

**A PARADOX IN A THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM AND
EQUALITY: THE EXPERIENCES OF PASTORS' WIVES
(*AMAYI BUSA*) IN THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF
MALAWI (BACOMA)**

By

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DECLARATION

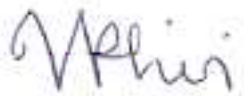
As required by University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal, (Pietermaritzburg Campus) and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text it is my original work.



MOLLY LONGWE

July 2012

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission



PROFESSOR ISABEL APAWO PHIRI

July 2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all pastors' wives everywhere in recognition of your faithfulness to your calling from God.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a critical exploration and analysis of the experiences of ‘being church’ for women married to pastors in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). The study focused on the following research question: ‘What does being church mean for women who are married to pastors in the BACOMA, whose distinctive mark is freedom of choice in matters of faith and ministry according to the Baptist-held principle of the priesthood of all believers?’

It is a qualitative empirical study of the life experiences of pastors’ wives which used feminist narrative methods of inquiry. In order to get a full picture of the role perceptions and experiences of pastors’ wives, the study used in depth interviews, group discussions and participant observation. A purposely selected group of twenty-nine pastors’ wives from BACOMA-affiliated Lilongwe Baptist Association of Malawi were individually interviewed by the author. In addition, two group discussions with members of the Lilongwe Baptist Association Pastors’ Fraternal group (LBAPF) were conducted and fifty church members that included women, men, and young people were also interviewed in order to determine the congregational perceptions of a pastor’s wife.

The purpose of my study was to determine the ideo-theological and socio-cultural factors that contribute to the construction of the identity of a pastor’s wife in the BACOMA. By presenting a synthesis of the various perspectives on the experiences of pastors’ wives, this study has demonstrated that a plurality of perspectives contribute to the construction of the identity of a pastors’ wife. This causes her to be identified as a “dialogical self”¹ because of the many positions that contribute to the self understanding of her identity. These perspectives, which are embedded in patriarchal ideologies, include: doctrinal or biblical, ecclesiastical, congregational, cultural, and the “Self”. I have also shown that the areas of conflict and tension

¹ A metaphor of the polyphonic novel proposed by Bakhtin. The principle feature of the polyphonic novel is that it is composed of a number of independent and mutually opposing viewpoints embodied by characters involved in dialogical relationships. See H H Herman, H J G Kempen, and R J P van Loon, ‘The dialogical self: Beyond individualism and rationalism’ *American psychologist* vol 47, no 1 (January 1992), pp. 23-33 and H J M Hermans, ‘The construction and reconstruction of a dialogical self’ *Journal of constructivist psychology*, 16 (2003), pp. 89-130.

between the Self and the “others” can be clues towards transformation. This is in addition to the alternatives suggested by feminist theologians in the study. Baptist ecclesiology in Malawi is challenged to take cognisance of these factors in order to build an inclusive ecclesiology that affirms the humanity of women in general and pastors’ wives in particular.

Key Themes: *Abuse; African Feminist principles; African Women’s Theology; Androcentric Language; Baptist Churches; Baptist Doctrines; Christianity; Clergy; Dialogical Self; Domestic Violence; Ecclesiology; Faith Communities; Feminist Research; Gender; Gender-Based Violence; Gender Justice; Gender transformation; Headship; Liberation Theology; Malawi; Narratives of Lived Experience; Oppression; Pastors’ Wives; Patriarchy; Power and Control; Priesthood of All Believers; Theological Education; Women’s ordination.*

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS²

ACEM	Association of Christian Educators in Malawi
AIDS	Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome
BACOMA	Baptist Convention of Malawi
BMIM	Baptist Mission in Malawi
BTSM	Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi
BWA	Baptist World Alliance
CHAM	Christian Health Association of Malawi
CIRCLE	The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
EAM	Evangelical Association of Malawi
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ECC	Ecumenical Counselling Centre
ECM	Episcopal Conference of Malawi
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
LBA	Lilongwe Baptist Association
LBAPF	Lilongwe Baptist Association Pastors' Fraternal
MCC	Malawi Council of Churches
MHRC	Malawi Human Rights Commission

² This present study utilises the standard set of abbreviations for use in Biblical Studies essays as approved by the Society of Biblical Literature. These conventions can be accessed at: <<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~eslinger/genrels/SBLStandAbbrevs.html>> [Accessed 30 January 2012].

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PACSA	Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness
SARDC	Southern African Research and Documentation Centre
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
UN	United Nations
WCC	World Council of Churches
WLSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa

DEFINITIONS

In this dissertation entitled “A Paradox in a Theology of Freedom and Equality: Experiences of Pastors’ Wives in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)” there are some words and phrases such as, androcentrism, clericalism, domestic violence, feminism, *Imago Dei*, liberation theology, patriarchy, priesthood of all believers, and sexism that need to be contextually unpacked.

Androcentrism: Literally means man or male-centeredness. It is the bias of society, culture and religion towards the assumption that the male is the norm for human life, while what is female is regarded as an exception to the norm and therefore is secondary or inferior (Clifford 2001:19). Historically, religious institutions have formulated theological doctrines that have been regarded as bearing a universal human reflection, while in reality they have been only male reflections. The advent of feminism as a theory and movement in the 1960s began challenging this anomaly. This study is a feminist research which seeks to be a contribution to the process of bringing women’s voices and visions as public knowledge in order to counteract the normalisation of androcentrism.

Clericalism: It is an ideology that divides people in the church into clergy and laity and states that the clergy are the ones with authority. Its assumption is that the clergy alone are legitimized to preach, teach, and to administer the ordinances (Ruether 1983:206-207). While the Baptist-held tradition and principle of the priesthood of all believers places all Christian believers, including the pastor, on the same status, the praxis in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) reveals the presence of a male-gendered clericalism which holds the reigns of power above that of ordinary members.

Domestic violence: The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Aware (PACSA 1998) of South Africa defines the various aspects of domestic violence in the following way:

Physical violence: includes “slapping, punching, kicking, shoving, choking, stabbing and shooting, perhaps using weapons like guns, knives, forks, sjamboks, knobkerries, hammers, or axes, etc. A physical beating often ends in the women being hospitalised, sometimes being permanently disabled, and even in death”.

Sexual violence: is defined as “forced sexual activity, including rape, degrading jokes about women, name-calling, unwanted touching and using pornography”.

Spiritual violence: It is “when a woman’s faith is used to keep her from finding help, or leaving an abusive situation, by telling her that she must endure, submit, return and make sure she doesn’t do anything to upset her husband, etc. She is led to believe the abuse is her fault, and that if she seeks to leave, she is unchristian, and will be condemned by God. The Bible is quoted to her literally and out of context, particularly passages that serve to put her in her place, condemn divorce, or glorify suffering”.

Emotional, verbal and psychological violence: It is where “the woman is made to feel useless and that nothing she does is good enough. The abuser may treat the woman as though she has no emotional needs and is only there to serve his needs. He may be extremely jealous and possessive and accuse the woman of having affairs and being unfaithful. He does not trust her and might not let her leave the house. Some women describe constant criticism and being undermined in private and public. He may mock her family and those close to her, swear at her, shout at her and call her names. He may control her activities, disrupt her routines, deprive her of sleep or food, or isolate her from her family and friends. Psychological manipulation includes threats or attempts to commit suicide, to hurt the victim and her loved ones, to harm her property, to kidnap or harm the children. He may force her to do degrading

things or he will do things that will terrorise her, like playing with a knife or gun in her presence”.

Economic violence: It is where “the abuser uses money to undermine the woman. He may spend most of the money on himself and only give her a small amount for the support of the family, He expects her to do more with the money than she possibly can. He accuses her of stealing his money or of using the family’s money for her own benefits only”.

In the course of this study, I have critically engaged with these definitions and have redefined them in accordance with the findings of my research.³

Feminism: This is a theory and a movement which arose in nineteenth-century Europe and North America when women struggled for social, political, and economic equality. There are three waves of the feminist movement. This present study is located within the third wave of feminism which arose in the 1970s as a women’s critical awareness of the various experiences of oppression of women through the ideologies of sexism and patriarchy worldwide (Bentley 1975). African women’s theologies belong to the third wave of feminist theologies. It arose as a response to issues of injustice that African women experience, and this study is part of this struggle.

Imago Dei: Translated ‘image of God’ is a very significant term in Christian theological anthropology in the understanding of humanity. Historically, the Christian tradition recognizes that humanity as created in the image of God is fallen and sinful, yet regains its full humanity in Christ. The question that feminist theology is raising is: while the *Imago Dei* is correlated with maleness and femaleness, how did this dualism result in a hierarchy with maleness as superior to the femaleness? Furthermore, feminist theology challenges the assumption that femaleness is linked to the source of sin, resulting in defining women in derogatory terms that make them not reflect the image of God (Ruether 1983:93-94). This negative picture of women is traced from the Greek philosophers and influenced the Church Fathers in their

³ See in particular chapter eight of this dissertation.

formulation of the Christian traditions. Feminist theological anthropology emerged as a response to untangle and correct this distorted picture of women which has influenced all societies to date. In this study, feminist theological anthropology has been used as one of the tools to analyse the experiences of pastors' wives, who have not escaped this negative labelling of women.

Liberation theology: Arose first in Latin America as a theological response in the context of poverty and oppression. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian theologian became the leading theologian to articulate liberation theology as a tool for social change. Now it has a plurality of forms (Clifford 2001:269 *cf.* Gutierrez 1973). All who undertake to transform society from all forms of oppression are in the family of liberation theology, such as Third World theologies, African theologies, feminist theologies, just to mention a few. This study is located within the feminist theologies from an African woman's perspective seeking justice for all people and the Earth.

Patriarchy: Literally refers to the rule by a father/master or husband over his household. As an ideology, it is a way of thinking and feeling that has been recognized as the root of all forms of oppression, especially the oppression of women. It refers to legal, economic, and political systems of relations that legitimate and enforce relations of dominance in society (Clifford 2001:19-20; Rakoczy 2004:10-11). Analysis of the experiences of pastors' wives in the BACOMA from a feminist perspective in this study, demonstrate that socio-cultural and ideo-theological factors that contribute to the construction of the identity of pastors' wives are enshrined in patriarchal ideologies that subordinate women's experiences. Feminist ecclesiology has been used as one of the tools to analyse and critique the BACOMA doctrines, teachings and biblical interpretations that promote only male leadership in church and in the family.

Priesthood of all believers: According to Baptist church doctrine, it rests on the notion that every believer has freedom of direct access to God through Christ; freedom to express faith through ministry, worship, and theological understanding; freedom to read and interpret the Bible (Hobbs and Mullins 1978). Thus, every believer has the same privileges and responsibilities. This study has been done within the framework of the priesthood of all believers from a feminist perspective to show

that a BACOMA pastor's wife does not enjoy the same freedom and privileges as her husband and other church workers.

Sexism: Patriarchy is a root cause of sexism. It is societal prejudice that persons are superior or inferior to one another on the basis of their gender (Clifford 2001:272). Historically, however, women have been more negatively prejudiced as inferior than men. Society and religious institutions have constructed relationships between men and women hierarchically. The result is that women have been relegated to the subordinate position in relation to men. This has been more evident in heterosexual marriages where men have been in control even in decision making. Analysis on the experiences of BACOMA pastors' wives in this study, has demonstrated that this patriarchal hierarchy has been the cause of domestic abuse and violence even in pastors' families.

POLITICAL MAP OF MALAWI



LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Church Member Participants Coded Identifications	121
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	viii
DEFINITIONS	x
POLITICAL MAP OF MALAWI.....	xv
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCING THE STUDY	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.1.1. The Nature and Goal of this Study	1
1.1.2. The Methodology of this Study	2
1.2. The Background and Direction of this Study	3
1.2.1. The Context of the Study	3
1.2.2. Rationale and Motivation for the Study.....	4
1.2.2.1. The Gender Profile of Malawi	4
1.2.2.2. African Women Theology	5
1.2.2.3. Personal Experience.....	6
1.3. Locating the Study within Existing Literature.....	7
1.4. The Research Problem	9
1.5. Principal Theories Undergirding this Study	11
1.5.1. Feminist Ecclesiology.....	12
1.5.2. Feminist Anthropology	13
1.5.3. African Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics	13
1.5.4. The “Dialogical Self” Theory	14
1.6. Key Research Questions and Objectives	15
1.7. My Positionality as a Researcher	16
1.7.1. My Position as a Christian Feminist Reconstructionist	17
1.7.2. My Position as an African Woman Theologian.....	18
1.8. Reflexivity, Credibility, Dependability, and Transferability of the Research ..	18

1.8.1. Reflexivity.....	19
1.8.2. Credibility	19
1.8.3. Dependability	20
1.8.4. Transferability	20
1.9. The Structure of this Study	21
1.10. Chapter Summary	24
CHAPTER TWO	25
BEING CHURCH: SITUATING FEMINIST ECCLESIOLOGY WITHIN THE	
GLOBAL FEMINIST THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	25
2.1. Introduction.....	25
2.2. Feminist Theologies: The Socio-historical Context	25
2.2.1. The First Wave of Feminism	26
2.2.2. The Second Wave of Feminism	26
2.2.3. The Third Wave of Feminism.....	27
2.2.4. The Theoretical Location of this Study	27
2.3. Feminist Ecclesiology	29
2.3.1. The Urgency and Goal of Feminist Ecclesiology	29
2.3.2. Issues of Concern in Feminist Ecclesiology	31
2.3.2.1. The Translation of <i>ekklesia</i>	31
2.3.2.2. The Writing of Church History	32
2.3.2.3. The Position and Ministry of Women.....	33
2.3.2.4. The Access of Women to Theological Training	36
2.3.2.5. The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible	37
2.3.2.6. Traditional Images of the Church	39
2.4. Alternative Feminist Models for an Inclusive Ecclesiology.....	43
2.4.1. The Church as a Discipleship of Equals	43
2.4.2. The Church as a Roundtable	44
2.4.3. The Church as a ‘Hot-house’ or Safe Space	45
2.4.4. The Church as <i>koinonia</i>	46
2.5. Chapter Summary	48

CHAPTER THREE	50
BEING HUMAN: SITUATING FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY WITHIN THE GLOBAL FEMINIST THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	50
3.1. Introduction.....	50
3.2. African Women's Theologies: An 'Irruption within an Irruption'	50
3.3. The Socio-historical Development of the Circle	51
3.1.1. Some Distinctive Features of African Women Theologies	54
3.4. Feminist Theological Anthropology	56
3.4.1. Subordination of Women in Society: A Global Phenomenon	57
3.4.2. Issues of Concern in Feminist Theological Anthropology	58
3.4.2.1. The Oppressive and Dehumanizing Role of Ritual	58
3.4.2.2. The Processes of Societal Socialisation.....	60
3.4.2.3. The Role of Communal Ideology	63
3.4.2.4. The Double-Sided Nature of Hospitality	64
3.4.2.5. The Use of Androcentric Language	65
3.4.2.6. The Religious Roots of Women's Subordination	66
3.5. Alternative Feminist Models of Theological Anthropology.....	69
3.6. Chapter Summary	72
 CHAPTER FOUR.....	 73
BAPTIST DOCTRINES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON MALAWI BAPTIST CONVENTION WOMEN.....	73
4.1. Introduction.....	73
4.2. A Brief Synopsis of the Historical Development of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)	74
4.3. The Baptist Understanding of the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers.....	76
4.3.1. Its Biblical and Historical Development.....	76
4.3.2. The Baptist Understanding of the Doctrine	78
4.3.3. Other Baptist Teachings within the Context of the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers	79
4.3.3.1. The Authority of the Bible	79
4.3.3.2. The Doctrine of the Church	83
4.3.3.3. The Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit	86

4.4. Baptist Teachings on Women's Roles in the Church	88
4.4.1. The Southern Baptist Convention's Complementarian View on the Role of Women in the Church.....	89
4.4.2. The Southern Baptist Convention's View on Theological Education and Women	91
4.4.3. The Southern Baptist Convention's View on Women's Role in the Family	95
4.5. The Feminist Response and an Alternative Model to the Baptist-held Doctrines	96
4.5.1. The Woman as 'Helper'	97
4.5.2. The Traditional Interpretation of <i>Zela</i>	97
4.5.3. The Justification and Reinforcement of Women's Subordination.....	98
4.6. Chapter Summary.....	98
 CHAPTER FIVE	100
RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS	100
5.1. Introduction.....	100
5.2. The Intention of this Study.....	100
5.2.1. The Renaissance of Feminist Qualitative Research.....	101
5.2.2. The Phenomenology of Women's Experience	101
5.2.3. The Employment of Narrative Methodology.....	102
5.2.4. Research Participants and Purposive Sampling.....	103
5.3. Procedure of the Study and Selection of Research Participants.....	104
5.3.1. The Selection of Research Participants.....	104
5.3.1.1. Pastors' Wives.....	105
5.3.1.2. Church Members	107
5.3.1.3. Pastor Couples.....	108
5.3.2. Data Production: Process and Methods	109
5.3.2.1. In-depth Interviews	110
5.3.2.2. Focus Group Discussion.....	112
5.3.2.3. Participant Observation	114
5.4. Review of Documents	115
5.5. Data Analysis: Process and Methods	115
5.5.1. Approaching Narrative Data: Five Analytical Lenses	117

5.6.	Methodological Limitations	118
5.7.	Ethical Considerations.....	120
5.7.1.	Concern for the Welfare of My Participants.....	120
5.7.2.	Respecting the Autonomy and Dignity of Each Individual	121
5.7.3.	Maintaining the Principle of Justice in Research.....	122
5.7.4.	Preventing the Fabrication and Falsification of Data	122
5.8.	Chapter Summary.....	122
CHAPTER SIX		124
THE CALL TO MINISTRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE		
THEOLOGICAL TRAINING OF BACOMA PASTORS' WIVES IN THE		
BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI (BACOMA).....		124
6.1.	Introduction	124
6.2.	The Call to Pastoral Ministry: A Comparative Analysis.....	125
6.2.1.	Not Initially Called	125
6.2.2.	Called while Married	128
6.2.3.	Called before Marriage	131
6.2.4.	The Baptist Procedure for Engaging the Services of a Pastor	133
6.3.	The Theological Education of a Pastor's Wife in the BACOMA.....	137
6.3.1.	The Respondents' Perceptions on Theological Education for Spouses....	137
6.3.1.1.	Skills Training.....	138
6.3.1.2.	Character Formation.....	138
6.3.1.3.	Resources for Ministry	138
6.3.2.	Theological Training as Tool of Indoctrination.....	141
6.4.	The Challenges Experienced by Pastors' Wives.....	142
6.4.1.	Low Self Esteem	142
6.4.2.	Intimidation.....	143
6.5.	A Feminist Interpretation of the Call to Ministry and Theological Education.	144
6.5.1.	Pastors' Wives Hearing God through their Husbands	144
6.5.2.	The Pastor's Wife as an Unpaid Labourer	146
6.5.2.1.	Exploitation and Economic Violence.....	146
6.5.2.2.	Exploitation and the Violation of Human Dignity	148
6.6.	Chapter Summary.....	148

CHAPTER SEVEN.....	150
THE ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF A PASTOR’S WIFE IN THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI (BACOMA).....	150
7.1. Introduction	150
7.2. The Roles of Pastors’ Wives in the Church	151
7.2.1. The Pastor’s Wife as a Leader	151
7.2.2. A Teacher and Leader of Women	152
7.2.3. A Leader of Rituals	155
7.2.4. A Community Leader	158
7.3. Pastors’ Wives as Supporters of their Husbands’ Ministry.....	161
7.3.1. Teaching Sunday School Classes.....	162
7.3.2. Involvement in Preaching	162
7.3.3. Pastoral Care and Visitation.....	164
7.3.4. Administration of the Ordinances?	165
7.3.5. Patriarchal Power and Authority vs. Women’s Ability	166
7.4. The Roles of Pastors’ Wives in the Home	167
7.4.1. A Loving Wife	167
7.4.2. A Prayer Support.....	168
7.4.3. A Spiritual Advisor	168
7.4.4. A Shield and Protector	169
7.4.5. A Mother and Homemaker	169
7.4.6. Culturally and Biblically Prescribed Roles	172
7.5. The Challenges Faced By Pastors’ Wives.....	173
7.5.1. Conflicts in the Husband-Wife Relationship	173
7.5.2. Neglect of Family	175
7.5.3. Suspicious of ‘Immoral Women’	176
7.5.4. Different Priorities	179
7.6. Feminist Perspectives on the Roles of Pastors’ Wives	179
7.7. Chapter Summary.....	181
 CHAPTER EIGHT	 182
THE EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY BACOMA PASTORS’ WIVES	182
8.1. Introduction	182

8.2.	Gender-based Violence: A Global Problem.....	183
8.3.	The Types and Sites of Gender-based Violence	185
8.3.1.	Domestic Violence	186
8.3.2.	A Pastor's Home: A Haven of Love or Hell on Earth?	187
8.4.	Stories of Domestic Violence: Two Case Studies.....	188
8.4.1.	Akonda's Story	188
8.4.1.1.	Emotional, Psychological, Sexual, Spiritual and Physical Violence ..	190
8.4.1.2.	The Husband as the Perpetrator of Violence and Its Implications for Christian Ministry	191
8.4.1.3.	The Culture of Silence.....	191
8.4.2.	Fatsani's Story	193
8.4.2.1.	Emotional, Psychological, Physical, and Financial Violence	195
8.4.2.2.	The Husband as the Perpetrator of Violence and its Implication for Christian Ministry	196
8.4.2.3.	Intervention by the Family and the Christian Community.....	196
8.5.	Feminist Reflections on Domestic Violence	197
8.5.1.	Factors that Contribute towards Domestic Violence	197
8.5.2.	Religious Teachings that Contribute towards Domestic Violence	198
8.5.2.1.	Headship and Submission	199
8.5.2.2.	Moral Inferiority.....	200
8.5.2.3.	The Virtue of Suffering.....	200
8.5.2.4.	Quick or Biased Forgiveness.....	201
8.5.2.5.	Divorce as Answered Prayer	202
8.6.	Feminist Alternative Models of Marriage.....	203
8.6.1.	Respect and Recognition.....	203
8.6.2.	Mutual Partnership and Sharing Power	204
8.6.3.	Servanthood and Humility	204
8.7.	Chapter Summary.....	205
CHAPTER NINE		207
CONCLUSION:		207
THE PASTOR'S WIFE: A 'DIALOGICAL SELF'		207
9.1.	Introduction	207
9.2.	Re-Setting Theories and Doctrines in the Context of Women's Experience ...	208

9.3. A Synthesis of the Perspectives and Experiences of Pastors' Wives in the BACOMA	212
9.3.1. The Doctrinal Perspective.....	213
9.3.2. The Ecclesiastical Perspective	215
9.3.3. The Congregational Perspective	216
9.3.3.1. Women's Marginalization, Oppression and Exclusion.....	217
9.3.3.2. The Eruption of a New Church for Malawi	218
9.3.4. The Cultural Perspective.....	218
9.3.5. The 'Self' Perception	220
9.3.5.1. Hearing God for Oneself.....	220
9.3.5.2. Theologically Equipping Oneself as God's Agent for Change.....	221
9.3.5.3. Resisting Self-Confinement and Going Beyond Barriers	221
9.3.5.4. The Power of Questioning and Self-Reflection	222
9.3.5.5. The Actions of Resistance of a Local Church.....	222
9.3.5.6. Resources for Transformation and Change.....	224
9.4. Contributions to Establishing New Knowledge	224
9.4.1. An Empirical Study.....	224
9.4.2. An Academic Contribution	224
9.4.3. African Feminist Research.....	225
9.4.4. The Construction of Identity	225
9.4.5. Feminist Empirical Research	225
9.4.6. New Knowledge.....	226
9.5. Identifying the Gaps and Suggestions for Future Research	226
9.6. Summary of Conclusions and Final Statement	226
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	228
1. Primary Sources	228
1.1. Oral Informants.....	228
1.2. Unpublished Church Documents.....	228
1.3. Published Church Documents.....	228
1.4. Newsletters and Magazines	229
1.5. Dissertations	229
2. Secondary Literature	230
2.1. Published Works.....	230

2.2. On-Line (World Wide Web) Sources	264
APPENDIX I	266
SAMPLE OF PASTOR’S WIFE PARTICIPANTS.....	266
APPENDIX II.....	267
SAMPLE OF CHURCH MEMBER PARTICIPANTS	267
APPENDIX III	269
CONSENT FORM FOR PASTORS’ WIVES TO BE INTERVIEWED	269
APPENDIX IV	272
CONSENT FORM FOR CHURCH MEMBERS TO BE INTERVIEWED.....	272
APPENDIX V	275
CONSENT FORM FOR PASTORS’ FRATERNAL MEMBERS	275
APPENDIX VI	278
RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR PASTORS’ WIVES	278
APPENDIX VII.....	280
RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH MEMBERS	280
APPENDIX VIII	282
RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION.....	282
APPENDIX IX	283
DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE OF PASTORS’ WIVES (PARTICIPANTS)	283
APPENDIX X.....	284
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF MALAWI (BTSM).....	284
APPENDIX XI	285
LIST OF BOOKS FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF MALAWI (BTSM) WIVES’ CURRICULUM.....	285
APPENDIX XII.....	286
LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI (BACOMA).....	286

A PARADOX IN A THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY: THE EXPERIENCES OF PASTORS' WIVES (*AMAYI BUSA*) IN THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI (BACOMA)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

The common-place catchphrase, “Women are the church” is characteristically heard not only within the academy, but also in the church community at large. Yet, regardless of their numerical strength and commitment globally, women’s experience of ‘church’ has at the very most been ambivalent. The nature and the role of the church has come under feminist scrutiny. For example, Musimbi Kanyoro (2002a:25-26) and Natalie Watson (2002:2-3) both argue that while the church has been the space where women have been able to develop their own discourses of faith, it has also been where women have experienced institutional subordination and injustice. Feminism which is one of the theoretical frameworks of this present study is a movement and a theory within liberation theology which is not only opposed to discrimination, but seeks equality and justice among all, regardless of gender.⁴

1.1.1. The Nature and Goal of this Study

This study is an exploration and critical analysis of the experiences of women married to pastors in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (*hereafter*, BACOMA). The BACOMA is one of the largest groups of affiliated Evangelical congregations in Malawi. Formed in 1970 out of the missionary endeavours of the North American-based Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), it is a voluntary national organization of Baptist churches. The SBC commenced its missionary work in Malawi in 1961 through what was then the Baptist Mission in Malawi (BMIM).

⁴ See in particular chapter two of this dissertation.

Located within feminist Christian theological study, the underlying assumption of this present study is that pastors' wives experience abuse of their freedom and dignity due to those patriarchal socio-ecclesiastical teachings and structures which keep women in subordination. The goal of this study is therefore to determine, from a Christian feminist perspective, the ideo-theological and socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the construction of the identity of a pastor's wife, while proposing alternative theologies that can affirm the full humanity of both women and men for the BACOMA and in particular, its pastors' wives.

1.1.2. The Methodology of this Study

Methodologically, this is an empirical narrative qualitative research, based on the premise that different perspectives regarding the experience of pastors' wives are "the products of systems of meaning that exist at a social rather than an individual level" (Terre Blanche et al. 2006:278). Thus, the assumption is that the various perspectives of the research participants would shed more light on the meaning of such experiences.

Theoretically, this study will describe and theologically analyse the experiences of the pastors' wives within the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers using conceptual frameworks of feminist ecclesiology, feminist anthropology and African feminist cultural hermeneutics. In line with feminist theology, this study is therefore committed to moving from mere theological reflections to a reflection-action paradigm of liberation in order to bring about the desired outcomes of justice and transformation.

By uncovering some of the factors that contribute to the construction of the identity of the pastors' wives within the BACOMA, the study will offer both a particular and a general narrative about the experience of 'being church'. It will seek to present a story of the experiences of the pastors' wives within the BACOMA. In particular therefore, the study will seek to illuminate the patriarchal cultural and church traditions coupled with misinterpretations of some biblical texts that have contributed to the subordination of the women and pastors' wives in the BACOMA.

1.2. The Background and Direction of this Study

The purpose of this section will be to introduce the study by presenting its direction and background.

1.2.1. The Context of the Study

This study was confined to the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) with special focus on the Lilongwe Baptist Association (*hereafter*, LBA). In general terms of church leadership and structure, the Baptist denomination follows a congregational church model and believes in the autonomy of the local church (*cf.* Samuel Turner 1987; Jesse Mugambi 1995:118-120). Beyond the local church, the Baptist churches in Malawi are organized into associations, which follow nearly the geographical districts of the country, with some districts having more than one association. In total, there are about forty Baptist associations in the BACOMA.

The Lilongwe Association (Lilongwe district), was chosen because of the following three reasons. First, Lilongwe is my residential location. Second, the Lilongwe Association has more Baptist churches compared to the other associations, whereby it consists of more than one hundred churches, and therefore has the largest number of pastors (more than 40 pastors in total). This gave me a larger population to choose my research sample from. Furthermore, the Lilongwe Association has a vibrant pastors' fraternal group that meets each month for fellowship and other activities. As a result, this group gave me an already existing group for my focus group discussion work. In addition, the Baptist theological institution is located in Lilongwe which also provided me easy access to sources. Lilongwe Association was therefore used as a strategic association because issues discussed by this association have had a national impact on the BACOMA as a whole. The third reason is that geographically, Lilongwe district is strategically situated. It is situated in Central Malawi.⁵ Being a cosmopolitan city, it has a mixed population in terms of ethnicity. This fact is reflected in my research sample.

The city of Lilongwe is the administrative capital of Malawi and covers a land area of 6, 159 square kilometres. The altitude of Lilongwe is 1, 403 m above sea level with a

⁵ Consult, Political Map of Malawi, p. xvi.

largely plain landscape. According to the national census of 2008, Malawi has a population of 13, 077,160, out of which 49% are males and 51% are females. Of the 32 districts in Malawi, Lilongwe, as with many other cosmopolitan cities, is one of the fastest growing cities with a 4.4% annual growth rate. Lilongwe rural has the highest population of 1,228,146, while Lilongwe city also has the highest population density of 669,021, compared to other districts in the country (See, National Statistical Office 2008:7-10).

According to the national census, at a national level, the religious profile of Malawi is comprised of 83% Christian and 13% Muslim, while 2% follow other religions and 2% do not belong to any religion (National Statistical Office 2008:13). We can therefore safely say that Malawi is predominantly Christian. However, what these figures do not show is that while many Malawians are Christian or Muslim, many also belong to African Traditional Religion (ATR). This is important for my study because the construction of women in Malawi is predominantly influenced by these three major religions.

1.2.2. Rationale and Motivation for the Study

Several factors compelled me to undertake this study. These included the gender profile of Malawi, as well as various academic and personal imperatives.

1.2.2.1. The Gender Profile of Malawi

The gender profile of Malawi, according to the National Gender Policy for the period 2000-2005, shows the various areas where disparities exist between men and women in power sharing, participation and control over decision-making processes, all of which favour men and put women in subordinate positions (See, Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services 2000). These disparities are derived from culture, economy, education and health. Culturally, there are some beliefs and practices that are harmful to the people, especially towards women (See, Malawi Human Rights Commission n.d). Economically, the majority of women belong to the low or no income farming sector (See, Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services 2000). Similarly, many economic activities are linked to gender roles within households. While most women work harder and for longer hours,

usually they have little or no control over the proceeds of their labour.⁶ Furthermore, there is an uneven gender distribution of the labour force in the formal and informal employment sector, giving low representation of women in decision-making positions. Because poor women in rural areas benefit the least from national resources, it also impacts on their literacy levels thereby providing less job opportunities (South African Research and Documentation Centre 2005:10). The majority of women do not have high education. Adult female illiteracy is estimated at 71%, while that of men is 52% (See, Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services 2000). To reduce this gap in the school system, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Policy for the period 2000-2005 mainstreamed as its high priority, gender sensitive policies in the education system at all levels (*cf.* Maluwa-Banda 2003). With regard to health, women face low nutritional status at the household level as compared to men, despite the fact that they are the main producers and processors of food.

The above gaps between women and men permeate Malawian society at all levels of life. These gender disparities which are due to unequal power relationships between men and women have made women more vulnerable to all kinds of infectious diseases such as HIV, and violence against women (See, Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services 2000). A study of the experience of pastors' wives of the BOCOMA is thus very relevant because they are not an exception with regard to the plight of women in Malawi. This study has therefore been undertaken to explore and theologize the experiences of pastors' wives in the BACOMA in line with Malawi's realities of gender imbalances. Even so, pastors' wives are in a unique position; a position in which they can become agents of transformation, as the study will show.

1.2.2.2. African Women Theology

The second motivating factor for my study is academic. Within formal academia, African women theologians through the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (*hereafter*, the Circle) have used academic writing as a means through which they attempt to come to grips with the institutionalised marginalisation of

⁶ Research on gender-based violence was done in three districts of Malawi: Mulanje, Dedza and Rumphi (See Saur et al., 2005:20-35; South African Research and Documentation Centre 2005:6, 20-24).

women's experiences in church and in society (*cf.* Phiri and Nadar 2005). African women theologians recognize that the Christian religion and African Traditional Religion (ATR) contain both liberative and oppressive elements towards women. Reading through the literature of the Circle, I realised that there are other marginalized voices which have not yet been heard, yet they are very crucial to this struggle. This study therefore seeks to make a significant academic contribution to the debate in the struggle against a myriad of injustices directed against women.

Furthermore, within research conducted by members of the Circle, while most has focused on the exclusion of women to the ordained ministry and decision making positions in church and society (*cf.* Isabel Phiri and Sarojin Nadar 2006c), there is recognized dearth of literature on the experiences of women married to pastors. A number of factors make African pastors' wives a unique phenomenon. While they may not be regarded as part of the clerical leadership *per se*, they are not seen as part of the laity. Similarly, their calling and role in the church is subsumed into their husband's job description, remuneration and ministry. Nevertheless, without their supporting role, their husband's ministry would not be successful, nor could the church women's organizations prosper. This study therefore sought to investigate those factors which contributed to the construction of the identity of pastors' wives in the BACOMA and by so-doing, make what is hoped a significant contribution to the depository of knowledge within Circle research.

1.2.2.3. Personal Experience

The third and final factor for the motivation of this study is my personal experience of patriarchal attitudes in my career as a theological educator at a Baptist theological institution in Malawi from 1996 to the present day. While my employment as the first African female lecturer was not only considered a bold step and a departure from the inherited Western missionary model, the challenge was for me to be accepted by the male students as a full lecturer. This manifested itself through the students' evaluation forms of the teachers. While some of the students' comments were constructive, most revealed some deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes towards me (*cf.* Molly Longwe 2010). Based on this experience, I was motivated to further my studies and equip myself with appropriate gender tools so as to articulate these issues theologically.

Having given the motives contributing to this study it now becomes necessary to locate the study within existing literature.

1.3. Locating the Study within Existing Literature

The discourse on women's experiences of patriarchy in church and society is well documented especially in the global North and the Circle.⁷ Because of the feminist emphasis on particularity of experience and location, the focus of this study is the experience of women married to pastors in the BACOMA. While many of the experiences of Pastors' wives in the West have been well-documented,⁸ the experiences, visions and voices of pastors' wives in Africa remain documented in a very limited way. One goal of this study is therefore to argue for a transfer of their experience from the private to the public domain through empirical research because in feminist theory "the personal is political".⁹ It thus becomes necessary to first build on existing limited literature with the intention of contributing new knowledge to fill in the gaps with empirical research. This study seeks to provide a contribution to the much-needed academic resources on this subject.

In the context of my study, which is Malawi, the Malawian scholar, Phiri (1997a:11) was the first to theologically grapple with the issue of patriarchy and the subordination of women in the Presbyterian Church. In her PhD. dissertation (1992) she shows how patriarchy in the Presbyterian Church and Chewa culture constructs women as being inferior to men. While pastors' wives are among the oppressed Chewa women in the Nkhoma Synod of the Central Africa Presbyterian Church, she also points out the issue of ministers' wives (and their husbands) oppressing other women through the control of the women's group called *Chigwirizano*. While the focus of her study is on women in general and not on pastors' wives, my study focuses on the experience of pastors' wives in the BACOMA.

From a historical perspective, Hany Longwe (2007) devotes a chapter of his PhD. dissertation of 2007 on the work of Baptist women (and pastors' wives) in the

⁷ For example, Circle writings include: Kanyoro (2002a); Kanyoro and Njoroge (1996); Oduyoye (1995a; 2001a), Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2006); Phiri (1997a); Phiri et al., (2002).

⁸ See for example, Baker and Scott (1992:33-43); Lane and Blanton (1994:189-195).

⁹ The meaning behind this slogan, especially from feminist perspective, was to show that women's oppression is not a private or individual matter, but "part of a larger system of sexism and patriarchy by which women were governed" (Phiri and Nadar 2010:83).

establishment and development of the BACOMA. However, he highlights how the same women, especially the pastors' wives, were subordinated by patriarchal teachings in the BACOMA. Similarly, the research conducted by Rachel NyaGondwe-Fiedler (2005b) for the Circle's consultation of 2003 gives an outline of the experiences of pastors' wives of various Christian denominations in Malawi from a historical perspective.

Using these works as a springboard, this study proposes to be an in-depth theological reflection on the experiences of wives married to pastors in the BACOMA. This study, therefore, went beyond the historical and focused more on the ecclesiological structures from a gender perspective.

This study is firmly built on the work of Chene Swart (2003). In her (2003) unpublished MTh. Dissertation, Swart investigates ways in which the lives of white Afrikaans women married to pastors in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC/NGK) in South Africa have been influenced by their position. Using a feminist narrative participatory action model involving fifteen women, her research challenges the institutional structure of the church through narratives of pain, survival and hope and collaboratively presents ways of caring and supporting these women. The difference between her research and mine is that her research is located in pastoral theology while mine is located in systematic theology using the framework of feminist ecclesiology.

From the global North, I found the following works relevant to this study. The (2000) unpublished PhD. dissertation of Christine Rogers provided an in-depth qualitative life-history study of the experiences of four pastors' wives, whereby she explores the process of being and becoming a pastor's wife from a socio-psychologist's perspective. From other published sources, Dorothy Pentecost (1964) deals with problems and questions that plague the minister's wife. These include, her training, personal appearance, responsibilities and persecution (see also, Ruth Truman 1974; Lora Parrott 1956). Pentecost believes that a minister's wife should also have the call from God as the helpmate of her husband.

In a move towards a less traditional stand, Daniel Langford (1998) in his personal reflection on the challenging experiences of a pastor trying to balance his career and

family life calls for a change in ministry policies that will enable pastors to devote as much time to their families as they do to their congregations. Langford also challenges the exploitative nature of the role of a pastor's wife, arguing that the churches should develop healthy models in relation to church, pastor, and family.

In summary, with regard to the preliminary literature review I want to make the following observations. First, the studies on the pastors' wives reveal that the experiences of pastors' wives in ministry are a global phenomenon whereby they operate within the socio-religiously constructed paradigm. Second, I have found that much study on the pastors' wives in the global North focuses on socio-psychological factors (i.e., causes, effects, coping, and alleviating mechanism) such as loneliness, stress, depression, well-being and satisfaction (See in particular, Shirley Hartley 1988; Lane and Blanton 1994). While these factors are relevant for pastors' wives in the African context, in my study I will focus on the religio-cultural factors that contribute to the construction of the identity and roles of African women in society and church because of their impact in stereotyping women into the status of subordination, particularly in Africa. Third, although all the above cited studies resonate with the purpose of this study which seeks to find liberating trajectories for both the pastors' wives and the church, none of these aforementioned studies challenge the discrepancies experienced by pastors' wives based on the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Furthermore, they do not engage with the issues that plague the ministers' wives from a feminist theological perspective. These are the three gaps that this study seeks to fill. In so doing, this study will seek to make a significant contribution to this deposit of knowledge. I now discuss below the research problem.

1.4. The Research Problem

The problem that this research is trying to solve is the meaning of 'being church' for women married to pastors in BACOMA. For one to understand this problem, one needs to locate it in the wider discourse of institutional marginalisation and exclusion of women's experience in church and society. Feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983) argue that throughout the history of the Christian tradition, male experience, rather than the universal human experience, has been the norm. Having been brought up in the Evangelical tradition of the BACOMA, I noticed that

the Association still had a number of issues to grapple with, in terms of gender justice and equity. For example, the ordination of women remains a contentious issue, albeit this was not the focus of this study. My interest in this study is the experience of being church for pastors' wives in the BACOMA.

As a lecturer in ministerial training at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Lilongwe, I have had many opportunities to interact with student pastors and their wives; in addition, my involvement in the church through pastors' fraternal, associations and regional meetings has also given me opportunity to listen to the successes and struggles of the pastors, especially of their wives in ministry. In particular, my study has identified three problems.

First, I agree with the observations of NyaGondwe-Fiedler (2005b) and Longwe (2007) that pastors' wives are as much involved in pastoral work as that of their husbands. Indeed, they play an important role in pastoring the thriving women's groups in the churches. In addition, they play a very significant support role in supporting their husbands both in the church and in the home. Yet, they receive no recognition or remuneration for their agency in their work.

Second, according to the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, every believer has freedom of choice in matters of faith, life and ministry; nevertheless, it is debatable if this is true for a pastor's wife. Several questions arise: Is the pastor's wife restricted only to the role expectations that the church has about her, even though she has no 'official' recognition? Or is she operating between expectations and actuality? Does she have her own calling even though the church does not call her specifically?

Third, it is in relation to the structure of the BACOMA. While the pastor answers his call and goes through all the required procedures with a local church for 'employment' (e.g., training, interviews, ordination), the church does not do the same with the wife. She is therefore not employed nor paid, yet, she is expected to work beside/alongside her husband fulltime without formal negotiation. The church therefore has no job description, no conditions of service, and no remuneration for her. The voice of the wife is silent throughout, except her services are seen. Based on these experiences, it is my studied contention that pastors' wives experience: (1) abuse of their freedom for they are denied freedom to express and exercise their God-

given gifts according to their own calling, which may not necessarily be a career in the church; and (2) abuse of labour in that the church takes their services for granted. From a gender perspective, this is due to patriarchal ecclesiastical teachings and structures which keep women in subordination, consciously or unconsciously.

This study therefore seeks to investigate and determine the socio-theological factors that contribute to the ambivalent construction of the identity of a pastor's wife in the Baptist churches, and proposes liberative and transformative theologies for them and for the churches. This will be achieved by investigating the tension between expectation and actuality as the pastors' wives name their experiences by articulating their stories of faith and ministry. This study will also seek to determine socio-cultural and ideo-theological factors that have contributed to the construction of the identity of the pastors' wives. By using the narrative form, the study will also seek to give a voice to the pastors' wives within specific theoretical frameworks as will be shown below.

1.5. Principal Theories Undergirding this Study

A detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks for this study will be provided in chapters two and three. It is therefore the intention of this section to briefly introduce each theoretical framework. The expression "theoretical framework" refers to a structure of concepts or theories which act as an analytical map for the study. This study is located within the programme of Gender and Religion. As a result, it becomes necessary to study feminist theories that provide a theoretical framework, which will be used as a tool in the analysis of the findings of this study.

The study will use the re-constructionist approach of the feminist theologies in order to analyse the experiences of pastors' wives of being church. As noted in the literature review section above, feminist theology begins with the experiences of women in its deliberate task of seeking to liberate them from all forms of oppression both in church and society and bring about equality and dignity of both women and men in all areas of life. The task was therefore to deconstruct and critique the male cultural paradigms and reconstruct and formulate new perspectives (Young 1990:11-14; Clifford 2001:33-34). As Ruether (1983:18) has argued, the critical principle of feminist theology "is the promotion of the full humanity of women". For that reason,

feminism as a theory becomes the framework within which women of faith critically articulate their experiences. Within this framework, this study will use the following feminist tools of analysis: feminist ecclesiology, feminist anthropology, and African feminist cultural hermeneutics. In addition, this study will also use identity construction theory from a social-psychological perspective, in order to understand the construction of identity of pastors' wives.

1.5.1. Feminist Ecclesiology

In my study, feminist ecclesiology will be used to analyse the pastors' wives' experience of being church. Even with their numerical strength, women's experience of being church has been severely limited by the patriarchal structures and teachings of the church. Watson has cogently argued that feminist ecclesiology is one of the ways in which women "speak about their being church and their embodying the divine in the world" (2002:2). She further observed that feminist theologians have found that those churches which understood themselves as being "Churches of the Word", (e.g., BACOMA), have been, and continue to be, "a place where women suffer institutional injustice; where women are told of their supposed insignificance..." (2002:2-3). For Watson (2002:3), feminist ecclesiology is the search for "counter-patriarchal and subversive readings of traditional ecclesiology" so that the church can be a liberating and a life-giving environment for both women and men. All forms of oppressive language used to describe the church, including texts that describe institutions which oppress and marginalize women and exclude them from all essential processes of representation and self-definition will be critically scrutinized by feminist ecclesiology (*cf.* Russell 1993; Rakoczy 2004).

As noted above, Baptists claim, as their distinctive mark, the principle of the priesthood of all believers and the individual freedom to be and to do according to one's own gifting and calling. As will be seen, a feminist analysis of this key principle will reveal a number of inconsistencies in Baptists' understanding and practice of this principle, especially with regard to the identity and roles of pastors' wives.

