6. *Hamdun Dagher, The position of women in Islam* (Villanch : Light of ife, 1995), pp. 10 - 19.

are girls ".²⁷

Some of the reasons attributed to the problems are :

1.4.6 Financial constraints and cultural bias.

In most poor countries, for instance, it is said that under financial problems, boy children are given priorities against girl children. Most parents value more boys who are sent to school, than girls, who are often kept at home and sometimes forced to marry at early ages for economic gain. Formal education for girls is often regarded by some as useless, just as Fr Patrick Wachege tells us :

" To this day, a considerable number of Kuria do not see the value of educating girls. The underlying mentality is that the domestic education girls receive through their mothers is enough to help them be good wives ".²⁸

1.4.7 Early pregnancies and marriage

This factor is more common to Africa than elsewhere probably. It is estimated that between 80 and 90 per cent of girls stop schooling at primary and high school levels.²⁹

Due to cultural bias, whereby the role of women is more limited to looking after homes, especially in rural areas, I have witnessed families in which girls are

²⁷ *The Advancement of women - Notes for Speakers, Department of Public Information (United Nations 1995), p. 44.*

²⁸ *Patrick V. Wachege, African Women Liberation - A Man's perspective (Nairobi : Industrial Printing Works Ltd. 1992), p. 90.*

²⁹ *The advancement of women - Notes for speakers, Department of Public Information (United Nations, 1995), p. 44.*

not given opportunities to go to school, so that they may take care of families. That often happens when a mother in the family has died or when there has been a divorce between the parents. An older girl child normally will fall a victim to the situation.

One of the surveys conducted on gender issues affecting female students, reveals that between 1970 and 1990 in the sub-Saharan region, female students, registered in different Universities from ten African countries, were less than a third of the whole enrolment. It seems that with extremely few women who have reached a higher level of learning, it will be very difficult to have a good number of women representatives at higher levels of politics.³⁰

1.4.8 Undemocratic regimes

Most undemocratic regimes, come to power by force and often are characterised by a military coup. Most high ranking army officers are men and they are the ones who plan and overthrow governments. Often whenever there is a coup d'état, the first thing we hear is the suspension of constitutions and a ban on political parties. That violates a universal human right which states that :

" Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or indirectly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance

³⁰ *Mungech, Annalee Ngeny M, ed., Building Technical Capacity and Gender Advocacy of Young Professional African Women (Nairobi : A joint of UNIFEM and The African Academy of Sciences, 1994), p. 49.*

Often men who grab power appoint fellow men to rule and make decisions concerning their states. They form a clique which safeguards their interests. Women in such regimes are either totally absent or extremely few, in positions which are far from affecting decisions. One way of solving such a problem is to reject and fight against any form of undemocratic regime, especially military governments. Instead, democracy should be encouraged and protected.

1.5 Problems affecting Kenyan women

The following obstacles are very much related to those mentioned above except that these reflect a Kenyan experience. The facts to be discussed refer more to the recent Kenyan general democratic elections, which took place in 1997.

1.5.1 Cultural Bias

The patriarchal system which has been discussed above has a lot of influence on the social and political organization among Kenyan tribes, which regard them as belonging to men only. Women are viewed as lacking the basic qualities of leadership, hence they are not expected to contest any political position. The problem came more to the surface before the 1997 presidential

³¹ *Marta Nzomo ed, The Gender Dimension of Electoral Politics in Kenya: Capacity Building of Women candidates for 1997 and Beyond (Nairobi: NCSW, 1997), p. 5.*

elections when Mrs. Charity Kaluki Ngilu declared her intention of standing against the incumbent, Daniel Arap Moi. Surprisingly enough, Mrs Kittony, the then Chairperson of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake (Women's Development Movement) reacted against the candidacy of Charity. She referred to the act of challenging Moi as lack of respect. This reaction proves right the remark made by Dr Specioza Kazibwe, the Vice-President of Uganda during her visit to Kenya, early January 1998, when she said that : *women are the worst enemies of themselves* ¹³²

1.5.2 *Unlevelled campaign playground*

Some people believe that there was a manipulation of the electoral commission, which is also accused of ignoring gender issues as of no significance. Women candidates had to face insults, aggressivity, intimidation and bribery; the tactics which are used by their male counterparts in order to win the election. As a result of such factors, women get discouraged and lose votes. Mrs Ngilu, for instance, faced similar problem in her constituency during the 1997 general elections in Kenya.³³

¹² Ajoki Kuruoya, " Skill, steel and thick skin is what a woman needs, " *In : The Sunday Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 4, 1998), (Lifestyle), p. 7.*

¹³ John Githongo, " What happened to the Ngilu campaign wave ?" *In : The East African, No. 166 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 5 - 11, 1998), p. 5.* Joe Ombuor. *Op. Cit.* p.11. Kwendo Opanga, " Uneven playing field beats women's agenda " *In : Daily Nation (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, December 23, 1997), p. 5.* Ciugu Mwagiru, " Where did women go wrong? " *In : The Sunday Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 11, 1998). (Lifestyle), p. 7.*

1.5.3 Illiteracy

Some women candidates in the 1997 general election had to contest under small parties which were either little known or not known at all. With a high level of illiteracy among women voters, it is said that some of them did not even know the symbols of those small parties. Consequently the female candidates lost their possible votes.³⁴

1.5.4 Wrong targeting

There have been complaints that women candidates do not target women voters, especially to conscientize them about the importance of having women politicians in decision making-positions. Many women also complain that female candidates target more men, whom they even include in their entourage. Women voters therefore get discouraged and lack confidence in their fellow women who seek their votes.³⁵

1.5.5 Contesting in the same area

It is said that women candidates sometimes concentrate in the same area,

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ William Nduta and Albert Gachiri, "Gender factor and fall of Nyiva, Ndetei". In : *Daily Nation* No. 11531 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, December 29, 1997), p. 5.

opposing one another. This tendency limits their possible number to be elected.³⁶

1.5.6 Lack of gender sensitivity by parties

Political parties do not give sufficient importance to gender equality within their structures. This fact was quite evident when nomination time came before the 1997 general elections. Very few women were nominated, especially among main and popular parties. That is why some women candidates had to contest under small and little known parties to avoid elimination during the nomination process.³⁷

The lack of sensitivity to gender issues is not only displayed within party circles but also by the government. One incident to recall is when President Moi appointed his cabinet. He had appointed a male member of parliament to head the Ministry which was formed to deal with women issues.³⁸ However, soon the Ministry was dissolved. Two questions may be asked here. First, was there no woman capable of heading the ministry so that the President had to appoint a man? Second, are women issues of such small importance that the government cannot form a specific ministry to deal with them?