1.5.2. Feminist Anthropology

This study will use feminist theological anthropology to analyse the experience of the pastors' wives on the question "what does it mean to be human?" (Rakoczy 2004:28). This question is important because of the way women have been constructed both by society in general and the church. Throughout the ages, both society and the Christian religion have denied the full humanity of women by constructing them negatively. The goal of feminist theological anthropology therefore is to critically examine factors that contribute to the wrong attitudes on women and restoration of their full humanity as created in the image of God.

1.5.3. African Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics

This study will use African feminist cultural hermeneutics as an appropriate tool to analyse the participants' perceptions because of its emphasis on African culture. While African cultural theology would have been an appropriate tool for this study, its lack of engagement with women's experience rules it out. In addition, while African cultural theology glorifies African culture, African feminist cultural hermeneutics argues that not everything in African culture promotes the well-being of all people. Indeed, there are aspects of African cultures that are oppressive, especially to women, as pointed out by both Mercy Oduyoye (2001a) and Kanyoro (1997a; 2002a:25-26). Oduyoye (1995b:39) laments:

Only on very rare occasions have African church-women challenged African culture, even when they have judged its practices to be inhuman and unjust.

Furthermore, because of the way Africans read the Bible, African feminist cultural hermeneutics promotes the use of a "hermeneutic of suspicion" when reading the Bible (Oduyoye 2001a; Kanyoro 2002a). In as much as the Bible is liberative to women, it has also been interpreted in such a way that it becomes oppressive to women (*cf.* Oduyoye 2001a). I will therefore use African feminist cultural hermeneutics to critically analyse a variety of issues as experienced by the pastors' wives, to highlight the oppressive elements of both African and biblical cultures. At

the same time, I will seek to reclaim and retain those liberative elements found in both cultures.

African feminist cultural hermeneutics will also enable me to recognize that to be called a pastor's wife is a social construct in the sense that she is a product of both the African socio-cultural milieu and the ideo-theological forces from the Western Christianity, both of which are patriarchal. Kanyoro (1997b:177) rightly argues that:

...the roles and images of African women are socially and culturally defined, and within this framework of operation, women have been socialized into a state of numbness where we have lived our lives without really determining the course of it.

Furthermore, using the tool of African feminist cultural hermeneutics will enable me to understand the issue of women's submission to male dominance which has moulded the pastor's wives to regard their being used and exploited by the church as being normal and expected. In other words, critical analysis will show that the pastors' wives see their submission to male dominance as part of their ministry, and therefore cannot question or challenge it. This study will therefore seek to critique this construction through the lens of feminist thinking, and, by so-doing, bring to consciousness the oppression which pastors' wives experience (*cf.* Phiri and Nadar 2006c), thereby goading them to challenge the systems.

By using African feminist cultural hermeneutics, feminist ecclesiology, and feminist anthropology, this study will seek to bring a better understanding of the experiences of pastors' wives in relation to their socio-economic, cultural and religious oppression.

1.5.4. The “Dialogical Self” Theory

Since the central objective of this study is to understand the construction of identity of the BACOMA pastors' wives, the study also benefits from the theories of identity construction from a social-psychological perspective. In this study, I have used what psychologists identify as the “dialogical self” theory to analyse the various perspectives that contribute towards the construction of the pastors' wives' identity.

Although not presented in a full chapter, I have briefly introduced this theory in this section, and only used it in the analysis in chapter nine.

According to Hubert Hermans (2003:93; Hermans et al. 1992:23-33) “dialogical self” is a metaphor coined by a Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). The principle feature is that a number of viewpoints embodied by characters in a novel are involved in dialogical relationships that can agree, oppose or conflict with each other. Hermans further points out that the “dialogical self” can be described in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of voiced positions in the setting of the mind, intertwined with the minds or voices of other people. As a result, the “dialogical self” has different I-positions that are embodied in the multiplicity of voices (Hermans 2001:243-281).

With regard to the self-understanding of the BACOMA pastors’ wives’ identity, this study will seek to show how within the internal realm of the self are located the various positions which they appropriate as theirs. By using the ‘dialogical theory’ I seek to highlight the dialogical perspectives (doctrinal, ecclesiastical, congregational, and cultural) that interact with the self in the identity construction.

Having considered the relevant theoretical frameworks for this study, the key questions and objectives of this study will now be discussed in detail.

1.6. Key Research Questions and Objectives

The research was done to answer the following central research question: What does being church mean for women who are married to pastors in the BACOMA, whose distinctive mark is freedom of choice in matters of faith and ministry according to the Baptist-held principle of the priesthood of all believers?

In response to the above central question, several sub-questions were formulated to clarify and guide the present study. These were:

- How can the tools of feminist ecclesiology and anthropology be used to examine the experiences of women in a global context and pastors’ wives in particular?
- How has Baptist ecclesiology influenced the role and identity of Baptist women in general and pastors’ wives in particular?

- What is the pastors' wives experience of being church in BACOMA?
- What is BACOMA's perspective of a Baptist pastor's wife?
- What are the socio-cultural ideologies that influence the subordination of women in general and pastors' wives in particular in BACOMA?
- What appropriate theologies can help BACOMA effectively engage with issues of gender discrimination and women?

The objectives of the study are therefore:

- To examine the experiences of women in general and pastors' wives in particular using the tools of feminist ecclesiology and anthropology.
- To critically analyse how Baptist ecclesiology has influenced the role and position of women in general and pastors' wives in particular.
- To examine and analyse the experience of pastors' wives from their perspective.
- To examine and analyse the perspective of BACOMA on pastors' wives.
- To determine socio-cultural factors that relegates women and pastors' wives in particular to subordination.
- To propose appropriate theologies that can help BACOMA effectively engage with issues of gender discrimination and women.

Having clarified the research question and objectives, the next section will focus on my positionality as the researcher in this study.

1.7. My Positionality as a Researcher

One factor that distinguishes feminist research from the conventional type is the 'self-disclosure' of the researcher. It is thus important to guide the reader into how my position will influence my research.

I belong to the Evangelical Christian tradition through my membership in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). The BACOMA is closely linked to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) of the United States of America, known for its patriarchal conservative tradition with regard to the position of women in pastoral positions. My

privileged position as a pastor's wife working as a lecturer in pastoral training at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Lilongwe, Malawi gives me the opportunity to interact with pastors and their wives both at local as well as at ecumenical level. My position also gives me the possibility of listening to the successes and struggles of the pastors, and especially their wives in the ministry. It is on the basis of this solidarity that I identify myself as an African woman struggling to understand, analyse and transform from within the patriarchal systems and structures that relegate women to subordinate positions in church and society.

1.7.1. My Position as a Christian Feminist Reconstructionist

I therefore write first from the position of a Christian feminist re-constructionist who seeks, in the words of Anne Clifford:

...a liberating theological core for women in the Christian tradition, while also envisioning a deeper transformation, a true reconstruction, not only of the church structures but also of civil society (2001:33).

In her analysis of the three types of feminist theology, Clifford (2001:5) states that a feminist re-constructionist position differs from that of the revolutionary or radical feminist theology whose proponents abandon the Christian tradition because they see the patriarchal tradition as being patently irredeemable. She observes however that, while both take a critical appraisal of patriarchy, Reconstructionists believe that transformation can be done by reinterpreting the traditional Christian symbols without abandoning Christianity (2001:33). Clifford further notes that re-constructionists also draw much from reformist feminist theology, especially in their commitment to Christianity. They differ however in that reformists take a moderate way, while the feminist re-constructionist takes a critical pathway in their commitment for the liberation of women (2001:33-34). The reconstructionist position which belongs to the third wave of feminism,¹⁰ goes beyond conscientisation of the women's experience of discrimination and subordination, towards unmasking the root causes of the ideologies of patriarchy and androcentrism (Clifford 2001:36). Another distinguishing feature of the Christian re-constructionist feminist theology according to Clifford is an acknowledgement of "the reign of God, proclaimed by Jesus, the Christ, in word and

¹⁰ For further discussion on third-wave feminism, see chapter two of this dissertation.

deed” (2001:34). She therefore affirms the liberating and empowering force of the reign of God for the “fullness of life” (2001:34) for women.

1.7.2. My Position as an African Woman Theologian

Second, I write from the position of an African woman theologian. In this, I attempt to find appropriate terminology that can adequately capture both sides of women’s activism for gender-justice, namely, the radical “head-on” approach and the more subtle “treading softly, but firmly” (Phiri and Nadar 2006b:2) adopted by the Circle which takes the positions of partnership, interdependence, and mutuality seriously and pro-actively.¹¹ Hence, as with the re-constructionist approach, anything that threatens life must be resisted. And yet, for African women theologians as represented in the Circle, African traditional religions and Western missionary Christianity are a “double-edged sword” which should be viewed with a “hermeneutic of suspicion” as both bear life-affirming and life-threatening realities, especially for women (*cf.* Oduyoye 2001a). Another factor that I draw from African women’s theologians, as represented by the Circle, is their insistence on partnering with male theologians in the struggle for justice, especially for women (Oduyoye 2001a).

Having stated my intended positionality; I will now discuss issues of reflexivity, credibility, dependability and transferability in the section which follows.

1.8. Reflexivity, Credibility, Dependability, and Transferability of the Research

My study falls under qualitative research. In qualitative research issues of reflexivity, credibility, dependability and transferability are as important as validity, reliability, and generalisation in quantitative research (*cf.* Mary van der Riet and Kevin Durrheim 2006:90-94). I will now turn to explain what these terms mean for my present research.

¹¹ The phrase “treading softly, but firmly” was first coined by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and was used to contrast the methodology used by the Circle with the ineffective “hammer and axe” intentionally confrontational method used by others in women’s struggle for gender justice (*cf.* Phiri and Nadar 2006b:1-4).

1.8.1. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a significant feature in feminist social research. Feminist researchers insist upon recognizing the shared ‘human attributes’ of researcher-participant. They are self-conscious of the role their ‘identification or disidentification’ with participants might play in the research process and therefore in the eliciting of research data (*cf.* Eagle et al. 2006:506). With such awareness, feminist researchers take the following options: 1) by including in their report, their subjective response to the research process; and 2) by using the counter-convention use of the first person, by referring to that of “*I* observed that/this,” or “in *my* analysis”, explicitly acknowledging their role in the research process. In this regard, I acknowledge my role in the research process by using the first person approach throughout this dissertation.

1.8.2. Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree by which the participants’ perceptions of the phenomenon under study are considered to be reliable. According to van der Riet and Durrheim (2006:91), the credibility of qualitative research is established while the research is in progress, whereby the researcher continually looks “for discrepant evidence to the hypotheses she or he is developing as a means of producing a rich and credible account”. In this study, this aspect has been taken care of by using research methods that have given accurate and rich picture of the research setting and participants.¹²

Multiple sources of data was used to ensure a broad representation of the perceptions of the experiences of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA. Through triangulation, the different sources of data have been compared to substantiate the conclusions of the study. A particular effort was made to present a balanced view of all the perspectives on the understanding of the experience of pastors’ wives within the BACOMA.¹³

Furthermore, an attempt was made to enhance the credibility of the present study by ensuring that the research findings are grounded in the data, by “staying close to the

¹² For further discussion on this topic, see chapter five of this dissertation.

¹³ See in particular, chapters six through eight of this dissertation.

data” from both an empathic as well as a constructivist position (*cf.* Terre Blanche et al. (2006:280). In addition, a clear connection was made between each theme (finding) and its supporting data extracted from the interviews. The themes will be presented in a manner appropriate to the data with all interpretations and conclusions supported by the data and literature.¹⁴ In particular, an effort will be made to minimize personal biases through a thick description of the research findings.

1.8.3. Dependability

Dependability or reliability in qualitative research “refers to the degree to which the reader can be convinced of the findings, as reported by the researcher” (van der Riet and Durrheim 2006:93). This will be achieved by providing a rich and detailed explanation of how data production and analysis was done. An empirical qualitative narrative analysis on the experiences of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA will be made with an extensive explanation of the methods.¹⁵

1.8.4. Transferability

Finally, the issue of transferability is related to the issue of generalisation (*cf.* Kelly 2006:381). Because of the contextual nature of qualitative research, research findings cannot be generalized to other settings than the one being researched (*cf.* van der Riet and Durrheim 2006:91; Kelly 2006:381). In other words, it reflects the extent to which a study is able to generalise its findings from the sample to the whole population. Instead, transferability in qualitative research is the term used to mean lessons learned in one context can be used in other similar settings (Durrheim 2006:49). In other words, the findings can help to understand other contexts or groups similar to those studied. An attempt will be made in my study to provide a thick description of the experiences of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA.¹⁶

I will now turn to outlining the structure of the present study.

¹⁴ See in particular, chapters six through nine of this dissertation.

¹⁵ See chapter five of this dissertation.

¹⁶ Chapters two through four of this dissertation will provide theoretical and doctrinal analysis so as to supply the frameworks within which the experiences of pastors’ wives have been analysed and theorised.

1.9. The Structure of this Study

This study will comprise of nine chapters, divided into two main sections. The first section comprises of chapters one through five. These chapters deal with the theoretical, doctrinal and methodological framing of the study. The second section, comprising of chapters six through nine will deal with the presentation, discussion and interpretation of the research findings and conclusions of the study. A brief description of the structure of the dissertation is given below according to what each chapter will deal with.

Chapter One: Here, I introduce the study with a brief discussion of its orientation and background.¹⁷ The discussion follows the following sub-themes: context of the study; rationale and motivation; locating the study within previous study; stating the problem; principal theories; key research questions and objectives; researcher's positionality; and issues of credibility, trustworthiness and transference of the research findings; and the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Here, I examine the theoretical framework provided by feminist ecclesiology so as to analyse the experience of being church of the pastors' wives in the BACOMA. These include feminist ecclesiology and feminist theological anthropology. In order to answer the question "What does it mean to be church in relation to the experiences of women globally?" I divide the chapter into three sections. In the first section, I discuss the development of feminist theologies within its socio-historical context of the third wave of feminist theology and African women theologies. In the second section, I examine and analyse feminist ecclesiology, focusing on its urgency, and issues of concern in feminist ecclesiology. I conclude the chapter with alternative models of an inclusive church that feminist ecclesiology proposes as a way forward.

Chapter Three: Here, I focus on the second theoretical framework of feminist theological anthropology. In attempting to answer the question "What does it mean for women to be human?" I again divide the chapter into three sections. Because this study is heavily located within the African women's theologies, in the first section I focus on the socio-historical development of African women's theologies, of the

¹⁷ Consult, Political Map of Malawi, p. xvi. in order to locate the geographical area of this study.

Circle, and of African feminist cultural hermeneutics. In the second section, I examine and analyse feminist theological anthropology, focusing on the global nature of women's subordination and issues of concern in feminist theological anthropology. I conclude the chapter with alternative feminist models of a relational anthropology that affirms the full humanity of women and men.

Chapter Four: Here, I focus on the Baptist doctrines that undergird the experience of Baptist women. In answering the question "What are the Baptist doctrines and teachings that prevent Malawi Baptist Convention women from experiencing the freedom and equality that the Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of all believers provides?" I divide the chapter into five sections. In section one I present a brief historical development of the BACOMA. In the second section I discuss the Baptist-held understanding of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In the third section, I analyse Baptist-held teachings on the authority of the Bible, ecclesiology, and spiritual gifts. The aim here will be to show how they impinge on women's full experience of the freedoms enshrined in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In the fourth section I analyse the North American, Southern Baptist Association (SBA) interpretation on Baptist-held teachings and its impact on the BACOMA with regard to women's roles in the church and its implications for women's theological education and women's role in the family in the light of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. I conclude the chapter by summarising a feminist critique of the Baptist doctrines.

Chapter Five: Here, I signal the beginning of field work by presenting the research design, methodology and methods used in the study. It centres on the general phenomenological perspective of life experience, discussing first the data-generation process and progresses to data-analysis process. The discussion is centred on the sub-themes of the phenomenology of experience; research participants and sampling; data generation and analysis process; methodological limitations, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Six: This chapter, and those which follow, presents the first-level analysis and interpretation of the actual experiences of the pastors' wives who were interviewed in my study from a feminist perspective. The discussion is based on the findings from the three categories of the research participants namely, twenty-nine

pastors' wives; fifty church members comprising deacons, women's and youth leaders and ordinary members; and eight pastor couples. In this chapter, I present a feminist comparative analysis of the views of the pastors' wives and the church community on the call of a pastor's wife and her theological education. In answering the question "In a church that does not ordain women, do pastors' wives receive a call to ministry and what is the implication for theological education and remuneration?" I divide the chapter into four sections. In the first section, I analyse the responses of the pastors' wives and the church community on whether a pastor's wife is called to ministry or not. In the second section, I analyse the type of theological training that they say they have received in preparation for ministry. In the third section, I analyse the challenges identified by pastors' wives, church community, and focus group in relation to the call and theological education of pastors' wives. I conclude the chapter by examining the feminist interpretation of women's call to ministry and theological education.

Chapter Seven: Here, I continue with the presentation and analysis of the research findings. In answering the question, "How do the pastors' wives, the church community, and the focus group understand the roles and challenges of a pastor's wife both in the church and at home?" I divide the chapter into four sections. The first section focuses on the pastors' wives roles in the church. The second section focuses on their roles in the home. The third section examines the challenges faced in relation to their roles. The fourth section provides a feminist critical analysis of the roles and challenges of the pastors' wives based on the feminist understanding of what ministry is for women.

Chapter Eight: Here, I specifically focus on domestic violence as one of the main themes that emerged from the narratives by the pastors' wives. In answering the question "Is there domestic violence in pastors' families and what are the implications for ministry?" First, I show the global nature of gender-based violence in general and domestic violence in particular. Second, I narrate the stories of domestic violence as experienced by pastors' wives in my study. Third, I examine the community's (in the church and in the society) perception of domestic violence especially with regard to a pastor's family. Fourth, I examine socio-cultural factors and religious teachings that contribute to domestic violence in the pastors' homes. Finally, I examine alternative

models of the husband-wife partnership as proposed by feminist theologians as a way forward.

Chapter Nine: Here, I analyse the different perspectives emerging from this study using feminist theologies. I also provide critical theological reflections based on the emerging themes. Using a deconstruction-reconstructionist approach, my aim is to provide alternative models for an inclusive ecclesiology for the BACOMA which affirms the humanity of women in general and pastor wives in particular. By way of conclusion, I end the chapter by pointing out the gaps as identified in the study for further research.

1.10. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented a comprehensive map that charts and guides my work here. The central themes covered include, rationale and motivation; locating the study within previous studies; the research problem; principle theories; key research questions and objectives; my positionality as a researcher; issues of credibility, trustworthiness and transferability of the research; and finally, the overall structure of the research study.

CHAPTER TWO

BEING CHURCH: SITUATING FEMINIST ECCLESIOLOGY WITHIN THE GLOBAL FEMINIST THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

In chapter one, I explained that the study of the experiences of pastors' wives in the BACOMA is located within feminist theological studies. The aim of this present chapter will be to situate the study within the development of feminist movement and its theories from a theological perspective. In particular, I will focus my attention on one of the feminist theoretical frameworks, namely, feminist ecclesiology.¹⁸ The question I will seek to answer will be: What does it mean to be church in relation to the experiences of women globally? In order to answer this question, I will first discuss the development of feminist theologies within its socio-historical context with the aim of locating my study within the third wave of feminist theology and in particular within African women theologies. Second, I will examine and analyse feminist ecclesiology, focusing on its urgency, and issues of concern. I will conclude the chapter with alternative models of an inclusive church that are offered by feminist ecclesiology.

2.2. Feminist Theologies: The Socio-historical Context

In this section I will examine the different types of feminist theologies locating them in their socio-historical context. This is necessary in order to highlight the development of the feminist theological discourse. It is my intention in this section to show that feminist theologies draw on the wider context of feminist theory and the feminist movement from the nineteenth century to the present day. In conclusion, I

¹⁸ This framework was briefly introduced in chapter one of this dissertation as part of an introduction to my entire study.

will provide a synopsis of the development of feminist theologies through three major historical ‘waves’.

2.2.1. The First Wave of Feminism

Euro-American women’s suffrage is considered by many to be the first wave of feminism. Emerging in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as women struggled for the right to vote and own property in their own name, it soon went into oblivion (*cf.* Clifford 2001:9-13; Bentley 1975:20-21). Of importance here is the fact that seeds of feminist biblical scholarship were planted during the first wave of feminism with the publication in 1898 of Elizabeth Stanton’s *Women’s Bible* (Stanton 1993). At this stage, some women started questioning sexism which was promoted by the church as a result of the way men interpreted the Bible.

2.2.2. The Second Wave of Feminism

Anne Clifford notes that the second wave emerged in the 1960s when women pressed for greater political and social equality; for equal pay for equal work; for reproductive rights and legal rights. In religious institutions, women began to press for the right to enter the ordained ministry (Clifford 2001:21; Susan Rakoczy 2004:12-13). Feminist theories were also brought into the various academic disciplines where scholars identified the various manifestations of the feminist movement, including liberal feminism, cultural feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism, all of which, Clifford asserts “affect and intersect with theology done by Christian feminist theologians” (2001:21). While it is not my aim here to describe each type of feminism, Clifford (2001:21) argues that they all failed to “capture the complex contours that take into account the great variety of women’s experiences” as my research will show. What is however important to note are the different stages of the development of the feminist movement, the main aim being to expose the root causes of sexist attitudes which were deeply entrenched in all spheres of life, including the religious life, theology in particular (Clifford 2001:21 *cf.* Jones 2000).

Although scholars such as Mary Baker Eddy (Clifford 2001:29) had already noticed the absence of women’s perspectives in Christian theology in the first wave feminism,

Christian feminist theology emerged during the second wave. While drawing on the feminist theory, according to Clifford:

The distinguishing feature of Christian feminist theology is its attention to the neglect of women's full incorporation into the people of God (2001:28-29).

It is thus made clear, throughout the centuries, that which was thought to be universal Christian theology, was actually male theology.

2.2.3. The Third Wave of Feminism

Third wave feminism developed towards the end of the 1970s as a critique of the whiteness and middle-class status of second wave feminism. As Ursula King has pointed out:

Feminist theology is not simply a white, Western, middle-class phenomenon....The prophetic critique of feminist theology and its call for liberation can empower women everywhere (1994a:15).

As a result of this, the injustice that women from African-American, Hispanic, African, Asian, Latin American and indigenous cultures experienced were also brought on board and taken into serious consideration (Clifford 2001:12, 29; Rakoczy 2004:13).

2.2.4. The Theoretical Location of this Study

This study is located firmly within the third wave of the 1970s feminist movement which embraced feminism internationally, with its focus on women's experience as a source of theology.¹⁹ It was on the basis of the diverse experiences and social locations of women that various feminist theologies came into being.²⁰ These include:

¹⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983:12-13) notes that "experience" includes experience of the "divine, of oneself, and of the community and the world in an interacting dialectic".

²⁰ Emphasizing the diversity of women's experience, Serene Jones (2000) warns against generalizing, and stresses the need for feminists to listen carefully to the varied experiences of all women. Similarly, Ursula King (1994a:4) argues that feminist theology is "always dynamic and pluralistic...for it means suffering and seeking, listening and speaking, voicing and questioning, encountering and sharing, responding to and being responsible for action".

*Womanist*²¹ theology by the African-American women; *Mujerista*²² by the Latin American women; Asian feminist theology²³ by the Asian women; and African women theologies²⁴ by the African women. What all these third wave feminist theologies have in common is that they are connected to the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) (See Fabella and Oduyoye (1998); King (1994a). Until this time, it was Western white women theologies that were dominant.²⁵ However, despite the differences in the naming of feminist theologies, Clifford (2001:30) observes that what Christian feminist theologies had in common was the rejection of patriarchy and androcentrism as not being reflected in the message of who God was. Reuther (1983:13) makes a similar observation that women share a common condition of “dependence, secondary existence, domestic labour, sexual exploitation, and the projection of their role in procreation into a total definition of their existence”. Nevertheless, the assertion made by Third World feminist theologies should be taken seriously that the experience of sexism and discrimination among women differs according to race, ethnicity and class.

Having established the emergence of various feminist theologies according to the diversity of women’s experience, I will now turn to feminist ecclesiology.

²¹ Anne Clifford (2001:21) notes that although Alice Walker is credited with coining the term in the 1970s, its first extensive explanation appeared in print in her book, *In Our mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose*, in which Walker asserts that “womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender”. Similarly, Raquel Clair (2007:55) asserts that “womanist” resonates with African American women of colour and their experience of patriarchy, racist views by white women and white men. On the other hand, Stephanie Mitchem (2002:5 *cf.* Williams 1994) stresses that race, gender, and socio-economic dimensions of class and income undergird womanist theology.

²² Coined by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz (1994; 1996) to name Hispanic women because they found that Anglo-feminism undermined the intersection of racism/ethnic prejudice, classism, and sexism in their midst. Clifford (2001:26) notes that other women of Hispanic origin prefer to use Latina when speaking of their theology; others prefer something that reflects their country of origin, such as Mexican-American or Chicana, because each Latin American country has its own unique history that has affected the experience of the women who live there.

²³ Championed by Kwok Pui-lan (1994 *cf.* 2000), this form of theologizing takes into account the marginal status of Asian women as they grapple with multiple layers of oppression, e.g., economic, political, cultural, and religious.

²⁴ Founded by a few African women theologians led by Mercy Amba Oduyoye the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians aims at rejecting sexism and patriarchy and at establishing a more just and equitable society of men and women that seek the well-being of the other, including the environment. See, Oduyoye and Kanyoro (1990b); Oduyoye (2001a); Phiri and Nadar (2006c); Rakoczy (2004:19-23).

²⁵ African women theologians contest that the use of the term ‘Third World’ connotes denigration of the African continent by the ‘First World’. Hence, they prefer the term ‘Two-Thirds World’. See, Phiri and Nadar (2006c:5-10). Currently, the terms, ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ are used to refer to the ‘First’ and the ‘Third’ Worlds respectively.

2.3. Feminist Ecclesiology

All of the feminist theologies mentioned above identify ecclesiology as an important area of study and theological engagement. This is because, regardless of their numerical strength, globally women have experienced exclusion and marginalization in the church. My interest in this section is first, to discuss the urgency and goal of feminist ecclesiology; second, to identify some major issues that are of concern in feminist ecclesiology, namely, ‘church’ and ‘*ekklesia*,’ church history; position and ministry of women in the church; theological education and African women; biblical authority and interpretation; and traditional images of church; and third, to discuss new models of church as put forward by scholars of feminist ecclesiology.

2.3.1. The Urgency and Goal of Feminist Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology, which simply means the study of the doctrine of the church, has not escaped the critical eye of many feminist theologians. Daniel Migliore (1991:185) observes that “for many Christians ecclesiology is perhaps the least interesting and the most irritating topic of Christian theology” because “many associate it with the politics of organization and management” of the church. Mary Hunt (2005:64) argues that ecclesiology is a topic churches should have discussed with women for centuries because of its ambiguity, especially in relation to women’s experience of church, where women have largely been excluded from the process of definition (*cf.* Watson 2002:30). Feminists have thus accused the churches of being “the ideological backbone and stronghold of sexist practices” (Nicholas Lossky et al. (2002:1037). In their reports of an ecumenical Community Study Group of the World Council of Churches, (which include voices from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the United Kingdom), Janet Crawford and Michael Kinnamon (1983:28) show that churches are often seen as perpetrators of oppressive attitudes towards women as well as lagging behind society with regard to transformation.

In this regard, Nicola Slee (2003:83) bemoans the fact that the Christian church, as much as society, is “riddled with male-dominated hierarchy and clericalism, patriarchal symbolism and language, and its history and traditions”. Moreover, Stephanie Mitchem (2002:127) makes similar observations about women of colour in the United States of America, that “some church structures in black community have

generally excluded women from formal leadership roles, yet women have comprised the majority membership of black churches”. With regard to churches in Asia, Kwok Pui-lan (2000:99) has made similar remarks about the exclusion of women, where she notes that women are marginalized in the power structures of the church and the life of the congregation not just by the male hierarchy of the church but by “those women who are steeped in the church’s androcentric teachings as well”. African women theologians share similar experiences that the churches’ teachings have promoted women’s oppression of other women shown by women opposing the ordination of women (*cf.* Phiri 2002a:75-76). Of significance to this study is the 1995 Pan African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, whose theme focused on Women in the Household of God in Africa. Letty Russell lists many forms of dehumanization of women in the life of the church as the “reason for the development of *feminist ecclesiology* from the perspective of advocacy for the full humanity of *all* women together with *all* men, and in harmony with *all* the creation” (2001:48-49 *Italics original*).²⁶

The goal of feminist ecclesiology is therefore to seek to equip scholars in the field of gender and religion with appropriate tools to engage the existing church traditions and structures. This is rooted in the strong desire among women to make the church a place where justice is done and right relationships are formed in a “framework of interconnectedness and participation” (Watson 2002:109). For example, Hunt (2005:54) argues that “in these difficult times on our planet, ecclesiology (from the feminist perspective) is a welcome and useful tool for creating justice” because, according to Mitchem (2002:127), it studies aspects of the church itself, “its structures, systems, and polity” including its “doctrinal development” and also “explores its traditions and heresies”. As a result, Baptist ecclesiology needs to be critically analysed through the lens of feminist ecclesiology.²⁷

²⁶ Letty Russell (2001:48-49) lists the following forms of violence against women that necessitate the development of feminist ecclesiology: sexual harassment in the churches; giving divine blessing to male dominance and physical violence in the home and to the miss-use of male clerical power to dominate and harass women; preaching and teaching that women were created second and “fell” first and, therefore, deserve to be dominated and controlled, and to the re-enforcing of ancient patriarchal traditions and cultural traditions that obscure the full humanity and dignity of women as being created, with men, in the image of God.

²⁷ This will be discussed in further depth in chapter four of this dissertation.

2.3.2. Issues of Concern in Feminist Ecclesiology

Having established the goal of feminist ecclesiology, I will now turn to some of the issues that are of concern in feminist ecclesiology, namely, the terms ‘church’ and ‘*ekklesia*,’ church history; position and ministry of women in the church; women and theological education; the Bible, its authority and interpretation; and traditional images and new models of church as put forward by scholars of feminist ecclesiology.

2.3.2.1. The Translation of *ekklesia*

The first issue concerns the translation of *ekklesia* as ‘church.’ Feminists have challenged the translation of the English term ‘church’ from the Greek *ekklesia*. For example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1997:2-3) argues that to translate ‘ekklesia’ as ‘church’ is misleading. She points out that the word ‘church’ derives from the Greek word *kyriak*, which means “belonging to the lord/master/father/husband”, while “ekklesia” is best rendered as “democratic assembly or congress of full citizens” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1997:3). This entails two contradictory meanings: the *kyriak* which subordinates everyone to the master/father of the house, and the *ekklesia* which understands the equality of all its members in terms of citizenship and friendship (Schüssler Fiorenza 1997:3). Schüssler Fiorenza (2002) takes this argument forward when she argues that it is the historical development that has privileged the kyriarchal/hierarchical form of church over that of a democratic congress or discipleship of equals that characterised the Jesus movement and the Early Church. Clifford (2001:135) makes similar observations that it is the church authority modelled after imperial Roman rule, with its well-defined hierarchy, that has become the paradigm for the Christian church, and that along with it, is the subordination of women. It is this ‘patriarchal-kyriarchal’ form of church, with its all-male clerical control as well as authoritarian and hierarchical structures which feminist ecclesiology challenges because it is the one that continues to be oppressive towards women by ruling over and excluding them (Hilkert 1993:76). In response to this, feminist ecclesiology seeks to deconstruct this kind of church and reclaim the democratic ‘ekklesia’ of the equality of citizenship where all are welcome to mutually and equally participate in the building of the Body of Christ (*cf.* Hunt 2005; Pui-lan 2000:102-103).

Furthermore, Watson (2002:47-52 *cf.* Young 1990:107) argues that since the ‘ekklesia’ is portrayed in the New Testament as a local autonomous democratic assembly, it can be an effective starting point for change for it can make decisions about issues without seeking approval of the authorities. The model of the local autonomous church resonates with existing Baptist ecclesiological models and will therefore be suitable for developing appropriate theologies that can help the BACOMA effectively engage with issues from the perspective of the local church. At the same time, I am aware that the same cannot happen in the Episcopal churches (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, and Lutheran) because of their hierarchical models of ministry and church government.

2.3.2.2. The Writing of Church History

The second issue concerns the writing of church history. Feminists such as Watson (2002:16-17) have challenged the claim of conventional church history as being “objective, neutral and universal history” because, as she argues, “writing history is a process of selection and selective interpretation in order to make sense of the present”. For Watson, this process has essentially been the history of men, written by men and transmitted by men as if women never existed. Citing Schüssler Fiorenza, Watson (2002:17-21) points out that although women have always been ‘church’ their experiences, their contributions, or their achievements have generally been marginalized, trivialized, or ignored.

The particular concern of African women theologians has been the dearth of literature on African women by African women. One of the reasons the Circle was formed was to fill this gap (Oduyoye and Kanyoro 2001a:3; Phiri 1997a:15-18). As Phiri has observed, in Religious Studies and the Departments of Sociology in universities across the African continent, there is a telling shortage of scholarly literature on African church history.

Since its inception, the Circle has been very instrumental in research and writing and compiling books and articles in journals on women’s issues as written resources (Phiri 1997a:15-18). The book edited by Phiri et al. *Her-stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2002) is one such publication. Over the years, as NyaGondwe-Fiedler (2010:186) has rightly observed

in her recently defended PhD dissertation, Circle women have written, edited, and published books and articles that have “transformed this landscape of theological literature in Africa”. As a result, many theological institutions in Africa have benefitted greatly from literature from the Circle as resource material for on-going research on women’s issues.

2.3.2.3. The Position and Ministry of Women

The third issue of concern to feminist ecclesiology is the position and ministry of women in the church. As Susan Rakoczy (2004:198) has pointed out, “no issue in feminist theology is as contentious as that of women’s place in the church and their call to ministry”. Similarly, Clifford (2001:148) admits that the topic on women’s participation in their churches is a big issue that it can only be adequately covered in many volumes. It is a controversial issue because, as Slee (2003) has also observed, until women speak up, many congregations will continue to deny women access to its practices, offices and positions of leadership, as well as opportunities for theological study. This is attributed to the fact that, as Thayalini Thiagarajah (2004:37 *cf.* Pui-lan 2000:98-102) from an Asian perspective notes, the church as an institution, has over the years developed into a pyramidal church hierarchy, the result of which has been “power struggle, corruption, manipulation, unjust practices and abuse”. Writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Ruether notes that clericalism empowers the pastor over the laity. It also dis-empowers women in sacramental life, in theological education, and in church administration.²⁸ Clifford (2001:164-166) has expressed similar sentiments that although the participation of Hispanic and Latin American Catholic women in the church is increasing, much work still needs to be done for the realization of the discipleship of equals in the church. With regard to African American women, Jacquelyn Grant (1992:141) criticizes the saying that “women are the ‘backbone’ of the church”. She argues that what appears to be a compliment actually means that “women are in the “background” and should be kept there as mere

²⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether defines clericalism as “the separation of ministry from mutual empowerment in community and its distortion into hierarchically ordered castes of clergy over laity. The clergy then monopolize sacramental action, education and teaching, administration and leadership in mission, turning the laity into passive dependents who are to receive these services from the clergy and carry out their orders, but not participate in shaping, defining and embodying these activities themselves”. See, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Church as Liberation Community from Patriarchy: The Praxis of Ministry as Discipleship of Equals*. *Institute for Feminism and Religion News*, (23 July 2005). Available at: <<http://www.instituteforfeminismandreligion.org /RRRWoo.html>> [Accessed 20 May 2009].

“support workers”. Grant therefore laments the fact that this understanding has given women responsibilities only in the kitchen “while men are elected or appointed to the important boards and leadership positions” (1992:141). In the case of the BACOMA, who claim equality of all believers through the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, women are consistently denied entry into the ordained ministry and leadership positions because of their sex (Longwe 2007:197-200).

Notwithstanding the fact that some Christian church denominations ordain women and incorporate them into leadership positions, the underlying features and assumptions of clericalism continue to operate. As Reuther (1996:209) has argued, “constructing a church of liberation from patriarchy requires dismantling clericalism” as well. She thus calls for the churches to deal with this issue both “in terms of ecclesiastical organization and in terms of theology” (1996:209).

For African women theologians, the concern has been voiced that the church in Africa has relegated women to subordinate positions through some of its widely-held church traditions, teachings, and the use of the Bible. For example, concerning the Presbyterian Church in Malawi, Anne Nachisale Musopole has noticed:

We saw God becoming reconciled with Malawian women, too, through Jesus, and we wondered why in our churches women are left out of important decisions, even those concerning women and children as members of the church (2006:199).

Musopole (2006:199 *cf.* Phiri 1997a:119-120) further laments the fact that although these women did their theological training together with men and even did well, their ordination was not permitted. She attributes this attitude to the inherited European Christianity that does not allow women to become ordained.

The Presbyterian Church is not alone. Modupe Owanikin (2006:208) adds the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Baptist churches, and attribute their attitude to “perhaps the long traditions of these churches, which are characterized by rigid conservatism”. Tradition is therefore the driving force behind the unwillingness of these Christian denominations in Malawi to change, whereby the exclusion of women is justified in the name of ‘tradition.’ The argument of African women theologians

within the Circle is finessed even more in that it is the missionary-western type of churches that do not allow women into leadership ranks while in African Traditional Religion (ATR) women were allowed to hold priestly offices (*cf.* Owanikin 2006; Musopole 2006; Phiri 1997a). Indeed, Owanikin (2006:208) contrasts the Western mission initiated churches with the numerous leading women prophets in the Pentecostal-type indigenous churches, most of which were even founded by women. Owanikin's observation is supported by much scholarly literature which reveals the significant roles that women play in most African Initiated Churches (AICs), especially the Spirit-type movements (see for example, Sundkler 1961; Phiri 2000a; Daneel 2000). Owanikin (2006:208) also observes that while women in society are increasingly holding leadership positions, the church still lags behind, resiliently holding on to its long-held traditions.

The above women's arguments are supported by some male evangelical Christians, for example the American Evangelical Robert Clouse who has pleaded for Christians to deal justly with others regardless of race, social class, or gender. Clouse supports his argument by citing the philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, who stated that:

The question that women in the church are raising is a question of justice. There are, indeed, a good many more dimensions involved than this one of justice, but justice is basic. Women are not asking for handouts of charity from us men. They are asking that in the church—

in the church, of all places—they receive their due. They are asking why gender is relevant for assigning tasks and roles and offices and responsibilities and opportunities in the church. The gifts of the Spirit are relevant. But why gender? (Wolterstorff cited in Clouse 1989:20-21 *cf.* Wolterstorff 1986).

Of particular interest to my study is the fact that Clouse raises this question in a book dedicated to a discussion of four views on evangelical doctrines on women's

participation in the church.²⁹ It is therefore timely that the BACOMA joins in this discourse.

Similarly, male observers from The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women add their concern to African women theologians, when they lament that:

We have to face the reality that women are discriminated against within the church and within the African tradition. Within both traditions we argue at a theoretical level that men and women are equal, but many things at a practical level continue to undermine and contradict that affirmation (Bongani Finca 1994:192).

It is thus clear: while the churches claim to believe one thing, their practice is different (Oduyoye 2001a:85).

2.3.2.4. The Access of Women to Theological Training

The fourth issue of concern, especially to African women theologians, is the observation that the church has denied women access to theological training. Even where they are accepted, there are often questions raised as to how liberating the theological training is for African Christian women and pastors' wives in particular. African women are not only shaped by their traditional religion and culture, but also by the teachings of the church. As noted by Phiri (2005:34), it is the desire of African women theologians that both women and men receive a "relevant theological education that promotes female and male humanity as reflecting the image of God". Phiri (2005:34) goes on to argue that:

...such an education will help demystify the Bible so that it does not add to the oppression of women, but rather becomes life-giving' as women understand God for themselves, instead of through an "all-male pastor.

²⁹ These views can be summarized as follows: (i) the traditional view that women should not exercise authority over men or teach men; (ii) that which allows women to teach but not hold positions of authority; (iii) that which advocates for the plurality of ministry and yet questions clerical ordination as a means of conferring authority; and (iv) that which defends the full equality of men and women in the church. A fuller discussion of each of these positions can be found in Clouse and Clouse (1989).

Similarly, Oduyoye (1995a:191 cited in Phiri 2005:41) identifies with the need for a theological education that will help the church in Africa “get rid of the literal interpretation of the Bible that lead to the oppression of women”.

2.3.2.5. The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible

A fifth area that has caused much concern especially among African women theologians is that of the authority and interpretation of the Bible. The centrality of the Bible in African theologies is well acknowledged for it bears witness to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The Bible has also been a tool of liberation for many African people and for the expansion of African Christianity, especially with the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of the African peoples as espoused by scholars such as David B. Barrett (1968), Lamin Sanneh (1989), and Kwame Bediako (1995). Oduyoye (1995a:173-174), along with other feminists, has nevertheless expressed her anger at the African churches who have absolutised the Bible with phrases such as “the Bible says” especially with regard to the oppression and subordination of women. She has observed that such high regard of the Bible inevitably makes people regard everything in the Bible as truthful, normative, and unquestionable (1995a:174). African women have become victims to this viewpoint because as Oduyoye goes on to observe, African Christians love the Bible, “they own it and they quote from it very easily” (1995a:174). She therefore warns that although the Bible’s liberative stance has served Africa well, “oppressive strands of the same Bible help to reinforce the traditional socio-cultural oppression of women” (1995a:175). Oduyoye (1995a:191) goes on to advise that African women need to be suspicious of what the church teaches and admonishes in the name of the Bible, and that they need to be proactive in studying the Bible for themselves with their own life experiences as the correct starting point.

With regard to biblical interpretation, African women theologians observe that many churches in Africa still maintain the traditional, male-oriented interpretations of the Bible that serve to justify and maintain that women are subordinate to men in the order of creation, as well as stereotyping such roles and images in church and society, thereby relegating them to the position of second class citizens (*cf.* Crawford and Kinnamon 1983). Phiri (1997a:49) expresses similar sentiments that “the missionaries’ image and understanding of the place of women in the church in the

nineteenth-century was based on a specific interpretation of Genesis and the letters of St. Paul”.

For a long time, women have accepted and internalised this kind of teaching. From a postcolonial women’s perspective, Musa Dube (2000:16) points out that “the connection of biblical texts to Western imperialism has had several implications for reading the biblical texts—such as issues of the land, race, power...and gender”. She therefore calls for a new “model of reading that takes seriously the presence of both imperialism and patriarchy, and seeks for liberating interdependence between genders, races, nations, economics, cultures, political structures, and so on” (2000:39). The church in Africa adopted the same attitude of subordinating women, believing it to be sanctioned by God. As a result, women were denied full participation in both church and society.³⁰

As I have sought to confirm, not all African cultures are liberative and life affirming for women and men. By using African feminist cultural hermeneutics, African women approach the Bible with similar caution, especially since the Bible has become part of the African context (Oduyoye 2001a:11). Moreover, as Justin Ukpong (1995:6) has observed, the Bible itself is “steeped through and through in the culture and life experiences of those communities that produced them”. Hence, as with culture, the Bible is a “double-edged sword” and it should be used with a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (Oduyoye 2001a:11-12). For Oduyoye (2001a:11-12), the biblical narratives are embedded in multicultural layers, and cultural hermeneutics should enable women to view the Bible through African women’s eyes and to distinguish and extract from it what is liberating and life giving.³¹

African women theologians have thus brought to the fore new or alternative readings of the Bible with a view to retrieving life-affirming elements. For example, Teresa Okure (1988:52) points out that although the creation account in the Old Testament Book of Genesis together with the New Testament writings of the Apostle Paul have been misinterpreted to determine the role and status of women in church and society,

³⁰ It will be shown in chapter four of this dissertation that the BACOMA needs to adopt a rereading of the Bible with new eyes from the perspective of African women.

³¹ How Baptists use the authority of the Bible and the interpretation of certain biblical texts to legitimize the subjugation of women in general and the pastors’ wives in particular will be further examined in chapter four of this dissertation.

there is a liberative side of the story and other biblical stories where women are shown as God's co-workers and agents of life, apart from being just a mother. I concur with Okure's call for women to "reject all measures that contradict their divine vocation as agents of life" (1988:53) because, as she argues, the liberative elements in the Bible with respect to women stem from the divine perspective, while the oppressive ones stem from the human perspective. She notes that the struggle for liberation and transformation can only be genuine if it is liberation in Christ and hence, "sustained efforts must be made to educate both men and women, through Bible study groups, in a proper understanding of the Bible" (1988:57). Accordingly, Okure (1988:57) maintains that such efforts will "free people from centuries of socio-cultural and theological conditionings based on a false understanding of the teaching of the Bible concerning women".

How can BACOMA develop practical strategies for equipping the BACOMA pastors' wives to become God's agents in their own right; agents that will understand God for themselves and not mediated through their husbands? Cultural hermeneutics will be the means of bringing a better understanding of the experiences of the BACOMA pastors' wives of their socio-economic, cultural and religious oppression; and seek life-affirming theologies.

2.3.2.6. Traditional Images of the Church

The traditional images of church are the sixth issue of concern to feminist ecclesiology. Feminists have challenged various images that have traditionally been used to describe the church because feminist ecclesiology "seeks to transform church traditions so that women can experience that tradition, and its practices, as welcoming" (Russell 2001:49). I discuss below four traditional images of the church which, according to Watson (2002:3), show signs of "ambiguity and alienation".

2.3.2.6.1. The Church as the Bride of Christ

Watson (2002:33-37) critiques the image of "the church as feminine" as described in Ephesians 5:22-33. In this text, the writer challenges his male audience to love their wives "as Christ loved the church", and the married women to "obey their husbands as in the Lord". Watson (2002:33-37) makes the argument that throughout the history

of the Christian tradition, married women in heterosexual relationships have been instructed to obey and be submissive to their husbands. This kind of teaching puts the woman in a passive and subservient position which has brought unspeakable suffering to many. Such teaching justifies a hierarchical, rather than a mutual love relationship. It also endorses pre-existing socio-cultural attitudes and sex-role stereotyping in many societies as shown by African woman theologians (e.g., Phiri 1997a; Oduyoye 2001a:81), and Asian woman theologian (e.g., Pui-lan 2000:99-102).

2.3.2.6.2. The Church as the Body of Christ

This image is taken from 1 Cor. 12:12-31 where Paul describes the church as the Body of Christ with every member being a functioning member, but all belonging to the same body. However, Watson (2002:43) challenges this long standing tradition which “renders women’s bodies as unclean and in need of purification”. Watson (2002:42-43) therefore asks the important question:

What does it mean for women that on the one hand they have, through baptism, the symbolic new birth, and have become part of the body of Christ, but on the other are denied access to its assemblies after their own bodies have been rendered temporarily unclean by giving birth?

Pui-lan (2000:99-100) expresses similar sentiments about purity taboos in respect to women in Asian religious traditions. She observes, for example, that in the Shinto, Buddhist and Taoist religions, menstruation and sexuality are viewed as unclean and negative. Instead of challenging these unjust social customs, the Christian churches perpetuate and reinforce the exclusion of women on the same basis through their teachings and practices. Issues of sexuality and impurity for women have thus been an important topic of discussion by African women theologians because the Christian tradition has used the same rules drawn from the Old Testament Book of Leviticus to exclude women from ordination and the sacraments (*cf.* Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1992; Oduyoye 1995a). The question that women ask is thus: “Why women should be regarded as impure for bringing life?” The extent to which women are excluded from church activities on the basis of their menstrual cycle is yet to be investigated in the BACOMA.

2.3.2.6.3. The Church as Servant

According to Migliore (1991:1996 *cf.* Russell 1974:140-144), this model may also be called the “diaconal model” for the church “serves God by serving the world in its struggle for emancipation, justice, and peace”. In other words, the church is a servant rather than master of the world. Migliore (1991:198) further points out that the servant model’s significance is that it helps to remove the spiritual/material division that exists in the mission of the church. However, Migliore (1991:198) is aware of the dangers of distortion in this model. One such danger is that ‘service’ for women has often meant “always being submissive and allowing others to dominate one’s life rather than entering into new freedom and friendship in Christ that empowers service of others”. While acknowledging the centrality of service of God and others for Christian identity, Migliore (1991:198) warns that its meaning must be carefully distinguished from “servitude and self-negation”.

Similarly, Russell (1974:140) argues that the role of the servant in both the Old and New Testaments was in service to others on behalf of God. It was not an indication of inferiority or a form of subordination towards other people, but “rather a free offering of self and acceptance of service and love in return”. She further argues that whatever the role of servant has become to mean in the history of the church, “in the Bible it is clearly a role of honour and responsibility to take part in God’s work of service in the world” (Russell 1974:141-142). Russell, thus cites the Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng, in his important (1972) work, *Why Priests? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*, when he observes that the “opposite of service is domination and misuse of power (Russell 1974:143). Yet, she argues, “both women and men, as representatives of the new humanity, are called by God in Jesus Christ to be both servants and apostles.” (1974:143).

Watson (2002:44-45) points out that the metaphor of service, especially if read in the context of women’s experience in both society and the church, has meant service without the benefit of financial return. In addition, the servant metaphor is often used to justify the violence and abuse that women suffer, “as Christ suffered for them”. On the basis of this analysis, Watson (2002:46-47) goes on and asks whether the “self-denying suffering of Christ is the message which women need to hear or whether it condones and perpetuates structures which are indeed sinful and require eradication”.

She thus calls for a feminist reconsideration of ecclesiology which takes account of discourses of women's faith and spirituality.

Similarly, Stephen Patson (1997:250) can point out that:

Theologies which emphasize servanthood and the ideology of motherhood may play on women's guilt, encouraging a position of submission and servitude which limits their potential.

As I will later show, pastors' wives in the BACOMA live a life of servanthood as they serve the church without financial benefit.³² This is because they are supposed to work as their husband's helper ("help meet"³³) even though, as it will be shown from the stories of the pastors wives, they feel they work harder for the church than their husbands!

2.3.2.6.4. The Church as the Family of God

Although Watson does not discuss it, this model is probably the most pervasive imagery for the church in the New Testament.³⁴ As Karl Sandnes (1994:10) has pointed out, early Christian ecclesiology was examined from the point of view of the family or household (*oikos*). In African Christianity, African theologians propose this model of family as it depicts symbols and analogies such as 'clan', 'kinship', 'lineage', 'relationship', 'solidarity', and 'communion'. Douglas Waruta (1990:117), in his search for an African church, asserts that if the church should be an "African community working as a team; it must be presented as a big family" with an emphasis on "communion, awareness and solidarity". Similarly, John Waliggo (1990) speaks of the "African clan" as a model of African church. Accordingly, Charles Nyamiti (1990) proposes an African ancestral ecclesiology because of the church's association with Christ, the Supreme Ancestor or Ancestral Spirit. All these analogies suggest a community which embraces those yet to be born, the living and the living dead, as well as the participation of all its members.

³² For an in-depth analysis of the research data see chapters six through eight of this dissertation.

³³ See Genesis 2:18 "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (King James Version).

³⁴ See, Exploring Christianity: The Church. <<http://www.christianity.co.nz/church9.htm>> [Accessed 28 May 2009].

This model of the Christian church as a family agrees with the feminist ecclesiological models that emphasise the ideas of community, participation, sharing, and inclusiveness, all of which are inherent in both the Christian tradition and the African worldview. That said, African women theologians' concern is that both the "African community and family are structured on patriarchal principles which are oppressive to both themselves and their children" (and the men too) (Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike 1990:70). African women theologians call for the purification of the patriarchal nuances if they are to "serve an adequate symbol of a just and non-sexist" church (e.g., Nasimiyu-Wasike, (1990); Rosemary Edet and Bette Ekeya 1988).

I will now turn to a more detailed discussion of feminist alternative models of an inclusive ecclesiology.

2.4. Alternative Feminist Models for an Inclusive Ecclesiology

The call and concern of feminist ecclesiology is to return to the early church's understanding of church as being an inclusive community. I therefore want to conclude this chapter by examining alternative models that feminist scholars have proffered, namely, the "discipleship of equals" model proposed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; the "roundtable" and "hot-house" models proposed by Russell; and the *koinonia* model as proposed by Nelly Ritchie and African women theologians.

2.4.1. The Church as a Discipleship of Equals

First is the model of church as a discipleship of equals, proposed by Schüssler Fiorenza (1997:1).³⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza (1997:2) points out that:

In the discipleship of equals, wo/men have equal status, dignity and rights as images of the divine and equal access to the multifarious gifts of the Spirit, Sophia. Each and every one enriches the discipleship community of equals with their different experiences, vocations and talents. In short, the concept of "discipleship of equals" seeks to map a radical democratic vision and reality that articulates an alternative to kyriarchal structures of domination.

³⁵ Ranjini Rebera from Asia (cited in Kanyoro 2002a:76 n.17), uses the term "partnerships of equals" to mean "discipleship of equals".

This model underscores the principle of equality in diversity (Schüssler Fiorenza 1997:2). Schüssler Fiorenza thus calls for a return to the biblical tradition where the community around Jesus and the early church was indeed a “discipleship of equals” and the patriarchal/kyriarchal model of power over and domination of others was abolished.

In arguing for the fuller inclusion and participation of women, Kwok Pui-lan points out that Asian feminist theologians search for exemplary women disciples and their ministries during the Early Church period. As with Schüssler Fiorenza, Pui-lan (2000:102-109 *cf.* Fabella et al. 1983:11-12) challenges contemporary Christian women to build an inclusive and egalitarian faith community of equals.

In similar vein, Ruether (2005) argues that the concept of church as a “discipleship of equals” is based on her understanding of “church as a community of liberation from patriarchy”.³⁶ For her, the Early Christian church was a community that overcame all social hierarchies of ethnicity, class and gender through “baptism into the Christ-nature in whom there is no more Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female” (Gal. 3:28). Ruether concludes by lamenting that this vision of a community of discipleship of equals was lost as relationships of domination and then hierarchies began to take root socially as well as spiritually in the church. It is important to note that both Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether are from the Roman Catholic tradition. It is equally important to listen to a Protestant voice of an alternative ecclesiology. Therefore, the next alternative model I have chosen is proposed by Russell, the first woman to be ordained in the US-based, United Presbyterian Church.

2.4.2. The Church as a Roundtable

The second model of church is that of a roundtable. Russell has proposed this model of the church based on the concept of a ‘round table’ which does not allow distinction between people based on either rank or status. It includes all those for whom “society and religion have excluded and invites them to gather around God’s table of

³⁶ Ruether argues that this was the understanding of the early Christian church as a community of liberation from slavery and oppression as symbolized by the theme of Israel’s exodus from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. See, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Church as Liberation Community from Patriarchy: The Praxis of Ministry as Discipleship of Equals*. *Institute for Feminism and Religion News*, (23 July 2005). Available at: <<http://www.instituteforfeminismandreligion.org/RRRWoo.html>> [Accessed 20 May 2009].

hospitality” (Russell 1993:25). Russell argues that the ‘roundtable’ is a “symbol of hospitality and a metaphor for gathering, sharing and dialogue where no one should be excluded nor denied a share in the resources and privileges”.³⁷ Russell further notes that everyone has the power to name the agenda, and authority is shared among the community of all believers. For Russell (1993:25), this is what it means to be church in the image of the Triune God. Utilizing this powerful symbol of the roundtable, the Circle also observes that in addition to creating a safe space for women to theologise, the ‘circle’ is the creation of a new model of church and society in Africa which is inclusive, “open and non-discriminatory” (Bam 2005:11 *cf.* Oduyoye 2001c).

With regard to church leadership, the image of a roundtable envisions a leadership role that is both liberating and empowering; it recognizes that a call to ministry is a call to share in Christ’s ministry of service. Hence, the feminist critique of the traditional understanding of ordination as a hierarchical divine, rather than a “gospel understanding of the order of freedom” (Russell 1993:47) needs to be taken seriously. As with the “discipleship of equals” model, there is equality in diversity in the community of the “round table”.

2.4.3. The Church as a ‘Hot-house’ or Safe Space

The third alternative model of church as ‘hot-house’ (safe space) is also proposed by Russell. Using the Japanese ‘hot-house’ analogy as meaning a “safe space”,³⁸ Russell identifies such a safe space by referring to the “church as sanctuary”, a concept deeply rooted in the tradition of the “cities of refuge” in the Hebrew and Christian traditions (Exod. 21:13; Num. 35:9-15). Coming from the Latin *sanctus*, and Hebrew *kadosh* to describe God as ‘holy’, Russell (2001:50) argues that the “right of protection for all persons is derived from God’s holiness and provides the basic theological

³⁷ Russell (1993:17-18) sees “the table” as one of the most important metaphors for church in the Gospels, especially in the Gospel of Luke. She argues that the image of table is “defined by Christology”, by the story of Messiah, who came to welcome all those who were marginal, excluded from society and from the religious practices of Jesus’ time. She further argues that the round table itself emphasizes connection, showing that when people gather around the table, they are connected; they are in a relationship with one another.

³⁸ Russell (2001:48) observes that a “hot-house” is a “special place of safety, comfort and care” in the city of Minamata in Japan which was developed to care for children with deformities and their families. She further observes that the same metaphor was adopted by a group of women called Women Church (also called “Women’s Prayer Circle”) in Japan to describe their understanding of “being church” since “hot” as a metaphor means “safe, relaxed, comfortable” in Japan.

understanding of hospitality in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures”. As in the ‘round-table’ model above, Russell argues that hospitality is part and parcel of the gospel message of caring and welcoming all persons, particularly those who are most marginal to the table, according to the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke (10:30-37). Such welcoming and willingness to provide a safe space is also essential to the feminist understanding of the church as “a community of Christ” where everyone is welcome.³⁹ Finally, Russell (2001:52-54) points out that in order for churches to become such safe spaces or ‘hot-houses’ women need to share in justice, equality, and a safe environment within the churches.

2.4.4. The Church as *koinonia*

The fourth alternative model of church is that of *koinonia* proposed by Nelly Ritchie from Argentina and African women theologians (see Ritchie 1989). According to Ritchie (1989:152), *koinonia* means common participation. She states that participation in community manifests itself in relationships such as found in “marriage, trade, friendship, and communion with God”. For Ritchie (1989:153), *koinonia* also signifies an attitude. She therefore argues that a relationship is a sphere where a person does not remain passive, but is one which actively creates “communication of common interests, purposes, and efforts”. Drawing on the Old and the New Testament language of the people of God, Ritchie (1989:152-153) argues that they form a community which “gather around the purposes of the God of life and actively take part in a community”. Ritchie (1989:152-153) further argues that the Christian community that is born and grows around the Risen Lord, and celebrates new life, is one that discovers the key to sharing a life of sisterhood and brotherhood in mutual responsibility and exercise of solidarity and justice. In such a community there is interdependence of the members which comes from its head, Jesus the Christ. Finally, Ritchie (1989:153) argues that with such an understanding there should be no problem as to who should or not participate in certain spheres of the ecclesial domain.

The *koinonia* model of an alternative church is also expressed by African women theologians. For example, Oduyoye (2001a:85) argues that mutuality and partnership are cardinal marks of the *koinonia* of the church. This can be achieved by affirming

³⁹ This is also echoed by African women theologians such as Oduyoye (2001a:91-95).

women's God-given gifts and potential and work in partnership or *koinonia* while at the same time rejecting the churches' teaching that places women in subservient positions (Kanyoro and Njoroge 1996:xiii). Similarly, Nyambura Njoroge (1996:12) calls for the partnership of both men and women in participation and community-building where mutual love, justice and respect for all life are the building blocks towards transformation. These women decry the fact that despite their numerical strength and partnership, the exercise of power in the church community has been one-sided due to the predominance of sexist attitudes. For example, Edet and Ekeya (1988:8) point out:

If we in Africa base our theology of the church on the Bible, then we shall not fall into the one-sided ecclesiology that we have inherited from the missionaries....Culturally, women's experiences are different from men's experiences on the societal level. Hence feminist interpretation is indispensable as a balance to the masculine. The church in Africa must reflect the feminine face of God as traditional religion tries to do through the institution of the priesthood as a function for both women and men.

Here, Edet and Ekeya make a wrong assumption, namely, that a Bible-based ecclesiology would be sufficient to solve women's problems of suffering from sexism. They do not seem to take into account the fact that some of the ecclesiological models of the church referenced in the Bible also promote sexism. It makes sense then to focus on African women's call for African Christianity to emulate the models provided by traditional religions and African Initiated Churches (AICs). In most of these institutions, both women and men exercise their gifts of "teaching, preaching, evangelism and healing" equally (Owanikin 1992:217).⁴⁰ In addition to the women's significant role, African theologians agree that the communal nature of the church is most distinct in the African Initiated Churches (e.g., Phiri 2000a; Daneel 2000). Oduyoye (2001a:87) for example laments that "no health, healing or empowerment in and by the church is complete when women are excluded". Similarly, Phiri (2005:40-

⁴⁰ From the same Nigerian context, Oduyoye (2004:79) notes that although women take up such important roles in African tradition, she argues that there are also women in secondary roles of mediums and cultic dancers. Oduyoye further observes that although women in AICs are included in leadership structures, they are also excluded from sacramental roles due to traditional taboos.

41) observes that the church in Africa needs to look at the example of some churches founded by women whose model of being church includes the facet of holistic healing.

For African women theologians such as Oduyoye (2001a:85), “justice, participation, inclusiveness and ministry are the most frequent concepts that generate discussion of the church’s self-understanding among African women”. For example, at its 1996 conference, the Circle’s discussion of ecclesiology centred on the concept of *koinonia*. The African women theologians and practitioners present noted the church’s inequalities and general lack of democracy, which resulted in women being treated as junior partners rather than as daughters in God’s house (Oduyoye 2001a:85-86). Oduyoye (2001a), citing various African women from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia, pointed to the injustices of the church against women such as the denial of equal rights where women are denied the right to make decisions. As Oduyoye (2001c:82-84 *cf.* Phiri 2005:34) asserted, it was the responsibility of African women to work together as well as support and encourage one another in their own self-liberation by getting involved in decision-making structures and committees within the church.

2.5. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that various feminist theologies of liberation emerged during the third wave of feminist movement as a response to various oppressions by church and society that women were experiencing worldwide. Second, I have shown how feminist ecclesiology emerged as a response to the way the church has discriminated against and denied women meaningful participation in church life. Third, I highlighted issues that are of concern to feminist ecclesiology such as the meaning of ‘church’ as a translation of *ekklesia*; the writing of church history; the position and ministry of women; theological education; and finally, biblical authority and interpretation. I also examined some of the images of church that feminist ecclesiology has found alienating towards women, such as church as the Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, the Servant and church as family.⁴¹

⁴¹ In chapter four of this dissertation, I will seek to show that the feminist models of ecclesiology resonate with Baptist ecclesiology which believes in an *ekklesia* of the priesthood of all believers.

In the chapter which follows, I will focus on feminist theological anthropology and how society has constructed the personhood of women throughout the human ages and how such interpretations have impacted the understanding of what it means for women to be fully human.

However, by using the lens of feminist ecclesiology, injustices against women will be evident in the praxis of this teaching.

CHAPTER THREE

BEING HUMAN: SITUATING FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY WITHIN THE GLOBAL FEMINIST THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

It was noted at the beginning of chapter two that due to the diversity of women's experiences of injustice across the globe, Christian women have named their theologies according to their contexts. With my focus in chapter two on the experiences of being church for women globally, I provided an examination and analysis of some of the major issues of concern in feminist ecclesiology and alternative models of being church according to a selected group of feminist scholars. In this present chapter I will focus on feminist theological anthropology. Within this chapter, the question that I seek to answer will be: "What does it mean for women to be human in relation to the experiences of women globally?"

To answer this question, I will divide the chapter into three main sections. Because this study is located within the African women's theologies, the focus of the first section is on the socio-historical development of African women's theologies. The second section focuses on the issues of concern in feminist theological anthropology. I will conclude the chapter with alternative feminist models of a relational anthropology that affirm the full humanity of both women and men.

3.2. African Women's Theologies: An 'Irruption within an Irruption'⁴²

As noted in chapter two of this dissertation, the emergence of African women's theologies must first be seen within the wider context of the feminist movement of the third wave. Second, African women's theologies 'irrupted' from within what were

⁴² This term was originally coined by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1994a) and refers to women's theologies having irrupted from within the larger context of male-dominated Third World theologies, which was an earlier irruption from the previously dominant, First World theology.

male-dominant African theologies. It was in the course of saving the African culture from Western colonial and post-colonial marginalization that African women theologians questioned the absence of women's experience in their culture(s) and religions. In other words, African theologies remained patriarchal and sexist as women and women's issues remained invisible despite the fact that African theologies were firmly in the family of liberation theologies through its membership within the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).⁴³

One however cannot talk of African women theologies without locating it within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. The Circle emerged as a platform for African women's theologies, where many women's experiences, perspectives and theological reflections are brought to light with the aim of bringing, "dignity, liberation and fullness of life" (Njoroge 2001b:vii), especially to the women of Africa. As noted in chapter one, the Circle also provides the immediate context within which the stories of the BACOMA women of Malawi, and those of their pastors' wives in particular, will be reflected in this study. With this in mind, I will now turn to discuss the historical development of the Circle.

3.3. The Socio-historical Development of the Circle

The Circle was formally inaugurated in 1989 at a ceremonious "Biennial Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture" held in Accra, Ghana. The leadership of Mercy Oduyoye in the process of the establishment of the Circle is well acknowledged (Kanyoro 2002b; Njoroge 2001b). It was her long ecumenical experience with the World Council of Churches (*hereafter*, WCC) and EATWOT and

⁴³ In support of the claim of African women, Tinyiko Maluleke (1997:39-41 *cf.* Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1990:11), is an exception among a small number of male South African scholars and activists, including Simon Maimela, Charles Villa-Vicencio, Itumeleng J. Mosala, Steve de Gruchy and Gerald West, all of whom accord some space for women's issues. Suffice it to say, these are not the only male theologians on the African Continent who have taken women's issues more seriously. From the beginning of the Convocation of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians in 1989, a number of male scholars have worked tirelessly with African women in the planning and implementation of the establishment of the Circle. It is noteworthy that the list of men engaging with women issues is increasing and includes the Zimbabwean scholar and activist, Ezra Chitando, and many other male PhD. candidates whose dissertations are on issues of gender and religion in Africa. The current trend in the participation of some male scholars in articulating women's issues shows the importance of the work initiated by the African women theologians of the Circle. Furthermore, more theological institutions, even those which are heavily male dominated, are responding positively to some of the issues raised by the African women theologians. The Baptist Theological Seminary in Lilongwe, Malawi is a good example of an African theological institution which has mainstreamed African women's theologies and gender issues in the curriculum since 2000.

her concern for African women and their subjugation that inspired her to gather together African women theologians from across the world to begin to reflect theologically together on what it meant to be a woman in the African religions and culture(s).⁴⁴

In the (2006) volume of collected articles, *African Women, Religion and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, which honours her life and contribution, not only is her role as a researcher, writer and publisher is given prominence, but as Russell rightly points out in her contributed article, it is her role as “a teacher, trainer and a mentor of several scholars in and outside the African continent” that is her continuing legacy to the women of Africa. Accordingly, she is called the “mother of the Circle” (Russell 2006:47).

The inauguration of the Circle was also precipitated by factors such as what could be called the ‘feminist theological wind’ that was blowing globally, as well as the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) which, at its closing meeting in 1985 in Nairobi, challenged the churches to continue the efforts of the United Nations (*hereafter* UN) on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The challenge of the UN gave birth to the launch of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) organized by the WCC, a project that gave women throughout the world the impetus to critically focus on their experiences of “being Church” (*cf.* Gnanadason 2005:6).⁴⁵ As explained by Aruna Gnanadason, after the close of the WCC Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, another process began which was appropriately named ‘Women’s Voices and Visions: On Being Church.’ In 2003, the Circle became part of this important global project which resulted in the publication of the (2005) book *On Being Church: African Women Voices and Visions*, again edited by Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See Kwok Pui-lan (2007:472) for an empathetic review of Oduyoye’s ecumenical journey and legacy.

⁴⁵ The ten-year programme was offered to the churches as a time ‘to look at their structures, their teachings and practices with a commitment to the full participation of women. See, WCC Eighth Assembly: Women’s Challenges into the 21st century. <<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/assembly/chall.html>> [Accessed 11 March 2009].

⁴⁶ Being motivated by this publication, I trust that my study here can contribute to this project by bringing the voices and visions of the BACOMA pastors’ wives to the notice of the Circle.

Oduyoye embodies the Circle's goal of senior theologians encouraging and mentoring young emerging scholars (*cf.* Phiri 2009). In fact, the Circle was structured in such a way that this mentoring process is prioritised. As a result, Circle members are divided according to regional, national, and city circles, so as to network and facilitate research and writing, and thereby initiate new publications on women, religion and culture in Africa. As Russell has correctly observed:

By writing their own history the [Africa] women were resisting the power of scholars from the North who call themselves experts on the lives of African women (2005:17).

Linguistically, the Circle is organized according to three dominant European language groups in Africa: English, French and Portuguese, and is intentionally multi-faith.⁴⁷

Theologically, African women theologians seek for a “two-winged” theology in Africa as was stressed by Oduyoye in her address at the Circle's inauguration (1990b *cf.* Njoroge 2001c:247) in 1989. Oduyoye concluded her address by pointing out that:

[The] transformation of negative attitudes towards women would come only as the whole community of women and men became open to re-examining faith-based discrimination against women and cultural provisions for downgrading the humanity of women (2007:1).

Hence, from its inception, the Circle has welcomed all African women from the continent and the Diaspora.

In support of the women's petitions, the South African academic theologian, Tinyiko Maluleke (1997:39-41) put out a challenge to his fellow men, that the church and society in Africa, (which is made up of both women and men) should join their hearts, hands, and heads together to fight anything that is life denying, especially towards women. Furthermore, Rakoczy (2004:20) rightly asserts that “without women's voices and contribution the development of African theology will be incomplete and skewed”.

⁴⁷ However, the fact that the majority of the women in the Circle come from Christian contexts and mostly from English speaking Africa has sometimes brought feelings of discrimination or subordination to the other world faiths and language groups as was reflected in the 2007 report of the Yaoundé Pan-African conference.

Njoroge (2001a:81), concludes this call by stating that throughout the world, and especially in Africa, women must reject all “life-destroying activities in our homes, churches and societies”, and yearn for just-oriented theologies and activities that promote fullness of life.

The Circle’s tremendous growth since 1989 is evidenced by the plethora of writings and publications, in both recognized journals and peer-reviewed books and collections, as scholars engage with issues that are of concern to the continent. In her (2010) PhD. dissertation, “The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (1989-2007): History and Theology”, NyaGondwe-Fiedler sums up well the growth and achievements of the Circle when she states that the “numerical, leadership and administrative growth of the Circle” has been the result of “collaborative work by many members of the Circle”. Religion and culture are institutions that have come under particular feminist scrutiny because of their ambiguity in the way women have been treated.

3.1.1. Some Distinctive Features of African Women Theologies

Since its inception, African women’s theologies have developed their own distinctive characteristics and features aimed at dealing with injustices against women and creating a just world for both women and men. Phiri and Nadar summarize some of its main features well:

- Culture as a source of doing theology and African feminist cultural hermeneutics as an analytical tool for critiquing one’s culture and sacred texts;
- Narrative theology as a source of theologising;
- A focus on the transformation of society;
- A focus on communal theology which seeks to replace hierarchies with mutuality;
- The Bible as a central source of theologizing;
- A focus on issues of race, class and gender;
- The inclusiveness of other religions apart from Christianity;
- An engagement with the earth (Phiri and Nadar 2006c:10-21 *cf.* Oduyoye 2001; Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1990a; Rakoczy 2004:21-22).

It is not the aim of my study to describe each of the distinctive features. However, since the overall goal of African women theologies is a critical examination and reflection on the status of women in Africa and the role of religion and culture in shaping their lives and destinies, more needs to be said about African feminist cultural hermeneutics. Kanyoro (2002a:64) notes that while African women theologians agreed with the ‘inculturation’ of African theologies, they have cautioned that African culture should be “scrutinized under a strong microscope” for through such there exists the oppression of women. It is for this reason that African feminist cultural hermeneutics becomes an appropriate analytical tool which seeks to analyse the socio-cultural ideologies that influence the subordination of women in general and pastors’ wives in particular (*cf.* Kanyoro 2002a; Oduyoye 2001a). Similarly, Emmanuel Martey (1998:44) argues that any analysis of African culture should “by no means exclude the religious, linguistic, and ethnic dimensions of the African cultural existence as each of these aspects has had tremendous impact on the status of women in African society” both positively and negatively. That is why Kanyoro (2002a:14) sees culture as a “double-edged sword” because of this ambivalence.

In this section, I want to build on my definition of African feminist cultural hermeneutics provided in chapter one by focusing on its significance in the research of African women theologians. To begin with, Kanyoro has reminded scholars that hermeneutics belongs to biblical interpretation in the field of Biblical Studies.⁴⁸ However, through EATWOT, cultural hermeneutics was linked to biblical and theological studies mainly by African women theologians (Kanyoro 2002a:18).⁴⁹ This has been acknowledged by African women biblical and theological scholars as the first step towards a biblical hermeneutic that is liberative for African women (Kanyoro 2002a:19). Furthermore, as Kanyoro argues, it is the culture of the reader in Africa that has “more influence on the way the biblical text is understood and used in communities than the historical culture of the text”, although that is also important. In

⁴⁸ The term ‘hermeneutics’ may generally be described as the “development and study of theories of the interpretation of texts”. Essentially this involves “cultivating the ability to understand things from somebody else’s point of view and to appreciate the cultural and social forces that may have influenced their outlook”. See, Hermeneutics. <<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/hermeneutics/>> [Accessed 12 January 2009]. The study of hermeneutics within feminist cultural hermeneutics is thus one of the important tools developed by African women theologians, which can be used to interrogate both the biblical practices of culture and the varied cultures present on the African Continent.

⁴⁹ Teresa Okure (1995:58) attributes this recognition mostly to the Third World theologies who “engage in feminist hermeneutics or reading the Bible from women’s perspective”.

her experience with women from her home village in Kenya, Kanyoro (2002a:19) notes that:

It was through reading the Bible with women in my village that I came to the realization of the importance of culture in people's lives and the consequent influence of that culture on the interpretation of the Bible.

Kanyoro (2002a:20) points out that she noticed that many people read the Bible “with the eyes of their cultures” while at other times, the Bible helps them read their cultures. This means that both culture and the Bible are significant issues for African Christian women.

African feminist cultural hermeneutics is therefore an appropriate tool to use in the analysis of this study because of its emphasis on both African culture and the Bible. The argument of the African women theologians is that although culture forms their identity and that the Bible is liberative for the African Christians, one should approach the Bible and culture with caution (*cf.* Kanyoro 2002a). This is due to the fact that not everything in African culture and the Bible promotes the life of women; for as African women theologians have consistently shown, the Bible and culture often contains some aspects which are oppressive to women. In the same vein as women theologians from the global North, African women promote a “hermeneutic of suspicion” when dealing with the Bible and African culture (See, Oduyoye 2001a; Kanyoro 2002a; Clifford 2001:55-56).

Having sought to establish the socio-historical development of the Circle and African feminist cultural hermeneutics, I will now turn to feminist theological anthropology.

3.4. Feminist Theological Anthropology

As mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation, another area that feminist theologians worldwide have identified as important to engage with is the study of anthropology. This is because of the way women have been constructed both by society and religion in general. My interest in this section will be first to discuss the global phenomenon of the subordination of women; second, to identify some of the major issues of concern in feminist theological anthropology, such as rituals; the

socialisation process; communal ideology; hospitality; language; and the religious roots of women's subordination; and third, to discuss new models of anthropology as perceived by scholars of feminist theological anthropology.

3.4.1. Subordination of Women in Society: A Global Phenomenon

The following section will seek to show that the experience of women in the church is often an extension of the subordination of women in the society. There are various ways in which women are subordinated and oppressed in patriarchal society. Patson (1997:241) remarks that one does not have to go far to find oppression for "injustice is in our own backyard, in our own homes". He describes women's oppression as a worldwide phenomenon whereby women are systematically subordinated and discriminated against; women are denied equal opportunity in spheres such as education, the legal system, the workplace, and the medical system. Similarly, women are blamed for failures in parenting; they are subject to physical violence from men in and outside the home; and they are often deprived of essential financial support by their male partners. All of these constitute an ongoing, real, and vicious war by men, individually and as a group, against women (Patson 1997:243).

Using the United Kingdom as an illustration, Patson (1997:245) points out that women in that society are stereotypically understood as having no value; this in turn promotes a "psychology of insignificance and low self-esteem". Society confines women to the household: bearing and looking after children; caring for dependant relatives; taking care of the entire household, including their husbands. Patson (1997:246) concludes his study by exclaiming that it is no wonder that "many women often have a sense of low self-esteem, helplessness, and hopelessness".

Using the case of North American society, Susan Basow 2001:125) illustrates how androcentrism operates as a "core assumption of our thinking through theories, language, research, the workplace, and the family". According to Basow (2001:135) this demonstrates that "androcentrism fits in with a patriarchal power structure, one in which males and their experience are privileged" while the women's experience is marginalized at every level of human culture and society. Basow (2001:133-134) further observes that although more and more women are joining the workforce and assuming more leadership roles in business, women still find themselves more

involved in caring and serving activities; doing more of the housework, regardless of their employment status. Thus, without changed attitudes many North American women will continue to be marginalized both in church and society. In a similar vein, the writings of women theologians from Africa (Oduyoye 2001a:66-77), Asia (Pui-lan 2000; Chung 1994) , Hispanic and Latin American (Isasi-Diaz 1996:128-147) exhibit a similarly deplorable picture about women in their respective cultures. The irony is that even organized religion offers no better picture as I will seek to show below.

That said, Constance Parvey (1984:158) notes, there is a “freshly expressed consciousness emerging worldwide among women—East, West, North, South, rich and poor, women from dominating and oppressed classes”. In other words, with the onset of the global feminist movement, there are many women speaking openly and honestly about their positions and roles; about their being exploited; how they have been defined; and their visions for a new humanity (See, Parvey 1984:158-179; Oduyoye 1986). This study is part of this ongoing process, whereby the BACOMA pastors’ wives who have not escaped the evils besetting women in general speak up for the first time. In the section which follows, I will seek to analyse some of the main issues of concern in feminist theological anthropology.

3.4.2. Issues of Concern in Feminist Theological Anthropology

Having established the global nature of the subordination of women, my focus in this section will be to highlight some of the main issues that have contributed to the adverse construction of African women. To do this, I will draw on the works not only of African women scholars, but feminist scholars worldwide. In particular, this will reference the BACOMA pastors’ wives, who are the subject of this study.

3.4.2.1. The Oppressive and Dehumanizing Role of Ritual

Because of the vast influence it has on the construction of the identity of African women, the first area of concern by African women theologians I want to discuss is that of ritual.⁵⁰ African women theologians observe that while most of the rituals and ceremonies in African life and culture aid personal development, others are

⁵⁰ For an excellent collection of essays by African women theologians which addresses this important topic, see articles Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2006).

particularly oppressive and dehumanizing towards women.⁵¹ For example, Oduyoye warns that such traditional practices are associated especially with the different stages in life, from birth to death and beyond:

Cultural hermeneutics directs that we take nothing for granted, that we do not follow tradition and ritual and norms as unchangeable givens, and that cultural relativism does not become covert racism and ethnocentrism.... Experiences are to be analysed, not only for their historical, social and ethical implications, but also for their capacity to create what grows to become cultural norms... African women have identified culture as a favourite tool for domination. In Africa what we have to contend with is multiple cultures and multiple oppressions... What we seek are strategies for transforming attitudes, beliefs and practices (2001a:12).

Oduyoye further notes that purification rites, especially for women, abound in many African societies. For example, as Oduyoye (2007:8) has shown, many of the Akan women in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire undergo various purification rites such as "after a man's failure to achieve a task; after a husband's death, or after childbirth". Very often these rituals are prescribed by men diviners and performed on women by women. African women theologians have thus argued against such practices, including widowhood cleansing rituals, the initiation rituals for girl children where they are exposed to sexual activity; the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), which is particularly dehumanising and life-threatening, especially in the context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic (See, Oduyoye 1995a; Oduyoye and Kanyoro 2006; Kanyoro 2001b).

At the same time, African women also advocate for the retention of those practices that enhance the well-being of women and society as a whole (See, Kanyoro and Njoroge 1996:163-270). As Oduyoye (2007b) has noted, because of the negative connotation of menstruation, many African women refuse to participate in some religious rituals when they reach puberty and resume only at menopause. Oduyoye (2007b:8) therefore sees that religious functionaries use religious notions as an

⁵¹ Even Western missionaries recognized this fact and managed to deliver African women from such rituals, although often not without resistance. See for example, Phiri (1997a).

ideology to demean and intimidate women, some using what are often considered divinely sanctioned creation myths in order to maintain their control on women.

3.4.2.2. The Processes of Societal Socialisation

The second area of concern is the processes of societal socialisation which is often where societal constructed roles of women are lived out. As in many other cultures, traditional ritual ceremonies are significant vehicles within African society used to indoctrinate and strengthen cultural values. Women theologians observe that these often consist of rituals that affect women's lives and which make them aware of what it means to be a woman in an African community (*cf.* Oduyoye 2001a:30). Traditions are passed on from one generation to the next through what are called rites of passage. These are processes of socialization, which contribute to human development and informal learning. Kanyoro (2001a:159) points out that women in Africa are the custodians of cultural practices, whereby from one generation to the next, traditional practices or "cultural values," are passed down. Even when deemed harmful, they are not to be "discussed, challenged or changed", thus perpetuating their harm not only to the women, but to children and even boys and men. Similarly, Oduyoye (1995b:39) laments that "only on very rare occasions have African churchwomen challenged African culture, even when they have judged its practices to be inhuman and unjust". Oduyoye adds that in a world that takes religion to heart as the "validator and shaper of culture, African people lay such a great store on culture that when people say something is cultural, it begins to mean beyond critique, beyond question, and beyond transformation' therefore it is very difficult to abandon it" (1995b:39).

Elsewhere, Oduyoye (1995a) observes that the institution of marriage is one of the most effective instruments of socialization in Africa which has placed women in vulnerable positions of subordination to men. In fact, the process of the marriage begins with the puberty initiation rites, when the adolescents are introduced into the adult world. During the initiation period, the novices are grilled into their respective roles as a woman and a man in the community (See, Phiri 1997a; NyaGondwe-Banda 2005; Longwe 2006; Mbano-Moyo 2009). From her analysis, Bernadette Mbuy Beya a Roman Catholic theologian and Mother Superior concludes that a woman from her native country of the Democratic Republic of Congo is a victim of multiple layers of violence: in her family as a child; as a young woman; in her marriage as both wife and

mother, and in her social environment as worker or colleague, due to the gap existing between societal expectations and individual rights. Mbuy Beya (2001:185) therefore calls on her society “to rethink ways in which the individual can be properly socialised”. Similarly, the feminist scholar and theologian from Malawi, Fulata Mbano-Moyo (2009:12, 16) condemns the one-sided nature of the socialisation process of women in Southern Malawi. She argues that it is not a sexual problem for women only, but that *chinamwali* disempowers both women and men.

Oduyoye also notes that a woman’s social status derives not only from her personal qualities or achievements, but primarily is found in her relation to others. She points out that in African anthropology, as in biblical anthropology “the humanity of the woman is circumscribed by her femaleness, which is rooted in notions that the woman is a wife and a mother” (2001a:71). Therefore, being a housewife and being dependent (economically and psychologically) upon a man becomes the traditional norm (Oduyoye 1986a:122). Similarly, Ada Nyaga expresses her concern that the term ‘woman’ is still limited to the narrow gender specific “traditions and cultural systems which state that a woman’s wealth comprises a fertile womb by means of which she can earn status and eternal ties to the living and the dead” (1996:75). Nyaga further asks the question:

How can African women be affirmed, to change their self-image from being the production machines and property of men to human beings worthy of God’s creation?

However, Oduyoye argues that mothering is an obligation for both women and men, yet she also acknowledges that in women it is “this compassion that is at work in the self-giving care that is expected of them and which most give without counting the cost” (2001a:72). Women admit that “it is one thing to be a subject of voluntary self-sacrifice and entirely another to be the object whose self-sacrifice is involuntary or who is as unwilling victim” (Oduyoye 2001a:38). In addition, recent research has shown that globalisation has an impact in the way African women are responding to

cultural constructions of their roles. Women are showing that cultural roles for men and women are also contested terrains (*cf.* Phiri and Nadar 2009).⁵²

According to Oduyoye (2001a:31) other ways of informal learning of societal norms include:

Proverbs, maxims and other wise sayings with which Africans lace their daily speech are carriers of these cultural expectations. They are the pegs on which the community hangs its mores. They are treated as truisms to make people adhere to the style of life that custom has come to expect of them.

Proverbs, which abound in every African community, play a religio-cultural-social role in educating people about the cultural values. In her discussion on the role of African proverbs and spirituality, Hannah Kinoti (1998:55-60) notes that proverbs aid people to appreciate nature; instruct in wisdom; teach morality; serve to promote healing in individuals and communities; a proverb clinches or shortens an argument; and proverbs aid people to appreciate the supernatural. However, although Kinoti (1998:65) laments the undermining of such rich oral traditions by Western colonialists and missionaries, African women theologians go on to note that many African stories, sayings and proverbs describe women in very derogatory terms (Oduyoye 1995a:213). Oduyoye (2007b:2-8) warns of some arenas that perpetuate subordination and violence towards women. For example, idioms or sayings about women in all Ghanaian languages abound that are aimed at “subduing or marginalizing women”; sayings that arise from cultural myths and assumptions of male superiority and female inferiority, and from the belief that the sexuality of women belongs to men; thereby relegating women to becoming “domestic staff in the place they call home” (Oduyoye 2007b:8). African women theologians are in agreement therefore that the search for an empowering anthropology begins with a “probe into African myths of origin, asking fresh questions in order to untangle the thread which has tied women to iniquity” (Oduyoye 2001a:68).

⁵² How many of these observations are true for pastors’ wives in the BACOMA will be shown in chapter seven of this dissertation.

3.4.2.3. The Role of Communal Ideology

The third issue of concern is that of communal ideology. This is another space where the identity of women is constructed and lived out. The Kenyan philosopher and theologian, John Samuel Mbiti, has argued clearly that in Africa, life is understood as life in community:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group....Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am". This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man (Mbiti 1990:108-109).

While the modern applicability of Mbiti's assertion has been challenged (*cf.* Mtata 2011), since the majority of African people are still found in rural areas and African cultural practices are still done by a significant group among urban Africans, the importance of communal rituals cannot be undermined. Rituals require communal observation of taboos for the well-being of the whole community. The tendency to circumscribe to the needs of the community therefore becomes the norm. There is no room for individualism. The formal and informal socialisation processes described above also aim at positioning everyone in their rightful place in the community (Oduyoye 1995a). Thus, role assignment based on gender stereotypes is another area that the socialisation processes found in most African societies have had the greatest impact both at the family and communal levels. In terms of power, the Lutheran theologian Klaus Nürnberger has noted that African society, as with other traditionalist societies, takes the form of a patriarchal hierarchy where levels of authority move from the "kingdom down to the wards, the households, the homesteads of wives and the individuals" (2007:23).

It is the aim therefore of African women theologians within the Circle to dismantle such entrenched patriarchal hierarchies and relationships because, it is here, as Nürnberger, using Wilson's analysis, points out, that "the status and role of every member is defined in terms of age, gender and seniority" (2007:23). Nevertheless, as, Oduyoye argues, the concept of equality cannot be applied to this model because the African social structure is "not meant to be valued hierarchically" (2004:79). For example, Denise Ackermann notes that men have largely defined the humanity of women through "their experience, perceptions, thoughts and beliefs" (1991:93), thereby deforming women's humanity. Cooley et al. (1992) also observe that the value of a woman is subordinated to that of a man, irrespective of her status. Similarly, Ruether (1983:72-75) adds that men are not only definers of the hierarchy of male and female spheres; they are also definers of humanity over natures.

African patriarchal communities therefore have had significant influence in shaping a woman's world and her worldview as subordinate to and inferior to that of her male counterpart. This is why African women's anthropology insists that both men and women should work as "human beings together for the well-being of the whole community" for that is what our cultures teach us (Oduyoye 2001a:72).

3.4.2.4. The Double-Sided Nature of Hospitality

A fourth and related element of African culture is hospitality which also affects the identity and roles of women. Oduyoye observes that the issue of hospitality is at the heart of who women are. She notes however its double-sided nature. While women aspire to be hospitable, they also tell of experiences of hospitality that make them less human (Oduyoye 2001a:73-74, 90-109). For example, Oduyoye (2001a:91) states that people like Ebenye Mbondo (from Zaire), praise African women for their abundant "tenderness and hospitality", without which life would be hard especially in the home, yet acknowledges also the exploitation of hospitality that has made women to be the "object of violence and intimidation" (Oduyoye 2001a:91), which is contrary to the original idea of goodwill and hospitality. Again, using Rose Obianga's words (a Cameroonian), Oduyoye (2001a:93) points out that "offering and receiving hospitality is a key indication of the African emphasis on sustaining our life-force at all costs, both as individuals and as communities". In terms of African women and the BACOMA pastors' wives in particular, it is thus important to note Oduyoye's primary

concern, where she maintains that hospitality built on “reciprocity, openness and acceptance”, often makes women vulnerable because they are ready to “compromise and to accommodate even what erodes their dignity” (Oduyoye 2001a:94 *cf.* Moyo 2005a).