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Catherine Mgendi, "Women Should head Ministry", *In: Daily Nation*, (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 13, 1998), p. 4.

1.5.7 Lack of funds and misappropriation

Most women candidates do not have sufficient funds despite the effort by donors to fund the Women Movement organization for the advancement of women. It is claimed that women candidates do not benefit much from that common fund, due to corruption within the organization. Lack of money hampers women's effort to campaign equally with men.³⁹

1.6 A need for women politicians

I believe that the need is there to have female politicians. There are many reasons for this firm belief.

1.6.1 Justice and equality

As a matter of fact women are human beings and to deny them their right to equal participation in politics is a violation of human rights and pure injustice. In order to bring about gender balance then we need women politicians.

1.6.2 Time has come

Another reason for having women politicians is that women have been marginalized for a long time. That is why Dr Kazibwe said that :

³⁹ Cigu Mwangi, *Op. Cit.* p. 6.

" men have been around for too long since independence and it has been their world too long. It is high time women gave themselves a chance ".⁴⁰

I fully support the argument, and I would add that it is time for women because men have been ruling even long before independence.

1.6.3 There are many qualified women

Women politicians are needed because we have so many educated women with leadership qualities. In fact women are believed to be born leaders just as Dr Kazibwe says:

" women have brought up families and in essence brought up and shaped the society. Women would therefore make very good leaders as women tend to be more considerate, caring and productive as compared to men ".⁴¹

1.6.4 Women have proved their capability

A number of women leaders that we have mentioned above have proved to be very good heads of states. One may recall Mrs Indira Gandhi who was the first Prime Minister of India for more than one term, 1966-77, 1980-84.⁴² Benazir Bhutto was the first woman to head a predominantly muslim country twice as a prime minister between 1988-90 and 1993-96. Mrs Margaret Thatcher successfully

⁴⁰ Ajoki Karuoya, " Skills, steel and thick skin is what a woman needs " *In: The Sunday Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 4, 1998), (Lifestyle), p. 7.*

⁴¹ Ajoki Karuoya, " Skills, steel and thick skin is what a woman needs " *In: the Sunday Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 4, 1998), (Lifestyle), p. 7.*

⁴² Immaculate Hokie, " Indira, a woman of courage", *In : Sunday Nation No. 2237 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, July 13, 1997), (Young Nation), p. 6.*

led the British government for two terms. We also know that Sri Lanka has been led by a woman for more than one term at different times, including this moment under the leadership of Chandrika Bandaranaike, who was elected in 1994. Those few women leaders show that if they were not capable, people would not have voted them to power more than once. And if that is the case, why shouldn't we have more women as heads of states ?

1.6.5 Women may save the world from disaster

Most women are credited with being better diplomats, peace makers just and anti-corruption than men. It is true that no woman politician of our own time has ever been a dictator to be compared with Hitler, Stalin or Idi Amin and Sadam Hussein. I therefore believe that with more female politicians, especially Heads of States, our world would avoid unnecessary wars and their serious consequences that we are witnessing today.⁴³

1.6.6 Women can offer something new

The fact that most women have been left out of politics for a long time, offers them an opportunity to see the shortcomings of male leadership. If they are given chances they may be able to correct mistakes, to avoid them and offer something

⁴³ *„Miruka," Gender & Politics " ,Op. Cit. pp. 21 - 23.*

unique. That was the case when Mrs Charity Ngilu decided to contest the presidential seat in Kenya. She promised the Kenyans ' *a new beginning* ' just to offer the people another chance to start afresh in building their country. She was clear in her Manifesto and Programme when she said :

" I want to eliminate corruption, plan and use resources appropriately and basically give Kenya another chance to start ".⁴⁴

She was really determined to tackle the real problems facing the majority of Kenyans, such as poverty, lack of basic needs and ignorance.

Despite the exemplary women leaders we have had in the world, most of our societies, especially in Africa, have not realized and accepted the truth. However, the only female Vice-President in Africa, Dr Specioza Kazibwe of Uganda, is doing well in her political career.⁴⁵ One may also recall the role played by the first female Prime Minister in Africa, the late Mrs Agatha Uwilingiyimana, who worked hard to bring about reconciliation, peace and democracy in Rwanda. She was brutally murdered at the beginning of the genocide in 1994. The following was said of her:

" a pleasant lady, firm in character and a moderate Hutu from the South, was at the forefront of the drive towards democratic rule. Even though she knew her political authority would essentially end by the close of the transitional period, this noble Lady and stateswoman fought relentlessly to have the BBTG installed. She yearned for a United Rwanda and won the admiration of all who came into contact with her. It was a pity for a country

⁴⁴ Jeremiah Mwakisha, " A chat with Charity ". *In* : Daily Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 23, 1998), (Weekender), p. 4.

⁴⁵ Nyoki Karuoya. " Specioza's Special role as Uganda's Vice president ", *In* : The Sunday Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 4, 1998), (Lifestyle), pp. 6 - 7.

in search of honest leadership to lose a lady of her calibre.⁴⁶

1.6.7 Conclusion

The global survey and the analysis of the problem that we have done both in general and in a Kenyan perspective, leaves us with no doubt that the problem exists and that it is a serious one. Despite the factors which hinder the participation of women in politics and in the decision-making bodies, the study has shown that women are capable of effectively taking up top political leadership positions. The study also gives sufficient reasons for a need of women politicians.

⁴⁶ Henry K. Nyandoho. "Witness to Genocide and the storming of Kigali". *In: The East African* No. 2110 (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, August 31 - Sept. 6, 1998). (Part 2), p. 2.
BBTG is an abbreviation of Broad Based Transitional Government.