3.4.2.5. The Use of Androcentric Language

The fifth issue of concern in feminist theological anthropology is how language is used to construct womanhood. The South African Roman Catholic theologian, Stuart Bate (2002:21) points out that language provides the “entry point to culture since it gives us our categories of thought, helps us make sense of our experiences and provides the means of our reflection processes”. Similarly, the Ghanaian Anglican theologian, John S. Pobee (1996:25) calls language “the soul of the people” to describe the centrality of language in any culture. The importance of language is that it is the medium or vehicle of communication for every culture. Bate (2002:21) also observes that while language refers to what we call ‘mother tongue’ (a gendered term), it may also refer to the “special terms or words that are used with special meanings” such as religious language, school language, secret language, and so forth. Similarly, each language has its own riches, values, riddles, and so on, which penetrate the depths of its native culture (Bate 2002:33). Another factor about language is that words in one language do not always translate easily into another. This became evident in the translation of the English versions of the Bible into the African languages by the Western missionary enterprise. While this task has been thoroughly acknowledged, some words were rendered vague, meaningless or misleading to the Africans than if they were translated straight from the original biblical languages of Hebrew or Greek (Reisenberg 2009). Hence, the need for more African biblical scholars to engage in the task of re-translation.⁵³ It is also noted that some African names for God found their way into the Christian vocabulary because the missionaries could not find equivalents in their languages (Phiri 1997a:27).

Feminist theological anthropology’s concern is that throughout the history society and religion has used androcentric language that normalises the male and marginalises the female. The English language is the most marginalising and oppressive to women in

⁵³ The Nigerian Methodist theologian, Bolaji Idowu (1913-1993) was the first African theologian to bring out this concern in his *Towards an Indigenous Church*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1995).

various ways. It is the task of African women theologians therefore, by using feminist cultural hermeneutics, to interrogate the African culture and the Christian tradition, and to delve into the linguistics of much gender-ambivalent language. There is need to give up the 'bad' language and revise, keep or create new language that bring dignity especially to women; and to revive the traditional names for God in the church.

3.4.2.6. The Religious Roots of Women's Subordination

The sixth area of concern is the religious roots of women's subordination. Feminists identify religion, especially Christianity, as endorsing oppression and violence towards women.

Stephen Patson (1997:248) has stressed that the Christian religion is one of those institutions which has "severely defamed, denigrated, and negatively stereotyped the humanity and dignity of women". Similarly, Pamela Dickey Young (1990) points out how throughout history, Christianity has failed to treat women as full and whole human beings, thereby fitting them into male-defined roles. The Christian tradition has portrayed women in negative images, even labelling them as dangerous or evil. Similarly, Ruether observes that while traditional Christianity acknowledges the fallen nature of humanity's *Imago Dei*, an ambiguity exists in the way the *Imago Dei* has been linked with maleness and femaleness. More specifically, it concerns the way femaleness has been associated with the "lower part of human nature in a hierarchical scheme of mind over body, reason over passions" (1983:93).

Christianity's failure to take women into account has impacted the entire theological enterprise; a fact that is particularly reflected in the exclusive use of male images for God (Young 1990:13 *cf.* Rakoczy 2004:29-36). Similarly, the same male language pervades the Christian language about God and the Holy Trinity. The implication has been that God is portrayed as male; therefore every male holds the true image of God while every female is deemed not to be fully human and therefore fit only to be ruled and subordinated by her male counterpart. The plea of African women theologians is that when the church proclaims a "Gospel that presents both women and men as reflecting the image of God, it is easy for women and men to work together as partners in the church" (Oduyoye 1986:136-137 *cf.* Phiri 2005:33). However, African

women theologians observe that the names for God are not so problematic for Africans because in traditional Africa most of the names for God are gender-neutral. For example, among the Chewa of Malawi, God is described as *Leza, Chiuta* (Phiri 1997a:28) and among the Ga of Ghana, God is named *Ataa-Naa Nyonmi* (Abbey 2001:141). The lament here is that most of the African names for God are often not used, despite their richness in meaning and inclusivity of gender.

Rakoczy demonstrates how the (so-called) Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria as well as Greek philosophers, the Roman law and Jewish tradition contributed to the negative attitudes held towards women, which she calls “bad news” (2004:30). Women were described by terms such as the “Devil’s gateway,” “the most harmful of the save beasts,” “a sick she-ass,” and so on (Rakoczy 2004:30-31). Similarly, Ruether traces patriarchal anthropology from St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, to Martin Luther and John Calvin of the Protestant Reformation. Here, the female body is often found interpreted as an obstacle to the fullness of the woman’s humanness for women have been excluded from some church activities because they are sinners or impure (Oduyoye 2001a; Phiri 2005:33).

This attitude is traced to Greek biological and philosophical thinking by scholars such as Gerda Lerner. Lerner (1986:206) remarks that Aristotle is quite “consistent in reasoning that the biological inferiority of woman must make her inferior also in her capacities, her ability to reason and therefore her ability to make decisions”. Lerner (1986:207) further quotes Aristotle as having said that because women are (supposedly) weak in rational discernment, it is helpful for them to be ruled by a man. Lerner also shows that Aristotle’s worldview of natural hierarchy and dichotomy extends to all people in which the “soul rules over body; rational thought over emotion; humans over animals; male over female; masters over slaves; and Greeks over barbarians” (1986:207). Sharing Lerner’s observations about Aristotle is that of Philip Payne (2009:32), who states that Aristotle believed that since man is rational while woman is irrational, the two cannot be on an equal footing. Even “their virtues are qualitatively different” and that man has the “courage of command” while the woman has that of “subordination” (2009:32). Payne (2009:33) goes on to state that Aristotle called the “female as a deformed male”. Lerner (1986:207-208) therefore

laments the fact that Aristotle's assumptions have remained virtually unchallenged and endlessly repeated for nearly two thousand years.

The above suppositions were reinforced by Old Testament restrictions on women and their exclusion from the covenant community, by the misogynist teachings of the (so-called) Church Fathers and by the continuing emphasis in the Christian era on charging the biblical Eve—together with all her women progeny—with moral guilt for the Fall into sin of humankind (Lerner 1993:6-7). Thus, the mind-body dualism inherited from Greek thought has had significant influence on the development of the Early Church's theological view of woman: that woman's inferior status means that she is not quite made in the image of God (Rakoczy 2004:42).

Likewise, Ruether (1983) and Schüssler Fiorenza (1997) attribute subordination of women to biblical tradition and human cultures, both of which are inherently patriarchal. Nicola Slee (2003) also argues that the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 has been used to endorse the subordination of women both in church and society. It is argued that because Adam was created first and in God's image, women are marginal, subordinate to men and not fully in the image of God. Similarly, Slee (2003:38) argues that "the story of the Fall into sin has been used by male scholars throughout the ages to portray women as morally frail, sexually corrupt and guilty". All this boils down to the denial that woman is fully in the image of God while man is.⁵⁴

The above mentioned concerns demonstrate that there are immense tendencies and beliefs in African cultural and religious traditions that sanction patterns of relationship in which men dominate women. In African traditional society and the Christian traditions throughout the ages the major pattern of relationship between women and men has been one of "dominance and subjugation, sustained through beliefs about the essential inferiority of women to men and the need for a hierarchical order in social arrangements" (Farley 1990:241). In addition, women have often been associated with evil and perceived as temptresses. Both society (especially African), and religion (especially Christianity) has denied the full humanity of women, thereby bringing serious and negative consequences upon the humanity and dignity of women. The

⁵⁴ The issues raised here by feminist theological anthropologists will assist me in analysing the self-perception of the BACOMA pastors' wives (see chapters six and seven of this dissertation) and experiences of domestic violence by the BACOMA pastors' wives (see chapter eight of this dissertation).

goal of feminist theological anthropology is therefore the restoration of the full humanity of women as created in the image of God, to which I will now turn.

3.5. Alternative Feminist Models of Theological Anthropology

Globally, feminist theologians have come up with alternative models of anthropology that affirms the full humanity of women and men (e.g., Rakoczy 2004:52-56; Ackermann 1991). This comes from the understanding that women and men are interconnected in a web of relationships, hence a relational model. I will discuss the relational model under two factors, namely: the Trinitarian model of mutuality, and the interconnectedness of humanity and nature.

First, a truly relational anthropology includes relationship with God, oneself, and others, based on the Trinitarian model. Oduyoye (1986a:120-137 *cf.* Hilbert 1995) sees the Holy Trinity as a good model of a community interconnected by relationships. She argues that God is the centre of relations where Father, Son and the Holy Spirit act and interact as one Person toward the world without subordinating anyone (1986a:136). Oduyoye (1986a:136) further argues that the Trinitarian model was what the early church strived for in building the new community, “not on a hierarchy of being but on the diversity of gifts that operate in an integrative manner”. Thus, each person within the community is accepted and acknowledged with integrity. Oduyoye thus acknowledges the failure of the dualistic and hierarchical modes of ordering human relationships and advocates the necessity of mutuality and partnership in “not just in man-woman relationships but in all human enterprises” (1986a:136).

African women seek the combined effort of both women and men in their pursuit of what it means to be human, especially for women who have been marginalized both by religion and culture. As Oduyoye (2001a:72) has emphasized, “women are seeking an anthropology that makes women and men co-responsible for the well-being of the whole community, especially the family”.⁵⁵

In addition to the Trinitarian model, Mary Aquin O'Neill (1993:146 *cf.* Rakoczy 2004:44), in reconstructing a Christian anthropology of mutuality in contrast to

⁵⁵ A model that seeks the well-being of the other, regardless of gender, will be useful when examining domestic violence experienced by the BACOMA pastors' wives in chapter eight of this dissertation.

anthropology of male superiority and headship, suggests a rereading of the Genesis creation story and of Jesus' way of relating to women and men. For O'Neill (1993:146), mutuality acknowledges that "human beings are created in the image of God and that God's image is embodied in both male and female". It also entails the belief that both women and men are responsible for sin and are affected by the history of sin; both stand in need of forgiveness, deliverance, restoration, redemption (O'Neill 1993:146).⁵⁶

Further still, Ruether argues for a new integrated approach, not just of self but of the entire social order. Hence, by tearing down the walls that separates the self and society into male/female; public/private; political/domestic spheres, she posits a "new relationship that allows the thinking-relational self to operate throughout human life as one integrated self, rather than fragmenting the psyche across a series of different social roles" (1983:113-114). This is what Ruether calls a "recovery of a lost humanity" into a "redeemed humanity reconnected with the *Imago Dei*" (1983:114). In terms of traditional Christian theology Ruether sees Christ's redemptive purposes as the model for this redeemed humanity that was lost through sin. Ruether (1983:114) further points out that although the Christ symbol is problematic for feminist theology because of Jesus' maleness which the Roman Catholic Church considers a necessity for its (exclusively male) Priesthood; it is still a positive redemptive model for fullness of humanity which is experienced as partial and incomplete. She states that the fullness of this redeemed humanity, as image of God, is to be sought "as a future self and world, still not fully achieved nor fully received" (Ruether 1983:114). The encounter with Jesus of Nazareth is only a foretaste; she argues (1983:114). It means that Jesus Christ, his birth, life, death and resurrection, is the archetype of what it means to be fully human in God. It is a paradigm in which the authenticity of the personhood of self experiences glimpses of the fullness of redeemed humanity, as the image of God (Ruether 1983:114).⁵⁷

Second, relational anthropology entails the interconnectedness of humanity and nature. The saying, "I am because we are", reveals that life in community is only

⁵⁶ It will later be shown that the BACOMA's teaching on the headship of the man and the required submission of his wife creates a hierarchy which subordinates all women, including the BACOMA pastors' wives.

⁵⁷ This understanding becomes important especially for women who are abused by their own spouses as will be shown in chapter eight of this dissertation.

meaningful when—as African and Asian women observe—it is lived in a community in relationships (Chung 1994). However, these relationships are not only human relations, but they also include nature. Clifford (2001:219-221) gives some insight on the feminist understanding of interconnectedness. She begins by defining the term ‘ecology’ which is a translation of the Greek *oikos*, meaning ‘house’ or ‘home’. Clifford (2001:222) states that ecology as a more holistic term than ‘environment’ is more concerned with the “interrelationships among all forms of life with which humans share a common earthly home”. Another term used to describe this relationship is ‘web of life’ which according to Clifford (2001:225), “captures more accurately and concretely the kinship relationship of the human species with the rest of nature”. Unfortunately, the human attitude of ignoring, dominating, as well as destroying everything upon the planet has caused an ecological crisis. The lament is that as participants in God’s creation, humans have stripped the planet of its sacredness. Eco-feminism is therefore a term used in feminism as a response to reclaim the sacredness of creation (Clifford 2001:225).

Eco-feminism has its roots within the broader feminist tradition of the second wave, coined as a concern for the health of the planet.⁵⁸ However, it was reasoned that patriarchal attitudes and systems that oppress women also subjugate the nonhuman nature (Clifford 2001:222-223). Mary Judith Ress (2006:110) laments that the patriarchal attitude comes from “a misguided sense of the need to control and to dominate the other”. Sallie McFague calls this “patriarchal idolatry” (McFague cited in Clifford 2001:236). Thus, eco-feminist theologians, such as McFague call for a God-language that is connected to the ecological health of the planet (McFague cited in Clifford 2001:236), while Ruether calls for ecological healing through “theological and psychic-spiritual process in which spirituality and eco-justice are interrelated” (Ruether cited in Clifford 2001:237). Ruether also argues that since women and men are made in the image of God, they are charged with the stewardship of the earth, not to dominate but to care for it (Ruether cited in Clifford 2001:241-242). Susan Rakoczy (2004:304) also draws attention to the fact that it is the responsibility of feminists from both the global north and the global south to care for the ‘one home’ they share, just as they all experience oppression as women. In addition, Oduyoye

⁵⁸ According to Clifford (2001:222) it was the French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne (1920-2005) who first coined the term ‘eco-feminism’ See also, Françoise d’Eaubonne, *Le féminisme ou la mort*, (Paris, P. Horay, 1974).

notes that all human relations are rooted in their belonging to God. She argues that God is “the sole creator and sustainer of all things, who expects human beings to be to God as children and to each other as siblings and to respect the earth and other natural phenomena”.⁵⁹

3.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated that since my study is located within African women’s theologies it was important to trace in more detail its development, which was a response to the inability of the African liberation theologies to deal with women’s issues. I have also shown that the Circle emerged as an academic platform where African women theologians could reflect theologically on issues of injustice to women. Further, I have shown that African women theologians developed African feminist cultural hermeneutics as a tool to analyse African culture because of the way African societies have defined women into subordinate positions to men. I then turned to highlight issues of concern to feminist anthropology such as rituals; socialization process; communal life; hospitality, and language. I also examined the biblical roots of women’s subordination that have shaped Christian theological thinking throughout the centuries and which have contributed to the denial that women are fully in the image of God and fit only to be dominated and ruled by men. I concluded by offering a feminist theological anthropological alternative model of interconnectedness which is rooted in the Trinitarian model of mutuality and Eco-feminism which binds humanity with ecology.

In the next chapter, I propose to examine Baptist teachings and its impact on the BACOMA women and its pastors’ wives.

⁵⁹ Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. The African Experience of God through the Eyes of an Akan Woman. <<http://www.aril.org/african.htm/>> [Accessed 23 January 2012].

CHAPTER FOUR

BAPTIST DOCTRINES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON MALAWI BAPTIST CONVENTION WOMEN

4.1. Introduction

The major thrust of chapters two and three above has been to unravel the reality of what it means to be a woman in church and in society, both of which are sexist and patriarchal in nature. Such unravelling has also demonstrated women's resistance and their quest for alternative models of being church and of being human.

The focus of this present chapter will be on the Baptist doctrines of the BACOMA that undergird the experience of Baptist women. This focus is important because according to Pamela Dickey Young (1990:13) every theological doctrine and concept must be examined "anew in light of the growing awareness of the patriarchal sexism against women both in the church and in society". In support of Young's statement, African women theologians have also seen the need to use African feminist cultural hermeneutics in order to expose those Christian traditions and interpretations of the Bible which have had a negative impact on the status of women (Oduyoye 2001a:18).

The question that I seek to answer in this chapter will be "What are the Baptist-held doctrines and teachings that prevent the BACOMA pastors' wives from experiencing the freedom and equality that is enshrined in the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers?"

To adequately answer this question, I have divided this chapter into five sections. In section one I will present a brief synopsis of the historical development of the BACOMA. In the second section I will discuss a brief review of the Baptist understanding of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In the third section I analyse Baptist-held teachings on the authority of the Bible, ecclesiology, and spiritual gifts, to show how they impinge on women's full experience of the freedoms

enshrined in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In the fourth section I analyse the North American Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) interpretation of the Bible and associated teachings and their impact the role of the BACOMA women in the church; its implications for women's theological education, and women's role in the family in the light of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. I conclude the chapter by providing a brief feminist critique of these Baptist-held doctrines.

4.2. A Brief Synopsis of the Historical Development of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)

As stated in chapter one, this study is located within the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). It is therefore important to place the BACOMA within its historical context so that the practices towards Baptist women in general and pastors' wives in particular can be fully understood. Within the Malawian context, there are several groups that use the term 'Baptist' in their names, while others do not and yet they are Baptist.⁶⁰

As mentioned in chapter one, the BACOMA has its origins as a mission church of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the United States of America. While it is not my intention to give the history of the American Southern Baptists here, it is necessary to mention three historical factors concerning the emergence of SBC in North America.

Firstly, SBC emerged and developed from the broader eighteenth-century Western cultural background of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth-century missionary enterprise (Walls 1996:226; Latourette 1975; Hastings 1996; McBeth 1987a:381-391). Therefore one understands why the SBC was involved in missionary activities in Malawi that led to the formation of the BACOMA. Secondly, the SBC emerged out of a growing schism between the American Northern states and the Southern states over the nature of slavery and its place in the Bible in the nineteenth century; Southern Baptists defending the keeping of slaves through their interpretation of the Bible (McBeth 1987a; Fletcher 1994:39-40; Leonard 2003:204). Lastly, in 2004, the SBC resigned its membership from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) (Cooperman

⁶⁰ One such church is that of John Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission (PIM). It is only recently that Malawians have known that the PIM is a Baptist church in terms of its doctrine and practice, although it does not use the term 'Baptist' in its title (Longwe 2000:50).

2004). One of the reasons for this was due to the BWAs support for the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry.⁶¹

These three historical factors are important for my study because it reveals that by the time the SBC came to Malawi to begin its missionary endeavour, they were already supporting gender injustice by using the Bible to support their position. This point will be elaborated below.

Notwithstanding the above picture of the SBC, Baptists in general are known to have championed social justice issues. They have a long history of participation in human rights especially from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. Baptists championed the cause of freedom of conscience and the worth of the individual, which resulted in social changes in Europe and America, such as “the universal suffrage; the abolition of slavery; prison reforms; the adoption of the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution, and many other social changes” (Wood 1990:257-258). It is also important to bear in mind that there are more Baptists in the United States that ordain women than those that do not. For example, the American Baptist Churches USA, Northern American Baptist Conference, Alliance of Baptists, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, National Baptist Convention, USA, and Progressive National Baptist Convention, all ordain women.⁶² Examples from outside the United States of America, of Baptist churches that ordain women include the Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden, Bund Schweizer Baptistengemeinden in Germany and Switzerland.⁶³ In the case of Southern Africa, the Baptist Convention of South Africa also ordains women. The examples above prove that globally, not all Baptists hold the same interpretation on issues of gender justice and especially on the ordination of women.⁶⁴

⁶¹ The BWA is a fellowship of Baptist Conventions and unions across the globe. As at 2008, the BWA comprised of 214 affiliated Baptist Conventions and unions with a membership of 36 million baptized Christian believers worldwide (Baptist World Alliance 2008:2; Cooperman 2004).

⁶² See, Ordination of Women in Protestant Churches.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_women_in_Protestant_churches/< [Accessed 21 December 2011].

⁶³ See, Ordination of Women in Protestant Churches.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_women_in_Protestant_churches/< [Accessed 21 December 2011].

⁶⁴ I will further emphasize this point later on in this study, in the way that the BACOMA deals with women and issues of gender justice.

Longwe and NyaGondwe-Banda have shown that many of the BACOMA affiliated churches began as Bible study groups and women's sewing lessons led by SBC missionaries with selected Malawians serving as interpreters from 1959.⁶⁵ It was not until 1970 that the BACOMA as a body was officially formed (Longwe 2007:70). The BACOMAs historical, ecclesiastical, and theological links to the SBC helps us to understand why it does not ordain women. But how does BACOMA reconcile its teachings on women when it is founded on the doctrine of priesthood of all believers? This question is the topic of my next section.

4.3. The Baptist Understanding of the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers

In this section I want to locate the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in its historical context and then go further to examine the Baptist understanding of this doctrine.

Walter Shurden (1987:6) has convincingly argued that the significance of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is that it cuts across most major theological themes of the Christian faith such as “the doctrine of God, doctrine of Christ, doctrine of the church, and doctrine of salvation”. Furthermore, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers also speaks to issues of “worship, baptism, the Christian life, stewardship, ministry, and biblical interpretation” (Shurden 1987:6). As a consequence of these doctrinal connections, it becomes necessary to briefly discuss the historical development of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

4.3.1. Its Biblical and Historical Development

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is a fundamental belief among Baptists globally, and as with all doctrines, it has a history and a heritage, as well as several distinctive features. In this section, I will discuss two factors, namely: its biblical and historical development; and an outline of some characteristic features of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

⁶⁵ Hany Longwe (2000:65-111) has traced the development of the Baptist church in the Central Region of Malawi from one missionary couple, the Albrights, who moved to Lilongwe in 1960. He notes that the Albrights started their work among the already established indigenous churches of the Achewa Providence Industrial Mission (APIM). Alternatively, Rachel NyaGondwe-Banda (2005:18-88) discusses the work of two Baptist missionary couples, the Wester and Kingsley couples in Southern Malawi.

Biblically, Baptists trace the concept of the priesthood from the life of the Israelites as portrayed in the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible. A priest among the Israelites meant “one who stood before God as servant or minister” (Shurden 1987:13; Sullivan 1983:23). According to the covenant that God made with the Israelites on Mount Sinai in the Book of Exodus, chapter 19, God called the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests. That meant they were “to relate to and act for God” (Shurden 1987:14). Having been birthed in the Old Testament, the New Testament re-affirmed that the new Israelites (the first century Christian believers) were priests unto God. As a result, the priesthood of Israel became the priesthood of believers in the New Testament.⁶⁶ Moreover, Baptists believe that the priesthood of the believers is “inextricably related to the priesthood of Christ for he is called the “great high priest”⁶⁷ who “offered up himself” (Shurden 1987:15). Even though the phrase ‘the priesthood of believers’ is not found in the Bible, the New Testament, directly and indirectly, teaches “not only the high priesthood of Christ, but also the priesthood of Christians” (Shurden 1987:38). It is also important to note that the priesthood was literally a male domain, while the symbolic meaning, i.e., Israel = Christian believers, was inclusive of men and women.

Historically, however, following the first century CE, through to the sixteenth century, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers went into oblivion. Walter Shurden summarizes well what happened over the next fifteen centuries to the Reformation: The “Priesthood was clericalized!”⁶⁸ “Grace was sacramentalized!”⁶⁹ The “Church was institutionalized!”⁷⁰

Led by the reformer Martin Luther, it was sixteenth century Protestantism that restored the New Testament doctrine of the universal priesthood. Luther rooted it in

⁶⁶ “...to be a holy priesthood....But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood...” (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). “...and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father...” (Rev. 1:6). “...you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God” (Rev. 5:10). “...but they will be priests of God and of Christ...” (Rev. 20:6).

⁶⁷ “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession” (Heb. 4:14).

⁶⁸ This meant that the priests were separated into two distinct classes of Christians, clergy and laity (Shurden 1987:16).

⁶⁹ This meant that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) became the means of dispensing grace and salvation; hence sacramental faith replaced personal faith (Shurden 1987:16).

⁷⁰ This meant that the church became an institution superintended by the ordained clergy rather than the body of Christ with all members participating (Shurden 1987:16-17).

his famous “doctrine of justification by faith alone” (Shurden 1987:17). However, as Ruether (1990:144) has shown, the rejection of the elite unmarried pastor/laity division also made room for an emphasis on the patriarchal family as the “nucleus of the church, to be modelled by the married pastor and his obedient wife and children”. In relation to the formation of Baptist thinking, in 1608, John Smyth of England, who is called the first Baptist, explicitly brought this doctrine as the Baptists’ “single most distinguishing denominational distinctive” (Shurden 1987:19).

4.3.2. The Baptist Understanding of the Doctrine

Building on this foundation, Shurden (1987:18-19) has identified five features or distinguishing marks of the principle of the priesthood of all believers.⁷¹ The first feature is that it is a universal priesthood for all Christians, irrespective of gender. This point is very important for my study when considering the role of the BACOMA pastors’ wives. Secondly, it places all Christian believers on an equal or level footing. In other words, all believers—both lay and ordained—are equal and all have equal privileges and responsibilities before God. Again this is important when looking at the workload and remuneration of the pastor and the wife in the BACOMA. The third feature is that it accords the right of religious liberty to all people. In other words, everyone has the freedom and responsibility over their own life in matters of faith and life. Thus, it advocates a democratization of the faith whereby no religious or political power should stand between a Christian believer and God, for God alone is the Lord of the conscience. In theory this also should apply to receiving a call to ministry from God and how an individual responds to that call. In practice however, as it will be shown through the experience of the pastors’ wives call to ministry, this feature does not seem to apply in the BACOMA. Fourthly, it gives the idea of the competency of the soul in religion (Shurden 1987:19) as championed by Mullin (Hobbs and Mullin 1978). This is not born of human self-sufficiency, but competency under God. It shows a person’s ability to hear and respond to God. This feature is related to (iii) above, when applied to the experiences of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA. Fifthly, it is the duty of every Christian believer to serve as a priest in relation to others. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is the democratization of the Christian faith that has been expressed by the BACOMA members through witnessing, teaching,

⁷¹ See also, Baptist Faith and Message (2000) and Hobbs (1995:20-21).

preaching, and other acts of service (Longwe 2007:410). In practice however, as it will be shown in chapter six of this dissertation, this does not seem to apply to the theological education of pastors' wives in the BACOMA.

A further building block in understanding the priesthood of all believers in the Baptist tradition is provided by Yarbrough (1995:160-165) who has summarised it into what he calls "four freedoms". These freedoms are: soul freedom;⁷² ecclesiastical freedom;⁷³ theological freedom;⁷⁴ and religious freedom.⁷⁵

Of particular interest to this study is how these four freedoms are enjoyed by the BACOMA pastors' wives. This will be investigated in depth in chapters six and seven of this dissertation. Suffice it here to argue that when one compares the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers with feminist ecclesiology and anthropology as described in chapters two and three of this dissertation, there is present a certain resonance. In theory, it can be argued that the doctrine of priesthood of all believers, as practised by all Baptist churches as described above, renders itself to Christian experience as being free from sexism or androcentricism or clericalism. Yet, as it will be shown in chapters six and seven of this dissertation, that is not the case in the BACOMA. Why then are Baptist women not experiencing the freedom of the Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of all believers?" Below, I will attempt to show how other Baptist teachings affect the praxis of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

4.3.3. Other Baptist Teachings within the Context of the Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers

4.3.3.1. The Authority of the Bible

The first Baptist teaching that impinges on the practice of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is the Baptist-held view of the authority of the Bible.

⁷² This refers to the fact that the soul is competent before God, and is capable of making decisions in matters of faith without coercion or interference by any larger religious or civil body.

⁷³ This means that the local church is free from outside interference, whether government or civil.

⁷⁴ This means that the individual is free to interpret the Bible for herself or himself, using the best tools of scholarship and biblical study available to the individual.

⁷⁵ This means that the individual is free to choose whether or not to practice any religion. "Freedom of religion" is not championed only by religious bodies; it is also a human rights issue as endorsed by the instrument of the International Bill of Human Rights and many other human rights Conventions and Declarations adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and signed and ratified by its member states. However, Baptists were at the forefront of the fight for such freedom (Lorenzen 1999).

Central to Baptist identity is the cliché, “people of the book”.⁷⁶ Although literally it may mean a people who are stuck with the ‘text’ or the ‘printed’ word, in common thought, the Bible is considered to be their guide in all matters of faith and daily living. Historically, Baptists share the fifteenth century Reformation tradition of *sola scriptura* (scripture only). As with others of the Evangelical tradition, Baptists believe that the Bible is the only authoritative source for doctrine and practice. This means matters of church polity and practice must agree with the Bible both in the life of the individual believer and with regard to the structures of the church.⁷⁷ With regard to the authority of the Bible, it is stated in the *Baptist Faith and Message* that:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true centre of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation (Baptist Faith and Message 1963:7).

Baptists therefore hold the Bible in high esteem. Bediako has noted that the Bible is held in similar high esteem within the Reformed (Presbyterian) Tradition (Bediako 1999). Furthermore, Sarojini Nadar (2009:131-132) describes the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal (Charismatic) churches in South Africa as treating the Bible as a sacred object, whereby any attempt by critical scholarship to question its validity or outright authority is regarded with suspicion (Nadar 2009:131-132). Words such as, “inerrancy, infallibility, inspiration, and immediacy” which Nadar calls the “four I’s” of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal approach to Bible, are very important in their vocabulary (2009:133-146). In a similar vein, speaking as a Baptist, William

⁷⁶ Slayden Yarbrough (2000:121-124) adds that Baptists are also identified as “a people of faith”; “a free people”; “a servant people”; “a diverse people”, and “a people of conflict and controversy”.

⁷⁷ *The Baptist Faith and Message* is the Baptists’ considered their doctrinal standard, but not like the Apostolic Creed is held in other (mainly Episcopalian) churches. Baptists claim that it has no authority over the Christian life; nor are its members required to adhere to it. Additionally, SBC-affiliated member churches are not required to use it as their Statement of Faith or accepted doctrine, but merely as a guide to faith and practice (Hobbs 1971:20-21).

Lumpkin talks of the Bible as “sufficient, certain, and infallible” because it is the “Word of God” (Lumpkin 1959:240 *cf.* Estep 1987:599). Baptists thus argue from biblical texts such as 1 Timothy 3:16 “all scripture is God-breathed” that it can be strongly asserted that “God can breathe error” (Hobbs 1995:122).

Within this same tradition, biblical inerrancy is also asserted as a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith (Baker 1995:146; Hobbs 1995). Hence, to reject the inerrancy of Bible is to implicitly deny the gospel, which in principle means removing oneself from the Christian faith (Bauder 2003:1-2; Baker 1995:146). For Baptists, the Bible is the inspired “Word of God”. Consequently, even though there are religious freedoms (see above), such freedoms can only be interpreted on the basis of the totality of the Bible as being the “Word of God”. This means that when the Bible places restrictions on women’s participation in the church, this is considered to be more important than the priesthood of all believers and the freedoms which this doctrine gives to women.

Notwithstanding the Baptist belief in the Bible as the inspired “Word of God”, if this model is not helpful in terms of social justice, Nadar’s question, “are there alternative approaches to Scripture which we can draw on?” (Nadar 2009:138) becomes ever more relevant when analysing the BACOMAs position in relation to what the Bible says about the position of women in general and pastors’ wives in particular. In this regard there are three major issues which the Baptist do not take into account when discussing about the Bible as the “Word of God”:

First is the question of translation. The challenge against the *sola scriptura* principle and the inerrancy tradition is the fact that what is believed to be the “Word of God”, that is, the Hebrew/Christian scriptures, has undergone many stages of transformation in the translation process. The transmission of the text with the resulting textual variants is also an issue. This means that the text we have now, may not be the original inspired text. This is not to suggest that the Bible loses its inspiration, for God still speaks with people through the Holy Spirit by “God’s Word”. However, scholars observe that in as much as people involved in the translation process attempt to be loyal to the original meaning of the text and the inspiration, “additions, omissions and changes” have been made “intentionally or unintentionally” (Reisenberg 2009:85-94). It is therefore important to “recognise that every participant in the process, whether

consciously or unconsciously, interferes with or stamps his or her mark on the text” (Reisenberg 2009:85 citing Bassnet-McGuire 1980:14).

Second, the Baptist tradition ignores the importance of context when interpreting the Bible. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers gives freedom to every believer to interpret the Bible personally through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Hobbs 1995:19). While Baptists do not have a central authority which tells them how to interpret the Bible, their mission churches follow the Western missionaries’ models of interpretation, which from a feminist perspective, and together with the translations, have been male-oriented all along and without the benefit of women’s reflections. The lament of Ruether (1983:22) is that “there is no question that patriarchy is the social context for both the Old and the New Testament and that this social context has been incorporated into religious ideology on many levels”. One cannot argue against the fact that the Bible is highly regarded in African Christianity as a Western missionary heritage. Not only is the Bible the basic source of African theologies, it has also been a tool of liberation for the African people and for the expansion of African Christianity. Not only are the vernacular Bible versions significant for the African people,⁷⁸ the various English translations versions of the Bible also claim the same significance in contemporary Africa. However, as with their Western sisters, African women theologians observe that, not only do people take and interpret the Bible literally, but that the Bible itself is a “double-edged sword” and that it should be used with a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (Kanyoro and Njoroge 1996:xiii; Oduyoye 2001:11-12).

Thirdly, the Baptist tradition assumes that the Bible speaks with one voice which they understand as authoritative. Biblical hermeneutics goes beyond the issue of inspiration and looks at the history, culture, and socio-political issues which are encapsulated within a biblical text. In addition, one should critically examine who is speaking, and from what or whose perspective. For example, Ruether (1983:20-33) illustrates how within the Bible, the prophetic tradition was fundamental in the denunciation of unjust social hierarchies and powers by using a critical-prophetic language. She points to the religious spokespersons that identify themselves with the poor and the oppressed.

⁷⁸ This is especially the case with the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of the African peoples as espoused by scholars such as Barrett (1968); Sanneh (1995); and Bediako (1995).

Ruether also notes however the limitations present in this dominant/oppressed socio-religious model. She observes that there are times when the religious spokespersons are seen as “stabilizing the existing social orders and justifying the power structures” against the enemies (1983:26). In this case, she sees the prophetic language as “deformed in the interests of the status quo” (1983:29). Thus, while they speak with a liberating voice to one group, to another, it becomes an oppressive voice. A good example which shows how the Bible has been used to oppress people is the apartheid system. Ruether (1983:29) further observes that Jesus’ language in the Gospels belongs to the “tradition that criticizes existing power systems and places God on the side of the oppressed”. Ruether therefore asserts Jesus’ vision as a “revolutionary transformative process that will bring all to a new mode of relationship; a relationship not of domination and subjugation, but of mutual enhancement” (1983:30). Ruether (1983:31) thus calls for “a renewal of the prophetic meaning of religious language from its ideological deformations as the creative dynamic of Biblical faith” She further argues that “this rediscovery of prophetic content, and its discerning reapplication to new social situations, is precisely what the Bible calls ‘The Word of God’” (1983:32). In other words, it is the hermeneutical principle for discerning prophetic faith within the Bible as well as for its ongoing interpretation as critique of tradition. Hence, from a feminist perspective, Ruether argues that we need to go “beyond the letter of the prophetic message” in order to rediscover the “prophetic-liberating principle to women” (1983:32). In other words, what began as the critique of hierarchy must now include a critique of patriarchy and sexism because women are among the oppressed. What is of particular relevance to my study here is that Ruether’s analysis of these different voices present within the Bible links well with Nadar’s (2009:138) quest for alternative approaches to the Bible.

4.3.2.2. The Doctrine of the Church

The second Baptist teaching that impinges on women’s freedom as provided for in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is the Baptist doctrine of the church. The Baptist understanding of ecclesiology is very important, as it is here that Baptists find their concept of autonomy as shown within the New Testament. Ecclesiastical autonomy refers to the right of each individual congregation to choose and define its ministry (Chapman 1985:5; Fiedler 2008:1). For Baptists, the churches of the New

Testament were local, independent, self-governing, and operated through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Chapman 1985:4-5). Baptists therefore always reaffirm the principle of local church autonomy as one of the most cherished distinctives of their ecclesiology. As a result, the BACOMA rejects the notion of a national church and champions in its place a church which is local and voluntarily entered.

Notwithstanding the concept of autonomy, the structure of the Baptist governance provides room for the formation of associations at regional, national, and international levels. In this regard, the BACOMA is a member of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), a fellowship of various Baptist traditions throughout the world. By virtue of being a member of the Malawi Council of Churches, the BACOMA is also a member of the World Council of Churches, while its mother body, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) are not affiliated with the WCC because they see it as a violation of the autonomy of constituent churches (Gaines 1966:350). However, the BACOMA uses the same argument of autonomy to affiliate with whomsoever it wills. This freedom of networking with other autonomous churches and associations has exposed the BACOMA women to alternative models of being church. It has also given them the courage to voice out their dissatisfaction of their own churches' understanding of being church.

Within Baptist ecclesiology, the church is also understood as belonging to a believing community, the Body of Christ, for baptized believers (Longwe 2007:392). The BACOMA believes that converts become members of the living Body of Christ by consciously and voluntarily receiving the Spirit of Christ. In other words, the membership of a Baptist congregation is made up of only those who have experienced spiritual conversion, and have confessed their personal faith in Jesus Christ and been baptised by full immersion in water.⁷⁹ In this case, as Klaus Fiedler argues (2008:2), all believers are priests, and that is what produces the concept of the priesthood of all believers. However, a Baptist South African scholar, Louise Kretzschmar (1998:103), has argued that the Baptist emphasis on individual sin and salvation “gives room for

⁷⁹ In the view of Bill Leonard (1995:101), it was the Baptist concern for evangelism and conversion that caused them to be labelled as ‘Biblicists’ because they believed that the Bible taught all that was necessary for salvation and was the means of conversion. They were secondly called ‘Pietists’ because they believed that salvation was the mysterious activity of divine grace experienced in the heart of all true believers.

the denial of structural or institutionalized injustice such as racism, patriarchy, sexism, or clericalism as sin”. In addition, there is a “danger of focusing on the afterlife which has the potential of blinding people to the realities of the present life” (Kretzschmar 1998:103). Therefore, while altar calls for individual salvation are a common practice in Baptist services, aimed at challenging and preparing people for candidacy into heaven, there is a danger of ignoring altar calls for salvation from other types of oppressions that require corporate prayers. Hence, while the Baptist doctrine of being church allows women to confess personal sin in order to experience divine salvation, it impinges on their freedom to confess the structural sins of psychological, physical, sexual, or spiritual abuse that mainly women experience.

Baptist ecclesiology also recognizes the two offices of the pastor and deacon based on an interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12. In addition, some Baptist churches also acknowledge the office of an Elder. Although the term ‘pastor’ is found only once in the New Testament (Eph. 4:11),⁸⁰ Baptists prefer this term because of its meaning, which is shepherd. A shepherd is one who leads his or her flock, feeds and protects them against harm. The shepherd also seeks the wandering sheep and ministers to the weak and helpless. Clyde Turner (1956:124) sums up the work of a pastor as being that of a “preacher, teacher, leader, and counsellor”. The BACOMA inherited from the SBC that a pastor can only be a male. This impinges on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers by denying women entry into the pastoral office and other positions of church leadership (Slee 2003:38; Rakoczy 2004:28-33). In addition, by having an all male leadership, this means that member churches of the BACOMA deny women the right of administering the two Baptist ordinances of Water Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion).⁸¹

Reflecting on Baptist ecclesiology from a feminist perspective, it can be observed that while the Baptist church structure is hierarchical and excludes women, its government of autonomy is in line with the feminist vision of an inclusive and democratic church. Notwithstanding that, it is unfortunate that the democratic governance does not translate to inclusion of women in leadership positions due to patriarchal interpretations of the Bible as noted above. Furthermore, although the priesthood of

⁸⁰ Eph. 4:11 “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (New Revised Standard Version).

⁸¹ Baptists call the rites of Water Baptism and the Lord’s Supper ordinances instead of sacraments.

all believers does not confer any special status or position on the pastor, a hierarchy exists between pastor and lay people in the form of ‘clericalism’. As observed earlier in chapter two, Ruether (2005) argues that clericalism dis-empowers women because the sacramental life is restricted to the ordained clerical order and church administration is male controlled. She therefore argues that within this kind of hierarchy, women are usually among the ordinary members and therefore denied decision-making positions (Ruether 2005; *cf.* Slee 2004:84-85). Since, the freedom that Baptist members enjoy is endowed by the Holy Spirit, I will discuss below the bestowing of spiritual gifts in relation to the priesthood of all believers to show that women do not enjoy the same privileges of being allowed to exercise their gifts in the church and in society.

4.3.3.3. The Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit

The third Baptist teaching that impinges on women’s freedom as provided for in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is on the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Baptists believe that, according to the Apostle Paul’s list of spiritual gifts, everyone who is born again by the Spirit of God is gifted in one way or another. Shurden (1987:95-110) identifies four factors in relation to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and spiritual gifts as follows:

Firstly, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are universal. This means that since the source of the gifts is God, every member of the body of Christ is gifted for priesthood. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good....All these are activated by the one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually Just as the Spirit chooses (1 Cor. 12:7-11 New Revised Standard Version). Secondly, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are diverse. According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit distributes gifts “in different shapes, forms, and styles” (Shurden 1987:98). Paul’s four lists of spiritual gifts highlight the diversity of gifts that the Holy Spirit apportions to God’s people.⁸² Likewise, Paul’s analogy of the human body to the body of Christ drives this point home (1 Cor. 12). Thirdly, the gifts of the Spirit are to be exercised. As Shurden points out, the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) illustrates that God’s gifts are “not to be buried in the ground; they are to be employed in the Kingdom” (1987:102).

⁸² *Cf.* 1 Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:1-18; 1 Pet 4:7-11.

Shurden further points out that factors such as ageism, sexism, and racism may prevent some people from using their gifts. Lastly, the gifts of the Spirit need to be developed. The New Testament teaches clearly that it is the responsibility of the pastor to identify and develop the gifts of the Spirit distributed among the members of the congregation (1987:105-106).

These four factors demonstrate that the church's witness to Christ is shared among the laity and the pastor. This means that in the BACOMA, the gift of being a pastor is one gift among many others. The four factors above also show that the ministry of the pastor is not above or below other ministries; it is a function of ministry alongside others. From Ephesians 4:12, it is further argued that the responsibility of the ordained ministry is to help others in the church to perform their ministry. In other words, the overarching calling of the pastor is to develop the spiritual gifts and ministries of all the members in the body of Christ. It is an equipping ministry that is achieved through teaching (Shurden 1987:106). It is therefore important that the equipper is well equipped for developing the gifts of the entire priesthood in a non hierarchical way (Shurden 1987:109).

Therefore, a feminist interpretation of the four factors on the Baptist teaching on the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit are in line with feminist ecclesiology as discussed in chapters two of this dissertation. Suffice it here to point out that while the Christian churches do not deny the distribution of spiritual gifts and ministries on men and women alike, Ruether (1983:196) argues that it was the rising Episcopal powers of bishops as keepers who "claimed the right to judge and control" the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the four factors above within the Baptist church show that it is the pastor who has the ultimate authority to judge and control the functioning of the Holy Spirit within the individual members. The system of leadership structure does not give the pastor the absolute authority to identify pastoral gifting in women. Such an imposed limitation infringes on women's innate freedom to follow their God given spiritual gifts. I therefore turn in the next main section to discuss the Baptist teachings on women's roles.

4.4. Baptist Teachings on Women's Roles in the Church

While to a great extent, Baptists encourage women and men to be all that they can be spiritually, a great divide has emerged on the issue of the role of women in ministry and its implications for women's theological education and that of women's role in the family. In order to understand the SBC and by extension, the BACOMA position on the role of and ministry of women in the church, one needs to locate it within the Evangelical discourse. In this regard, there are two publications of particular importance. The first is edited by and Robert G. Clouse and Bonnidell Clouse, *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1989) which presents four theological views, namely the traditional model; the male leadership model; the plural ministry model; and the egalitarian model. In the case of the traditional model, Robert Culver (1989:25-65) argues that women are not to be involved in Christian ministry. With regard to the male leadership model, Susan Foh (1998:69-123) argues for a limited involvement of women in ministry as long as they are under the direction of a male senior pastor. Walter Liefeld (1989:127-169) presents the plural ministry model whereby he supports the position that all believers are ministers and suggests that an overemphasis on ordination has caused Christians to argue over women's roles in the church to a greater extent than they should. Finally, Alvera Mickelsen (1989:174-220) argues for what she calls an egalitarian model and thereby fully supports female ministry. She argues that women should be able to engage in any kind of service for which God has endowed them and to which they feel called.

The second publication is that edited by James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2001). This presents two models in relation to the ministry of women and men in the church: the egalitarian and complementarian. The egalitarian model stresses the equality of men and women, not merely for salvation or in essential personhood, but that all should be given "equal opportunities to hold every office and play every role that exists in church life" (Beck and Blomberg 2001:9-22). The complementarian model, while also advocating for the equality of men and women, stresses that men and women hold different roles, especially in the church and family (Beck and Blomberg 2001:9-22). Among all these

models, the SBC supports the complementarian view, which I will discuss in the next section.

4.4.1. The Southern Baptist Convention's Complementarian View on the Role of Women in the Church

Taking its lead from the SBC, the BACOMA subscribes to what can be called the complementarian view. This is because of BACOMA's links with the North American SBC whose views are well represented by Thomas Schreiner, a professor of New Testament at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, situated in Louisville, Kentucky. As Schreiner (2001:177) has pointed out, since the language of ordination is not central to the New Testament, the issue is whether women are called "to function as pastors, elders, or overseers". According to the complementarian and the male leadership models, the response is a resolute "NO!" (*cf.* Schreiner 2001:178).⁸³

According to their interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12, both the SBC and the BACOMA believe that the Bible forbids women from teaching and exercising authority over men.⁸⁴ Schreiner (2001:178) further points out that although Baptists believe in *sola scriptura*, church tradition should not be discarded and thus fail to see what was clear to their ancestors: that women should not serve as pastors. Schreiner (2001:180) contends that it is what he calls "feminist revolutionists" who are promoting new interpretations, which, according to him, are unbiblical.

Sharing Schreiner's view is that of Mark Coppenger (2003:86), who traces the distinction in roles from the biblical creation stories before the first couple's Fall into sin, and urges people not to trivialize this distinction.⁸⁵ Given this difference,

⁸³ Although ordination to Christian ministry is not the focus of this study, it is discussed in this chapter to assist in understanding the SBC/BACOMA approach to biblical interpretation on issues concerning women and ministry, which also affect the role of the BACOMA pastors' wives at church and in the home.

⁸⁴ "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent" (New Revised Standard Version).

⁸⁵ Following Coppenger, Schreiner (2001:200-201) lists six indications of role differentiation from Genesis 1-3 as follows:

- i. God created Adam first, and then he created Eve;
- ii. God gave Adam the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil;
- iii. God created Eve to be a helper for Adam;
- iv. Adam exercised his leadership by naming the creature God formed out of Adam's rib, woman;
- v. The serpent subverted God's pattern of leadership by tempting Eve rather than Adam;
- vi. God approached Adam first after the first couple had sinned, even though Eve sinned first.

Coppenger (2003:82) argues that the Apostle Paul applied it to the work of the church, saying that women must not teach or have authority over men. It is asserted that according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, God has designated men as the “chief teachers, rebukers, correctors, and trainers”.⁸⁶ Coppenger (2003:81) disagrees with those who think that this limits women who are gifted to be pastors, because he sees numerous other ministries in which the women can utilize their gifts. In other words, what Coppenger means is that spiritual gifts are gendered, or that the pastoral office is gendered. It becomes clear here that the above arguments are based on SBCs understanding of the authority of the Bible and its interpretation and tradition as discussed above.

Of particular interest to this present study is the fact that the views of both Schreiner and Coppenger are not shared by all Baptist scholars. Writing from a historical perspective, Shirley Bentall (1990:279-281) has argued that despite the absence of women in the writings of Baptist historian scholars, as early as the seventeenth century, European women were elected and ordained into the diaconate, eldership and as preachers. She gives the example of Dorothy Hazzard whom she describes as an “effective teacher, leader, soul-winner and preacher” (Bentall 1990:279). Bentall further observes that from the eighteenth century onwards, North American Baptists involved women in the role of leadership, especially immediately after the (so-called) First Great Evangelical Awakening (Bentall 1990:280).⁸⁷ Bentall thus laments the change of attitude of the Southern Baptists from the nineteenth century onwards, when they began to reject the active role of women in ministry (Bentall 1990:280 *cf.* Longwe 2007:197).

The SBCs use of the Bible is challenged by the Baptist historian, H. Leon McBeth (1987a:381-391; 1987b). While McBeth acknowledges that not everything in the Bible is clear, it is “not a question of whether one believes the Bible, but of how we understand the Bible. McBeth reminds the Southern Baptists that historically, they

⁸⁶ “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (New Revised Standard Version).

⁸⁷ Robert G Clouse (1989:9-21) also singles out the seventeenth-century Baptists and Society of Friends (Quakers) as two radical groups who differed from the Protestant Reformers attitude against women. Clouse states that the two groups argued that because everyone is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, ministry of the Word of God is not limited to men. Clouse further notes that Baptists and others had women preachers in the Netherlands, in England and in Massachusetts (USA).

once interpreted the Bible to justify slavery (McBeth 1987b:9). McBeth's further concern is that because the SBC has always been run by men, this resulted in women's voices in all the decision making bodies of the SBC having been silenced. Yet, as he argues, women are the ones that have faithfully remained in the majority in the church. This should not however be taken to mean that they are contented to being regarded as second-class Christians (McBeth 1987b:4-5). He thus accuses the men of having become the creators of women and of taking over the role of the Holy Spirit in the church (McBeth 1987b:5).

In addition to Bentley and McBeth, Rick McClatchy has rightly argued that most of the biblical texts that are used against women becoming pastors were used "under special circumstances"⁸⁸ to correct particular situations, and that the Apostle Paul and the early church did not "establish rules to limit the freedom of the Spirit's work in the lives of women".⁸⁹ He therefore admonishes the church to acknowledge the Spirit's leadership and not "develop rules which restrict the Spirit."⁹⁰ It becomes clear then that the official SBC position on women which has also been adopted by the BACOMA contradicts the Baptist-held doctrine of priesthood of all believers. Of special concern to my study here is the fact that the SBC position on women and ministry has also impacted on women's theological education in the BACOMA as I will now reflect on below.

4.4.2. The Southern Baptist Convention's View on Theological Education and Women

The impact of the SBC's interpretation of Baptist doctrines and the role, position and ministry of women can best be understood in the context of women at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi (*hereafter*, BTSM). The BTSM was born out of the need for trained local leadership when the (North) American Southern Mission in Malawi established their first Baptist Bible School in 1964 (Longwe 2004:33-42; Longwe 2007:258). The entry qualification for the Bible school was primary school education and it included both women and men who were trained for the general

⁸⁸ McClatchy, R. Should a Woman Serve as Pastor?

<http://www.mainstreambaptists.org/mob/woman_pastor.htm/> [Accessed 15 November 2009].

⁸⁹ McClatchy, R. Should a Woman Serve as Pastor?

<http://www.mainstreambaptists.org/mob/woman_pastor.htm/> [Accessed 15 November 2009].

⁹⁰ McClatchy, R. Should a Woman Serve as Pastor?

<http://www.mainstreambaptists.org/mob/woman_pastor.htm/> [Accessed 15 November 2009].

leadership of the church (Longwe 2004:33). However, those who had secondary school education were sent together with their families for theological training to SBC institutions in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe with the understanding that it was the husband who was being prepared to be a pastor (Longwe 2007:258-270). From 1994 onwards, the SBC established the BTSM based in Lilongwe, Malawi. Longwe (2007:289) critically analysed the mission statement of the seminary and observed that although it states that it was established for “equipping God-called men and women for Christian ministry”, the inclusion of men and women was more in theory than in practice because the BACOMA had no women pastors.

The first request for women pastors in the BACOMA was brought to its annual general meeting in 2001. The majority of the members agreed that women could not become ordained pastors (BACOMA Annual General Meeting Minutes 2001:91). Nevertheless, this item was tabled again at the 2008 general meeting where the BACOMA position on women leadership in the church was further challenged but no decision was taken (BACOMA Annual General Meeting Minutes 2008:80). Again, it was brought to the 2010 annual general meeting where one church congregation challenged the assembly that it already had had a woman pastor for a period of three years. After intense debate on this issue, the meeting resolved that the BACOMA theologians should prepare a researched paper and present it at the next annual general meeting (BACOMA Annual General Meeting Minutes 2010:50). The fact that this issue continues to be brought to the BACOMA annual general meetings for debate and openly challenges the BACOMAs policy on the absence of women pastors is a good start towards transformation. In reality however, this transformation has already begun at the BTSM through enrolment of female students in their own right.

Between 1996 and 2010 a total of twelve female students were enrolled at the BTSM. In addition, it is significant to observe that five out of the BACOMA women have studied theology at other theological institutions up to post-graduate level.⁹¹ Although the response has been slow it is still significant in that a pool of possible female pastors is slowly being created. The slowness of having more women enrolling for theological education at the BTSM may be attributed to a number of factors. The

⁹¹ Of the five women, one has completed a PhD. and another is about to complete; three have completed BTh. studies (see Appendix IX: Demographic Table of Pastors' Wives (Participants)).

major reason is that BACOMA still refuses to welcome women into the ordained pastoral ministry, even though there are women who feel a call to pastoral ministry. However, through the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, such women are encouraged to equip themselves with theological training for other ministries while advocacy for change continues.

The majority of women who have studied at the BTSM are students' wives who receive training similar to what Klaus Fiedler calls "a reduced practical" programme (1994:303). Since its inception in 1994 to 2010, the BTSM has graduated 103 students' wives. While the wives' programme runs for a period of three weeks per year for four years, the men's programme runs for a total of eighteen weeks per year for four years. It is a great personal concern that there is such disparity on the content and time that the students' wives and the men spend on theological studies at the BTSM. This is where the complementarian view which is supported by the practices of the SBC comes starkly into view. In this particular case, the wives are given inferior theological education because they are seen as complementing their husbands' ministry. Notwithstanding the fact that the BACOMA women who have a high level of secondary school education have the opportunity to study theology at a tertiary level, it is the complementary view that still guides all pastors' wives participation in the church and in their homes.

An analysis of the four-year cycle of the BTSM wives' curriculum is significant at this stage.⁹² It is divided into five main categories. The first is the Old and New Testament courses which comprise a survey of the various books of the Bible and a study of women of the Bible. The second is the Book study courses which cover issues of personal spiritual growth, Baptist beliefs and doctrines, Christian family living, and how to teach women, girls and children.⁹³ Thirdly, Healthy family living courses which include lessons in child care/development; health issues such as various diseases, especially HIV and AIDS; first aid and nutrition; home management, plus any other relevant issues as the need arises. Fourthly, Practical courses which include sewing various items such as baby clothes, aprons; cookery of various foods and making various handcrafts. Lastly, Literacy/English courses which include reading

⁹² See Appendix X: Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi (BTSM) Wives' Curriculum.

⁹³ See Appendix XI: List of Books for Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi (BTSM) Wives' Curriculum, for a comprehensive list of books and manuals used on the Wives' Courses.

and writing skills for those with little or no basic education. Communication skills are also taught to those who are able to read and write and understand some English. The number of functionally illiterate pastors' wives students is, however, decreasing. This may be attributed to the Malawi government's policy on the educational advancement of girls and women. Indeed, statistics have shown that by 2000, the Malawi government had managed to open 3, 000 adult literacy classes across the country.⁹⁴ Thus, the BTSMs emphasis on literacy training is also aimed towards this same goal.⁹⁵ That said, NyaGondwe-Banda (2005:115) has tellingly written about the tension she has often observed when a lay woman has had to take over to teach or to preach in place of a pastor's wife who cannot read or write. As observed in chapter two of this dissertation, generally women and men with little or no education interpret the Bible literally, and to question or challenge anything is often tantamount to blasphemy.⁹⁶ As will be shown in chapters six and seven of this dissertation, there is usually tension present between people who are expected to be involved in pastoral and leadership work among women, yet, who cannot acquire the required skill levels because of their poor educational standards.

In my opinion, theological training is akin to the socialisation process that indoctrinates men and women into the doctrines and teachings of their church

⁹⁴ See, Malawi Country Gender Profile: Final Report. January 2007.

<<http://www.jica.go.jp/activities/issues/gender/pdf/e06malaw.pdf>> [Accessed 23 January 2012].

⁹⁵ It is important here to note that illiteracy is a global problem, especially for women (*cf.* Stromquist 1990:95-111). In support of literacy programmes, it has been cogently argued that literacy is a tool for personal empowerment and a means for social change, human development, and economic progress. Literacy also has a transformative effect on both the family and the wider community level when a woman is literate. Theologically, it is argued that although God uses people regardless of their educational qualifications, it is still difficult to fully participate in the life of the church especially at a leadership level if a person is not equipped at least with the foundational years of education (*cf.* Longwe 2007:200). While it does not make them unintelligent people, most rural African women have had no formal educational opportunities to learn a written culture (*cf.* Howell 2001:145). Nevertheless, it is problematic for most of the BACOMA pastors' wives to go further with their theological training or any other training for that matter due to the low level of their basic education. In contrast, those the BACOMA pastors' wives with higher educational qualifications can pursue their calling (except becoming ordained pastors) and get involved in various other ministries independent of their husbands.

⁹⁶ An good illustration of this is my experience at a Baptist Women's Meeting in 1998 held in Malawi where the issue of whether or not women should wear long pants (trousers) was discussed for more than four hours. This debate took place just after the State lifted its longstanding ban forbidding women to wear trousers in public. This resulted in many mixed feelings being expressed about the issue. Since the leadership of the BACOMA Pastors Wives is much respected in such discussions due to their having received theological training, their strong views against women wearing trousers prevailed, using Deuteronomy 22:5 as the basis for the majority of their arguments. Interestingly, the women who did wear trousers or mothers who allowed their daughters to dress in such a manner were condemned as being "unchristian". Sarojini Nadar (2009:133-134) also narrates her own experience of being forbidden to put on jeans, which were considered a "man's garment", because as a Pentecostal, the Bible was taken very seriously and literally in her family.

traditions, as well as into their distinct roles. That is not to deny the spiritual formation that such training provides. The BTSMs wives' curriculum demonstrates that pastors' wives are trained not only for good womanhood, motherhood, and pastor's wifehood; but are equipped to teach and train women and girl children. The rationale is that women, as custodians of traditions, are supposed to pass them on to younger generations. There is also the patriarchal stereotype at play here which works with the essentialist mentality that mothers are inherently nurturers and are therefore eligible to teach children. In patriarchal thinking, women and children belong to the same subordinate status of being ruled by the husband-father. The participants' stories in chapters six and seven of this dissertation concerning the call and roles of the BACOMA pastors' wives as their husband's helpers in ministry and in the home will attest to this model of training. It will be my focus in the next section to see how the complementarian view has described (and prescribed) the role of women in the family.

4.4.3. The Southern Baptist Convention's View on Women's Role in the Family

The SBCs complementarian model with regard to roles of men and women applies equally in ministry and in marriage. The SBCs 1998 annual meeting affirmed the complementarian view of marriage by appending "Article XVIII, The family" to the 1963 version of the Baptist Faith and Message, which affirms the headship of the husband and the submissive role of the wife (Baptist Faith and Message 2000⁹⁷). As a Baptist theologian, Wayne Grudem (1994:454) summarizes the relationship between husband and wife in three ways. He argues that the creation of man as male and female shows God's image in: (1) harmonious interpersonal relationships; (2) equality of personhood and importance; (3) differences in role and authority.

While both husband and wife must treat each other with dignity and respect since both are created in God's image, Grudem (1994:456) argues that the Bible specifies that God made Eve for Adam, not Adam for Eve. He therefore affirms male headship which he argues does not imply a lesser importance for Eve. He then connects the relationship pertaining the husband and wife, (which he attributes to the creation story in Genesis chapters 1 and 2), to male leadership in the church (1994:456-464). In

⁹⁷ See, <<http://www.sbc.net/>> [Accessed 01 March 2010].

addition, Grudem (1994:468) agrees with Schreiner (2001:190) that Paul's teaching is clear for both the wife to submit to her husband and the husband to love his wife, and that the husband's love is exercised in his leadership of the home. Grudem further argues that husbands should strive for a "loving, considerate, thoughtful leadership" in their families, while wives should aim for "active, intelligent, joyful submission to their husbands' authority" (1994:465). For Grudem, if husband and wife follow this model of partnership, they will soon discover true biblical manhood and womanhood in all its dignity and joyful complementarity, as God created them to be (1994:468 *cf.* Schreiner 2001:192).

In Malawi most SBC missionary wives fulfilled the complementarian model by supporting their husbands' ministries in two ways: a) through teaching the Bible and home-making skills to Malawian women; and b) by being housewives who were only involved in home-making.

This model of restricting the wives' ministry was intentionally transferred to the local indigenous pastors and their wives who subsequently internalized it. As a consequence, the BACOMA pastors' wives have become effective in the support ministry to their husbands as will be shown in chapter seven of this dissertation.

4.5. The Feminist Response and an Alternative Model to the Baptist-held Doctrines

The feminist model of the partnership extant between husband and wife that the SBC are reacting against above is best illustrated by the work of the feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, Azilla Reseinberg. Reisenberg (2009:85-94) has offered an alternative interpretation of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 that challenges the patriarchal and hierarchical structure of the family. Accordingly, Reisenberg uses the two creation accounts of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-2:25 as an example of what she terms "interlingual translation as a reflection of social context" (2009:88-90).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Reisenberg borrows the three categories of the translation process from Susan Bassnett who also used Roman Jakobson's work. These categories are: intralingual translation, interlingual translation, and intersemiotic translation (Reisenberg 2009:88-90).

4.5.1. The Woman as ‘Helper’

First, with regard to woman as ‘helper’ Reseinberg (2009:88-89) points out that while the first chapter describes the creation of male and female human beings as equal (reinforced in Genesis 5:1-2), the second chapter depicts the creation of the woman as an afterthought, when the first created human needed an *ezer kenegdo* (a compatible partner.) Reisenberg further notes that throughout the generations, believers and sages tried to reconcile the two creation stories of the woman by suggesting a separation of the male and female which in the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:21-22 reads:

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ‘zela’ and closed up its place with flesh; and the ‘zela’ which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman.

4.5.2. The Traditional Interpretation of *Zela*

Second, Reisenberg (2009:89-90) challenges the traditional interpretation of *zela* as meaning ‘rib.’ Reisenberg stresses that the translation of *zela* as ‘rib’ does not exist in the Hebrew Bible vocabulary. She suggests that the idea that Eve was created from Adam’s rib could have been suggested by a superficial reading of the poetic idiom “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”. For Reisenberg (2009:90) such Hebrew poetic idiom describes the blood ties of close kinship, in contrast to a physical bone or flesh which gives the idea of a “component, a side of a body”.

Reisenberg sheds further light on this by suggesting that an error might have been introduced during the earliest translation of the Bible into the Greek language (the LXX or Septuagint), around the third century BCE, when women were considered inferior to men. This is because the word ‘side’ is *costa* in Greek, and that *costa* also means ‘rib.’ The translators could not therefore accept that the “first woman was created as an equal part/side to the man, they initiated and later perpetuated the understanding of the word *costa* as rib” (2009:90). Hence, Reisenberg (2009:90) argues that the belief that God created Eve as an “afterthought, from a non-essential part of Adam’s body, and assigned women to perpetual inferiority” is not supported by the Hebrew Bible. For scholars such as Reisenberg, when a text is translated into

another language, it “implies transferring culturally bound texts into another culture with its own social reality” (Reseinberg 2009:86).

4.5.3. The Justification and Reinforcement of Women’s Subordination

In light of the emphasis of the SBC and the BACOMA on the complementarian model, it is important to listen to the warning of Rosemary Dawson (1987:130-133) when she maintains that a patriarchal reading and interpretation of the Bible together with society’s division into separate public/private realms has been used by authorities in the church and society to justify a superior/subordinate view about men/women. Hence, the emphasis that women must be submissive to their husbands “to fulfil the law of Christ” has been used to justify violence against women’s minds, bodies, and spirits (Parvey 1992:68). The subversive efforts of the church to re-enforce the subordination and subjugation of women especially through its teachings and doctrines has applied Christian values such as obedience, humility, self-denial, perseverance, suffering and servant-hood mainly to women as they emulate Christ.⁹⁹

4.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated that Baptist doctrines and teachings have prevented BACOMA women from experiencing the freedom and equality that is enshrined in the Baptist principle of the priesthood of all believers. Doctrinally, there are three SBC doctrines and teachings that the BACOMA inherited from the SBC which impinge upon women’s freedom. These include: the authority of the Bible and its interpretation as the “Word of God”; the doctrine of the church; and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

On the authority of the Bible as the “Word of God”, the BACOMA ignores three issues in particular. It fails to take into account the translation process; it ignores the importance of context when interpreting; and it ignores the multiplicity of voices (not all of which are authoritative) in the Bible. On the doctrine of the church, the BACOMA has not translated the democratic governance accorded by the principle of the priesthood of all believers to mean the inclusion of women to positions of

⁹⁹ This will be discussed in further detail in chapter eight of this dissertation.

leadership and authority in the church. On the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the BACOMA has failed to equip pastors to recognize and utilize the spiritual gifts given by God to women. Practically, the BACOMA inherited from the SBC the complementarian model of the different roles for women in ministry, in theological education, and in the family. There is however a paradigm shift occurring, in which women are more and more being accepted for theological training in their own right. With regards to the family, the BACOMA accepts the complementarian model which affirms the husband's headship role and the wife's submission to him.

What stood out for me as a researcher in this discussion is how the SBC and the BACOMA have used the Bible to exclude women from meaningful participation in the leadership of the church and the family. Of particular concern is the use by the SBC and the BACOMA of the passages in the Book of Genesis and Pauline Epistles. I have therefore concluded this chapter by highlighting an alternative model that feminist scholars have offered to promote transformation in women's participation in the church and in the family.

Having analysed the Baptist doctrines that undergird the BACOMA women's experiences, in the next chapter I will signal the results of my field work by presenting the research design, methodology and methods used in the research study. Its main foci will be on data-generation processes and moves to the processes I employed in data-analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

5.1. Introduction

In chapters two, three and four I focused on setting the context and theories for my study. This present chapter focuses on fieldwork, the data from which results are extrapolated in chapters six, seven and eight. In order to fully understand the results of my fieldwork, the purpose of this chapter will be to discuss and justify the research design, focusing on methodology and methods employed to produce and analyse data.

This study represents a qualitative research. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:2), qualitative research is conducted through an “intense and/or prolonged contact with a field or life situation which is reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organizations”. On a similar note, Kevin Durrheim (2006:47) explains that qualitative methods allow the researcher to study “selected issues in the categories of information that emerge from the data”. Thus, at the centre of qualitative research is the human being’s perception of reality (Sarantakos 2005:41). In other words, qualitative research is about how human beings create meaning systems and construct reality. This is different from quantitative research which uses researcher-controlled answers, normally short, to make generalizations (Durrheim 2006:47).

5.2. The Intention of this Study

The intention of this study is to describe, analyse and theologically reflect, through the use of themes, the experience of being church of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA using self- and congregational-perceptions. The aim of this chapter is thus to discuss and justify the choices made with regard to the research design, methodology and methods of data production and analysis. I have organized the chapter under the following five headings: phenomenology of women’s experience; research

participants and sampling; data generation (process and methods); methodological limitations; and ethical considerations.

5.2.1. The Renaissance of Feminist Qualitative Research

From a feminist theological perspective, the second wave of the women's movement of the 1960s saw the renaissance of feminist qualitative research (Chase: 2005:651). It emerged as a critique of the conventional research's disregard of women's perspectives (Chase 2005:651). Feminist research is an emancipatory type of inquiry that "not only documents aspects of reality; it also takes a personal, political and engaging stance to the world" (Sarantakos 2005:54). Situated within the African theologies of liberation, this present research utilizes methodologies within a reconstructionist paradigm (Mugambi 1988:32-35). This is a method that goes beyond description and analysis to reconstructive theological action from an African feminist perspective (Rakoczy 2004:16-17).

A significant feature of qualitative methodology in feminist theology is the emphasis on human experience, as a theological phenomenon communicated through narratives (Young 1990:51). A major thrust of feminist theology is thus its desire to reflect theologically on that experience. By listening to previously silenced voices, feminist researchers challenge social science knowledge about society, culture, and history (Chase 2005:651-655). Consequently, feminist qualitative research treats women's personal narratives as essential primary documents for research (Chase 2005:657).

5.2.2. The Phenomenology of Women's Experience

Feminist research is based on the assumption that the world is socially constructed (Sarantakos 2005:54). It therefore critically studies and exposes the social conditions of women's experience in a "sexist, 'malestream' and patriarchal society" (Young 1990:50 *cf.* Oduyoye 2001a:11; Sarantakos 2005:55). Feminist theologians argue that women's experience—which includes their experience of patriarchy—needs to be taken into account. For example, Ruether and Pamela Dickey Young cogently argue that while women's experience may mean a multitude of things (Ruether 1993:12; Young 1990:49-50), primarily it denotes, "the basic experience of being a self in relation to the whole of reality of which one is a part and in relation to others within

that whole” (Young 1990:50). Young (1990:52) goes on to point out that women’s experience may be seen differently depending on the perspective employed. The aim in feminist research is therefore “to empower women and give them a voice to speak about social life from their perspective which ultimately leads towards social change and transformation” (Sarantakos 2005:54-55). Thus, women’s perspectives are a major part of feminist critical theologizing.

5.2.3. The Employment of Narrative Methodology

This study has employed narrative inquiry to explore and analyse the experiences of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA from the participants’ perceptions and that of the general church community. Narrative methodology in qualitative research helps to illuminate how research participants perceive their social world. As mentioned in the introduction above, there is no need to make generalizations about populations. Accordingly, statistical analysis which aims to represent populations has little or no place in narrative research (Josselson 2010:872). In this light, although I only narrate the stories of two pastors’ wives in chapter eight, the significance of the existence of such narratives is more important than their quantity among my sample.

Susan Chase observes that since the explosion of interest in women’s personal narratives as a type of discourse, especially from the second-wave feminism onwards, feminists resist the traditional assumptions about research that:

Life histories and other personal narratives were primarily useful for gathering information about historical events, cultural change, or the impact of social structures on individuals’ lives. Rather, they were interested in women as social actors in their own right and in the subjective meanings that women assigned to events and conditions in their lives. Importantly, these feminist lenses opened up new understandings of historical, cultural, and social processes. Furthermore, as feminists approached women as subjects rather than as objects, they also began to consider their subjectivity—the role that the researchers’ interests and social locations play in the research relationship (2005:655).

Chase argues, therefore, that narratives are “socially constrained forms of action, socially situated performances, ways of acting in and making sense of the world” which can “advance a social agenda” (Chase 2005:655). Similarly, Oduyoye argues that women’s storytelling is a method of “bringing to the centre of theological debate the perspectives of the disadvantaged persons” (Oduyoye 2001a:23). That is, by telling their stories, marginalized people in general and women in particular, can help to create a public space requiring others to hear. Hence, they make and express meaning about their social world.

As mentioned in chapter one, this study is located within the re-constructionist feminist theological paradigm that envisions transformation and reconstruction not only of religious traditions and structures, but of society at large (Clifford 2001:33). This study seeks to critically analyse the experiences of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA and determine the socio-cultural and ideo-theological factors that contribute to the construction of their identity and roles.

5.2.4. Research Participants and Purposive Sampling

In designing a research project, the type and number of participants to include in the study is the most significant factor researchers have to consider. Sampling is the selection of research participants whereby a small part of a target population is selected (Durrheim 2006:49). The process of sampling involves making decisions about which people, settings, or events to study (Durrheim 2006:49). As to who or what will be sampled in a particular study is influenced by the unit of analysis (Durrheim 2006:49).

While there are various types of sampling, this study used purposive sampling. According to Sotirios Sarantakos (2005:154), purposive sampling is the technique whereby researchers purposely choose participants who, in their opinion, are relevant to the study. Soritios Sarantakos (2005:164) further points out that the choice of participants is guided by the researcher’s own judgment, that the people “can offer adequate and useful information that will give a picture” of the issue being investigated.

5.3. Procedure of the Study and Selection of Research Participants

In this section I will seek to describe the procedure and three categories of research participants. In addition, the reasons for selection as well as how the sampling was done will be described. In keeping with the key research question, the sample of the study comprised of three categories of research participants, namely: pastors' wives; members of the church community and pastor couples.

5.3.1. The Selection of Research Participants

The selection of participants was based on their ability to contribute to the understanding of the experience of pastors' wives in the BACOMA. Before the commencement of my studies, the BACOMA had approved the topic of my studies and my research to be conducted in the churches of Lilongwe Baptist Association.¹⁰⁰ Prior to my fieldwork, I personally contacted Lilongwe Baptist Association committee members and explained my research project, its purpose and the participants to be involved. I also explained the methods of data production to be used and expected benefits of the study for the BACOMA in particular and to the academic community in general. In addition, I explained about my research project to the women at the meeting of the *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi* and at a gathering of the Lilongwe Baptist Association Pastors' Fraternal group (*hereafter*, LBAPF). The issue of consent forms was briefly explained to each group and in greater detail to individual participants at the time of interview.

After introducing my research project to all the categories of the participants, I personally contacted thirty BACOMA pastors' wives individually to make appointments for a personal visit; in certain cases, I followed up by telephone. This helped to strengthen the relationship of trust between researcher and participants as well as instilling a sense of worth especially to some BACOMA pastors' wives who may not have been interviewed on their experience before. I followed the same procedure and made appointments with fifty BACOMA church members and eight BACOMA pastor couples for group discussion. I conducted my fieldwork in the months of December 2008 through January 2009 and June 2009 through July 2009. I will now describe the three categories of the research participants.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix XII: Letter of Approval from the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA).

5.3.1.1. Pastors' Wives

As feminists have come to recognize, women's experiences, even within similar contexts, are not a homogenous category.¹⁰¹ Consequently, the study benefitted from a diversity of participants' experiences. Out of the sample of thirty BACOMA pastors' wives that I had initially contacted, a total of twenty-nine women participated in the research project. The one person who I did not interview had initially agreed, but due to time constraints it was not possible for us to find a mutually free time for the interview. After several attempts I came to accept that it was not possible. I then realized that the twenty-nine that I had interviewed had given me enough data for my study to be successful.

The twenty-nine BACOMA pastors' wives who participated in the research came from various social, economic and cultural backgrounds as will be shown below. Since naming is also important in feminist studies,¹⁰² and for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, the participants gave me permission to carefully select pseudonyms in the vernacular to represent each one of them.¹⁰³

Ethnically, of the twenty-nine BACOMA pastors' wives whom I personally interviewed, six belonged to aTumbuka from Northern Malawi, who are mainly patrilineal in their marriage system; five were aMang'anja from Southern Malawi, who are mainly matrilineal; and eighteen were aChewa from Central Malawi, also matrilineal. At the time of the interviews, all except three of the participants had their families serving Baptist congregations in Lilongwe. The other three participants were serving in Dowa in Central Malawi; Mangochi in Southern Malawi; and Mzuzu in Northern Malawi respectively, but nevertheless agreed to be participants in the study. The fact that my sample comes from all the three major ethnic groups in Malawi gives the chosen sample credibility in terms of mixed experiences of cultural construction of women.

¹⁰¹ The common denominator among the women's diverse experiences was that throughout the human ages, women in African have experienced discrimination, oppression and domination (*cf.* Landman 2006:430).

¹⁰² In feminist studies, it has been argued that throughout Christianity history, beginning with the Bible itself, many women remained nameless or were referred to as "the wife of..." or "the daughter of..." It is therefore important to identify people, especially women, in their own right and to let them speak for themselves (See for example, Phiri and Nadar 2006:5-24; De Vault 1999:88).

¹⁰³ See Appendix I: Sample of Pastor's Wife Participants, for a list of names of pastors' wives and the dates of each interview.

With regard to social location, the participants came from both rural and urban areas and thereby provided different perspectives to the participants' understanding of what it meant to be a BACOMA pastor's wife. At the time of interview, fifteen participants were serving in rural areas, while fourteen were serving in the urban areas. Those who were serving in rural areas were usually serving in their home areas or closer to their homes and depended mainly on subsistence farming and their husband's wages for their livelihood. Those serving in urban areas had the advantage of engaging in some meaningful money earning activities as well as will be shown in chapter six. The advantage of having a balanced rural and urban sample of BACOMA pastors' wives is that there is equal representation of the socio-economic variables that contribute to the experiences of pastors' wives.

With regard to their levels of education, nine had no basic education, but had done some literacy education;¹⁰⁴ six had primary school level education;¹⁰⁵ seven had secondary school level education;¹⁰⁶ and seven had tertiary education.¹⁰⁷ All twenty-nine participants, except two, had done formal theological education either at a Bible school, seminary or university. The advantage of having a broad spectrum of educational levels is that it has an impact on: 1) the wives' level of theological education; and 2) the self-understanding of their role in the church within the Baptist policy on husband-wife partnership in ministry.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ These were: Chilungamo, interview, 08 July 2009, Lilongwe; Fatsani, interview, 16 January 2009, Lilongwe; Chikondi, interview, 17 January 2009, Lilongwe; Kondanani, interview, 01 January 2009, Lilongwe; Akondwere, interview, 22 January 2009, Lilongwe; Tisekere, interview, 27 January 2009, Lilongwe; Chikhulupiriro, interview, 10 July 2009, Lilongwe; Ufulu, interview, 11 July 2009, Lilongwe; and Walani, interview, 30 December 2008, Lilongwe.

¹⁰⁵ These were Akonda, interview, 04 July 2009, Lilongwe; Chisomo, interview, 15 July 2009, Lilongwe; Abale, interview, 13 July 2009, Lilongwe; Mtendere, interview, 29 December 2008, Lilongwe; Kuseka, interview, 15 January 2009, Lilongwe; and Chiyanjano, interview, 07 August 2009, Lilongwe.

¹⁰⁶ These were: Tiyanjane, interview, 26 January 2009, Lilongwe; Odala, interview, 27 November 2008, Lilongwe; Ulemu, interview, 29 December 2008, Lilongwe; Madalitso, interview, 21 November 2008, Lilongwe; Chiyembekezo, interview, 31 December 2008, Lilongwe; Kuyere, interview, 14 July 2009, Lilongwe; and Alinafe, interview, 13 July 2009, Lilongwe.

¹⁰⁷ These were: Tadala, interview, 19 July 2009, Lilongwe; Chitsimikizo, interview, 28 July 2009, Lilongwe; Chigwirizano, interview, 29 July 2009, Lilongwe; Tigawane, interview, 17 July 2009, Lilongwe; Chiyero, interview, 11 January 2009, Lilongwe; Tikhale, interview, 13 July 2009, Lilongwe; and Apatso, interview, 14 July 2009, Lilongwe.

¹⁰⁸ This will be covered in further depth in chapter six of this dissertation.

5.3.1.2. Church Members

My purposive sample of fifty church members was taken from the Lilongwe Baptist Association. The church members included pastors, deacons, women's and youth leaders, and lay members. Some of the participants were members of executive committees at association and national levels. The participants were selected because as a congregational denomination, these members formed part of the church councils within their local churches. In the Baptist form of democratic church government, it is possible for all members to participate in the church decision-making process. The participants were therefore purposively selected for their strategic roles they played in their local churches in matters of policy. All church members, including the lay members, proved to be rich sources of information on the role of a pastor's wife in the BACOMA.

As explained above, I introduced my project to the group of participants at various BACOMA meetings. Thereafter, I approached each individually through the churches or in their private homes, or when they visited the Baptist seminary where I was teaching.¹⁰⁹ For the purpose of data analysis as shown in Table 1 (below), I divided this group as follows: AFU (Adult female urban); AMU (Adult male urban); AFR (Adult female rural); AMR (Adult male rural); YFU (Young female urban); YMU (Young male urban); YFR (Young female rural); YMR (Young male rural); PR (Pastor rural); PU (Pastor urban); PY (Pastor young); PA (Pastor adult).¹¹⁰

Table 1 (below) shows that the total of fifty church members in my sample was further divided as follows: 27 female and 23 male; 25 rural and 25 urban; and 28 adult and 22 young.¹¹¹

The purpose of classifying this group in this manner was, first to differentiate between the voices of women from men; and then from older people and younger people; and then from rural people and urban people. Second, I worked with the assumption that age, gender and the socio-economic position of an individual influences that

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix II: Sample of Church Member Participants, for the coded identifications and the dates of the interviews.

¹¹⁰ Note: Adult = 35+ years of age; Young = 18-35 years of age.

¹¹¹ Note: Adult = 35+ years of age; Young = 18-35 years of age.

individual's perception of the world in general and of the pastor's wife in particular as will be shown in chapters six through eight of this dissertation.

AFU	AFR	AMU	AMR	YFU	YFR	YMU	YMR	PU	PR	PY	PA
9	8	4	2	5	5	4	6	3	4	2	5

Table 1

Church Member Participants Coded Identifications

5.3.1.3. Pastor Couples

In addition to the fifty church members described above, I also benefited from the perspectives of a group of eight pastor couples from the LBAPF. These couples were chosen from the LBAPF that meets once a month for fellowship. Further to announcing my research project to this group, eight pastor couples volunteered to be part of my research project. I therefore requested from the organizers of the LBAPF to set aside time from their meetings so that I could conduct group discussions with the eight pastor couples who had volunteered to be participants of my study.

I chose to work with the LBAPF because it is an important component of the BACOMA. It is a fellowship of pastors and their spouses, Christian ministers and teachers' (LBAPF Constitution nd:1-7). It is organized both at national as well as at association level. In addition to fellowship, a number of issues of common interest are discussed at their gatherings. In recognition that the church is like a family, the LBAPF deals with pastor's marital problems as well. Included in the LBAPF mission statement is a clause that reads:

The fraternal seeks to encourage closer ties amongst Lilongwe Baptist Association pastors through regular meetings of fellowship, prayer and discussion' (LBAPF Constitution nd:3).

One such discussion included helping pastor couples with their marital problems.

5.3.2. Data Production: Process and Methods

In order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of the experience of BACOMA pastors' wives, I used a combination of methods for data generation. Triangulation or the mixed method model is the term used for several research tools within the same research design (Sarantakos 2005:105; Silverman 2001:98). Just as feminists recognize diversity in women's experience, they also advocate variety and diversity in methods (Landman 2006:432). For example, Shulamit Reinharz provides the following reasons for using a combination of methods in feminist research:

Feminist descriptions of multi-method research express the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks. Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, "data-gathering" and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks. In addition feminist researchers use multiple methods because changes that occur to them and others in a project of long duration. Sometimes multiple methods reflect the desire to be responsive to people studied. By combining methods, feminist researchers are particularly able to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experience. Multiple methods increase the likelihood of obtaining scientific credibility and research utility (1992:197).

In other words, in order to elicit meaningful data, feminist researchers invest considerable time and effort in obtaining the trust of their participants as they are often interested in hidden, personal or private aspects of people's lives. To achieve this, the most common methods used are interviewing, focus groups, or open-ended methods (See, Eagle et al. 2006:506).

By using the narrative method, this study employed personal interviews, combined with observation and focus group discussions in order to generate primary data. I will now turn to discuss each method in detail.

5.3.2.1. In-depth Interviews

Three semi-structured interview instruments were used as the main data generation techniques: one with the pastors' wives; one with church members, and one for group discussions with pastor couples from the LBAPF group.¹¹² The interviews helped me to explore the participants' understanding regarding the experiences of BACOMA pastors' wives.

The advantage of having in-depth interviewing with the pastors' wives and the church members is that it provided me with a way of generating empirical data about their social world by asking the participants to talk about their lived experiences as pastors' wives or as church members who have interacted with pastors' wives. More particularly in feminist research, Reinharz (1992:20) has argued that interviewing is "particularly suited to female researchers" for it 'draws on skills in the traditional female role'. She goes further to suggest that "this method is very useful when conducted by a woman; for a woman to be understood it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by a woman" (Reinharz 1992:20). This method worked well for my research project when I personally interviewed the pastors' wives and the twenty-seven women church members.

When conducting the in-depth interviews I had in mind the statement of Benedict Carton and Louise Vis (2008:44) who have rightly stated that the purpose of the interview is not to make it into a formal question and answer format, but, guided by open-ended questions, into a conversational style. Hence, when conducting in-depth interviews, I did not follow every question from my interview instrument, but instead made sure that each theme that I was concerned about was covered in my conversation with each participant. This allows the interviewee to narrate her experiences in a more detailed and relaxed manner. It also allows the interviewer to probe the respondent with more questions. It is this informal dialogue or interaction, as asserted by feminist researchers, between interviewer and interviewee that is important for in-depth interviewing in qualitative research, or what Sean Field (2008:146) has called the "inter-subjective interview dialogue". The assumption is, as

¹¹² See Appendices VI, VII, and VIII for a list of the research questions used.

Jennifer Mason (1996:38) has noted, that data generated via interaction,¹¹³ because either the interviewee(s), or the interaction itself are the data sources. Mason (1996:38) argues that this is one characteristic feature of qualitative interviewing. My intention was therefore to provide the pastors' wives with enough time, safe space, and an interactive dialogue on their own terms.

To get the participants to narrate their stories, I explained the significance of their stories and their usefulness for the understanding of the phenomenon of the experiences of being a pastor's wife. The participants were given the option to use the language in which they were comfortable. Among the pastors' wives, twenty seven preferred to be interviewed in Chichewa, while two other chose their interviews to be conducted in English. Among the church members, forty-seven chose to have their interviews conducted in Chichewa, while three chose to be interviewed in English. However, among those who preferred to use English, in some cases they would use both English and the local indigenous language. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in the language of choice of the interviewee and then translated into English. In this study, all the direct quotes from the interviewees are presented in English.

I allowed at least one hour of interview with each pastor's wife at a location of her choice in order to allow time for meaningful conversation; or as Burges (cited by Mason 1996:38) calls them, "conversations with a purpose". Some interviews however were as long as two hours. In the case of church members, the duration of the interviews was between thirty to fifty minutes. The imbalance in time allocation between the pastors' wives and church members is based on the fact that the study's central focus of research was on BACOMA pastors' wives. Therefore, in my opinion as the principal researcher, it seemed appropriate to locate more time to the pastors' wives.

The central concern of feminists has been the issue of power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee which affects data. Therefore, it was important to challenge the conventional social science methodology of subject-object dichotomy and hierarchy between researcher (who have been until recently all male) and

¹¹³ This method is variously named. Hence according to Oakley (1999:45) "reciprocity"; or sisterhood according to Letherby (cited in Landman 2006:431)

researched. As a result of this challenge, feminist researchers are now advocating that interviewees should be treated not as objects of research but as subjects of their own narratives (Chase and Bell 1994:64). In their case studies, however, Chase and Bell have shown how complex such a commitment can be, especially in interviewing women, who, being in positions of authority as subjects, were at the same time subjected to gendered or racial inequalities (Chase and Bell 1994:80). Similarly, Joey Sprague and Mary Zimmerman (1993:257-260), in contrasting what they call “positivist” researchers who do fieldwork as the “privileged” and the “knowing” party, stress the principle that feminist researchers must emphasize the interviewees’ own subjective experience and their emotional aspects of social life grounded in concrete, daily experiences. This is what constitutes qualitative data. On power relations, Maeve Landman (2006:433) points out that balance of power shifts during the process of data generation between the interviewer and the interviewee.

While conducting my interviews with the pastors’ wives and the church members I was constantly aware of the power dynamics in play. This was particularly relevant considering that I am a pastor’s wife and PhD. student candidate, which places me in a powerful category. However, the fact that I am a Baptist pastor’s wife as with my respondents, and that I speak the language of the majority of the participants made it easier for me to establish a rapport with both the female and male interviewees. Furthermore, having been a long time member of the LBAPF group, it made it easier for me to conduct interviews.

5.3.2.2. Focus Group Discussion

According to Sotirios Sarantakos, focus group research is described as

A loosely constructed discussion with a group of people brought together for the purpose of the study, guided by the researcher and addressed as a group (2005:194).

Other terms used for this method include, “focus group interviewing” because of the use of interviewing techniques, or alternatively, “group discussion” (Sarantakos 2005:194-195). Within the qualitative paradigm, focus group methods aim to probe the attitudes and opinions of small groups. For this study, I had one focus group

comprising of eight pastor couples, who were members of the LBAPF group. In choosing this group, I was guided by the insights of Kitzinger (1999:194-195) who has argued that there are specific benefits for working with an already existing group. He states that an already existing group can “provide one of the social contexts within which ideas are formed and decisions made”. The fact that the research participants know each other as friends and colleagues can also generate valuable comments and contributions without intimidation (Kitzinger 1999:194). Another advantage is that the group benefits from “collective remembering” (Kitzinger 1999:194). However, Kitzinger also cautions that it should not be assumed that group discussion is unproblematic, because to engage all people in the conversation is a challenging factor (Kitzinger 1999:195). This can be overcome when the researcher, who acts as a facilitator, and not a controller, guides the discussion so as to address the research topic. This encourages discussion among the members of the group, while at the same time observes and records the discussion (Kitzinger 1999:195).

I also seriously considered the warnings raised by Sotirios Sarantakos (2005:198) about the weaknesses of working with a focus group. Sarantakos has thus identified the following four weaknesses: being in a group might make participants hide their real opinions because of lack of confidentiality of information; recording of the data can be problematic; some members may not participate in the discussion; domination of the discussion by some members.

From the beginning of my research, I overcame these weaknesses by: 1) Not looking for confidential information from the focus group. Any confidential information was obtained through the individual in-depth interviews. 2) With their permission, I asked if I could use a tape-recorder to record the discussions; bearing in mind that the presence of a tape-recorder itself can put other people off from sharing their opinions. However, I assured them, that during the writing of my dissertation, I would not refer to them individually, but collectively. Therefore their names would not be associated with the information obtained. 3) In the case of some members dominating the conversation more than others, I was also aware of the complications concerning gender sensitivity and the fact that men tend to dominate discussions while women just ‘listen’ as if to confirm the fallacy that women are good listeners than men. Since it was the pastors’ views I was more interested in, I did not push for the wives’ voices

during the discussions, although all of them participated in the discussion, because I would hear the wives' voices during the in-depth interviews.