CHAPTER II

PERSONAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The poor representation and participation of women in higher political offices especially in the political decision-making bodies, is a challenge to the international community, individual states, and especially to us Christians. The fact is that the position which is occupied by women in the highest political bodies is not proportional to their numerical figures and their natural sociological and theological status as equal partners with men in the societies. What we see here is a clear inequality and underestimation of women. The patriarchal system has penetrated nearly all societies and it has made most people believe that leadership and political decision-making are areas reserved for men only. According to this belief, women have to listen and follow what men decide from their own perspective. Most rules and laws of our societies reflect patriarchal cultural and traditional values which in a way suppress women's rights and undermine their dignity. An example of such laws and rules is that among the Luo and the Abakuria tribes in Kenya, where women were not allowed to participate in decision-making bodies. Such bodies were entirely reserved for groups of elders which were exclusively composed of men. Since to become a member of the wise elders a person had to be a man,

women were automatically barred by the principle.⁴⁷ Another example of Kenyan oppressive laws against women is that, by law, women cannot acquire passports or leave the country without the permission of their husbands. In case a woman is not married, even if she is old, the passport cannot be issued to her unless her father or a guardian has given a nod.⁴⁸ Because our upbringing and socialization is under a patriarchal system, we take it for granted and support the status quo. We therefore all share in a social evil which not everybody may be aware of. When we participate in the perpetuation of injustice, we violate human rights by undermining the dignity of women. We also offend God by violating his law of love. Christians and all believers ought to see people as God sees them and respond to their needs in the same way as God does throughout history.

2.1 Human dignity and rights

Human dignity is an expression of the worth of being human. It is a God-given property of all human persons who are created 'in the image of God' (Gen 1:26). This creative act out of which a human person originates is the source of equality amongst all the human race.⁴⁹ The share in the likeness of God which a

⁴⁷ *Mukabi Kabira & Elizabeth A. Nzoki, Celebrating Women resistance* (Nairobi : NEP Publications, 1993), pp. 5 - 6.

⁴⁸ *Andrew Ngwiri, " Seminars yes, but women need more " In : the Sunday Nation* (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, March 8, 1998), p. 18.

⁴⁹ *John Paul II, The church in Africa-post synodal Apostolic Exhortation in Africa*, (Nairobi : Pauline Publications Africa, 1995), p.88.

human person has, is what makes him or her unique among all creatures in the world. God treats both man and woman equally and with respect. Such an example of God is worth emulating by every human person in the way we relate with one another, especially in the relationship between men and women.⁵⁰ Because of the origin and the nature of the human person, everyone has rights which flow from his or her dignity. Those rights are necessary for defence and protection of the dignity of the human being. One of the rights which belong to the nature of a human person are for example, the right to take part in the government of one's own country. These principles are based on the church's teaching and the Christian belief.⁵¹ This belief and teaching of the church has the support of the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights by the United Nations Organisation, article No. 1, which says that:

*" All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood or sisterhood. "*⁵²

2.2 God's reaction to evil and injustices - in the Bible

2.2.1 Old Testament

God regards all human beings as precious in his eyes because they are his

⁵⁰ *Six Jean Francois, Church and Human Rights (Middlegreen : St. Paul Publications 1992), p. 22.*

⁵¹ *Efetur Oyakaminor, Catholic Social Doctrine - An Introductory Manual, (Nairobi : Pauline Publications Africa, 1996.), pp. 39 - 38. Austin Flannery, ed., Gaudium et Spes No. 22, In : the Vatican Council II - The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents (Bombay : St Pauls, 1975), pp. 811-12.*

⁵² *Efetur Oyakaminor, Op. Cit. p 46.*

creatures who are created in his or her likeness and with equal dignity (Gen. 1:26 - 27). Because of the equal dignity and value which human persons have, God does not like to see them being oppressed, exploited or degraded by other human beings or any other source of evil. That is why God sent Moses to liberate the Israelites from Egypt (Exodus 3: 7 - 12 : 42). In Micah also we read about the renouncement of those who oppress the poor and the promise of God's action to gather his or her people. (Micah 2 : 1 - 13). God also threatens to punish Israel because of unfair treatment among themselves (Amos 2:6-7).

2.2.2 The New Testament

In the New Testament we see the continued action of God to intervene in the human situation to liberate the human race. Jesus targeted more the oppressed and marginalized people. He attacked the oppressors and challenged the patriarchal system and all oppressive institutions.

(a) Jesus on Divorce (Mk 10 : 2 - 12)

In the Jewish community men had power from the law to divorce their wives, while women could not do the same to their husbands. When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees about the Mosaic law, which allowed them to divorce their wives, Jesus clarified it, insisting that neither a man nor a woman had a right to divorce his or her partner. Jesus certainly saw the injustice attached to this law which was

not intended by God in the relationship between husband and wife. That is why Hisako comments that :

" Divorce is completely one-sided system. It deprives wives of being equal partners with their husbands and reduces them to being their husbands' commodities".⁵³

(b) *Jesus attacks the Scribes and defends Widows (Mk 12 : 38 - 40)*

During the time of Jesus, there was a lot of corruption among religious leaders. They pretended to be very religious in long prayers, while using the temple to exploit people, even widows who had nothing left with them. Jesus challenged the system as he noticed how people were encouraged to offer everything they had, despite their poverty. The story of the poor widow (Mk 12 : 40 - 42) illustrates this attitude as described by a feminist theologian who says that :

" the temple cult had replaced prayer as the centre of their faith, the logic being that the greater your offering, the greater the blessings you receive. Thus someone thinking themselves to be seriously in need of blessings may jeopardize themselves economically. Conversely the more destitute one becomes, the more one feels impelled to invoke God's blessings through sacrifice. Widows are typical victims of the temple - centred religion ".⁵⁴

The whole mission of God and Jesus is based on the divine infinite love. God has a great concern for his creatures, especially human beings. Jesus himself revealed this as it had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah :

" The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has unointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord ". (Lk 4 : 18 - 19)

⁵³ Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark - A Japanese Feminist perspective* (New York : Orbis Books, 1994), p. 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

That is what Jesus preached and lived as he encountered people in their concrete situation. He taught about sharing with the needy, to defend the oppressed by sharing what they have and what they are (Mt 25 : 31-46). He cured anyone whom he came across, regardless of his or her background, status, sex (Mt 8 : 1- 17). He taught people to love their neighbours as they love themselves (Lk 10 : 25-28). St Paul reminds the Christians that we are all children of God and therefore equal before him, as he says that there is neither male nor female. (Gal 3: 28). All that expresses the greatest value and the dignity which all human persons have. If our faith and our mission have to be credible today, we need to look at God himself and to look at Jesus and try to learn from him and do the same as he did. The dignity of the human person and the equality between men and women have to be defended at all costs, hence they should be given a priority in our pastoral planning.

2.2.3 The social teaching of the Church

The social teaching of the church has been centred on the promotion of human rights and the protection of the dignity of a human person. The church has tried to continue the mission of God, which has been expressed through the prophets and revealed more clearly in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ did, the church too has been expressing its concern on the human situation.