5.3.2.3. Participant Observation

One of the methods for collecting information for my study was participant observation. Drawing from the work of the sociologist Derek Layder (1993:40), the method of participant observation allows for the "closest approximation to a state of affairs wherein the sociologist enters into the everyday world of those being studied so that he or she may describe and analyse this world as accurately as possible". As Christopher Scholtz (2007:252) has also stated, using participant observation as a method means to "enter the field and have direct contact with the actors". I chose this method because as a researcher I did not enter into the fieldwork for this research as an outsider but as an insider. As a BACOMA pastor's wife, I regularly take part in socio-religious activities such as weekly and monthly women's meetings, funerals, weddings, ordination ceremonies, etc. Furthermore, as I study the experiences of the pastors' wives, I am also studying what I myself have experienced. I freely admit that this may give room for bias, and thus become a limitation. Nevertheless, a combination of in-depth interviews with the BACOMA pastors' wives and church members and my own observations complement each other to give insight to the understanding, in this case, of the experiences of a BACOMA pastor's wife. Where my observation becomes scholarly, it is because of the element of critical reflection on experience. Therefore, I agree with Christopher Morgenthau who has argued that:

For many people religion is an unquestioned part of their everyday life and one possible effect of religion is that certain aspects of everyday life are not questioned. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the way people form and experience their religious practice is influenced by what is taken for granted (2007:244).

It is my opinion of the BACOMA pastors' wives in my study, that most of their everyday actions have become habits and routines induced by religious traditions, and that is what shapes and gives them identity. Yet I am working with the assumption that they do not reflect theologically on the meaning of their actions. Through personal observation, this study gives me an opportunity to reflect theologically and

critically on these actions and the developed identity of the BACOMA pastors' wives in my study.

5.4. Review of Documents

Document analysis of both primary and secondary sources was another method I used to generate data. In order to distinguish the primary from secondary, Ruth Finnegan (2006:142) describes primary sources as those which "form the basic and original material for providing the researcher's raw evidence". Besides the oral interviews, I used the following primary sources: Church documents such as the BACOMA and LBAPF minutes, congregational constitutions and church manuals.¹¹⁴

Ruth Finnegan (2006:142) has described secondary sources are those which "copy, interpret or judge material to be found in primary sources". In this regard, I used published books, unpublished and published theses and dissertations, chapters, journal articles, reports, and reviews on issues of women's experience of patriarchy in general and pastors' wives in particular, all of which provided me with valuable information on the experience of pastors' wives.

I used the documentary data generated to construct a socio-historical and theological context within which the research participants' perceptions could be understood. In other words, documentary analysis answered the question: "Where does my work fit in with what has gone before; and why, in the light of what has already been done, is my particular research worth doing?" Answering this question involved documentary analysis and the use of secondary sources from chapters one through nine.

In the major section which follows, I will discuss the process and methods of data analysis.

5.5. Data Analysis: Process and Methods

In this section I propose to discuss and justify the data analysis process and methods employed in my study. The data collection process is not an end in itself; instead, analysis, interpretation, and the presentation of findings form the goal of any qualitative inquiry. Data analysis has been described as a "range of processes and

¹¹⁴ See my bibliography for a complete list of church documents.

procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating”.¹¹⁵ Narrative analysis seeks to show how people construct life narratives around particular experiences (Josselson 2010:872) and in this case, the experience of the BACOMA pastors’ wives.

As a qualitative research, I used the narrative analysis method in this study, based as it is on the notion of life experience as narrative from a feminist theologian’s perspective. Methods of narrative analysis range from more traditional content analysis, through thematic analysis, to that of discourse analysis (Sapsford 2006:269-270). In my study, I specifically employed a thematic analysis approach. In thematic analysis, researchers usually begin by identifying and coding statements and grouping them thematically into coherent repertoires that express an underlying discourse (Sapsford 2006:269). Boulton and Hammersley (2006) provide the following steps in analysis:

The first step is a close reading of the data. This involves carefully looking at the data with a view to identifying aspects of categories that may be significant (2006:246). Boulton and Hammersley (2006:246) point out that the process actually begins at the start of data collection and continues through to the completion of the research report. For example, Becker observes that in participant observation, analysis is carried out sequentially, important parts of the analysis being made while the researcher is still gathering data (cited in Boulton and Hammersley 2006:246). In other words, these phases should not be taken to imply a linear process of data analysis.

Secondly, reading back and forth through the data. Here, the researcher notes down topics or categories to which the data relate and that are deemed relevant to the research focus, or are in some other way found interesting or surprising (Boulton and Hammersley 2006:251). Marginal notes are usually made, specifying the categories. The researcher is always on the look-out for recurrences that may indicate patterns or sequences of events in a particular setting (Boulton and Hammersley 2006:251).

¹¹⁵ See, Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA). <<http://www.onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/>> [Accessed 12 October 2009].

In line with the above steps, I identified the following five themes for my study: the call of a BACOMA pastor's wife; the theological education of a BACOMA pastor's wife; the roles of a BACOMA pastor's wife in the church and in the family; the challenges experienced by a BACOMA pastor's wife, and the presence of domestic violence in a BACOMA pastor's home. These five themes form the structure of the content of chapters six through eight of this dissertation.

5.5.1. Approaching Narrative Data: Five Analytical Lenses

From a feminist perspective, Susan Chase (2005:670-675) outlines five analytical lenses through which contemporary researchers need to approach narrative data. I found these factors congruent in the analysis of the experiences of the BACOMA pastors' wives. The first is that researchers should treat narrative as a "distinct form of discourse". In other words, they should be seen as "a way of understanding one's own and other's actions, or organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (Chase 2005:670). Secondly, researchers should view narratives as "verbal action—as doing or accomplishing something"; for among other things, "narrators explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain, and confirm or challenge the status quo" (Chase 2005:670).

The third factor is that a narrative expresses the "narrator's point of view, including why the narrative is worth telling in the first place" (Chase 2005:671). Thus, in addition to describing what happened, "narratives also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations" (Chase 2005:671). It also "highlights the uniqueness of each human action and event rather than their common properties" (Chase 2005:672). Recognising the importance of this point, each participant's story was handled as a valuable document. The fourth is that "whatever the particular action, when someone tells a story, he or she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality" (Chase 2005:673). This means that "when researchers treat narration as actively creative in this way, they emphasize the narrator's voice(s)" (Chase 2005:673). This factor was taken care of by intensively quoting from the participants' voices.

Lastly, she notes that researchers emphasize that "the narrator's story is flexible, variable, and shaped in part by interaction with the audience" (Chase 2005:674). In

other words, a narrative is “a joint production of narrator and listener, whether the narrative arises in naturally occurring talk, an interview, or a fieldwork setting” (Chase 2005:674). Narrative researchers as thus “like many other contemporary qualitative researchers, view themselves as narrators as well, as they develop interpretations and find ways in which to present or publish their ideas about the narratives they studied” (Chase 2005:674-675).

While it has been argued that “seen in traditional terms, the reliability and validity of qualitatively derived findings can be seriously in doubt” (Chase 2005:675) those who hold this view, such as Miles and Huberman, consider issues such as:

Labour-intensiveness of data collection, frequent data overload, the distinct possibility of researcher bias, the time-demands of processing and coding data, the adequacy of sampling when only a few cases can be managed, the generalizability of findings, the credibility and quality of conclusions, and their utility in the world of policy and action (1994:1).

Nevertheless, feminist researchers insist that this kind of thinking reflects an androcentric perspective that overlooks or judges women’s social experiences as inferior or trivial (Chase 2005:675). Feminists claim that “superior ‘truer’ knowledge is thus derived from a committed feminist exploration of women’s experiences” (Landman 2006:430).

I will now turn to discuss the methodological limitations of my study in the section which follows.

5.6. Methodological Limitations

The first limitation, drawing on the experience of Geoff Payne and Judy Payne (2004:210), and by employing a feminist methodology, the study of the experiences of pastors’ wives in the BACOMA was limited to a critical in-depth paradigm which focused on the specific, and its meanings, while not explaining the wider processes. As explained in the sample size above, the participants in this research project were deliberately selected to come from the BACOMA rather than taking an ecumenical

cross-section of pastors' wives and church members in Malawi. This research limitation is acceptable in qualitative study as argued by Schofield (2006:48) when he admits that "the idea that a sample size should be related to the size of the population under study" is a fallacy.

A second limitation was the location for conducting the interviews with the BACOMA pastors' wives. For those who chose to be interviewed in their homes we experienced many interruptions, especially from unannounced visitors and children. In one home, a child was crying almost the entire time of our interview. I patiently waited until the baby slept on the mother's back before we resumed our interview. In such cases, I had to place my tape recorder on pause several times to accommodate these unintended interruptions and it was difficult to reconnect the rapport we had developed before the disruption. Nevertheless, we continued with the conversations until they were completed.

A third limitation was gaining access to my participants. As soon as my proposal was accepted at the end of the 2008 academic year, I was ready to do my fieldwork for three months at the beginning of the following year. However, December, January and February are rainy months in Malawi. I was therefore limited in my travels, due to the heavy rainfall in the designated area of my research. In another week, I had made five appointments with two pastors' wives and three church leaders, but it was raining so heavily almost every day, that I could not travel and therefore missed all the appointments. We had to reschedule these missed appointments. A related problem was that during the same months, people were busy working in their fields, planting seed and weeding. I could not therefore interfere with their schedules and impose my schedules upon them. I simply postponed our appointments until the following June-July when they were more available.

A fourth limitation was the difficulty experienced in confirming appointments with the participants due to technological problems, especially with telephone connections. At one particular time there was no cell phone network for almost the entire week, and so I could not make contact, and therefore missed my intended appointments. However, I booked other appointments on the day that the cell phone network was available.

A sixth (and final) limitation was the result of financial constraints. The funding that I received was insufficient to cover my field research. I therefore spent more time working than I at first intended in order to find the necessary financial resources to complete the fieldwork stage of my research. Inevitably, this delayed the completion of my dissertation.

I will now turn to discussing the ethical issues in the section which follows.

5.7. Ethical Considerations

In this study, I followed the University of KwaZulu Natal ethical requirements for fieldwork. In line with the University's ethical clearance policy, I attempted to observe the following four factors:

5.7.1. Concern for the Welfare of My Participants

Ethical standards require that researchers are concerned with the welfare of the participants. In other words, researchers should avoid anything that could bring physical harm, mental harm, or legal harm to the participants (Sarantakos 2005:18-19). In order to comply with this requirement, I did not include anything in my research instruments or procedures that could cause any injury to the participants. Pamela Abbott and Roger Sapsford (2006:291) warn that:

We need to look at the relationship of researchers to the “subjects” of the research and their interests and to the needs and interests of the wider society. When considering questions of “harm to subjects”, we need to bear in mind that research is embedded in people's real lives and it is not just the subjects of research who may be harmed, but those of whom they are taken as representative or typical, or even people who are not part of the research in any sense at all ... Careful consideration needs to be given to the ways in which anyone whose interests are touched by the research might be harmed by it or by the dissemination of its conclusions.

In addition, I avoided infringing upon the privacy of my respondents by not asking questions that might cause discomfort, stress of some kind, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, or embarrassment (Sarantakos 2005:19), pertaining to their personal and private, or intimate issues unless they initiated such themselves. While I utilized probing questions in conducting in-depth interviews, I listened attentively to my respondents' stories with few interjections and thereby maintained my guiding questions. I also asked additional questions for clarification or to gain more information where necessary.

The interview instruments were held in English and in Chichewa, the national language of Malawi. The participants were given freedom to express themselves in the language they felt comfortable. With the exception of a few participants, the majority preferred to use the vernacular Chichewa. However, even those who used English, it was a mixture of English and Chichewa in most cases. In some such cases, I found that my respondents expressed themselves better in Chichewa than in English.

5.7.2. Respecting the Autonomy and Dignity of Each Individual

Accepted ethical standards prescribe that researchers respect the autonomy and dignity of each individual, by avoiding violating any rights of the participants. Sarantakos (2005:20-21) lists such rights as the right "to confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity." In observing these ethical standards, I avoided any intentional deception by being transparent at all times with my respondents. I fully explained my research purpose to the Convention and to all participants. I also obtained the permission of all my respondents through the instrument of the signed informed consent form.¹¹⁶ I also explained the importance of their participation and that it was voluntary. My respondents were informed of their freedom to participate in the research, or withdraw at any time, without fearing any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves or their churches. I assured all my respondents that their responses would be treated in a confidential manner and that they were expected to maintain the same confidentiality. Permission to take notes and the use of a tape recorder during the interviews was sought from all participants. All transcripts and any notes taken in the field were filed and locked in a safe place, while the finished work will be made

¹¹⁶ See, Appendices III, IV, and V.

available in the libraries as a resource material. It is also a contribution to knowledge on the ongoing debate about women's leadership in church and in society.

5.7.3. Maintaining the Principle of Justice in Research

Being guided by the question: "Who benefits or what is due to the people as a question of maintaining the principle of justice in research?" the participants gave me their stories, their openness and their trust. I had to give them back the same trust. I therefore attempted to safeguard the research participants' confidentiality, anonymity and interests by avoiding disclosing their identities (Sarantakos 2005:18). Anonymity was achieved by using pseudonyms instead of the true names (orthonyms) of the BACOMA pastors' wives in my study and the creation of code names for the church community members as explained above.

5.7.4. Preventing the Fabrication and Falsification of Data

The final ethical consideration was what Sarantakos (2005:18) has described as the "fabrication and falsification of data". One way in which I met the stringent ethical requirements in writing up my results and analysis in this dissertation was by making clear my research motivation, research design, methodology, methods and their inner logic. I also tried to remain true to the content of the findings in my reporting. In addition, I acknowledged all the information used in this study.

5.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed and justified the research design, focussing on methodology and methods used to produce and analyse data. The first part discussed the data-production process with a focus on feminist methodologies; participants and sampling procedure; and research methods namely: in-depth interviews; focus group discussion; and participant observation. The second part discussed the data analysis process, focussing on thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The last part of the chapter focused on methodological limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

Since this study is divided into two parts, this chapter marks the end of part one. The other chapters in part one include chapters one through five. They deal with theoretical, doctrinal and methodological framing of the study. The second part,

which I will now move to, comprises chapters six through eight, which deal with the presentation, discussion and interpretation of the findings of the field research.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CALL TO MINISTRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THEOLOGICAL TRAINING OF BACOMA PASTORS' WIVES IN THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI (BACOMA)

6.1. Introduction

In my previous chapter I indicated that fieldwork was done as part of this study. What follows in this second part is a paradigm shift which is pivotal to my entire dissertation. The findings from the field research have been divided according to the following five themes: 1) the call to pastoral ministry of a pastor's wife; 2) the theological education of a pastor's wife; 3) the role of a Pastor's wife in the church and in the home; 4) challenges experienced by pastors' wives; and 5) domestic violence in a pastor's home. The first and second themes will be discussed in this chapter; the third and fourth themes will be discussed in chapter seven, while chapter eight of this dissertation will focus on the fifth theme.

In this chapter, I will seek to present a feminist comparative analysis of the views of the pastors' wives and the church community on the call to ministry of a pastor's wife and her theological education. The central question will be: "In a church that does not ordain women, do pastors' wives receive a divine call to ministry and if so, what is its implication for women's theological education and their remuneration?"

In order to answer this question, I have divided the chapter into four sections. In the first section I analyse the responses of the pastors' wives and the church community on whether a pastor's wife is called to ministry or not. In the second section I analyse the type of theological training that the women respondents say they received in preparation for ministry. The third section focuses on the challenges identified by the wives and the church community in relation to the call, theological education, and its

impact on ministry. I conclude the chapter by examining the feminist interpretation of women's call to ministry and theological education.

6.2. The Call to Pastoral Ministry: A Comparative Analysis

God's call to ministry forms an important component of a Christian's ministry and identity. Some are called as evangelists, others as pastors, deacons, elders, or as women's ministry workers. A divine call to ministry derives from a Latin term *ministerium*, being a translation of the Greek New Testament term *diakonia*, meaning "to serve" (Bromiley 1995:581). If ministry means 'to serve', then according to the principle of the priesthood of all believers, God calls each "priest" to service (Shurden 1987:44; Harrisville 1990:4-6). However, as with other Christian denominations, the BACOMA believes that God also calls and endows men and women with charismatic gifts through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in order to effectively shepherd God's flock. This is what Prime and Begg (2004:18) call the "unmistakable conviction an individual possesses that God wants Him [*sic*] to do a specific task", i.e., pastoral ministry. While Willimon (2002:14) argues that a call to pastoral ministry is regarded as a "vocation" or "calling" and not a "profession", I argue here that it is both a calling and a profession because the called person is not only trained, employed and remunerated, but can also be dismissed, by a congregation.

In this main section, I will discuss and analyse the responses of the pastors' wives and the church community on whether a pastor's wife is called to the pastoral ministry or not. I will divide the pastors' wives' responses in three categories. The first category comprises twenty pastors' wives who initially did not hear any calling, until their husbands announced that they felt God calling them to full time pastoral ministry. The second group comprises of five pastors' wives who felt called while they were already married. The third group comprises four pastors' wives who felt called before their marriage.

6.2.1. Not Initially Called

Almost all of the twenty pastors' wives in this category responded to my question as to how they received their call with the statement: "*When my husband received his calling...*" What they meant was that initially they did not have any calling at the time

when their husbands announced that they wanted to serve God fulltime through pastoring a church congregation. However, most of the pastors' wives in my study were actively involved in church work and some were in positions of leadership. Their husband's announcement entailed that they would be going for theological training and if he was working, he would have to resign. The wives' responses to their husband's announcement were given in two ways: those who agreed immediately to their husband's calling and those who hesitated but later accepted. For those wives who agreed immediately to their husband's calling, if they were working, they resigned and joined their husbands without any problem. They stated that they believed that it was God's will for them as a family. The wives embraced their husband's calling as their own; claiming that since they are one body or one family, their husband's calling was also their calling.

There were, however, those wives who hesitated to immediately accept their husband's announcement. One major reason they gave was that they had not heard the call from God themselves. The story of Madalitso illustrates well the response of this group, whereby she gives a clear indication of the psychological tension she experienced in finally accepting her husband's calling as her own:

We had been married for eighteen years when he said that he wanted to go into pastoral ministry. But because I did not agree with him, which was why it took a few years before he went for seminary training....I told him that I had not heard any calling myself....Then three pastors came to talk to me, but I told them that I have not heard any calling myself. The pastors told my husband about my response and they advised him to wait and pray until God speaks to me as well. He indeed waited for three years before I accepted....He even threatened me with divorce. I was hesitant too because I had seen the way my pastor's wife was. She was not well dressed and she was struggling to make ends meet. And so, I did not want my children to suffer. Of course later on I knew that as one family we must obey God (Madalitso, Interview, 21 November 2008).

By resisting, Madalitso was exercising her freedom not to be coerced to do something against her conscience. Her story also demonstrates that the husband's response to his

call from God depended on his wife's consent. This confirms previous studies that acknowledge the influence that a pastor's wife has "on the man to whom has been committed the spiritual leadership' of God's people".¹¹⁷ In addition, from what the respondent had observed, her image of a pastor's wife was not a good one. For Madalitso, a pastor's wife was someone who struggled financially and looked miserable; hence, she did not want to be identified with that kind of life. This raises many questions about the economic position and remuneration received by pastors.

The church members' that I interviewed understood that the call to service of a pastor's wife was not any different from that of the pastors' wives in the above category. The church members were unanimous that when God calls the husband, it means the wife is also called. For example, one young pastor from the rural area succinctly stated that:

My understanding is that God does not make any mistake to call only the husband. What is needed is that when the pastor says that he has been called, he should explain clearly to his wife so that the wife can understand what is the difference between being called as a Christian, so that she can also pray about it because when we talk of God's call, it means that God has called the whole family, even the children if they have children. The husband too must pray for his wife until God speaks to her as well (PYR6, Interview 01 December 2008).

The pastor's statement above stresses the importance of communication between the called pastor and his wife to reach a consensus.

In addition, the focus group discussions also emphasized the implications of the wife's refusal. In such a case they held, it would not be possible for a pastor to enjoy a successful ministry if his wife refused to agree with his calling because they were one body in the sight of God. This tension is also evident in Madalitso's story above. Yet, Madalitso understood that God speaks directly to an individual; hence, she did not want to follow her husband blindly when God had not spoken to her. Without recognizing it, Madalitso was applying a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' in order to

¹¹⁷ Frances Nordland (1972:9) calls the pastors' wife and all wives VIPs (Very Important Persons) because of the influence they have on their husbands, as well as on their families and the entire church.

destabilize the normality by challenging her husband's 'take it or leave it' assumption that wives must always submit. Madalitso also raised very valid theological issues regarding the idea of Christian marriage uniting couples together as 'one body'; hence, why did God not speak to her for almost three years? These kinds of issues that concern feminist theologians will be discussed later in this dissertation.

Some pastors' wives likened themselves to the neck of the 'one body', while their husbands were the 'head', thereby signifying their essential oneness before God. Some pastors and church members in the study used biblical examples such as Adam and Eve, or Abraham and Sarah to support the 'husband-wife' calling. The questions that feminist theologians would raise here concern the meaning attributed to the neck/head analogy, as well as the biblical references. These questions I will turn to later in this dissertation.

The wives in this category embraced their husband's calling as their own. The belief was obviously that God calls only men to be pastors. The divine calling of a pastor's wife in this model cannot be divorced from, or be subsumed into her husband's calling. The wife in this model, which is consistent with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) missionary model as noted in chapter four above, plays a supporting role for the husband in ministry. This will be discussed later in depth in chapter seven.

I will now turn to the second category of the wives who were called while in marriage.

6.2.2. Called while Married

The second group comprised of five women who stated that they felt called of God while already married. Within this group there were two types of wives: those who were married to Christian husbands at the time of their call from God; and those who were married to non-Christian husbands at the time of their call from God. Some participants of the focus group, who were serving pastors, acknowledged that women can also be called, but "*according to our system*" it must be the man who is the pastor. In other words, according to BACOMA tradition, no woman can be called to

be a pastor. Tigawane's experience illustrates this kind of understanding. She stated that:

As a born again Christian I was passionately involved in the spiritual life of young people. But as I did that, I had a calling for full-time ministry in evangelism in rural areas and see people come to Christ. Fortunately, I married an evangelist and together we were involved in planting churches. And after 16 years I strongly felt the desire to retire from my profession and go into full-time ministry, which I did. Then one day as I went on a meditation drive, the Lord led me to a certain village where I prayed for a sick chief and shared the word of God with the family. When I came back two weeks later, I found him well. He and his people asked me to continue sharing the word of God with them. That was the beginning of a church in that village. In addition, I introduced some literacy and sewing classes to the women and established nursery schools with feeding programmes to the children in the surrounding villages. But after two years of ministry, I introduced the church to my pastor in the city so that the city church adopts the village church, because I did not want it to be an isolated church, but to connect it to the bigger family. The 'mother' church adopted it and later engaged a full time pastor and now I just help with the other projects while the pastor takes care of the church (Tigawane, Interview, 17 July 2009).

Tigawane responded to God's calling, not through her husband, but independently of him. Nevertheless, her husband, who was heading up a Christian organization at the time, fully supported her decision. However, despite leading the church for two years, she understood that only men are pastors. That is why she decided to hand over the leadership of the church to a man. In my opinion, Tigawane would have continued pastoring the church because no one from BACOMA questioned her. However, since it is the 'system' or 'our tradition' that informed her decision, and not God; she handed over the shepherding of the church to a male pastor. From this it can be readily seen that it is the patriarchal system that regulates the women's calling.

Of particular interest to my study was the fact that Tigawane, at the time of her interview, was taking a degree course in theology. In this way she was equipping herself with the appropriate theological training for the possibility of leading a church once the policies of the church had changed to accommodate women as pastors.

While Tigawane had the support of her husband, another respondent, Abale, represents those women who although they felt called by God into ministry, struggled to exercise their call because their husbands were either non-Christian or unsupportive. During her interview, Abale gave the following story of her calling from God:

I was saved in 1982 and actively involved in serving God before my husband was saved....I found that after being saved God gave me utumiki (lit: ministry). I had the desire to serve him. I used to share the word of God, to pray for the sick and encouraging people. Others used to call me abusa (lit: pastor). I was very committed to this work so that I felt it was better to end my marriage and serve God alone because my husband was hindering me. Sometimes he would come to our meeting drunk, and shout a lot of things, or snatch the baby from me and tell me not to go to his house again. Or he would demean me and sarcastically ask: "Have you ever seen God yourself?" That kind of behaviour made me to desire divorce. I even desired to become a nun (laughs), so that I would serve freely. I knew that as a nun I would be committed to the work of God. But then, as a married person, I still had to wait for him, instead of divorcing him. I was therefore praying for him saying: "Please God, you gave me this man as my husband!" And God is a God of order; he sorted things out for me. My husband was converted and stopped all his bad behaviour. Then at that time I surely heard God's calling and I asked my husband to stop working so that we can serve God full time. At first he said that we needed to wait and pray, but later on he resigned and went for seminary training (Abale, Interview, 13 July 2009).

Abale's calling from God is not any different from that of men, and it fits well with the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Abale was the right

candidate for seminary or Bible school training instead of her husband. She ably recognizes that marriage can severely limit a woman's response to God's call. That is why she contemplated divorcing him and then become a nun in the Roman Catholic Church. However, since she was from an Evangelical Protestant tradition, divorce was clearly the least desirable option at that stage. Abale's only option therefore was to pray for her husband's salvation and calling. God indeed answered her prayers by saving her husband and agreeing to go for seminary training. The question remains, did Abale's calling change? I believe the call itself did not change; instead, she exercised it in a different form, as a pastor's wife, because of the limitations enforced by the church on women's ministry. Hence, her attitude and actions confirm the patriarchal interpretation of God's calling into pastoral ministry.

In the next section I will examine the third category of the calling of pastors' wives.

6.2.3. Called before Marriage

The third group comprised of four women who felt called of God into Christian ministry before marriage. Three of these women did not describe it in terms of an actual personal calling, but instead stated they desired to be married to a pastor. For Chigwirizano, her calling as a young woman was to be a pastor for the youth (Interview, 29 July 2009). However, because she knew that she could not go for theological training as a woman, her wish was to marry a man, not necessarily a pastor, but one who would not hinder her carrying out her ministry and calling. The man she married was later called into pastoral ministry and she exercised her gift of teaching young people but as a pastor's wife. The point I wish to raise here is: "Why do women tend to think of themselves, not as their own agents, but always in relation to 'marriage' or 'a husband?'" I believe the answer is found in the societal frameworks they are part of. Women, respond to God's call according to a societal prescribed framework for women and men. The pressure to be attached to a man in order to fulfil a particular goal is often understood as a condition of culture and religion (Phiri 1997a:34). As a professional psychoanalyst, Carol Gilligan points out that some women are characterised by "attachment, social interaction and personal relationships in contrast to men's individuation and separateness" (Gilligan 1982:25). Consequently, women tend to undermine their full human potential and agency, thereby hindering their own professional progression.

The issue of women hearing God's voice through or after their husbands' call to ministry is also reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Western missionary era and remains contentious among feminist theologians, especially as many women are still denied entry into the ordained ministry in their churches.¹¹⁸ The above stories show that God calls women to the pastoral ministry. However, because of the extant patriarchal structures, the women had internalized Baptist-held teachings that maintained that God only called men to be ordained pastors and their wives as helpmeets to their ministry. Those who responded were exercising their freedom in Christ to do what they felt God called them to do. Nonetheless, as Rachel Fiedler observes, they did not want to work "against the flow",¹¹⁹ by challenging the system.

Dorothy Harrison Pentecost's observation establishes the Baptist position when she states that:

A call to be a minister's wife is seldom sudden, or different from a call into any other kind of work. It is usually a slow unfolding of God's will by an inner urge of the Holy Spirit, coupled with circumstances ... As long as the husband is sure of his call to full-time service, there is no doubt that the wife is called also. God never plans separately for husband and wife. In his sight they are one! The wife must bring her will and desire into line with that of the Lord and her husband. Doing this may be the hardest adjustment of her life, but she must do it willingly, or disaster will usually result (1964:20-21).

¹¹⁸ Klaus Fiedler (1994:292-309) argues that Western single women were forbidden access to the international mission field as missionaries because the male dominated mission boards and societies argued that if God wanted women on the mission field, God would send them husbands! Even when single women were later allowed access to the international mission field, they were not counted as missionaries in their own right. This action implied that God would not call women to be missionaries in their own right, but only through their husband's agency. The hierarchical patriarchal structures were not only maintained, but transferred to the international mission field, such as in Malawi. Similarly, Valerie Griffiths (1987:73) points out that many mission societies expected that a missionary's wife should have the same calling as her husband, otherwise she would make her husband's work difficult.

¹¹⁹ Rachel NyaGondwe-Fiedler (2002:181-201) records similar instances where women defied the extant patriarchal structures, followed their calling from God and pastored churches. However, this step was never easy, and eventually patriarchy won over and men took over the churches. Other pastors' wives in my study, such as Chitsimikizo (Interview 28 July 2009) and Chikondi (Interview 17 January 2009) also established and pastored churches in their own right. Yet, while Chitsimikizo pastored the church she had founded for four years, she refused to be called a pastor and to administer the Lord's Supper or conduct adult Baptisms. Chikondi on the other hand, started a church when her husband was away. When he returned home, he found Christian converts ready to be baptised, and then he took over because he was 'the pastor'.

As the wife of J. Dwight Pentecost, Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary and one of the leading Evangelical ministers in North America at that time, Pentecost also believes in the 'one body' partnership in ministry just like the participants in this study. Writing in the early 1960s, the practicality of what Pentecost said is also true of the BACOMA even in the twenty-first century. The implications of the 'one body' ideology in relation to ministry and employment procedures continue to be of great concern to African women theologians to this day. However, in the following section I focus on the sub theme of the Baptist procedure for engaging the services of a pastor, who has heard God's call and the role of his wife in the entire process.

6.2.4. The Baptist Procedure for Engaging the Services of a Pastor

From the findings of my research, it revealed that although the pastors' wives accompanied their husbands for their formal interviews for the position of pastor, they were never interviewed individually by the local church. Instead, some were simply asked to teach Sunday school class. It is not clear whether the request to teach Sunday school class formed part of the interview for the pastor's wife. It is only the seminary interviews where the pastors' wives were individually interviewed. In my study, the pastors' wives mentioned that at such interviews, they were asked if they were in agreement with their husband's calling, thereby signifying the wife's support role as stipulated in the manual quoted below.

With regard to the terms and conditions of employment offered by the local church, almost all the participants stated that the wife was never formally included because the church employs the pastor. Most church members understood that the pastors' wives would work with their husbands because that was what they were called, trained, and expected to do. Most pastors' wives also stated that even though the local church did not discuss anything regarding their ministry role, they already understood their role in the local church to be that of teaching the church women.

With the above understanding and assumptions, the participants of my study were unanimous that when the church employs a pastor, the stipend package is for the pastor not as a single person, but as a family unit; and yet, not for two jobs, but for one job in which the husband and the wife would be involved. Many participants of

my study, including the pastors themselves, insisted that they are part of one family, so there was no need to pay them separately. This resonates well with other Christian organizations such as Life Ministry and the Evangelical Association of Malawi who follow a similar model of not remunerating the wives since they play a support role for their husband's ministry.

The pastors' wives also acknowledged that because their husband's stipend or salary was usually insufficient to cover the family's needs, they also received gifts. Ordinarily, these gifts would either come from church members through means of the "pastor's basket", the local Women's Union, or from individual members.¹²⁰ From a Western perspective, Christine Rogers (2000:29-30) notes that research has shown that low salaries for pastors is a global phenomenon and is believed to be one of the primary hazards to pastor marriages. My suggestion to the participants in all three research categories (pastors' wives, pastors and church members) was for a separate stipend for the pastors' wives. This was met with mixed responses. Some respondents were of the opinion that because the church occasionally gave them gifts in addition to their husband's stipend, it was not necessary for the churches to offer another stipend to the wife as well. Other participants were sceptical about the idea, arguing that it might result in problems to the pastor's family because of possible misunderstandings. Those who agreed with the idea nevertheless cautioned that it would require careful teaching to conscientise the churches.

It is my opinion that the BACOMA contributes to the economic disempowerment of pastor's wives by not paying her a salary or stipend for the work she does for the church. Although the participants in my study claimed that the stipend is paid to the family, it is usually the father/husband as so-called the "head of the household" who remains in control of its expenditure. It was expressed by some pastors' wives and pastors that financial constraints were among some of the major challenges in the husband-wife dyad. This confirms previous research where as a pastor's wife "you become unpaid labour for the church" (Rogers 2000: 30 *cf.* Phiri 2002b:136). Although this has been highlighted as a concern in most of the literature, no one has

¹²⁰ In addition to the ministerial stipend, it is the tradition in all of the BACOMA churches to set aside one Sunday each month for members to bring gifts towards what is termed "the pastor's basket". These gifts range from groceries and food items, kitchen utensils, or clothing. Some pastors' wives in my study from the rural areas stated that sometimes their churches arranged to assist the families of many pastors by working in the crop fields by tilling the soil, planting, and harvesting.

specifically addressed it as an issue of institutionalized economic injustice against pastors' wives. This study fills that gap.

The responses of all the participants in my study have their origins in the internalization of the BACOMA procedures contained in the *Bukhu Lothandiza Atsogoleri a Mpingo wa Baptist* (Manual for Baptist Leaders). Although each local church is autonomous and is responsible for its own affairs—including the engagement of a pastor—the manual provides some general guidelines for the local churches to follow.¹²¹ The manual is used in adult Sunday school classes, as well as in leadership training sessions to instruct church members on correct church procedures. For example, according to the procedures laid down in the *Bukhu Lothandiza Atsogoleri* (nd:63-67) the following qualifications and character traits are required of a pastor and his family wanting to go for seminary training, or to be invited by a church as a candidate for local church ministry:

- He must show that he is a born again Christian and served in the Baptist congregation for not less than two years.
- He must display characteristics of being called to the ministry
- He must show that he is gifted for ministry.
- He should have undergone seminary or Bible school training
- His life style should display the character traits as stipulated in the scriptures.¹²²
- His wife should be supportive to his calling; she should have been a Baptist member for not less than one year; and she should undergo the spouses' training course.

According to the *Bukhu Lothandiza Atsogoleri* (nd:48-49), the pastor's family should portray the following traits:

¹²¹ The BACOMA does not assign pastors to the local church, except in some cases where an association sees it fit to do so. A local church can engage the services of a pastor who is still in training; one who has finished his training; or even one who has not yet been trained, to be their pastor. A church can also call someone who is already serving in another church if the person also feels obligated to do so (*Bukhu Lothandiza Atsogoleri* nd:67-68).

¹²² '... must be above reproach, of one wife, temperate, sensible, respectable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way – for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert ..., he must be well thought of by outsiders.' (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

- The husband and his wife should be faithful and committed to the ministry of the Word.
- They should encourage each other and pray for one another.
- The wife should take care of her family.
- The wife should be hospitable to visitors and diligent in her home.
- She should be respectable and respect her husband's job.
- She should not be a gossip.
- She should be faithful in everything and provide a peaceful home for her husband.
- A pastor's wife should be one who loves God's work and not be engaged in bad habits.

When reflected upon from a feminist perspective, the above requirements reveal that pastors' wives are placed in very stereotyped positions. By using androcentric language for the pastor, it automatically excludes women from following their dreams and visions of being called by God to become a pastor. Women receiving theological education are also viewed as playing a complementary role to that of their husbands. This is why much emphasis is placed on the woman as being a wife, while the husband's responsibility is on pastoral ministry. Finally, these lists portray a definitive Western missionary model of both family and ministry in the (then) twentieth century. It indicates that the wife supports the husband by taking care of him and the family.

From the above analysis, the understanding of the pastors' wives, the pastors and the church members in my study was that God primarily calls the husband to the pastoral ministry. Similarly, the congregation calls, employs and pays the husband. The wife merely accompanies him as a helpmeet and gracefully accepts whatever the church offers them as a family. The wife is trained to support her husband. Hence, even if the wife receives her own call from God, it is subsumed into the husband's call. The wife submits obediently without raising any dissent. All decisions are made on her behalf by the local church and her husband.

In arguing against this “silent employment”, Miller argues¹²³ that it contradicts the New Testament model for a pastor’s wife.¹²⁴ I disagree with this argument because there were no paid pastors in the church of the first century (CE). However, the experience of pastors’ wives as ‘unpaid labourers’ in this study contradicts the principle of the priesthood of all believers where the pastors’ wives do not equally enjoy the privileges as paid staff members.

Having been called and gone through the employment process under the conditions described above, the question arises: “How is the pastor’s wife equipped for pastoral ministry?” I will now turn to an examination of this question in the section which follows.

6.3. The Theological Education of a Pastor’s Wife in the BACOMA

In chapter four of this dissertation it was noted that the majority of female students at the BTSM are pastors’ wives, while the number of women studying theology outside this category are relatively few, although slowly increasing in recent years. It was argued that the issue of power and authority, legitimized by the use of the Bible within the patriarchal structures of the church, family and theological education, has been used in the BACOMA to deny people, especially women, justice.

In this section, I will discuss and analyse the type of theological training that the pastor’s wives say that they have received in preparation for ministry. The questions I seek to answer in this section are two-fold: 1) What does it mean for the participants to be theologically trained? And 2) How does theological training contribute to the construction of a woman’s identity?

6.3.1. The Respondents’ Perceptions on Theological Education for Spouses

From the findings, I identified three specific areas in which the pastors’ wives felt that the seminary training empowered them for ministry.

¹²³ See, D. Miller, The Pastor’s Wife. *The Testimony* 44/5 (Spring 2003). <<http://www.03spring.pdf/pastorswife.pdf>> [Accessed 15 November 2009].

¹²⁴ Shirley Hartley and Mary Taylor (1977:63) have also pointed out that the Protestant ministry represents an extreme case of the two-person career, where the couple work at the husband’s occupation and for his salary. They further argue that, the minister’s wife, usually without theological training, is commonly engaged in leading prayers, teaching Sunday school class, and comforting the bereaved or stricken, and yet her services are generally taken for granted.

6.3.1.1. Skills Training

The first area I identified from the pastors' wives narratives on the perceived benefits of seminary training was that of skills training. The respondents mentioned that they acquired skills such as being able to lead women's groups; handle problems, and teach the Bible. Other skills included sewing, cooking and other handcraft skills. In addition, those with little or no formal education were proud that they had learned to read and write. Most church members made similar remarks about the impact of theological education on the pastors' wives. No one complained about the short duration of their courses or whether the training they receive matched the work they do in the field. As observed earlier in § 2. The Call to the Pastoral Ministry, many church members expected the pastors' wives to lead the women's group because of their theological training.

6.3.1.2. Character Formation

The second area I identified from the pastors' wives narratives on the perceived benefits of seminary training was that of character formation. They mentioned the following qualities they were taught as being needful for a pastor's wife: demonstrating humility; being well disciplined; being respectful; showing patience; one who does not gossip; one who does not show partiality but treats and loves everyone in the same way, and one who is respectful towards others. In addition, they mentioned that they learned that a pastor's wife needs to be a person of prayer and who studies the "Word of God" at all times.

6.3.1.3. Resources for Ministry

The third area I identified from the pastors' wives narratives on the perceived benefits of seminary training was that of acquiring resources that would help them in their daily ministry. They mentioned books such as the women's and the girls' manuals.¹²⁵ They felt that these booklets helped them in training other women leaders in their local congregations. They stated that many church members, especially women look up to them, to guide them in the things that they had learned from their seminary

¹²⁵ Namely, *Umodzi wa amayi a Baptist m'Malawi* and *Bukhu lothandiza atsikana a Baptist m'Malawi*. See Appendix XI: List of Books for Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi (BTSM) Wives' Curriculum, for a comprehensive list of books and manuals used on the Wives' Courses.

training. In addition to these manuals, the pastors' wives also mentioned the booklet *God's Chosen Woman: The Pastor's Wife*, (Nairobi, International Publications, 1986) (translated: *Mkazi wosankhidwa ndi Mulungu*). This booklet is of particular interest to this study because of biblical emphasis it places on the supportive role of pastors' wives. The booklet was written by Yvonne Parker, one of the Western missionary wives serving in Zambia during the 1980s. Parker was teaching the "Pastor's wife" course at the seminar. With the help of another missionary wife, Mary Small, she organized and compiled her lessons into this booklet as a resource for seminary or Bible school class study. It was translated into the vernacular languages in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. A summary of its contents is as follows:

The Lord wants her to be a supportive wife; hence she must understand God called him to be pastor. Need for her to understand what the Bible teaches about the qualifications of a pastor as listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and how to be a good wife such as found in Proverbs 31:20-31, the characteristics of a good wife. Her identity is as an individual plus as a wife (a partner to her husband) according to Ephesians 5:1-2; 21-33. That is, she should live through the eyes of her husband ... For a husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the church. Therefore being a submissive and respectful wife is a part of her obedience to God ... In addition she must see herself through her own eyes as one who has received special abilities and gifts with which to do God's work. These gifts vary from person to person, according to Ephesians 4:11.

The emphasis on being a good wife and her husband's helper in the home resonates with the missionary wives' role in the domestic sphere while their husbands were involved in the public sphere. In addition, the Bible is used to endorse the divine origin of her role. The content is similar to that contained in the leaders' manual with regard to the character of a pastor's family referred to above. In total, all the teaching stresses the supportive role a pastor's wife should give to her husband as having biblical support.

While the spouses' training programme was found to be beneficial and empowering for the participants in my study, the participants' stories revealed that some of those with low levels of basic education did not see much need for further theological education. They reasoned that since they are able to read the Bible and to preach to

the women that was enough. Their only desire was to improve their knowledge of English, in order to be able to converse with the Western missionaries and interpret for them during evangelistic and outreach campaigns.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, those who expressed a desire to continue studying, especially to improve their English language skills reasoned that it was because most of the resources they could utilize to improve their knowledge and understanding of the Bible was in English. For example, the following participant, Akonda, felt educationally inadequate and wanted to be equipped in many areas as indicated in her following response:

But without education, how can one read other books? Wide reading helps to develop the intellect....I learnt that without education, it is as good as death. I think those who discredit education have not travelled, or they have not been with educated people to appreciate education. For me, that is my desire. I even wanted to go for seminary training, or even to go back to primary school so that I can develop myself...because there are many challenges. As a pastor's wife, everybody looks to you for direction, and then you are not educated, things cannot go well with you as a leader because you have no vision. You may not even relate well with other people because you feel intimidated (Akonda, Interview, 04 July 2009).

Apart from learning English, Akonda viewed education as a tool to help her improve her effectiveness in ministry. There is nothing more challenging and frustrating, or marginalizing than being ill-equipped for a particular task. In addition, a person's level of basic education determines how much they can assert themselves and how far they can develop their skills and potential. It also increases a person's earning potential, although the participants' stories showed that for a pastor's wife to be employed outside her ministry work was not the best option.

¹²⁶ From the late 1990s, there has been a steady influx of Baptist teams from North America to Malawi through partnership programmes between the BACOMA churches and various Baptist groups in North America. Hence the need for more vernacular interpreters grew tremendously. Pastors' wives felt more pressured to be able to communicate in English because it is usually the pastor's home that provides hospitality to foreign visitors.

A paradigm shift is however evident in that many pastors' wives are improving their basic education, or pursuing some training in other professions, while others are studying theology independent of their husbands. At the time of the interviews, three pastors' wives were studying at diploma level at the BTSM with the intention of continuing into the degree programme. This is a good sign in the right direction for transformation. However, for some of the participants to continue with education is not an easy task. Another participant, Kondanani's echoes this struggle:

I have tried hard to find teachers to teach me English, but I do not know what happens, whether it is because I am not sharp enough, I do not know. While we were at the seminary, my husband found me a teacher who started to teach me. Similarly, when we came back home, he got another teacher to teach me English for almost a year. After that one I got another teacher who was teaching two of us, me and another pastor's wife. He taught us for about four months, but I do not know whether it is because of my lack of interest, I don't know, but I still find it very difficult to learn....That is another problem; I am too busy to find time for private study (Kondanani, Interview, 01 January 2009).

Kondanani and her husband pastor a large urban church. She is one of the pastors' wives with little basic education, which may be a contributing factor to her struggle to combine learning, home responsibilities and ministry work. It is observed that although many husbands are willing to share family responsibilities, many women still shoulder a greater share of parenting and family care, which may hinder progress in their educational pursuits. However, as Kondanani's story shows, her desire is not to increase her theological acumen but to acquire a better knowledge of the English language.

6.3.2. Theological Training as Tool of Indoctrination

In this section, I have shown that while theological training empowers the pastors' wives for ministry, it is also an indoctrination agent used to keep them in a position of subordination to their husbands. Nonetheless, I have shown that those pastors' wives who recognized the challenge caused by their low level of basic education were often

engaged in further studies to improve their educational and theological qualifications. What was of particular concern in my study was the huge disparity in training and what is demanded (and not just expected) of the pastors' wives by the churches, and even by their husbands.

Having examined the self-understanding and congregational understanding of the pastors' wives' call to support their husbands and as vindicated by the theological education that they receive, in the next section I will examine the challenges that the pastors' wives experience.

6.4. The Challenges Experienced by Pastors' Wives

All the three samples of my study, the pastors' wives, the church community and the focus group, identified some important challenges that pastors' wives experience in relation to the call and their theological education. The major challenge that was expressed by all three research groups was the low educational levels of the majority of pastors' wives. The concern was that the low education of pastors' wives sometimes brought tension not only between husband and wife, but also between the pastor's wife and her church community. My findings revealed that the tension as a result of the educational low levels mainly manifested itself in two ways.

6.4.1. Low Self Esteem

First, at a social level between the wife and a husband, some of the pastors in my study pointed out that sometimes they failed to attend some functions together with their wives due to the low educational status of their wives. Some pastors, especially those who had been exposed to gender issues, critiqued the belief that many African men did not want a wife who was more educated, and argued that in today's world it was necessary that both husband and wife were educated. The wives' desire to learn the English language was noted from the narratives of some of the pastors' wives in my study may be a reflection of this tension. The pastors were unanimous that the low education of their wives was a big problem. With this concern in mind, the pastors made several suggestions to curb the problem. The first suggestion was that it was their responsibility to help uplift the lives of their wives. This suggestion was supported by the pastors who were already assisting their wives to improve their

educational standard. The second suggestion was that the churches also should take responsibility to advance the education standard of their pastors' wives. While the pastors admonished one other to begin working towards their wives' advancement, others mentioned that in some cases it was the wives themselves who did not want to advance despite the efforts that their husbands put. In addition, some church members in my study pointed out the need for pastors' wives to acquire more skill-sets other than simply being a pastor's wife, because of financial concerns. They argued that in case of the death of the husband, the wife can at least do something to earn a living and support herself.

6.4.2. Intimidation

Second, some church members pointed out that in ministry, those female church members with higher education may undermine or despise the lowly educated pastor's wife. A pastor's wife may also feel intimidated by those with higher education than herself. This scenario is more apparent in urban church settings than in rural areas, where the pastor's wife may be the only educated person and therefore more knowledgeable and legitimate to teach them. One participant in my study expressed the problem by saying:

Pastors' wives with less education fail to participate fully in the life of the church with their husbands, because a pastor's wife is supposed to lead the women, teaching them the Word of God, and helping the women to grow. So, if she is not educated, then it will be too much for the husband to cope (YFU, Interview, 12 July 2009).

The church's expectations for the pastors' wives as outlined in the § 2.4. above, the Baptist procedure for engaging the services of a pastor does not put the wife's education as a priority; yet in reality, the women are struggling to fulfil their duties. This is noticed by themselves, the pastors and the members of the congregations. The biggest concern at this point, however, is that the big disparity between the wives' and the husbands' training underrates the significant role that these women play in the church. It also undermines the goal of theological education in Malawi and in the BACOMA in particular; that of "equipping God-called men and women for Christian ministry".

In view of the above analyses on the calling and training of the pastors' wives, in the section which follows, I provide a feminist interpretation of the call to ministry and theological education.

6.5. A Feminist Interpretation of the Call to Ministry and Theological Education

Having noted the challenges faced by pastors' wives, I have identified two issues of concern from a feminist perspective, namely, pastors' wives hearing God through their husbands and employing them as unpaid labour.

6.5.1. Pastors' Wives Hearing God through their Husbands

This chapter has shown that pastors' wives in the BACOMA are capable of hearing God for themselves, even the call to pastoral ministry, just as men do. The issue here is not about how many of the women I interviewed had heard the voice of God before their husbands. The issue is recognizing that women can also hear the voice of God in their own right either before or after their husbands receive a divine call to the ministry. This is perfectly in accord with the Baptist-held principle of the priesthood of all believers. Universally, Baptists rightly state that an individual is capable of hearing and responding to God's calling. While this understanding resonates with the feminist understanding of God's call, I argue here that the Baptist teaching and praxis contradict each other. The issue of God's call to pastoral ministry cannot be separated from the ministry of the Holy Spirit as poured out on women and men alike as described in chapter four.¹²⁷ Baptists are champions on soul freedom: that the soul is competent before God, and capable of making decisions in matters of faith without coercion or interference by any larger religious or civil body. Thus, if God calls women and the pastors' wives to various ministries, there is no reason why the same God cannot call women to pastoral ministry. Here it is the institution of the church which suppresses the spiritual dimension fundamental to the ministry of the Holy Spirit by being a "corrupting" or "manipulating" agent as to who can be called to the pastoral ministry (Ruether 1993:30). It is therefore the responsibility of the BACOMA

¹²⁷ "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18 New Revised Standard Version).

to assist all believers to recognize the voice of God and their Holy Spirit apportioned gifts of ministry. To restrict women from hearing and responding to God's calling and gifting for ministry not only deprives the church; it also hinders their obedience to God (Payne 2009:73).

The mission statement of the BTSM which states: "Equipping God-called men and women for Christian ministry" is rightly an inclusive statement. It will be shown in the next chapter that pastors' wives are involved in a lot of pastoral duties which require skill-sets beyond being a good pastor's wife or a women's leader. Although some voices from the African women theologians seem to suggest that the pastors' wives should be free to choose their own career instead of being 'forced' into theological training while the calling is their husband's (*cf.* Nadar 2005:21), I wish to differ with such a suggestion. While this suggestion resonates perfectly with the Baptist principle of freedom and equality, I argue that theological education is a necessary tool for every individual Christian because, considering the fact that every Christian is called to serve God in a particular area according to one's own gifting, all people need solid spiritual foundations through appropriate training. Similarly, a pastor's wife is a Christian in her own right and her study of theology may not necessarily be for a career in her husband's ministry, but for her own ministry. Moreover, since women are the church, quality theological training will better equip them to transform the patriarchal traditions that are rampant throughout the church and Malawian society in general. Similarly, Bernadette Mbuy Beya (2001:202) argues that adequate theological training will equip women to effectively participate in the whole life of the church. But with regard to the 'spouses' training, it specifically has a socializing effect as discussed above.

Baptist teachings reveal that the institutional authorities, in the name of 'our system' are the ones who choose to whom the Spirit should speak, and what gifts should be given to whom. According to Christian feminist theologians and historians, this exclusion of women goes back to the theology of male headship and female subordination, which unfortunately has held the Christian tradition captive for centuries as discussed in chapter three above (Schüssler Fiorenza 1997; Oduyoye 2001a; Rakoczy 2004; Phiri 2005). For example, Ruether (1993:195) points out that this subordination, "while attributed to women's physiological role in procreation,

extends to an inferiority of mind and soul as well.” Thus, because women are categorized as being “less capable than men of moral self-control and reason”, they can therefore “play only a passive role in the giving and receiving of ministry (Ruether 1993:195).

In the end, it all depends whether the BACOMA wishes to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church in this day, or to what ‘our tradition’ continues to repeat. Similarly, whether the pastors’ wives as priests before God are prepared to work with the men towards the transformation of BACOMA traditions and heed God’s call and purpose.

In the section which follows, I will discuss the second area of concern to women theologians, namely the way pastors’ wives are treated as unpaid labourers in the BACOMA.

6.5.2. The Pastor’s Wife as an Unpaid Labourer

This chapter has shown that according to Baptist (and by extrapolation, BACOMA) teaching, it is the (male) pastor whom the church employs; hence all the benefits to the pastor are inclusive of his wife (and family). However, his wife (and children) is expected to support her husband in ministry. The literature on pastors’ wives reveals that this is not a new phenomenon (Pentecost 1964; Nordland 1972; Meyrick 1998). However, no one seems to engage with it as a social-cultural problem which, from a feminist perspective, has its roots in the personhood of women and men. I will therefore examine it firstly as a form of economic violence and secondly as a violation of her human dignity.

6.5.2.1. Exploitation and Economic Violence

Firstly, employing pastors’ wives as an unpaid labourer reveals the exploitative nature of the church as a form of economic violence. Olufunmilayo Fawole, a public health scholar, defines the economic violence against women and girl children as follows:

Limited access to funds and credit; controlling access to health care, employment, education, including agricultural resources; excluding from financial decision making; discriminatory traditional laws on

inheritance, property rights, and use of communal land. At work women receiving unequal remuneration for work done equal in value to the men's; overworked and underpaid; used for unpaid work outside the contractual agreement. At home women barred from working by partners, while other men totally abandon family maintenance to the woman (2000:168).

The above definition shows that women have been unjustly exploited by employers simply because they are women. Although pastors' wives may be included in the 'women' group, the form of violence they experience is very subtle because it is not identified as violence or exploitation. This is confirmed by the fact that none of the participants mentioned the lack of payment for the services that the pastors' wives render to the church as a challenge or violence against women. They even went as far as to suggest that raising it with the congregation would bring confusion. While some of the participants agreed that the church members needed to be taught about the importance of remunerating pastors' wives, they cautioned that it should be done wisely because it has never been done before. Here, the concern is not about the congregation, but upsetting the economic power balance between the husband and wife.

The exploitative nature of congregations over their ministers is a global problem, although in some parts of the world it is beginning to change.¹²⁸ Paying one salary for two employees means going up against a country's labour legislation. The churches exploit not only the pastor and his wife, but also evade paying State taxes in the name of 'ministry' and the salary becomes just an allowance or stipend. Further research needs to be done in this area. The exploitative nature of the church as an institution is of great concern to feminist theologians, especially for those women who have given themselves fully to doing church work.

¹²⁸ For example, the observation of Louis McBurney (1977:47) in the late 1970s was that church ministers were the lowest paid professional group in the United Kingdom as well as in the United States of America. Writing in the early years of the new millennium, Richard Armstrong (2005:59) was able to say that gone are the days when many pastors were barely paid a subsistence wage, it being not uncommon to find pastors and their families severely strapped financially.

6.5.2.2. Exploitation and the Violation of Human Dignity

Secondly, employing the pastor's wife without recognizing her individual contribution to the church obliterates and undermines her humanity by exploiting her services. The BACOMAs policy of seeing the wife through the eyes of the pastor and his calling and therefore not recognising nor rewarding her is a form of institutional injustice and violence against women (Oduyoye 2001; Rakoczy 2004:21-22; Phiri and Nadar 2006:10-21). It also confirms Schüssler Fiorenza's and the observations of other Christian feminists, that it is "the centuries of wo/men's silencing that have shaped all western academic and religious discourses" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999:2). Furthermore, this "tradition of silencing has legitimated wo/men's subordinate position in western [and non-western] societies and in the Christian churches" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999:2).

6.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have highlighted the notion that the identity and call to ministry of the pastor's wife is subsumed in the husband's calling. The ministerial teaching prevalent in the BACOMA assumes that once the husband is called to ministry, the wife automatically is also called. The BACOMA does not recognize that a woman can have a call to ministry of her own. An analysis of my research findings has shown that when the church engages the ministerial services of a husband-wife team, payment is only given to the husband who is the recognized 'called' person.

In terms of theological education, it was noted that the wife's education is primarily that of a supportive role and yet the demands in the field are the same for the husband and wife team. I have also shown that the low education level of most of the pastors' wives in the BACOMA has brought tension in two areas. The first is at a social level between the husband and the wife, and second, between the pastors' wives and members of the congregation. I have also highlighted the importance of quality theological education for women and the need for the BACOMA to put an end to the economic abuse of their pastors' wives whereby they treat them as unpaid labourers, which according to current labour legislation is illegal.

In the next chapter, I will continue to present, analyse and interpret the research findings of my fieldwork research, with particular emphasis being placed on the roles of a pastor's wife in the church and in the home, and the challenges that this raises.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF A PASTOR'S WIFE IN THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI (BACOMA)

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter consisted of a comparative analysis on the calling of a pastor's wife and the implications on her theological training and remuneration from a feminist perspective. I argued that the patriarchal structures and clerical powers of the BACOMA conspire to undermine the call and dignity of pastors' wives as well as economically exploiting them. In this chapter, I propose to continue with the presentation and analysis of the research findings. I will present a feminist comparative analysis of what the pastors' wives, church community and focus group understands as the role of a pastor's wife in the church and in the home, as well as the challenges that she experiences. The central question that I seek to answer in this chapter will be: "How do the pastors' wives, the church community, and the focus group understand the roles and challenges of a pastor's wife both in the church and at home?"

From the outset, it is important to mention that when I originally framed the question, "What is the role of a pastor's wife?" I was expecting answers about their roles in the church because the title 'pastor' is an office and not a home title. However, when analysing the responses of my study, I noted that this question was understood differently by some of the participants. On the one hand, with the exception of seven pastors' wives who have tertiary education, twenty-two pastors' wives from my sample mentioned the church roles first and then the home roles second. On the other hand, the focus group pastors in my sample responded to my question by mentioning the home roles of pastors' wives first and the church roles second. In the case of the church members, all of them started with the role of the pastor's wife at church. In my opinion, the difference lies between Baptist teachings and praxis. For those with

higher theological education, they are taught at the seminary that the family comes first and ministry is second. Nevertheless, those who mentioned ministry first and family second based this on what they see to be the experience of pastors' wives. This will be confirmed when examining their roles in the church.

In order to answer the above question, I have divided this chapter into four sections. The first section focuses on the roles of pastors' wives in the church. The second section focuses on the roles of pastors' wives in the home. The third section examines the challenges faced by pastors' wives in these roles. The fourth section is the feminist perspectives on the roles of pastors' wives.

7.2. The Roles of Pastors' Wives in the Church

I have divided this section into three sub-sections which are: as a women's leader; as a community leader; and as a husband's supporter.

7.2.1. The Pastor's Wife as a Leader

Almost all of the participants from the three samples of this study mentioned that the main role of pastors' wives was to lead and/or teach the women of the church through the Women's Organization, *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi*. The involvement of pastors' wives in women's ministry in the BACOMA is best illustrated by one of the pastors' wives from my sample whom I have called Tiyanjane. She reported that:

My major role is that of teaching the women, encouraging them, so that their ministry is successful. That is, through me, they can also reach out to many people. I have a big responsibility for the women (Tiyanjane, Interview, 26 January 2009).

Similarly, one church member succinctly put it this way:

There is a general understanding that she works side by side with her husband. They automatically step in as leaders of the women, a very important role in the church because the women's group is very powerful and well-organized group. Many churches where the pastor's wife has embraced this role well, we find those churches to be very

*vibrant. However, we find it confusing when Western pastors come and their wives refuse to take this role; many Malawians find it very difficult to understand (AFU, Interview, 12 July 2009).*¹²⁹

The above stories confirm the understanding of the pastors' wives as to their roles and what the church expects of them. These two perceptions overlapped in most of the participants' stories—the pastors' wives, the church members, and the focus group. The question this raises is as follows: “What is the significance of the BACOMA Women's Organization, *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi*?”

In order to understand the BACOMA Women's Organization, *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi*, it becomes important to situate its historical roots within the Western missionary context. The *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi* was born out of the North American Southern Baptist Missionary wives' evangelistic work through their Sunday School classes, Bible studies, and home making skills from 1961 onwards, developing into a fully-fledged organization in 1975.¹³⁰ It is within the context of this organization that I will discuss the roles of a pastor's wife. Within the *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi*, the roles of the pastors' wives' can best be divided into three specific areas: 1) a teacher and leader of women; 2) a leader of rituals; and 3) a community leader. I will now turn to discuss each individual role.

7.2.2. A Teacher and Leader of Women

The pastor's wife is a teacher within the church women's organization. Her role involves teaching the women during the weekly meetings; inducting the new members, and pastoral duties among the church women. In relation to teaching during the weekly meetings, I found out that my respondent works with the *Umodzi wa amayi* committee. Her responsibility is to oversee that women attend meetings, are taught the Bible and various other skills, such as leadership, preaching, home building

¹²⁹ The issue that this respondent raised about foreign pastors references one local city congregation which has an international membership. Since its inception the church has hired only foreign white pastors. Although there are women's Bible study groups, and the *Umodzi wa Amayi* group, which comprises mainly of African women, they struggle to thrive because they have no pastor's wife leadership, other than the assistant pastor's wife and the women's committee.

¹³⁰ For a full discussion on the establishment and development of *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi* see the studies of both, NyaGondwe-Banda (2005) and Longwe (2007).

skills, and prayer.¹³¹ In addition, she makes sure that study booklets are available for the women to use. The booklet lessons are arranged in such a way that all women contribute, while the pastor's wife or the chairperson leads each lesson. At the end of each lesson, the pastor's wife summarizes the day's lesson. Some participants mentioned that in rural areas, the pastor's wife is the only one who is able to read and write, and so does all the teaching and the record keeping for *Umodzi wa amayi*. The attendance of the pastor's wife at the weekly meetings is therefore crucial for the spiritual nourishment, guidance, and encouragement of the women. The strength of her leadership is usually tested by the number of women who attend the larger gatherings of the *Umodzi wa amayi* or the regional meetings. As was discussed in chapter four and six of this dissertation, the pastors' wives are prepared for this work of ministry during their theological education at seminary. Even disciplinary matters are vested in the hands of the pastors' wives. For example, those who defy the rules of the organization are taken to task by pastors' wives.

In relation to inducting new members into the *Umodzi wa amayi*, in my study I found that this is another area where the pastors' wives showed sole responsibility. The pastor's wife takes responsibility for the teaching of new members of her own congregation as well as out-stations. This involves instructing the candidates into the *Umodzi wa amayi*. This entails assisting the candidates to memorize the aims of the organization, Bible verses, and the theme song. The pastor's wife is also responsible for teaching and monitoring the moral lifestyle of the candidates.¹³² Once the course is completed, the pastor's wife leads the candidates into the "wearing the uniform" ceremony during a Sunday church worship service. The significance of the women's uniform has already been well researched by other scholars.¹³³ NyaGondwe-Banda notes that in some churches in the Southern Region of Malawi,¹³⁴ the pastors (male)

¹³¹ Both women and men church members in this study testified to the significant role their pastor's wife played in their lives, in their homes, or in the improved home relationships. This will be further interrogated in the chapter on congregational perceptions of a pastor's wife below

¹³² This refers mainly to whether a woman is a second wife; if she is, then she cannot belong to the *Umodzi wa amayi*.

¹³³ For example, speaking about the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's *Manyano* Women's Movement, Lyn Holness (1997:26) observes that the uniform gives the women a "sense of identity, of being somebody in her own right". Dressed in her uniform, a woman "assumes a dignity, a self-confidence and a sense of pride" within a patriarchal society.

¹³⁴ I am sure this is also present in the other Regions as well.

take over the leadership of the “wearing of uniform” ceremony from their wives.¹³⁵ Such practices not only serve to dis-empower her, but it also shows the power of patriarchy which needs to be challenged.

In relation to pastoral duties by the pastors’ wives in the church women’s organization, I found out that all the participants in my research sample regarded her leadership in visitations as being a significant aspect of the women’s care-giving ministry. She oversees that both the spontaneous and planned visitations are carried out; her aim being to make sure that people are visited. These include visiting the sick in hospitals, or in their homes; those who have had a death in the family; the backslidden; those with newly born babies; or following up on new members. While the pastor’s wife may carry out some of these visits alone, or with her husband, it is within the *Umodzi wa amayi* that she plays a more significant leadership role. While most of the care-giving is done within the Baptist denomination, it also crosses the denominational boundaries to those in prisons, in hospitals, or to the orphanages. In all of these duties and responsibilities, the women look up to the pastors’ wives to lead them.

While many of the research participants attested to the great impact that a pastor’s wife can make in the lives of the women, some participants expressed their dissatisfaction. For example, one woman participant stated that:

In my church I do not see what our pastor’s wife does. She does not visit, she comes late for Thursday meetings; and she normally tells the women to go ahead with our meetings. I don’t know what you teach them here at the seminary (AFU, Interview, 20 January 2009).

While the pastor’s wife referred to in the above quotation may have had her own reasons why she was not able to lead the *Umodzi wa amayi* of her own congregation; what is of importance is that the congregation expects all their pastors’ wives to take a leadership role in *Umodzi wa amayi*. At the same time, it can be argued that such a pastor’s wife is exercising her freedom of choice according to the principle of the priesthood of all believers.

¹³⁵ Rachel NyaGondwe-Banda (2005:111-116) gives a detailed description of the origin, design and meanings, the rationale, and the regulations of *Umodzi wa amayi*, uniform.

On the whole, in addition to teaching and preaching at the women's weekly, association, regional, national and even international meetings, the leadership in pastoral care and visitation of the pastors' wives at the local church level takes on more importance than that of her husband.

7.2.3. A Leader of Rituals

Within the *Umodzi wa amayi*, a pastor's wife is a leader of rituals. This involves mainly giving instruction to young girls who have reached puberty, training the instructors of the girls who are called *alangizi*, and leading the women's activities at the funerals of the church members.¹³⁶ It is a requirement of the BACOMA that each congregation has two women instructors; ordinarily, these *alangizi* are elderly women. It is the responsibility of the pastors' wives to lead and guide *alangizi* in instructing the girls.¹³⁷

In my study, the pastors' wives stressed the need of instructing the young girls so that they "*take care of their sexual behaviour especially in these days of HIV and AIDS*" (Alinafe, Interview, 13 July 2009). It was noted that even before the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the initiation for young girls was already a Chewa cultural ritual. In addition to the issue of HIV and AIDS, some pastors' wives, especially from the rural churches, stated that it was their responsibility to make sure that the young girls are not pregnant on their wedding day at church. For example, Akondwere, one of the pastor's wives who was a participant in my study stated:

Before the church accepts a couple to register their wedding, the deacons wait to hear a report from me or from the instructresses. I, therefore, together with the instructresses examine the girl to make sure that she is not pregnant. We then report back to the deacons, who proceed with the registration. We do not want to be blamed later on by the church if they discover that they wedded an already pregnant girl (Akondwere, Interview, 22 January 2009).

¹³⁶ Other rituals in which women are involved include young mothers in pregnancy and being present at the birth of first babies.

¹³⁷ See the church manual, *Bukhu la Alangizi*, (Lilongwe, Baptist Publications, nd).

According to Akondwere's statement, the concern for the church is pregnancy testing, rather than virginity testing. The assumption is of course that as Christian girls they abstain from sexual relations until marriage. Since in traditional Chewa, it was a punishable offence to fall pregnant before marriage,¹³⁸ it seems that the Christian tradition continued with the testing, and adopted a 'no church' wedding policy for a pregnant woman to maintain the integrity, not only of the women instructors, but of the church as a whole. This confirms the findings of Molly Longwe (2006:94) on Baptist puberty instruction among the Chewa people, where she found that emphasis was placed on the need for the girls to marry in church and not to become pregnant before marriage. To do otherwise would mean that the church instruction loses its credibility, especially from the point of view of traditionalists. Therefore, it should be noted that the concern about HIV and AIDS as mentioned by the other participants above is only a recent development.

The pastors' wives in my study pointed out that in the Baptist churches the only instruction that a boy receives is the night before his wedding day from the male instructors, who are elderly men from the church. The gender imbalance here is clear. While the church is busy teaching, checking on, and protecting the girls from HIV infection, they nevertheless remain vulnerable because the young men are left to live as they please. This also confirms the African women theologians' concern that rites of passage are the most effective instruments of socialization that have placed women in vulnerable positions of subordination to men (Oduyoye 1995a; Moyo 2005:127-145). African women theologians therefore call upon the Christian church, especially the Christian women, to review the teachings of the church, and discard any customs or teachings that are harmful or demeaning to women and young girls. In my opinion, the role of pastor's wife as a trainer of *alangizi* and as a woman instructor places her in a very strategic position as a catalyst for transformation. In fact, as Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001a:26) reminds us, the celebration of these rituals is actually the celebration of life because African spirituality is rooted in the "fullness of life". It is only when the pastor's wife is herself transformed that she can then transform others.

¹³⁸ Isabel Apawo Phiri (1997a:35) argues that for a woman to fall pregnant before marriage would mean disobeying ancestral customs called *miyambo* in Chewa and other traditional societies in Malawi.

While initiation ceremonies mark the celebration of life on this side of the living, death and funeral rites mark the celebration of life on behalf of the departed for their smooth transition to eternity and for the well-being of the living. As with other rituals, death, funerals and post-burial rites form an important part of African life; hence, the understanding of death among Africans as many African theologians have demonstrated (Pobee 1986; Oduyoye 2006). The pastor's wife's role at funerals is therefore of great importance. In my study I found that the pastors' wives' major role at funerals of church members was mainly supervisory and in leadership.

Most of the pastors' wives in my study stated that usually a pastor's wife is the first to be informed about the death of a church member. She is the one who also organizes how the news is transmitted to others, especially to the deacons and the *Umodzi wa amayi* leadership. She also visits the home of the deceased to pay her respects and to assist with funeral arrangements, while the chairperson of the *Umodzi wa amayi* continues to inform the rest of the women and arranges for a night vigil. Night vigils are a common phenomenon in traditional African societies not only in the case of funerals but with other rituals as well. The singing of hymns, choruses, or choirs and preaching occupy the night's activities. A pastor's wife is usually one of the preachers during a night vigil.

However, certain societal expectations and responsibilities may prove overwhelming to a new or young pastor's wife, this being especially the case with funerals. For example, Chigwirizano narrated her traumatic experience at a church where her family pastored soon after completing her theological training. As a new and young pastor's wife, she was expected to lead the women in washing and dressing a dead body.¹³⁹ She stated:

I had just been inducted into my role as amayi Busa and my first task was to lead at a funeral, in everything. It was a time of anxiety. I asked myself, "What do I do here?" Well, I called the elderly women deacons and said to them, "You know better than I do what is supposed to be done here, and so even though you have given me this responsibility, I

¹³⁹ This practice is still carried out more in rural than urban areas, but to prevent the HIV infection they use surgical gloves and/or plastic shrouds.

am going to learn from you. So you should teach me because I have no previous experience in this” (Chigwirizano, Interview 29 July 2009).

Many of the pastors’ wives in my study narrated similar stories where they experienced anxiety especially at the beginning of their ministries because their training did not prepare them for such practical issues. However, after several years in the ministry, they expressed confidence. It seems that the congregations sometimes made unrealistic expectations of the pastors’ wives. The assumption is that theological training equips or commissions the pastors’ wives for any type of ministry. However, praxis has revealed that it sometimes takes years of experience before a person is fully prepared.

7.2.4. A Community Leader

From the pastors’ wives narratives in my study, I found out that most were engaged in other activities beyond that of their own congregations. These activities included prayer ministries, the care of orphans and widows, adult literacy classes and other life-skills, and income earning activities.

In relation to prayer ministry, some of the pastors’ wives in my sample stated that they were involved in prayer groups beyond their Baptist denomination. For example, Madalitso felt called to open her prayer ministry to the wider community:

In addition to our Sunday and Wednesday morning prayers in the church, God spoke to me to start other prayer groups. Every evening we have a community Bible study at our house; we also hold early morning ecumenical women’s prayers at a nearby hill every day, except on Wednesdays and Sundays; lastly, I carry out a healing ministry in our home to which people from around our area come (Madalitso, Interview, 21 November 2008).

Madalitso also stated that her husband was at first sceptical about her calling. However, this did not discourage her. From my personal observation, Madalitso’s ministry has had a great impact in her community. It has also contributed to the growth of her local church congregation.

From a South African context, Celia Kourie (2000:10) has observed the failure of mainline church institutions to satisfy the “growing spiritual hunger” of many modern-day Christians. She attributes this state of affairs to the modern world-view which has been shaped by the “Enlightenment philosophical ideas that demystified religion” (Kourie 2000:10). Apparently, some of the mission and mainline churches have taken note of this situation and have responded positively by encouraging many women’s prayer groups to provide space for spiritual renewal.

Women’s spirituality must also be seen as a characteristic of the traditional spirituality of African people, whose concern for spiritual power from a mighty God to overcome certain spirit-world based evils that threaten life, often results in an extensive and extended time of prayer for healing and deliverance. As one of the respondents in my study related:

For example, it became a big issue among the Baptist pastors, when a fellow pastor was sick for some time. While they continued to pray for him, another pastor from one of the indigenous churches came and prayed for him. The pastor diagnosed some witchcraft causes. He then gave him ‘holy water’ and milk to drink. After intensive prayer he removed some strange things from the pastor’s pillow. After also vomiting some strange things he gradually became better. The Baptist pastors accused the other pastor that he was claiming to be a pastor when he was a traditional healer (Mtendere, Interview, 29 December 2008).

This echoes well the spirituality of the African Initiated churches (AICs) that takes the African worldview seriously, resulting in issues such as sickness, witchcraft, and broken relationships being the focus of ministry and prayer for healing and deliverance.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ See Daniel (2000:312-327); Phiri (2000:267-293). It is in this context that one understands the significance of Madalitso’s ministry.

In relation to the care of orphans and widows, I discovered through my study that with the ever-increasing number of orphans and widows due to AIDS-related deaths, almost all the pastors' wives who participated in my research responded in various ways. Many of them stated that they were taking care of orphaned and abandoned children, many of whom had been left behind by their relatives. In addition, with the help of external funding, others managed to establish widows' support groups or orphanages as a way of intervention. For example, Akondwere reported in her interview that she was touched by the number of widows who used to come to ask for food from them (Interview 22 January 2009). With the help of her husband, she started a widows' support group in her community. They meet once a month for Bible study and prayer. They also obtained a plot of land where they grow maize and other foodstuffs. At the time of my interview, they were planning in starting a poultry project.

In relation to adult literacy and other life-skills, I found that some pastors' wives started centres for equipping women and young people with various skills. Some centres are for adult literacy courses and various crafts; others for more advanced skills such as computer lessons and tailoring; whilst still others have opened pre-school centres which include child feeding schemes. They also mentioned that they used such centres for Bible study. These centres are located either within the church grounds or compounds, at schools, or structures built solely for that purpose.

In relation to income-earning activities by the pastors' wives, some of them were involved in micro-businesses, while others were in fulltime or part-time employment in various professions such as teaching, nursing, or office work. The challenging task for most of them was to balance church work, home responsibilities, and income generating activities. Some pastors' wives, however, were sceptical about a pastor's wife being in employment outside the church and the home. The reason given was that it would rob her of her spirituality because she may not have enough time for meditation and prayer, or that she may become too busy and therefore neglect the work that God had called her to. This view was supported by some pastors from the focus group who expressed concern over the pastors' wives' busy schedules which resulted in some women neglecting their families as will be shown in the section on challenges below. Nevertheless, there were other pastors' wives who were of the

opinion that they would be capable of balancing home, church, and work outside the home and church because they support the observation that a woman's economic dependence on her husbands could lead to it being used as a weapon against her to punish her (*cf.* Phiri 2000b:108). Hence, by seeking to earn money, what the pastors' wives were expressing indirectly was their desire to be economically empowered. Strangely, what they were blind to was that the church was economically exploiting them.

It is evident from the above discussion that being church for the pastors' wives was reflected in their leadership role in the *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi*, although it tended to circumscribe the needs and expectations of the church. Second, being church extended to the wider community, with people outside their immediate congregations. Third, the pastors' wives used their skills and talents to provide services towards others. Finally, their aim for being involved in such activities is self-gratifying in terms of spirituality, service, and economic factors.

In the following section, I will analyse the role of pastors' wives as supporters of their husbands in ministry.

7.3. Pastors' Wives as Supporters of their Husbands' Ministry

Participants from all three categories of my research sample stated that a pastor's wife plays a very significant role in the church in supporting the ministry of her husband. Some even mentioned that a pastor's wife works "side by side" with the husband. Others described her using images such as:

She is the mzati! (lit: a pillar), not just of the church women's group, but of the whole church; or that she is the 'mother'.

One pastor even stated that:

She is an important person in the church. Because in addition to teaching the church women, she has a greater role beyond that – of helping the pastor in his work (visiting the sick, evangelizing, teaching, helping those with various problems, and so forth). We can even say that she is also a pastor (FGD, 29 November 2008).

The above statement came out at a focus group discussion and received affirmation from other members. However, other members of the focus group challenged the statement that “*She is also a pastor*”. They reasoned that when a pastor/husband dies, why does the wife not continue to pastor the church if she is indeed also a pastor?

Notwithstanding the SBC/BACOMA objection of a pastor’s wife being also a pastor, the support roles of a pastor’s wife towards her husband’s ministry includes teaching, preaching, and pastoral care, pastoral home; visitation; and administration of the ordinances of the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) and adult Water Baptism.

7.3.1. Teaching Sunday School Classes

Most of the pastors’ wives in my study stated that they were involved in teaching Sunday school classes in their churches. Although not all possessed the confidence to teach, especially at the beginning of their ministry, they argued that being a pastor’s wife, and being theologically trained qualified them in the role.

7.3.2. Involvement in Preaching

Some of the pastors’ wives and pastors in my study stated that some pastors’ wives were involved in preaching either during a normal Sunday worship service, or on Women’s Sunday. Other pastors’ wives even prided themselves in the fact that when their husband/pastor was away, the congregation looked up to them for direction and leadership. This occurred usually on Sunday services as well as at other public functions such as at funerals. Even some church members mentioned that while the pastors go out to various meetings and other ‘ministries’, it is the wives who keep the church going throughout the week. To this observation, some female members argued that the pastor’s wife should be given opportunity to preach at any other time if that is her gift, instead of being invited to preach only when there is a crisis. In addition, others argued that if the pastor’s wife is able to do pastoral duties when the pastor is absent, then she should also be called a pastor. Allowing women to be in charge contradicts the SBC/BACOMA teaching which forbids women to preach to men because in so doing she is exercising authority over men as some pastors rightly reminded. What stands out in this study is how the pastors’ wives take charge of the

public ministries in contrast to their Western counterparts whose role was usually limited to women ministries and the private sphere of the church work.¹⁴¹

One elderly pastor from rural area challengingly stated that:

Since I have attended many seminars on gender issues, I learnt that women can preach also. Although it took me a long time to accept, but after I discussed with my deacons, our women now preach on Sundays, even better than some men. The other five pastors in our area also allow women to preach when they saw us doing it (APR6, Interview, 01 December 2008).

A pastor from an urban church also stated that:

For me when I am away, my wife preaches and even teaches Sunday school, for she knows all our programmes—where we have come from and where we are going. Sometimes she is the one who directs everything. So even if I was to fall sick, she would not be stranded because we have been together in our programmes (APU5, Interview, 15 July 2009).

The above statements show that the pastor's wife acts as a substitute pastor, which somehow resonates with the notion that she is a pastor, although not an official one. In this regard one can argue that the Baptist principle of local church autonomy leaves room for individual pastors or churches to decide what fits them best, while others still wait for the BACOMA to change its policy towards women and the ordained ministry. It was noted however that urban pastors and churches give more opportunity to the pastors' wives and to women in general to serve in the church than those located in rural areas. They attributed this difference to lack of confidence in rural pastors wives due to less education and exposure. Thus, the fact that the pastors' wives were theologically trained, basic education plays a large role in ministry. This statement also nullifies people's arguments that opposition to having women pastors is due to Malawian culture.

¹⁴¹ For example, Lora Lee Parrott (1956:25) points out that when the husband was away, she took full responsibility of the church office and administrative work, while visiting clergy were brought in for each of the public services.

7.3.3. Pastoral Care and Visitation

The pastors' wives in my study stated that they often accompanied their husbands in providing pastoral care to the members of their congregations. In pastoral counselling, some church members stated that women find it easier to bring their issues to the pastor's wife first, and if she cannot deal with the issue then she can refer it to the pastor.¹⁴²

Almost all the participants from the three categories of my sample were unanimous that home or hospital visitation went hand-in-hand with the pastoral care ministry. It was a recurrent theme when the pastors' wives were asked to name the activities in which they were involved in most. They stated that they visited alone, as a couple, or with members of the *Umodzi wa amayi*. The visits could be spontaneous or pre-arranged. However, the pastors' wives further stated that church members expected their pastor to visit them, and failure to do so often resulted in some members either backsliding or moving to another church. In a survey held in 1999-2000, on why people left or joined the Baptist church in Southern Malawi by Rachel NyaGondwe-Banda (2005:195-212), few people mentioned the lack of visitation and pastoral care as a reason for leaving their churches and joining the Baptist church. The survey, however, showed that no one left the Baptist church because of lack of such pastoral care. This shows the effectiveness of the Baptist visitation programmes that the pastors' couples and the church members are continually involved in as confirmed by the pastors' wives, the pastors and church members of my study.¹⁴³ This also demonstrates that being church was not restricted to Sunday services, but it is extended to where people are as means of the ongoing caring of people throughout the week.

¹⁴² It is important to note here that within all Malawi cultures, it is disrespectful for women to bring their issues, especially marital problems, directly to a man. This shows that the culture is gender-sensitive.

¹⁴³ That visitation is a vital component of the ministry offered by the church was highlighted in the Baptist church that I attended during my study in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I quote from a leaflet entitled, *Scottsville Baptist Church (SBC) Visitation Ministry* that was distributed at a Sunday morning worship service held on 27 March 2011. It reads as follows: "As Scottsville Baptist Church we are a family who cares for one another....In order to streamline this ministry we would like to share our vision of the visitation ministry with you. Many of you are already doing visitations, seeing those who are ill, frail or shut-inns. As a leadership we would like to keep track of who has been blessed by a visit from you and who needs to be seen..."

In some cases pastoral care involved Pastors and their wives receiving members of the congregation into their own homes. The pastors' wives stated that since many churches do not have a safe space for pastoral counselling,¹⁴⁴ the pastor's home provided an ideal location. Other respondents implied that many people find the pastor's home a haven where they can find God's love. Hence, one participant remarked that:

All kinds of people come to our homes because they know that they will be assisted in one way or another (Chiyero, Interview 11 January 2009).

Nevertheless, it has been argued that intrusion into the family home brings inconvenience to the pastor's family in the form of lack of privacy and that it exerts much pressure especially on the wife.¹⁴⁵ Confirming this concern, one participant noted:

...especially those of us whose houses are at the church where almost every day, someone announces odi! (i.e., an oral traditional knocking) (Mtendere, Interview, 29 December 2008).

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Thus, some participants agreed that such intrusions usually had a negative impact especially upon their children (Kuseka, Interview, 15 January 2009; Kuyere, Interview, 14 July 2009).

7.3.4. Administration of the Ordinances?

With regard to the administration of the ordinances, i.e., the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) and adult Water Baptism, as well as child dedication, solemnization of marriages, and Christian burials, none of the pastors' wives in my study mentioned ever performing any of these rites. Most in my study expressed the belief that such

¹⁴⁴ This could be marital, pre-marital, crisis, or any other type of counselling.

¹⁴⁵ Christine Rogers (Rogers 2000:30 *cf.* Meyrick 1998:97-98), points out that in an assessment of 136 clergy couples from various Christian denominations in the United States of America, there was a marked increase in marital, parental and life satisfaction for both husbands and wives due to the use of their homes, and in an attempt to keep their homes in a state of perfection.

rites were to be performed by the pastor alone, and in this case, a male pastor! Most of the church members in my study also expressed the same understanding, that it was the (male) pastor's role to administer the ordinances.¹⁴⁶ However, one pastor participant from a rural church expressed his disagreement with the Baptist practice of barring women from administering such rites. He pointed out that his only fear for the women to conduct adult Water Baptism¹⁴⁷ was that she may encounter difficulties with those who “*manifest possession of evil spirits’ while being baptized*” (APR6, Interview, 01 December 2008). Although this comment was made in a positive sense towards women's full involvement in ministry, one has to be suspicious of such a response because women are able to deal with cases of demon possession in their own meetings. Although none of the participants mentioned issues of menstrual blood as being the main reason why women are barred from celebrating any of the church rites, it is the underlying religio-cultural reason (Oduyoye 2001a).

All the participants of my study have bought in the patriarchal theology of gendered rites. They each failed to see that even the jobs in the church are gendered, and hierarchical. That is, the male jobs are regarded as superior to those which are performed by women.¹⁴⁸

7.3.5. Patriarchal Power and Authority vs. Women's Ability

In summary, it was noted in this section, that the pastors' wives supported their husbands in ministry by teaching in Sunday schools; by preaching and taking care of the congregation in the absence of their husbands; and accompanying them in pastoral care and visitations. The issue that was raised in this section was that although the pastors' wives share with their husbands in some of the tasks of ministry, the husbands nevertheless remain in control by not allowing their wives to administer the

¹⁴⁶ It has been argued that barring women from performing these rites has no biblical basis. It is further pointed out that the Bible does not prescribe or limit the qualifications of those who are entitled to perform the rite of adult Water Baptism because in the New Testament the apostles, wandering preachers (Acts 8:38), or other members (Acts 9:18) equally performed these rituals. Even Clement of Alexandria (c. 155-c. 220 CE) spoke of Christian women missionaries who baptized their converts. To say therefore that these rites are exclusively the responsibility of a male pastor is not in line with the practice of the primitive church as recorded in the New Testament. It is however the issue of maintaining tradition that is embedded in patriarchy (cf. Bromiley 1995:420).

¹⁴⁷ Characteristically, Baptists perform adult water baptism by full immersion upon confession of faith.

¹⁴⁸ For example, ‘womanly’ tasks include chores such as setting up the sanctuary and the pulpit; preparing the baptismal and the Lord's Supper elements; and washing up; while the ‘manly’ tasks include preaching, administering the elements at the Lord's Supper, conducting weddings and burial rites.

ordinances according to the prescriptions of the BACOMA policy. The issue therefore is about power and authority and not about the ability of the pastor's wife. However, those pastors who did allow their wives to preach are moving in the right direction towards structural transformation.

Having examined the pastors' wives role as a leader in the *Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi*, a community leader, and her husband's supporter in ministry, I will now turn to her role in the home.

7.4. The Roles of Pastors' Wives in the Home

In this section, I have divided the pastors' wives' roles in the home into two separate sub-themes, namely, as a wife and as a mother and as a home maker.

7.4.1. A Loving Wife

Many pastors' wives reported in my study that in addition to church work they were also responsible to their husbands for encouraging them, advising them on good church governance, and correcting them when they made mistakes. Others stated that they even checked their husbands' sermons. Almost all of the pastors' wives reported that they prayed for their husbands, especially during preaching and sermon preparation time. Most of the pastors mentioned that the first role of their wives was to minister to their personal needs. Others saw the first role of their wives as being spiritual and emotional supporters.

For example, one pastor reported:

She is my number one supporter to stand by my side in ministry and prays for me; one who suffers together with me because we are one body (FGD, 19 December 2008).

Another pastor stressed that:

For the message to be effective, it is only when the pastor's wife is interceding for you (FGD, 19 December 2008).

This resonates well with what the wives understood to be their role, namely, to encourage and pray for their husbands.

7.4.2. A Prayer Support

Previous studies have shown that support through prayer is another vitally important contribution of a Pastor's wife in being effective in her husband's ministry. For example, Daniel Langford (1998:117-121) discovered that his wife was his number one prayer partner. Using Peter Wagner's Levels of Intercession, Langford concluded that his wife was the appropriate "1-1 intercessor" because of the intimate relationship between them, and that she had demonstrated the gift of intercession in her life in many convincing ways.

7.4.3. A Spiritual Advisor

Another role of the pastor's wife is that of a spiritual advisor to her husband. Pastors reported that their wives assisted them in decision making about church matters and corrected them wherever they were wrong.

One pastor reported that:

Even though the pastor is the head, he should not undermine the wife's advice for usually women have wise insights" (FGD, 29 November 2008).

Other pastors pointed out that there were some pastors' wives who were good advisors on how to run the church (FGD, 19 December 2008).

Another pastor added that:

She is also more knowledgeable about what is going on in the church, including gossips, because she is always with the people, while the pastor is busy reading the Bible or attending meetings (FGD, 19 December 2008).

Although this comment is supposed to be a compliment, it is also condescending towards women because women are perceived to be gossipers and men as being busy

doing important things. Yet, as shown above, women often do more public work than their husbands.

Other pastors' wives said that they also checked their husband's sermons and even critiqued them after preaching. The pastors' wives' self-understanding agrees with the observations of Derek Prime and Alistair Begg (2004) that a wife's criticism is the most important contribution towards her husband's effectiveness:

Our wives may be relied upon to be honest with us as no one else, whether we want to know how our teaching came across or the rightness of an immediate response to a crisis or a decision that must be made. It may not always be easy to accept what our wives say because of its honesty, but it is the one judgment we can entirely trust because of the love behind it (2004:278).

7.4.4. A Shield and Protector

The pastor's wife is also a protector or a shield to her husband. All three categories of the participants to my study pointed out that the pastor's wife is the best person who can protect or shield her husband from various kinds of temptation, false accusations, or even rumours. Again, this was associated with the issue of visitation; hence, the importance for her to travel with her husband so as to protect him from temptation, especially when visiting church members of the opposite sex. I have also discussed this issue under the heading of challenges below.

As a helpmate therefore, the wife is seen by all three categories of participants in my study to be very influential in her husband's life. The question one may ask according to Sarah Meyrick is whether such support "flows equally in both directions" (1998:51).

7.4.5. A Mother and Homemaker

The pastors' wives in my study stated that it was their responsibility to take care of the chores around the house. Hence, statements were made such as: "*I make sure I wash and iron his clothes*" (Tisekere, Interview, 27 January 2009); or, "*I wake up at four in the morning, do all my house work, and then leave for visitation*" (Ulemu,

Interview, 29 December 2008); or, *“On Sunday morning, I make sure that I put together all that he needs and then I can take care of the children”* (Kuyere, Interview, 14 July 2007). All these statements revealed how the participants prided themselves in providing domestic services for their husbands and children.

Almost all church member participants mentioned the important role the pastor’s wife plays in the home as a wife and as a mother. They reported that the wife is responsible for the house chores such as *“Preparing food for the family”* (YFU, Interview, 13 July 2009); *“Keeping the husband’s clothes clean all the time”* (YFU, Interview, 07 July 2009); or being *“Responsible for the general housekeeping”* (YMR, Interview, 16 July 2009). Others added that it was the mother’s role to teach their children because *“Children are well brought up by a mother”* (YFR, Interview, 13 July 2009).