- The equality of all human beings

The Church has been stressing the basic ontological equality of all, hence discouraging any form of discrimination on the bases of sex or of any other physical and social factors.⁵⁵

- Participation

The social teaching has also been emphasising the right of every person, regardless of gender, to participate fully in the affairs of running his or her state. That involves the right to vote for leaders, to participate in the organization of the government and the political decision-making structures, such as the parliament, cabinet of ministers and legal offices. The church insists that participation in the democratic process in each country is the right of every citizen and in fact a duty to all Christians.⁵⁶

It is by participating in the political system and democratic process that an individual can influence the policies which affect his or her life, as well as the life of every citizen in the country. I therefore think that it is necessary for each person to be represented in the political decision-making bodies.

⁵⁵ Flannery, *The church in the Modern World* (G. S. no. 29), p. 817.

⁵⁶ *Guadium et Spes* No. 73 I, *Octagesimum Advenens* No. 22 and No. 24, *Justice in the world*, In: *Proclaiming Justice & Peace - papal Documents from Rerum Novarum through Centesimus Annus*, Michael Walsh and Brian Davies (London : Twenty - Third Publications, 1991), pp. 176, 206, 255 - 56, 273.

2.2.4 The message for us today

The church ministers and all the faithful ought to look at God's saving action throughout history and see our position in his mission. The prophets prepared the way for Jesus and Jesus prepared the way for his disciples and all of us who believe in him. The values he taught by his way of living are the same as those we have to live and spread. We are therefore to appropriate his example in our own lives by playing a prophetic role wherever we are. When we see injustices, we have to act, even if it means to go against our own cultures and traditional systems. It may not be easy but that is what Jesus himself did. Women are part and parcel of the human race and their rights are human rights. When something is wrong, we have to stand up and challenge the situation and restore the order. That is our vocation as human beings, co-creators with God and Christians. In order to bring about equality and a new order Jesus set an example which we have to follow, as Shorter comments :

" As an adult, Jesus strongly challenged certain aspects of the culture he had inherited, the culture lived by his contemporaries. Like one of the classic prophets of the Old Testament, he inveighed against the established order so as to prepare the new order willed by God ".⁵⁷

The mission of God and the project of Jesus are not accomplished yet. God created us in his own image and he gave us the responsibility of joining him in the mission of salvation as co-creators. The incarnation of Jesus into our humanity, his

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.lyward Shorter, *Towards A Theology of Inculturation* (New York : Orbis Books 1994), p. 119.

death and resurrection enabled us to become children of God. We all share in the divinity of God, his life and mission. Jesus revealed the project of God and entrusted it to his disciples for its continuation. Jesus still lives with us and guides us in our endeavour to carry out his mission.

By virtue of baptism and confirmation all Christians share in the Priestly, Kingly and Prophetic mission of God. Their Kingly character makes them leaders and servants of others. Their prophetic mission makes them work tirelessly for the truth and also enables them to fight any form of evil and injustice. The prophetic mission also empowers the Christians to preach the Word of God without fear of anything, just as Christ did.⁵⁸

2.2.5 The role of liturgies

The liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist, have a great role to play in our lives. Apart from reminding us of the whole life of Jesus and making him really present among us, they also remind us of the self-giving of Christ himself to us, an example which we have to emulate. During the Last Supper Jesus shared bread and wine with the disciples. He also ordered them to do the same in his memory (Lk 22 :14-20). All those who share in the body and blood of Christ should be inspired by his Spirit to live as he did. Perhaps it is worth their asking

⁵⁸ *Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala, Archbishop of Kampala. " Obstacles to women equality ", In : Mwananchi (Nairobi : Catholic Media Trust, January 1998), p. 9.*

themselves about the meaning of the Eucharist and its implications in daily life.

Whenever the Word of God is read :

" My Commandment is this : Love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. And you are my friends if you do what I command you". (John 15 : 12 - 14).

Are we challenged by those words or not ? If we know what Christ did and what he commanded us to do, can we see injustice and yet remain indifferent ? Can we still defend the perpetuation of male dominance over women, violating their rights and oppressing them in the name of our traditions ? Then what will be our contribution to the mission of Christ ?

2.2.6 Conclusion

The word of God challenges us regarding the status of women and their participation in decision-making in our societies. The treatment of women and the position they hold in our communities contradicts God's plan, the teaching of Christ and the official teaching of the church.

It is my conviction that our faith must inform our lives and practice. Our lives and practice ought to reflect what we believe and the benefit we gain from our daily Eucharistic celebrations. The more we celebrate, the more our lives should undergo transformation, the more our zeal to imitate Christ should increase and the more we should be convinced of our duty to participate and commit ourselves to justice and peace.

CHAPTER III

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Having analysed and discussed the problem of poor representation of women in political decision-making bodies and having also discussed its theological implications, in this chapter I will offer some pastoral suggestions on how to overcome the problem. The suggestions will be given under the following sub-topics:

3.1 A change of attitude and mentality

Because of socialization in a patriarchal system, most people have been made to believe that women are weak and incapable of leadership. Such people view women as inferior to men to the extent that at times they would rather elect an illiterate man to office than a highly educated and qualified woman. The changing circumstances of our time have challenged such belief and proved it wrong. Women have increasingly exposed and proved their ability to lead, once given a chance. The belief itself is a big obstacle which women face in societies where they live. It seems that the biggest obstacle is the refusal by some individuals and societies to accept the truth and change their biased attitudes.⁵⁹ All children should be brought up on an equal basis, regardless of gender. The early

⁵⁹ Margaretta Gacheru, "Women must embrace constitutional reforms, says Hope Mwestigye". *In* : *The East African No. 218* (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 4 -10, 1999).(Part 2), p 4. Kitula Kingei, "Women leader's problems exposed", *In* : *Daily Nation No.11644* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, May 9, 1998), p. 27.

period of socialization should be used to instil in them the right values and attitudes. Anything which may lead to a superiority or inferiority complex between boys and girls must be discouraged. All of us ought to be realistic if we really want to move with time. In this regard therefore, women can neither be overlooked any more, nor can they be left out when crucial decisions concerning our communities and the society at large are made.

3.2 Empowerment

This term has a broader meaning but I prefer to use it in the sense of a summary made by Karl, who puts it this way :

" empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater decision making, power and control, and to transformative action. ""

In agreement with this definition, I would like to recommend the following steps to effect the process of empowerment:

Governments, women's movements, non-governmental organisations and Church institutions should help to create an awareness of the situation among women and show them the need to overcome it. That can be done through the media, education system, workshops, seminars and preaching. The main objective of such awareness should be to build confidence and self-esteem by helping women to realize and identify their leadership qualities. Female children at home and in

⁶⁰ *Martlee Karl, Women and Empowerment - Participation and Decision-making (London & New Jersey : Zed Books Ltd, 1995), p. 14.*

schools ought to be made aware of their capacity and rights to carry out public duties.

The church and all bodies concerned should promote education for women. Apart from ensuring equal enrolment of both girls and boys in schools, girls should be helped to avoid early pregnancies which lead them to drop out of schools. Strict laws should also be introduced and applied against those who prevent girls from either going to school or advancing in their studies. Some parents, especially in rural areas, have a tendency to either keep their daughters at home or withdraw them from schools in order to get married. Of course, parents get some social benefits in return, such as money, cows, and other material goods. All those benefits are short-term, while the disadvantages of such actions are long lasting. Lack of education among women not only affects women themselves but also the society at large. The action of encouraging girls' education, by itself leads to women empowerment. Adult education for women, who have never had a chance of attending schools, should be encouraged. Educated women will have an opportunity to develop their leadership talents. That will empower them to take part in decision-making bodies.

Girl students should be advised to aim high in education, instead of being content with the minimum achievements. They may also be encouraged to take subjects and courses which will enable them to participate in leadership and politics. The church and all other educators may motivate girl students by pointing

at some local women academic models, such as Prof. Wangari Maathai, a politician and leader of the Green Belt Movement, Prof. Ciarunji Chesaina, a distinguished intellectual Kenyan woman; the first woman full professor of literature in Kenyan University with six degrees in her hands.⁶¹

The students can also be inspired by local women who hold top posts in the judiciary and security forces. Those are, for example, police officers : Christine Mutua, who is a district police chief, and senior commissioner of police, Mrs Mary Mwangangi.⁶² They should also be brought into awareness of some Kenyan heroines; the Mau Mau fighters, whose contribution is rarely mentioned in the Kenyan history. Those are, for example, Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima of Nyeri, the late Wanjiru Kiore and Wambui Otieno.⁶³ In order to show them that high academic performance and a political career are possible, the examples of current women politicians can be given. For example, women who are members of parliament, such as Mrs Charity Ngilu, Martha Karua and Tabitha Seii.⁶⁴ That kind of example will empower, inspire and assure girl students of a possibility of making it to higher political offices.

⁶¹ *Jhogo Murage and Evan Mwangi. " Top scholar - Prof. Ciarunji, makes getting a degree look easy ". In : The Sunday Nation No. 2314 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd. January 3, 1999), Lifestyle pp 1 - 3.*

⁶² *Bob Odalo. " Why Spt Mutua is in a class of her own ", In : The Sunday Nation No. 2310 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, December 6, 1998), Lifestyle pp. 2 - 3.*

⁶³ *Joe Ombuor. " Women amounts odds ", In : Daily Nation No. 11827 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, December 12, 1998), Jamhuri Special, p. 10.*

⁶⁴ *Joe Ombuor. Op. Cit. p. 10.*

Another way of empowering girls and women is by undertaking grassroots level preparation on public speaking and participation in leadership positions. In schools and church youth groups, for instance, debates and discussions on various topics can be introduced. That will enable them to be self-confident and experienced in expressing themselves. As far as preparing them for leadership is concerned, girls and women in schools and parish structures may be encouraged to take up some top posts in leadership. They may take leadership in youth groups and other committees.

Exposure of particular groups of women to other women groups elsewhere will empower women by providing them with different experiences. Arrangements might be made to enable different groups to meet and exchange ideas and their experience on various issues. That may lead them to the formation of a good network and come to the point of defining some common goals for their advancement. That can be done between different groups from parish to international levels.

The promotion of women participation in political parties, trade unions, the elections for parliamentary and civic seats, will also empower women. Most top political leaders come from the political parties and trade unions which launch them to power. The involvement of women in such organizations will increase chances of women to take part in high political leadership and decision-making bodies. I recommend that political parties' leadership should be gender-balanced in their

composition and gender-sensitive during nomination of candidates for elections.

The church and her pastoral agents in various fields can play a major role in empowering women if they take the issue seriously. They may make strategies and choose effective means of pursuing it. For instance preachers may ensure that their homilies delivered at Mass are geared to empowering women as much as possible. Empowerment might also be effected through special workshops and seminars, targeting both women and men. Finally, the church and her ministers may ensure that our catechetical programmes, as the process and means of evangelization, aim at touching the totality of the whole person if real conversion has to take place.

3.3 Affirmative action

This term is understood as radical and positive measures taken to create a state of fair representation and participation of both men and women in structures of making decisions. This is also an attempt to remedy the past, to eliminate the existing and prevent the future discrimination of women. Normally, affirmative action is taken by introducing the so-called ' quota system '. By this system a certain number or percentage of seats is reserved for women as a way of empowering their participation in decision-making structures. An example of countries in which such a system has been adopted is Tanzania, where 15 seats of the parliament are reserved for women.⁶⁵ Many people believe that in any structure of decision-

⁶⁵ *Patricia A. Mameri - Mbote and Kivuta Kibwana, " Women, law and democratization process in Kenya ". In : Democratic Change in Africa, Women perspective, Wanjiku, Kabira, et al. (Nairobi*

making at least 30 per cent women representation would be a starting point to make their voice heard⁶⁶. This can be done for parliamentary seats, cabinet ministers, executive bodies in political parties and various commissions formed to deal with various issues.⁶⁷

In order to make a relevant affirmative action there should be an effective way of getting the best representation of women. The ability of those chosen should be considered first. The representatives should also reflect the wishes and needs of the women they represent.

I would like to make a recommendation that in order to ensure a successful and effective quota system, a law should be made to protect it. Anyone who may tamper with such a law should be taken to court. Such laws should be clearly stated and explain the procedure of effecting affirmative action. For instance, the Kenyan Parliament may make a law which requires a 40 per cent minimum representation of women among members of parliament, the cabinet ministers, among the diplomatic representatives etc. Then it should state quite clearly the qualification of those to be appointed and how to get them.

Association of African Women for - Research and Development (AAWORD), 1993), P. 20.

⁶⁶ *Jemimah Mwakisha. Op. Cit. p. 18. Takyiwa Manuh, " ECA's strategic proposal to reduce gender gaps ", In : Daily Nation No. 11854 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 4, 1999), p. 20. ECA is a short form for Economic Commission for Africa.*

⁶⁷ *The Advancement of Women - Notes for speakers, Department of Public Information (United Nations, January 1995), p. 76.*

3.4 The use of media

The Mass Media is quite influential in social and daily political life. It can be used to promote or to block the performance of women candidates for the elections. The media can be a good vehicle through which political education and gender sensitization can reach the majority of people in the country. Women, therefore, should do whatever they can to make use of newspapers, radio programmes and television.

- During a political campaign, women should visit the media and offer to be interviewed so as to make themselves and their policies known.
- Women candidates also can use it to encourage fellow women and the public to participate in the election and vote for them.
- Women can effectively influence the media by choosing it as a career. If many of the media staff are women, then the bias tendency against women by the media may be reduced, if not suppressed completely. Women in the media profession will help to make women's voices heard.
- Women's organisations may use some of the funds they have to buy some programmes on either television or radio. Such programmes can be used to speed up the process of gender sensitization and political education especially for women. The money also may be used to start their own radio or television stations, whose main objective is to air women's concerns and also to change society's negative view of women and their role in it.

- If the government is serious about the problem of gender imbalance in political decision-making bodies, it should as well introduce laws which will protect candidates and put a kind of control over the media on the way it treats women. I am not suggesting that the state should abuse its power by interfering with the freedom of the media. What I mean, instead, is that the state should play its role by protecting the rights and dignity of all citizens. Whenever images of women candidates are deliberately tarnished by the media in order to damage their performance in the elections, those involved should be prosecuted. Take an example of the news which appeared in the Daily Nation newspaper of the 29th December, 1997. The same news was on the BBC radio broadcast on the same day. The Standard Newspaper also supported the report on the 30th December, 1997. It was claimed that one of the female presidential candidates, Prof. Wangari Maathai of the Liberal Party, had withdrawn from the presidential election in favour of Mr Mwai Kibaki of the Democratic Party. The claim was denied by Prof. Maathai but the damage which had been caused was too much to repair.⁶⁸ Despite the denial of the distorted information, I think it was too late for the professor to recapture the disappointed supporters who had been misinformed. That certainly contributed to her poor performance and eventual failure. This example is a proof of how influential the media can be in political issues.

⁶⁸ *Nation Reporter, "I didn't pull out - Maathai". In : Daily Nation No. 11533 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, December 31, 1997), p. 4.*

Later on last year it was reported that the victim had taken legal action against the Nation Newspaper and her own party official, who is alleged to have participated in the conspiracy to let her down.⁶⁹

3.5 Solidarity among women

I believe that women cannot depend on men for their rights and advancement. Women themselves have power in themselves if they exploit it to their advantage. It is generally believed that the population of women in the world is more than 50 per cent.⁷⁰ If women had decided to participate in the election and support female candidates, certainly either Charity Ngilu or Prof. Wangari Maathai would have won the Kenyan presidency, while Hellen Johnson would have won the Liberian presidential election in 1997. Unfortunately women are not united and often they oppose one another. I think now time has come for women to mobilize themselves and take advantage of their superior number to stand for elections or vote for capable female candidates. If women were to come out in large numbers and stand for elections, and if women voters were to vote for most of the women candidates who have leadership qualities without being biased, obviously their representation in decision-making bodies and political high offices would have been much higher than it is at the moment. The row which occurred in January this

⁶⁹ *Nation Reporter*. " Prof. Maathai sues Nation, Party Official ". In : Daily Nation No. 11738 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd. August 28th, 1998), p. 5.

⁷⁰ *Rosemary Okello, Op. Cit. p. 47.*

year over the nomination of women representatives in the review commission of the Kenyan constitution, proves the lack of solidarity and focus on common objectives. Instead of putting their common interests first, some women started a quarrel with the caucus of women and rejected its nominees. That caused a crack in the solid foundation which they had established in order to make an effective participation of women in the constitution review process.⁷¹ Women therefore have to unite and support one another in order that eventually they may take up their rightful position in the societies and in high decision making bodies.⁷²

3.6 Financial resources

Money is an important factor in the promotion of women's representation and participation in the top decision-making bodies. If seminars and workshops on political education and gender sensitization are to be done in an effective and successful way, money is needed.

Women candidates for parliaments and presidential seats need money to travel around and campaign. Most individual women may not have enough money to do all that, but they can appeal for assistance from the government. The

Nation Correspondent, " Split emerges over five women for review team ". In : Daily Nation No. 1851 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 11, 1999), p. 2. Nation Correspondent, " Women team gets backing ". In : Daily Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 15, 1999), p. 16. Nation correspondent, " Women trade insults over caucus team ". In : Daily Nation No. 1854 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 16, 1999), p. 4. Jeremiah Mwakisha, " Shaming show from our women leaders ", In : The Sunday Nation (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 17, 1999), (Lifestyle), pp. 4-5.

⁷² *The Editor, " Women must put their house in order ", In : The Sunday Nation No. 2316 (Nairobi : Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 17, 1999), p. 6.*

National Women's Organisation should make sure that the money given either by the government or by international donor organizations for women is appropriately spent for the purpose. Those who either misuse money or fail to assist the right persons in need of it, should be punished by the law and be forced to resign.

Since the financial problem for women's development is a serious one, I propose that donor countries should recommend a specific percentage of money given to developing countries to be spent on women's development. That could be one way of enforcing an affirmative action regarding money distribution for various projects.

In the case of Kenya, some Harambees could be organised to raise money to support the political awareness, gender sensitization and promotion of women voter education campaigns. Unless women devise ways of raising money for their development with the support of the governments concerned, they can never compete equally with men. In Kenya, for instance, most male candidates are said to use a lot of money to attract voters, even to bribe and buy voters' cards from supporters of their challengers.⁷³ When money is used in that way, then women are more affected.

3.7 Reform constitutions, change religious practices

Women's degradation and discrimination will be avoided if the states'

⁷³ *Nation Correspondent*, "Election tactics annoy women", *In: Daily Nation No. 11808* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, November 18, 1998), p. 18. Joe Ombuor, *Op. Cit.* p. 11.

constitutions are free of loopholes. The governments concerned should make sure that their constitutions are reviewed and amended. Corruption in the electoral process should be curbed and anyone accused of involvement in such acts should be punished by the law if proved guilty. In Kenya, for instance, gender discrimination has never been outlawed explicitly. Up to this moment the government has not been able to ratify article 13 of the international convention on the elimination of all kinds of discrimination against women.⁷⁴

At the moment a special commission has been formed to review the Kenyan constitution. My hope is that the commission will come up with a proposal for a balanced and gender-sensitive constitution. I also recommend that all traditional laws and religious practices which assign a lower status to women in the society must be abandoned. Such laws and practices prevent a meaningful participation of women in political decision-making structures. Due to such laws and practices, women are often denied the right to own valuable property such as land. As a result of that, women remain powerless economically; a factor which is crucial for women advancement.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Patricia A. Kameri Mbote et al, p. 21. *Nation correspondent*, "Women want laws amended". *In Daily Nation No. 11810* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, November 20, 1998), p. 2.

⁷⁵ Paul Katana, "Women lists their woes". *In: Daily Nation No. 1809* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, November 19, 1998), p. 18. Jane Kabeberi Macharia, "Perspectives on women rights". *In: Mwananchi* (Nairobi: Catholic Media Trust (KEC), September 1997), p. 10.

3.8 Partnership in the church

When we read the creation story in the Bible (Gen. 1: 27; 2:24), we realize that God willed the union between him and human persons. When he created a male person he saw that something was missing for that man. Then God gave man a partner by creating a woman. Both man and woman shared his own image. He then ordered them to care for the rest of creation by participating fully in his plan as co-creators. Partnership and equality between man and woman are necessary for a successful participation in and fulfilment of God's plan. Gender distinction in terms of superiority and inferiority emerged due to sin and it has been strengthened by the patriarchal system. Men could not see themselves as equal to women any more and women had to take a back seat in almost all aspects of life. Christ came in to restore the order. By words and actions he insisted on mutual love and respect among all human persons. The breach of this teaching is the breach of God's plan regarding the relationship among human persons, especially the relationship between man and woman.

The church has taken the stand of Jesus, theoretically at least, by working hard to promote justice.⁷⁶ The aim is to bring about equality among all people; the equality which is rooted in love and mutual respect. Gender issues are among the major obstacles towards the restoration of the order for which Christ came into this world.

⁷⁶ .AMFCEA Pastoral department, ed, *The African Synod Comes Home - A Simplified Text* (Nairobi - Pauline Publication Africa, 1995), pp. 34 - 35.

Nevertheless, all believers have their hope in the message of Jesus and the teaching of the church. The church is seen as a liberator, a pointer to the truth and the defender of the weak. Indeed that is what the church is all about. Unfortunately most people still feel that the church has not done enough to address justice issues, especially issues related to gender discrimination and the impact the issues have on women's participation in the church and in the society. The leadership of the church has always remained a male-reserved area, while female members of the church remain regarded as a second-class group. They are always considered inferior to men, even if some of them may be more capable of doing things which are considered to be only for male members. Top administrative jobs are either given to priests or male lay persons, even if there are highly qualified religious and lay females. Women are almost always relegated to subordinate positions. It becomes difficult for males and females to sit down together to make and execute pastoral plans as real partner disciples. Men normally give orders and women obey.

That state of relationship contradicts the teaching of Christ as well as the teaching of the church. It therefore brings into question the credibility of the church in its effort to bring about justice in the civil societies. How can the church bring justice in the civil society, if within its structures there are visible images of injustice and inequality? That is why Jesus said,

" Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye ". (Mat 7 : 5).

The gender issue in the church needs to be addressed first. It is my belief that every Christian will agree with Fran John Ferder and Heagle when they say that

" Our faithfulness to partnership needs to go beyond lip service and polite gestures. Male-female partnership is a biblical call deep within our natures. It is placed there by God who preferred relating to isolation, revealing to hiding, a God who thought that women and men together was a much better idea than either of them alone "77.

The church therefore ought to take a lead by initiating and promoting genuine collaboration between its members of different sex. The church ought to promote the dignity and defend the rights of every person. The church has to transcend cultural and gender limitations, just as Christ himself did.

The fact is that women are equal to men in dignity and that the two are meant to complement each other. This original aim of God should not be violated in any way. Women have the right to participate in all aspects of life. They have the right to take part in any decision-making in governments and in the religious organizations. The church has always fought for human rights and the equality of everyone but at the same time it has argued strongly against the ordination of women, although its justification can hardly convince the majority of the faithful today. Fr Patrick Wachege, who conducted his research on different forms of oppression of women in Kenya, gives us some questions which most people ask concerning the church's stand on the ordination of women. Those questions are :

" Why should women be refused ordination to ministerial priesthood ? Why define this vitally inevitable ministry in gender terms ? Is this not sacramental

77

Fran John Ferder et al, Partnership among Women and Men in Ministry (Notre Dame : Ave Maria Press, 1989), pp. 54 - 55.

The debate on the ordination of women has been closed at the moment but I believe that there is still a chance for the church to review its stand on the issue.

⁸⁰ While it may take time for the church's authority to review the issue and change its stand, a meaningful involvement of women in church activities at other levels can be made. Here are some suggestions :

- Clear policies and rules can be laid down by the church on how every commission and committee has to be formed on the basis of gender equality.
- Capable and qualified lay and religious women should be put in charge of projects, even if among staff members are religious men. Women should not be denied such offices, simply because they are women.
- Dioceses, Parishes and all religious projects should be an example of implementing these suggestions. The number of office-holders in all church offices at all levels should reflect both merit and gender sensitivity.
- The church hierarchy should also consider possibilities of involving women among key holders of different high offices in the Vatican. Consultation of women should be thoroughly done on various issues before final decisions are taken and made public.

These suggestions are not easy to implement unless people in charge from the top in Vatican to the bottom in parishes and religious projects are convinced of

⁷⁹ Patrick. N. Wachege, *African Women Liberation - A man's perspective* (Nairobi : Industrial printing works Ltd, 1992), p. 97.

⁸⁰ John Paul II, " Apostolic letter of his Holiness John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic church on reserving priestly ordination to men alone ". Vatican : May 22nd, 1994.

the equality of women and men and the need for mutual collaboration between them. They have to be liberated from fear of losing their power. They must be people who are " not only gender sensitive but also gender informed ". Most members of the hierarchy of the church seem not to believe in male-female mutual and collaborative ministry. The majority of the Church ministers don't even want to hear about it, leave alone to introduce and implement it. I remember last year, 1998, at the Mercy Sisters in Nairobi, there was a workshop on the subject. Among the organizers were part of the Tangaza College Staff members in the Social Ministry Department. The workshop took place during the mid-term break, the time suitable for many male and female religious to participate. At the end of the workshop I was eager to know about the response to the invitation. I was told that none of the men religious had attended. This reflects the truth about the existence of the problem and it does not show any sign of a near future solution to it. How can we solve the problem if we are not aware or convinced of the its existence ?

I think there is a need to take the issue more seriously, especially regarding the training of the future priests and religious. The training programme has to address this need. If we want to implement the directives of Vatican Council II regarding the involvement of the church in the modern world, such subjects should be made compulsory for all priestly and religious students. People responsible for formation should ensure that students acquire adequate knowledge on how to deal with gender issues. If the Church continues to ignore the involvement of women

in decision-making, it will be making a mistake. I do agree with Fran John Ferder and Heagle when they remark that :

" When the two fundamental units of humanity, the male and female persons do not stand in mutuality they have no experience on which to build mutuality among people of different races, cultures, religions or political ideologies"⁸¹

3.9 Conclusion

All the ways suggested above, by which the problem can be tackled, can only be useful if the church and all others acknowledge the problem and collaborate to fight it. All enlightened women, especially Christians, should always be at the forefront in leading the campaign and help others to realize the problem and to see the need to overcoming it. They should be aware of their likeness with God, aware of his liberating power and aware of their share in the divine power, which gives them the mandate to play a prophetic role in the world. Women should not sit there passively and cast blame on men or society for their problems and their exclusion from taking part in decision-making. They really need to collaborate with men but they cannot depend on them entirely for their advancement. The real task to bring about change is theirs and the power to carry it out to some extent is within women themselves.

⁸¹ Fran John Ferder et al, *Op. Cit.* p. 56.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The general survey and analysis of the problem has revealed to us the fact that women's participation in decision-making, both at global level and in Kenya, is insufficient. This fact is a reflection of the reality in both civil and church circles. The situation is a big challenge to everybody, especially members of the church. It calls for a prophetic response to redress the situation according to God's plan. God's plan is that of love, partnership, equal dignity and status among all people.

Despite efforts by the international community and individual countries to bring about justice and equal participation in decision-making, the church has a duty to ensure that the issue is not only talked over but also that concrete actions are taken. The church will only bring this to realization if it makes the issue a priority and a target of its evangelization process.⁸² This will also require a critical and objective look at the church structures and policies which may need reform in order that it may lead the struggle by playing a model role to other organizations.

Judging quickly by the findings of this work, one may be discouraged by the picture perceived of the hopeless situation of women's participation in top decision-making structures. However, if one observes carefully and assesses the progressive achievements, one will become aware of some positive indicators of hope.

⁸² *John Paul II, Op. Cit. p. 54.*

Some of those indicators include, for example, the fact that there are some prominent women who either have been or are taking part in the top decision-making structures in their countries. There has been an increased number of highly educated women, a growing awareness of the problem among women and an increase in campaigning for concerted efforts to eradicate gender discrimination.⁸³

Other indicators of hope include the fact that, even in African countries where the culture has been more opposed to women leadership, things are changing. Uganda has the first woman Vice-President in Africa, Specioza Kazibwe. The late Agatha Uwilingiyimana of Rwanda had proved her competence as the first woman prime minister in Africa.⁸⁴ Chief Singobile Mabhena of Zimbabwe was the first woman to take the post among the Ndebele in 1997.⁸⁵ Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Maathai Wangari and Charity Ngilu of Kenya were the first women ever to participate in presidential elections in Africa in 1997.⁸⁶ The huge support they got indicates the changing attitudes among the people. With such developments more women have been encouraged and there are speculations that Gertrude Mongela of

⁸³ *Joc Ombuor, Op. Cit. p.2.*

⁸⁴ *Henry K. Anyindoho, Op. Cit. p. 2.*

⁸⁵ *New Africa No. 362 (London : IC Publications Ltd, April, 1998), p. 25.*

⁸⁶ *Avenute Allison, " Liberia : The race is now on " In : New Africa No. 354 (London : IC Publications Ltd, July - August 1997), p. 26. Baffour Ankomah, " At last, Liberia has a president " in New Africa No. 355 (London : IC Publications Ltd, September 1997), pp. 14 - 15 Sunday Standard No. 1939 (Nairobi : The Standard Ltd, January 4, 1998), p. 1 Hellen Johnson - Shirleaf of Unity Party (U. P.) defeated 11 male candidates taking the second position only losing to Charles Taylor of the National Patriotic Front (NPF). Charity Ngilu came up fifth among the 15 candidates, 13 among them men.*

Tanzania⁸⁷ and Nana Rawlings of Ghana are poised to contest the next presidential elections in their countries.⁸⁸ This is a good prospect for the future.

Uganda has succeeded in reforming the constitution and has made it one of the most gender-sensitive constitutions in the world.⁸⁹ Kenya is also in the process of promoting women's participation in decision-making. That has been proved by the recent decision to have 8 women out of 25 members in the constitution review commission. This is a clear indicator for the bright future and a major step towards the implementation of affirmative action.⁹⁰

Another indicator of hope is the fact that the church is now taking gender issues more seriously than ever. Church leaders are more and more talking about the need to promote women's participation in all aspects of life. Let us hope that this awareness of the problem by the church leaders will be translated into action, starting with a change within its own structures.

As we have seen in this paper, the problem of poor representation and

⁸⁷ Editors, "Gender Poser for Tanzania" *In: The East African No. 181* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, April 20 - 26, 1998), p. 8.

⁸⁸ Mike Afram, "Who will succeed Rawlings?" *In: New Africa No. 367* (London: IC Publications Ltd, October, 1998), p. 20. John Kartuki, "First Ladies and troubled times. Could Nana End up as President of Ghana?" *In: The East African No. 180* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, April 13 - 19), (Part 2), p. 2.

⁸⁹ Magareta Gacheru, "Women Must Embrace Constitutional Reform, says Hope Mwesigye". *In: The East African No. 218* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, January 4 - 10, 1999), (Part 2), p.4.

⁹⁰ Alburu Mwangi, "Key Step taken for laws review". *In: Daily Nation No. 11838* (Nairobi: Nation Newspapers Ltd, December 26, 1998), p. 1. Joe Ombuor, *Op. Cit.* p. 10.

participation of women in decision-making is a complex one. To tackle it we need to reflect on our attitudes and to undergo conversion. We can try all possible solutions suggested above, but we should realize our limitation and put God first in all our endeavours. Prayer is important in our mission. We have to go to God and ask for enlightenment and courage to carry out his / her plan for liberation of his / her people and the transformation of the whole world. For God nothing is impossible. The problem of poor representation and participation of women in decision-making bodies will come to an end, because that is what God wills and he will give us support to ensure our success.

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