Some pastors however in my study challenged such thinking by stating that restricting the wife to house chores lacked biblical support. For some, *“it comes from our traditional cultures”*, arguing that *“we end up oppressing the women by restricting them to housework and motherhood,”* (FGD, 19 December 2008). They noted that *“such [an] attitude has created a big social gap between the wife and the husband”* (FGD, 19 December 2008). Such reasoning is the beginning of transformative action that is required to deconstruct the societal norms that otherwise pervades the BACOMA churches.

Apart from being a cultural heritage, a large part of the training of a pastor’s wife at the BTSM concerns becoming a good homemaker, both in the manse and the church.¹⁴⁹ These housekeeping tasks—which are taken for granted as being so-called ‘womanly chores’—are not unique to Malawian women, but are part-and-parcel of a global societal belief about an ideal nuclear family.¹⁵⁰

Writing therefore from a Malaysian perspective, Patrina Guneratnam, the pastor’s wife of a large Pentecostal church in Kuala Lumpur, declares unequivocally:

No profession in the world requires the involvement of the wife more than that of a pastor. The degree of involvement may vary with

¹⁴⁹ See, chapters four and six of this dissertation.

¹⁵⁰ This was demonstrated earlier in chapter three of this dissertation under § 4. Feminist Theological Anthropology.

different situations, people or churches, but nonetheless, the pastor's wife is looked upon as one with her husband in his ministry to the church. There are certain expectations connected with the title 'pastor's wife'.¹⁵¹

According to Guneratnam:

I feel there is no higher calling, no greater task than this. In working towards excelling as the helpmeet God wants me to be to my pastor-husband, I am also liberated to fulfil the potentials of being a woman of God.

She therefore lists eight practical areas which for her are the basic ingredients of a good marriage and successful ministry. In order for a woman to become an ideal helpmeet to her pastor-husband, she needs: to be his helpmeet is to be submissive; to be a helpmeet is to be his faithful supporter; to be a helpmeet is to share his vision; to be his helpmeet is to communicate to your pastor-husband; to be a helpmeet is to avail yourself to him always; to be a helpmeet is to make sure he has a comfortable home; to be a helpmeet is to accept him as he is; and to be a helpmeet is to be his prayer partner.

All these eight points are markedly patriarchal descriptions of what it means to be a wife.¹⁵² This is made abundantly clear when Guneratnam confirms:

Today's woman is trying to stretch herself into a number of roles at the same time. She wants her own identity, she wants a career, she wants accomplishments to show, and so on. Many pastors' wives fall into this trap of activities. So, like a typical pastor's wife, I had my hand in more activities in the church than is really necessary.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ See, Patrina Guneratnam, The Pastor's Wife as a Helpmeet. *Christian Assemblies International* <<http://www.cai.org/bible-studies/pastors-wife-helpmeet/>> [Accessed 27 January 2012].

¹⁵² See, Patrina Guneratnam, The Pastor's Wife as a Helpmeet. *Christian Assemblies International* <<http://www.cai.org/bible-studies/pastors-wife-helpmeet/>> [Accessed 27 January 2012].

¹⁵³ See, Patrina Guneratnam, The Pastor's Wife as a Helpmeet. *Christian Assemblies International* <<http://www.cai.org/bible-studies/pastors-wife-helpmeet/>> [Accessed 27 January 2012].

In her mind, God spoke to her in order that she could get her priorities right and become the sort of wife God wanted:

God spoke to me about my lifestyle. I was too busy for His *[sic]* liking. He *[sic]* reminded me that He *[sic]* is not a slave driver. I began to release one responsibility after another. I realised that I could be replaced in all my activities, responsibilities and roles in the church, but no one could fill my place as wife to my husband, Prince, or as mother to our children, Pammie and Jimmy. Now all my ministries in the church flow from being the helpmeet God intended me to be.¹⁵⁴

7.4.6. Culturally and Biblically Prescribed Roles

In summary, the issues raised in this section include the role of a pastor's wife to her husband as a personal attaché in helping, advising, protecting, and praying for him, as well as performing some of his other duties. The participants' attitude was that a woman needed to do everything in her power to serve and care for her husband and her children. Culturally, such a woman is regarded as a good woman. The participants' statements also indicated that they were operating from clearly defined gendered roles that were both culturally and biblically prescribed. Second, my analysis reveals that there was no clear distinction between work and the home. The understanding of most participants was that ministry and the family mirrors one another. But this applies more to the wife than to the husband who is not expected to do any house chores. The participants' expectations were that a pastor's wife must fully support her husband in ministry as well as fulfil her 'wifely' duties in the home. Finally, there was a general acknowledgement that pastors' wives usually work harder than their husbands, something that both the pastors and the churches failed to fully recognize.

In the next section I will examine the tensions that a pastor's wife faces and the tensions that these challenges can bring to the marriage relationship.

¹⁵⁴ See, Patrina Guneratnam, The Pastor's Wife as a Helpmeet. *Christian Assemblies International* <<http://www.cai.org/bible-studies/pastors-wife-helpmeet/>> [Accessed 27 January 2012].

7.5. The Challenges Faced By Pastors' Wives

In this section I will examine the many challenges that pastors' wives faced as identified by all the three groups of participants in my study. I will examine these problems under the following sub-themes: conflict in the husband-wife relationship; neglect of family; financial restraints; 'immoral' women; and formal and theological educational disparities.

7.5.1. Conflicts in the Husband-Wife Relationship

I have specifically prioritized the issue of abusive husbands here because it was a major challenge that came out of the pastors' wives' narratives. However, I must also add the voices from the church members and pastors on the same issues. The pastors' wives mentioned several sources of conflict in the husband-wife relationship which had a negative impact on their ministry.

The first source of conflict was money. This came about when the pastor-husband was not transparent about the money he receives. Some of the pastors in my study blamed the numerous travels of their wives as the main cause of their family's financial woes. Nevertheless, some church members in my study recognized that some pastors' wives failed to carry out their visitation programmes due to a lack of finances. In my opinion, all the participants failed to recognise that the church was economically exploiting the pastors' wives by employing them as unpaid workers.¹⁵⁵

It is important at this point to always bear in mind that the financial constraints that the pastoral couples in my study were experiencing was not unique to them. Indeed, many other couples world-wide face the same challenges, especially during these times of global economic recession. I nevertheless find agreement with Richard Armstrong (2005:59) whose advice is that "openness, honesty, and thorough communication" on family finances is a good recipe for harmony in the marriage relationship. In this regard, the involvement of some of the pastors' wives in my study in income-generating activities is one practical way of attempting to reduce the financial constraints felt in a family. A second source of conflict was when some husbands just leave and go out without telling their wives where they are going. This

¹⁵⁵ See also my discussion of this issue in chapter six of this dissertation.

caused much anxiety for many of the respondents in my study. A third source of conflict was when the husband and wife differed on how to discipline their children. A fourth source of much conflict and pain in a marital relationship, as well as among their children and wider family members was that of marital unfaithfulness.¹⁵⁶ A fifth source of conflict revealed in my study was when a pastor's wife feels that her husband is undermining her role both in ministry and in the home. For example, Kondanani reported that:

Some husbands don't even want their wives to correct them, saying "you were not called; you are not the pastor, so what can you tell me." So for the woman who refuses to work with her husband, it means the problem is with the husband. The husband's demeaning words plant problems in the home; they are divisive. It means that the wife is on one side, and the husband on the other side; there is a big gap between them; a gap too difficult to join. So, even when the pastor is preaching, the wife will just be sneering at him instead of interceding for him. Some pastors are like that (Kondanani, Interview 01 January 2009).

While some husbands relied on the support of their wives, Kondanani's statement above shows that not all pastors appreciated the supportive roles that their wives often played. Even though Kondanani spoke as if she was referring to someone else's husband, it is likely she was reflecting on her own experience with her husband.

This was the case with with Chiyero, who reported that:

Sometimes, it goes with family problems. If the relationship between husband and wife is not good, the wife refuses to work with him saying that "it is not my work but his." So it really depends on the husband's relationship with his wife, for the wife says, "the way my husband treats me," or "with all the problems that I am going through with him, why should I help him in his work?" You see, she sees it as his work because of the way he treats her in the family (Chiyero, Interview, 11 January 2009).

¹⁵⁶ I will discuss this matter in greater depth in chapter eight of this dissertation.

It can thus be clearly seen that the husband abuses his power over his partner and undermines his wife's personhood by using demeaning and derogatory words. This becomes a challenge to both their relationship as well as to their ministry.¹⁵⁷ Some of the pastors' wives in my study argued that if they were not happy in the home and in their marriage, they would not be able to carry out ministry effectively. However, the reality is that wives often keep silent about such abuses. As the South African Anglican priest, Devakarsham Betty Govinden (1997:29) has observed:

Women have propped up attitudes of male domination by internalising their compliant status; they are pressured to remain silent about marital problems in order to maintain the respectable image of the pastor.

According to the presence of traditional socialization processes and the Western missionary teachings about being "a good wife", keeping silent about personal marital problems and domestic violence issues in the home,¹⁵⁸ becomes an important part of what it means to show respect to your husband. Indeed, in biblical terms, it is mistakenly seen by many as part of what it means for a wife to have a submissive spirit towards her husband.¹⁵⁹ While this attitude is particularly common with women everywhere, it is particularly prevalent among pastors' wives, whose husbands are respected as 'men of God', and whose family is supposed to be a role model for church members and society in general.

7.5.2. Neglect of Family

The neglect by their wives of their families and their needs, due to the pressure of too much church work and travel was a concern raised by all the pastors during my focus group discussions. The pastors pointed out that because most of the church programmes involve women, and are for women, a pastor's wife may belong to

¹⁵⁷ A list of some abusive elements were found in an anonymous document in a file at the BTSM where student pastors' wives described the various ways in which their husbands abused them: "he beats me"; "he hides money from me"; "he speaks abusive and demeaning language"; "he does not respect me"; "he becomes angry quickly and does not forgive easily"; "he likes the company of women than men"; "he always travels alone"; "he is always chatting with girls", just to mention a few. See a confidential pamphlet entitled *Weaknesses and Strengths List: Baptist Seminary Spouses* (March, 2009).

¹⁵⁸ The legal definition of domestic violence in many Nation States includes not only physical abuse, but also sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, and economic violence.

¹⁵⁹ Ephesians 5:22-23 states "Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are in the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour" (New Revised Standard Version).

various committees and therefore attends one meeting after another and spends most of her time away from the home. Such a situation exerts too much pressure on the husband and the home. For example, one pastor lamented:

For example with my wife, I do not know in how many committees she belongs, nor in how many ministries she is involved. She may be having a meeting with women at the local church; next, she may attend an association meeting for two days; then the regional meeting for another two days, or some committee meetings on some days. In all that, it means sleeping out almost every weekend in most cases. To say the truth, for me as a man, it affects me badly, because it means that I must do the cooking; I must care for the children—feeding and bathing them; above all, I need her as my wife. It is a real challenge (FGD, 29 November 2008).

The pastor's comment was met with a consensus from the other pastors. However, one can see a couple of factors. First, that the helper the pastors need is one who spends more time at home, taking care of him and the home, than one who attends to church work first. Strangely, no one, not even the wives who were present at the focus group discussions, challenged the pastors' similar busy schedules. In fact, husband-pastors have always been warned against neglecting their families because of ministry (*cf.* McBurney 1977:115; Langford 1998; Prime and Begg 2004).

Second, the issue of who is supposed to do house chores and take care of children arises from the above comment. This confirms the internalised role differentiation in the homes of which the wives seem to defy by going out into the public sphere (Daniel 2009:97-98). The ambivalence here is that it is the expectation of the church including that of the pastor, that a pastor's wife should fulfil both the private and the public roles equally. Third, the statement confirms what pastors' wives reported, that they are overworked with church work even though they are not paid for their labour.

7.5.3. Suspicious of 'Immoral Women'

In my study, the pastors mentioned what they called the "hidden agenda" of immoral women" in the church as being a serious challenge to the husband-wife relationship.

Elaborating on what they meant, they reported that there were some female church members who pretended to be very supportive of the pastor's family, yet had a "hidden agenda" or simply were driven by "wrong motives" to entice the pastor into an illicit love affair. They warned that, once suspicion of such "immoral women" sets in, it brings about serious tensions in the husband-wife relationship. The pastors' wives, on the other hand, understood that women who became unsupportive of their husbands, or who undermined the pastor's wife in the church may be those who have failed to entice their husbands into a love affair. Similarly, some church members were also aware of the presence of such women in the church who may be looking for a man such as the pastor. One female church member warned that:

Temptations come even to a pastor, for in church not all people are born again. Others go routinely, and such people can want to trap him. We should be on our knees always. The pastor's wife should be praying for him wherever he is going, for he is also human. She must also take responsibility on her part. How is she taking care of herself and her home?; is she always nagging?, how does she cook?; she must do her best so that he is not lured by other women. You see, it is your responsibility as a wife so that he is not tempted, for he is also human. She must develop herself to improve, even in education so that she does not feel intimidated (AFU, Interview, 02 January 2009).

Thus, the responsibility for the pastors not to be lured by other women falls on the pastors' wives. In relation to home and hospital visitation, almost all the participants mentioned that the pastor's wife should always travel with her husband, especially in doing home and hospital visitation. One pastor's wife expressed that it was dangerous for a pastor to visit alone, for it raises suspicion if he finds only a woman in a home and then spends time with her (Chisomo, Interview, 15 July 2009). One pastor thus reported:

A pastor's wife must protect her husband from various temptations that Satan may tempt him with. So if there are no deacons or other men to go with him for visitation, the wife must accompany him because there are other homes which Satan can use to tempt him and make him fall. She also protects him from false allegations of immoral life or sexual

misconduct for she is the one who knows him best (YPU3, Interview 02 December 2008).

From the above admonitions, I see two issues in particular: First, this thinking brings with it the assumption that men are morally weak and therefore need a ‘helper’ to protect him from being tempted by ‘Satan’ who is embodied in the immoral woman. This confirms the concerns of many feminists that women have been labelled as “sinners” “temptresses”, or the “Devil’s gateway” “who like Eve...caused the Fall of humankind” (Lerner 1993:6 *cf.* Rakoczy 2004:28-30). The pastors’ wives in my study have freely bought into these ancient patriarchal and androcentric notions about women.

Second, it raises the question, as to the goal of women maintaining their youth and beauty in order to keep their husbands. This reveals the Western cultural influence that socializes women into being their husband’s sexual objects and their husbands holding power over their wives’ sexuality. In this reasoning, when a man becomes irresponsible and immoral, the blame is placed on the wife that she had failed to protect and take care of her husband. What the participants in my study did not raise as a problem was when the pastors’ wives visited homes alone without their husbands. In other words, what was implied was that the pastors are more vulnerable to sexual temptation than their wives when they go out on visitation.

I nevertheless concur with Derek Prime and Alistair Begg who warn pastors to prevent situations that may raise the suspicion or create the jealousy of their spouses. They warn that a pastor should avoid those who make too great a claim upon his time, “especially when the person demanding his time is a woman” (2004:276-277). They further advise of keeping his conversations “within proper bounds”, especially with those women whom they discern want to find satisfaction in his company. Finally, they note that it must be a mutual responsibility that requires trust and honesty between a husband and wife together with the acceptance of just criticism on both sides (2004:277).¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Sexual betrayal as sexual abuse by pastors will be fully discussed in chapter eight of this dissertation.

7.5.4. Different Priorities

In summary, my study noted many challenges experienced by a pastor's wife in relation to their dual role in both the home and the church. What were identified as major challenges by the pastors' wives differed in substance from those priorities identified by the husband-pastors in my study. In the case of the pastors' wives, conflict with the husband was a major challenge, while on the part of the husband-pastors; the major challenge was the wife's neglect of the family. Where there was agreement between pastors' wives, pastors and church members, was on the perception that "immoral women" are the ones that are destroying the pastors, their ministry, and that pastors' wives must be on the watch and pray. No one in my study considered the "immoral women" as a cultural construction that exempts a man from taking responsibility over his own sexuality.

7.6. Feminist Perspectives on the Roles of Pastors' Wives

From the above findings, I identify three issues that are of concern from a feminist perspective.

First, the understanding of the church in viewing the Christian ministry and the pastor's family as one package or as mirroring each other makes them view the work of the pastor's wife in the church as part of her housework which has no monetary value. This notion goes back to the societal role differentiation between male and female, which is further traced to the societal construction of womanhood. Feminist theologians trace these attitudes back to social as well as religious teachings. It was noted in chapter three of this dissertation that globally the image of woman is that of a subordinate, whose sphere is the home and family, and "whose worth is tied up in the bearing and the raising of children" (Oduyoye 1995a:131-141; Phiri 1997a:32-37). In contrast, the man's world is that of work, the sphere of money, the "real world" whose image is that of a "breadwinner" (Young 1990:54-55; Oduyoye 2001a:71). This same attitude is transferred to the church work that a pastor's wife does as the mother of the church.

Second, there is an obvious ambiguity present, whereby the wife of a pastor professes to be her husband's helper, when in reality she puts herself on-par with her pastor-

husband by becoming involved in pastoral ministries independently, as well as together, with her husband. The church's expectation is that the pastor's wife gets involved in her husband's work fully, but without remuneration.

Western research on male pastors, as well as on pastors' wives focuses on factors such as stress, its causes, effects and coping mechanisms (Morris and Blanton 1994:189-195). It has been found that the constant demands made by church members on their ministers and spouses are one of the main causes for such stress. However, from a feminist perspective, I wish to point out that a congregation's unjust demands can actually be abusive, especially to the wife who is not paid by the church. Thus, the aim of feminist ecclesiology as noted in chapter two of this dissertation is to conscientise both the women and men of the church about institutionalized injustices with the aim of deconstructing them and bringing about transformation.

Third, the issue of whether a pastor's wife is actually a pastor as raised by some of the participants in my study, needs further investigation especially in relation to the issue of the ordinances of the church. The participants consistently noted that it is only the pastor who administers the ordinances. Klaus Fiedler (2008:4) has argued that while Baptist-held teachings place no special status on the pastor, pastor's claim such power through administering the ordinances. Clericalism and the ordinances (or the Sacraments as in Episcopal and Protestant church denominations) have similarly been identified by feminist theologians such as Ruether (1993:206-207) as wielding power to rule or to govern. This explains why the participants in my study reported that some pastors can allow their wives to run the church in their absence, but would not allow them to administer the ordinances and other rites because "they alone possess sacramental power" as Ruether observes (1993:207). A pastor's wife in such a framework can teach, preach, or do pastoral counselling and other church work in her capacity as a pastor's wife, but not as a recognised pastor. This fits very well with the complementarian view of role differentiation, which in my opinion is man-made (not woman-made or God-made!). In other words, while the pastoral roles of pastor's wife as a leader of women, a community leader, or even as her husband's helper in ministry would in my opinion qualify her as a pastor; whereas doctrinally, according to Baptist biblical interpretation, she does not qualify because she is a woman.

7.7. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have sought to demonstrate that a pastor's wife has leadership roles in the church, in the wider society, and in the home. In the church, she plays the role of a leader in the *Umodzi wa amayi*, which involves weekly teaching, inducting new members, training instructors of initiation rituals, and providing guidance over funerals. In addition, she also supports her husband's ministry by teaching Sunday School classes, preaching at Sunday services when her pastor-husband is away or not available, and supporting her pastor-husband in providing pastoral care to the members of the congregation. As an extension of her roles in the church, she also provides leadership in the wider community where she organizes and leads ecumenical prayer groups, establishes income generating projects, provides adult literacy and other skills training to the community. In the home, her roles are divided into two. The first is to provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual support of her husband. The second is to provide a nurturing environment for her children.

The above mentioned roles also come with challenges, which include conflicts with her husband over a number of factors. What became clear in my study was that in some cases all three groups of participants: pastors' wives, pastors, and the congregation, had similar expectations about the role of the pastors' wives. In other expressed cases, there were conflicting expectations among all three groups of participants on what should be the roles of the pastors' wives, which led to some tension. I have also highlighted that from a feminist perspective, the pastors' wives workload for church deserves payment by the church, and that the denying pastors' wives the role of administering the ordinances is more concerned about clericalism and maintaining the patriarchal power of pastors over their wives and all the laity.

Having examined the roles of a pastor's wife in the church and in the home, with the challenges that she faces above, one of the pertinent issues that arises from the challenge of conflict is that of domestic violence, a subject I will examine in greater depth in the chapter which follows.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY BACOMA PASTORS' WIVES

8.1. Introduction

In chapters six and seven I highlighted the fact that the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) assumes that by employing the husband it automatically means that his wife must support him in the ministry fulltime without being paid by the local church for her work. I argued that by employing her as an unpaid staff person, the BACOMA was economically exploiting her. This I understood as a form of violence against women, as well as undermining a woman's humanity as an individual called to serve God through the church, the body of Christ. I also noted that while the pastoral roles of a pastor's wife as a leader of the *Umodzi wa amayi*, a community leader, and her husband's helper in ministry would qualify her as a pastor, according to interpretation of the Bible by the SBC and the BACOMA, doctrinally she does not qualify because of her gender. Her roles also presented some challenges which affected the husband-wife relationship as well as their ministry together.

Having identified the challenge of domestic violence in chapter seven, I will discuss it in more depth in this present chapter. The central question that I will seek to answer will be: "In acknowledging the presence of domestic violence in pastors' families, what are its implications for the Christian ministry?"

In order to answer the above question, I have divided this present chapter into five main sections. Firstly, I will show the pervasiveness of gender-based violence in general and domestic violence in particular. Secondly, I narrate the stories of domestic violence as experienced by pastors' wives in my study. Thirdly, I examine the community's (i.e., in the church and in society) understanding of domestic violence especially with regard to a pastor's family. Fourthly, I analyse the implications of domestic violence in a pastor's home. Lastly, I evaluate the experiences of violence in

relation to the feminist response towards domestic violence among women in general and pastors' wives in particular.

The major thrust of my argument in this chapter will be to show how feminist theologians have observed that domestic violence has a specific history of being sanctioned through socio-cultural and religious norms all of which are rooted and maintained within patriarchal frameworks (*cf.* Phiri 2000b; Kanyoro 2002a; Watson 2002).

8.2. Gender-based Violence: A Global Problem

Since domestic violence is one form of gender-based violence, in this section, I will first of all show the pervasiveness of gender-based violence.¹⁶¹ Although violence against women is as old as the history of humanity, I wish to trace it from the World Council of Churches (WCC) initiative entitled, "Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women", which took place from 1988-1998 (See, Oduyoye 1990a; Llewellyn 1994).¹⁶² This programme of action was established as a call to member churches to join women in the struggle against the ideology of 'sexism'. Sexism was understood to be the root cause of the struggle for women's full participation and inclusion in leadership and decision-making positions (Oduyoye 1990a; King 1994b).¹⁶³

The mid-Decade WCC reports were quite revealing in that, among other things, violence against women and children loomed high in the challenges to the churches' solidarity with women (Gnanadason 1997:1). It was the pervasiveness of violence against women that precipitated the WCC to initiate a follow-up decade-long programme entitled "Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010 (DOV)" with a strong component on

¹⁶¹ While I recognize that gender-based violence refers to violence against both men and women, studies have conclusively shown that violence against women by men is overwhelmingly more prevalent than that of violence perpetrated by women against men. That is why this chapter assumes that perpetrators or abusers are men while victims of spousal violence are women.

¹⁶² See also my discussion in chapter three of this dissertation.

¹⁶³ As an ideology, sexism refers to male control over females in the belief that males by nature are superior to females.

overcoming violence against women.¹⁶⁴ It was on the basis of the emergent theological and ecclesiological challenges that violence against women posed on the global church that the WCC was compelled to launch this second decade of action. The aim of this second decade is to engage the churches in developing pastoral and practical responses and actions to overcome violence. Thus, while sexism is the root problem that perpetuates male superiority and power, gender-based violence is an abuse of that power as will be demonstrated in this chapter.

In response to the WCCs appeal to its member churches, the church in Malawi responded by establishing an Ecumenical Counselling Centre (ECC) in 2005, aimed at building the capacity of church leaders in counselling in various aspects of gender-based violence both in church and society.¹⁶⁵ The BACOMA pastors were among those who benefitted from such trainings. However, it is one thing to be trained, and another to translate this same head knowledge into practical life-solutions and ministry. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how church leaders, who as one of the major resources in the prevention of gender-based violence, can offer help to survivors of gender-based violence, when they themselves are the perpetrators of such violence.

Gender-based violence is not only a health or human rights problem. It is also a theological problem for it is a violation of what it means to be human in the sight of God. As Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1994c:39) puts it, any act of violence is a “denial of the humanity of the other”. Hence, globally, interventions to curb the scourge are at every level—international, national, and local - by governments, civil society, and the church. As Philomena Mwaura (2010:115) points out, the responses range from “legal, health, counselling and advocacy to create awareness against the crime”. Speaking about its insidious nature, Catherin Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark observe that violence against women is a reality that exists in every country worldwide. Moreover:

¹⁶⁴ See, Overcoming Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace, <<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/decade-to-overcome-violence/about-dov.html>> [Accessed 28 January 2012].

¹⁶⁵ The Ecumenical Counselling Centre (ECC) is an umbrella body of Christian churches and organizations in Malawi comprising the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM); Malawi Council of Churches (MCC); Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM); Association of Christian Educators in Malawi (ACEM); and the Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM). See the specially produced workbooks/manuals: *Church Leaders and Lay Christians Trainer's Manual* (2005) and *Gender-based Violence: A Church's Perspective: Facilitators' Training Manual* (2005).

It knows no socio-economic boundaries: rich women, poor women, black women, white women, educated women, illiterate women, religious women, beautiful women—all women are potential targets of violence, and all women are at some degree of risk (Kroeger and Nason-Clark 2001:14).

Thus, gender-based violence persists as one of the most systemic and prevalent crimes in the world, attacking the dignity of all women, Women married to pastors are not exempt from this heinous evil as will be shown in this chapter.

In the section which follows, I will examine what constitutes violence against women.

8.3. The Types and Sites of Gender-based Violence

It is very difficult to come up with a definition that adequately encompasses everything that gender-based violence means. Wendy Robins maintains that violence against women takes various forms, including:

Physical and sexual violence perpetrated on women without their consent; thus battering, rape, assault, burning to death, as well as its subtle and pernicious forms such as undermining the contributions of women, putting them down with sexist remarks, making unwanted sexual advances or contact and all other abuses of power in relationships (1995:102).

Aruna Gnanadason (1997:7-22) differentiates between what she calls “overt” and “covert” forms of violence. She states that the overt forms of violence include “violence in the domestic sphere, sexual harassment, rape, prostitution, and mail-order brides” (1997:7-21) while covert forms of violence include, “the living deaths millions of women face in their homes, workplaces and other social contexts where they are subjected to discriminatory and dehumanizing attitudes to them as women” (1997:21-22). She however laments that although “covert form of violence is usually not taken seriously, any form of violence, be it “verbal, psychological, emotional or physical, is dehumanizing, and all have the same effect on the woman, eating into her psyche and demoralizing her” (1997:7).

Kamanga Zula (2008:8-9) from Malawi understands gender-based violence as happening at every stage of a person's life even before they are born. He shows that gender-based violence is present at the pre-natal stage,¹⁶⁶ at infancy,¹⁶⁷ during childhood,¹⁶⁸ amongst adolescents,¹⁶⁹ during adulthood,¹⁷⁰ and during old age.¹⁷¹ Aruna Gnanadason (1997:6) had earlier made similar observations that a woman's life is not safe even before she is born.

The above definitions are significant because they serve to illuminate and illustrate the magnitude of the problem of gender-based violence and its many faces.

In Malawi, violence against women is translated into Chichewa as *Nkhanza kwa amayi*. This phrase adequately encompasses the types and sites of domestic violence discussed above and is known and understood by government, non-governmental organizations, civil society, members of parliament, as well as women's rights activists alike (White et al. 2002:23).

It is within this broader framework of gender-based violence that I will now turn to discuss domestic violence as experienced by some of the pastors' wives in my study.

8.3.1. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence encompasses all the features that define the various types and sites of gender-based violence as described above, but within the confines of the family unit. In particular, it describes the persistent or on-going use of physical, spiritual, economical, sexual, emotional and psychological violence against women. Speaking about the pervasiveness of domestic violence, Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2001:119)

¹⁶⁶ According to Zulu (2008:8), it contains 'sex-selective abortion, strong gender preferences, battering during pregnancy, denying pregnant women rest and medical care; coerced pregnancy, such as after rape'.

¹⁶⁷ According to Zula (2008:8), violence in infancy involves 'infanticide and differential access to food and medical care for girl infants'.

¹⁶⁸ According to Zula (2008:8), violence in childhood is associated with "child marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual abuse, differential access to food, education and medical care, child prostitution, and burdening girl children with household chores".

¹⁶⁹ According to Zula (2008:9), violence in adolescents includes "dating and courtship violence or date raping; economically coerced sex with sugar daddies; sexual harassment at school or workplace; forced prostitution; and trafficking in women".

¹⁷⁰ According to Zula (2008:9) Violence in adulthood involves "abuse of women by intimate male partners; marital rape; dowry abuse; femicide; sexual harassment; rape, and forced sterilization".

¹⁷¹ According to Zula (2008:9), violence amongst the aged includes "abuse of widows economically as well as physically; elder abuse; dispossession; depriving widows of their inheritance; sexual cleansing of widows; witchcraft; and violence associated with religion, tradition, culture and custom".

note that “careful and repeated research demonstrates that domestic violence happens in all cultures, all ages, all races, all socioeconomic groups and all faith communities”. As Anne Clifford (2001:13-16) points out, in the global problem of violence against women, domestic violence is the most fatal.

With particular reference to my own study here, the observation of Isabel Apawo Phiri (2000b:86) is important, when she notes that domestic violence is becoming more publicized, thereby, removing it from the private sphere. The stories narrated in this chapter are a contribution towards this process.

Before I examine the respondent’s stories, I will first highlight the ambiguous nature of a pastor’s home.

8.3.2. A Pastor’s Home: A Haven of Love or Hell on Earth?

The growing incidence and frequency of domestic violence is clear. As Al Miles (2002:20) has rightly observed, the “home is no more a safe place, but a place where they [women and children] are frequently beaten, cursed, raped, and terrorized in other ways”. Even Christian homes have not escaped this malady as Phiri’s research findings reveal (Phiri 2000b:85-110; Phiri 2002c:19-30). What is even more disheartening is that, as I have sought to show in chapter seven of this dissertation, the pastor’s home is a haven for many people. In fact pastors’ families themselves have become victims of domestic violence for they are “often perceived as respected members of the community and have the authority to make suggestions or even interventions about family issues” (Shannon-Lewy and Dull 2005). Yet, no-one may know how much the same home is ‘hell’ for the pastor’s wife, and children. This is because domestic violence takes place in the private sphere of the home, often undisturbed and unobserved by the world. Hence, domestic violence, which, as Emilie Townes (1998:60-70) rightly points out, was once regarded as a personal or private matter, should now become a “communal concern”, requiring public responsibility. My study seeks to be part of this process, as pastors’ wives break their silence as to what takes place within the privacy of their own homes/church manses.

I narrate below the stories of two pastors' wives from my study who courageously reveal the living social reality of domestic violence taking place in a pastoral couple's home.

8.4. Stories of Domestic Violence: Two Case Studies

8.4.1. Akonda's Story

Akonda (a pseudonym given to protect her privacy) who, having gone through the trauma, pain, stigma of domestic violence as a pastor's wife is now divorced and receiving healing, was able to tell her story as follows:

I noticed that my husband was coming back late in the night, and sleeping in his underwear. When I asked him why he was sleeping in his underwear, he would just become angry. I would ask him several days, but getting the same response. Then I would ask him no more. The problem was that he was also going out with some church women and some school girls. So you can see that mine was not marriage any more since he was busy with other women because he had more money. Whenever I rebuked him, hmm... it did not go well with me. Things got worse when he impregnated an orphaned girl, a member of our church. He told her that he would be helping her. He even started calling me names: "Do you think you are a woman when you look at yourself! There are others who are more beautiful than you! So do not burden me, you ugly woman! You should leave me to do what I like; we have freedom and I have freedom to do as I like, so no-one should hinder my freedom." He would angrily say those words to me.

But on my part, I did not change I continued to prepare him everything; I cooked for him washed and ironed his clothes. I did everything for him, but there was no marriage. Things did not change wherever we went and I was troubled. I persevered [in] such life from 1990 till 2003 when I left on my own, for I knew that my husband did not want me.

I can say that I was very much disturbed by the end of my marriage. What concerned me most was that we have shamed the name of God because of the ministry that we had, shaming the name of God, especially when we look at the reasons for leaving ministry. I remember in the first days, I used to feel as if I am naked; I have been stripped of my clothes. That is why I stopped appearing in public places, I was feeling disgraced because I knew it was the talk of the people, 'Look at her, their marriage ended!' and you know people can talk a lot of things as if they were insiders and that they knew everything that was going on in the marriage, and yet they didn't know what was happening. I was very ashamed and even my spiritual life, and physical life was badly affected. But I thank my children because they discussed among themselves, when I was back in the village and was very ill, they brought me into town and rented a house for me, so that I access medical treatment.

So since I came from the village to town, I could not be among my fellow women, especially among the pastors' wives. I was ashamed, ashamed, ashamed! And I used to ask myself: "Why are people still calling me Amai Busa (i.e., a pastor's wife) while my marriage got finished?"

Now I am used to the way I live, I do not have any problems now because when my marriage ended, or when I was in marriage, even though my husband was a pastor, I had a big problem. But being a mature person, and also a leader; a pastor's wife, I just kept it to myself. I was really in bondage. I see that God has done great things in my life that I do not even think about marriage anymore (Akonda, Interview, 04 July 2009).

In order to examine this story in depth, I have identified three groups of issues from Akonda's account of domestic violence: 1) emotional, psychological, spiritual, sexual, and physical violence as a result of her husband's unfaithfulness; 2) her husband as the perpetrator of violence and its implications for Christian ministry; and 3) the

culture of silence and lack of intervention by the church and community as a form of violence towards Fatsani.

8.4.1.1. Emotional, Psychological, Sexual, Spiritual and Physical Violence

The first issue that Akonda's story brings out is her discovery of an unfaithful husband and the forms of violence that were associated with it. Several words can be used to describe her husband's behaviour—immorality, infidelity, sexual misconduct, and deceit. All of these describe one and the same type of unacceptable behaviour which has devastating effects mainly on the spouse. To a lesser or greater extent, the other women and the impregnated orphaned child, the congregation, family, and friends are all affected, none are spared. For the wife however:

It is difficult to find words to describe the anger, grief, sense of guilt, shame, mental and physical pain and disillusionment at the deepest level that result from the infidelity of a person's spouse (Grenz and Bell 1995:29-30).

The pain which Akonda obviously suffered in all probability extended beyond the physical domain to include emotional, psychological, sexual, and spiritual trauma. Her suffering cannot even be equated to that experienced by a woman at the loss of her husband through death, even violent death. As if her husband's immoral behaviour was not enough abuse, he verbally abused and demeaned her—another form of violence. In addition, while the husband was busy sexually abusing church women and an orphaned child, Akonda suffered further sexual abuse by being denied her sexual intimacy rights from her husband. This kind of abuse however, is never talked about. The same is true of marital rape, when a husband forces himself on an unwilling wife. However, when a wife is also starved sexually because he is sleeping with other women, it should also amount to sexual abuse of a spouse. Similarly, often people associate physical violence with the male perpetrator harming a person physically with his hands or a weapon. However, in the case of Akonda I want to argue that although the husband did not inflict physical harm upon her, the fact that she became sick as a result of the constant abuse that she went through, is a form of psychological violence.

8.4.1.2. The Husband as the Perpetrator of Violence and Its Implications for Christian Ministry

As a perpetrator of violence, this man had no sense of guilt and no respect for himself, his wife or his children. This is shown by the fact that he continued to abuse his wife despite the nature of the job that he was doing. His behaviour is also an abuse of ministerial power invested in him as God's representative. Marie Fortune (1998:351-360) calls this a violation of professional ethics, while James Poling sees it as evil. As Poling rightly states:

Social injustice and individual abuse of power are evil. They harm the power of life itself within the relational web (1991:31).

As a recognised pastor, Akonda's husband abused his power and position in the community to sexually abuse and impregnate the orphaned girl which is also a criminal offence. It is unfortunate that Akonda was not courageous enough to report him to the police. Above all, he betrayed all the trust of his congregation because of his sexual misconduct. As Grenz and Bell (1995:9) can sum up, "perhaps no betrayal of trust has worked more devastation than clergy sexual misconduct".

8.4.1.3. The Culture of Silence

The further suffering imposed on Akonda as a result of the culture of silence by the community can be divided into three heads:

First, there is emotional trauma. Akonda suffered the emotional trauma of shame and the loss of self-worth and personal identity because of what she thought of herself and what society made of her. Usually society blames the wife, where according to Miles (2002:28-29) "victimised women are never the cause, often the blame" for the failure of their marriages. As a result, Akonda decided to isolate herself as she thought everyone was blaming and seeing her as a failure. Her words clearly reveal her inner crisis:

I could not be among my fellow women, especially among the pastors' wives. I was ashamed, ashamed, ashamed!

Basing their assertion on the work of Heather Bryce, Grenz and Bell (1995:123) describe the sense of severe loss on the part of a pastor's wife to include:

The destruction of her feeling of self worth, the forfeiture of the ministries in which she was involved, a gnawing sense of isolation that accompanies the withdrawal of her support structures, and the shock that paralyzes her into inactivity and prevents her from getting on with her life.

In narrating her story to me during the interview, I could see that Akonda had to endure all these losses.

Second, there is a culture of silence and shame. Because of their elevated position in the church and the community, it is very difficult for a pastor's wife to disclose her problems to anyone—especially marital problems—for that would make them vulnerable to the laity, whom they serve. It would also serve to betray the image that people have of them. If their members knew that their pastor and his wife had marital problems, how could they trust them with their problems in the future? Pastors' wives therefore pretend things to be alright in the home and thereby have to contend daily with the constant thoughts of falsehood and deceit bearing down hard upon their consciences. Moreover, the Malawian culture demands that women keep quiet and suffer in silence (*cf.* Kroeger and Nason-Clark 2001:118). Indeed, culturally, women are sternly instructed never to divulge family conflicts to anyone; it is being thought that women's silence means that they hope things will change for the better.

Last, there is injustice in the household of God. Akonda stated that during the first years when she realized that her relationship with her husband was deteriorating, she took courage and confided in a few of the leading ministers of the Lilongwe Baptist Association Pastors' Fraternal group (LBAPF). Unfortunately, they failed to resolve Akonda's case until she eventually left her husband. This also led to her husband-pastor receiving disciplinary action by being excommunicated from the church. Instead of getting the help she so sorely needed from the LBAPF, all she received was further ridicule from them. As she further explains:

To my dismay, I overheard them one day “teasing” my husband by saying that: “Your wife is complaining that you are not sleeping with her!” I was devastated and disappointed, that I stopped attending the fraternal meetings for some time.

The important concern here is whether Akonda found justice from the religious leaders who are supposed to administer justice and freedom on behalf of the oppressed. One can only presume that the pastors did not think that Akonda was making a genuine complaint, and instead decided to make a joke out of it. In the words of Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2001:121), the pastors found it easier to “deny, ignore, silence or minimise than to address the reality”. Their fear was that if the problem became known to the laity it might destroy their testimony as leaders. Yet in truth, the reality is “we harm our testimony far more by refusing to address the sin that is so prevalent in our midst” (Kroeger and Nason-Clark 2001:121). As supposed “men of God” who purport to know, understand and disseminate the truth of the “Word of God”, they should have known better than to condone or conceal the abuse by failing to grant compassion and justice to the victim.

Akonda’s story echoes the further observation of Kroeger and Nason-Clark when they state:

It is usually exceedingly hard for people to believe or admit that domestic violence can exist in a pastor’s home (2001:120).

Because of such attitudes, even if a pastor’s wife reports her marital problems to someone in leadership, very little is done quickly. Indeed, as Kroeger and Nason-Clark correctly admit:

Christian leaders in Evangelical churches have maintained that the problem of domestic violence is greatly exaggerated and does not have any particular relevance to born-again believers (2001:120).

8.4.2. Fatsani’s Story

The second story is the story of Fatsani (a pseudonym given to protect her privacy). She was chased away from the marital home together with her teenage children by her

husband. Fatsani and her husband had been separated for a period of one year. At the time of the interview, they were back together as a family.

Fatsani stated that it all began when a male friend visitor came and spent a night at their home. The visitor was personally known to Fatsani and her sister. This visitor was a leader of a certain prayer group where Fatsani's sister belonged. It was also where Fatsani's sick daughter was once prayed for and received divine healing. The visitor made an appointment through Fatsani to come and visit the family, something Fatsani's husband objected to. Fatsani did not think that her husband's objection was serious and so did not say anything until her visitor arrived on the appointed date. Fatsani's husband came back from work in the evening only to find this visitor in their home. Fatsani's husband showed his anger by refusing to eat and after briefly greeting the visitor, went straight to bed. In her own words Fatsani said:

During the night, I went to the toilet, which was outside the house. On my way back, I met with my husband in the passageway next to the living room where the visitor was sleeping. He grabbed me and walked towards the living room speaking angrily to the visitor: "What do you want in my house? I have caught you with my wife; if you want her take her with you!" I tried to resist and pulled myself off his grip. I stood, shocked, and did not say a word. He continued to shout at him: "Pastor! Pastor! What kind of pastor are you?" The children woke up and came asking: "Dad what is it?" He wanted to beat the visitor but this visitor managed to wake up quickly and walked towards the door. Things were not well and all of us were chased out and my husband locked us out.... I left with the children and stayed with my relatives.

His fellow pastors tried to reason with him but he refused and told them a lot of bad things about me....Even saying that not all of our children are his. Even our traditional marriage counsellors (ankhoswe) failed to help us because he never turned up at the village where we were supposed to meet. So I stayed for almost a whole year without any financial help from him. Then one day I received a message to come to the pastors' fraternal. There the chairperson asked me to explain what had happened. They asked him what he thought

and he said that I can return he has forgiven me. That is why I was thanking God that he has vindicated me (Fatsani, Interview 16 January 2009).

From Fatsani's story I also identify the same three factors in operation as in the earlier story of Akonda: 1) emotional, psychological, spiritual, sexual, and physical violence as a result of her husband's unfaithfulness; 2) her husband as the perpetrator of violence and its implications for Christian ministry; and 3) the culture of silence and lack of intervention by the church and community as a form of violence towards Fatsani.

8.4.2.1. Emotional, Psychological, Physical, and Financial Violence

Fatsani suffered emotional, psychological, physical, and financial violence as a result of her husbands' unfounded suspicions. The wife and the visitor were nearly beaten; they were shouted at, and accused of having an extra-marital affair. All was said and done in the presence of teenage children. Fatsani was shocked with her husband's reaction. She was dismayed, ashamed and humiliated and therefore suffered emotional and psychological harm. By verbally abusing his wife through demeaning and derogatory language, the husband undermined his wife's personhood. She also suffered from physical abuse when her husband grabbed her, pushed her, and threw her out of the house.

From a feminist perspective, Fatsani's husband reacted the way he did because of society's construction and perception that all women are Eve's daughters and therefore morally weak (Phiri 2000b). This is confirmed by his accusation that not all their children in their marriage were his. This is a form of emotional violence against his wife. Fatsani suffered from psychological abuse which served to sustain the victim's sense of low self-esteem, powerlessness, and fear. Fatsani also suffered financial loss during the year she and her children stayed at her relative's home, separated from her husband and without any financial assistance from him.

8.4.2.2. The Husband as the Perpetrator of Violence and its Implication for Christian Ministry

This is a case where again there was no remorse from the husband. He thought that he was the righteous one. This was clearly reflected when he later said that he had forgiven his wife. Forgiveness is a term usually associated with situations of abuse and violence. Al Miles (2000:133) defines forgiveness as:

The decision on the part of a person who has been abused, betrayed, or wronged to let go of, or put aside, the justifiable anger, bitterness, and hurt that arises from being victimized.

Fatsani said she was accused falsely. Hence, it was her husband who needed to be forgiven by her and not Fatsani's husband forgiving her. However, in the case of the LBAPF group, they rushed for instant forgiveness, when in actuality forgiveness is a process of healing towards reconciliation that takes a long time. Through such a process, the aim is that a perpetrator will acknowledge and take responsibility for their abusive behaviour. Fatsani's husband seems not to have taken responsibility for his behaviour, which points to a cultural myth that says *mwamuna salakwa* (lit: 'a man never errs'). Women have also internalised such beliefs and never challenge the situation because they are often financially dependent on their husbands. This was the case with Fatsani.

During my interview with Fatsani she reported that leaving her home and the congregation for one year had a negative impact, especially on the *Umodzi wa amayi* in their church. She stated that the church membership, especially of women, went down because they lacked her leadership. Maybe this was the women's way of showing their disapproval of their pastor's treatment of his wife.

8.4.2.3. Intervention by the Family and the Christian Community

Fatsani reported that their *ankhoswe* (i.e., traditional marriage counsellors) failed to resolve their marital problem. Fatsani explained that on the night of her ordeal, she first went to report the matter to an elderly pastor friend. This friend contacted the chairperson of the LBAPF, whereupon they, together with their wives, all met at

Fatsani's home. Since Fatsani's husband was still angry, and that they could not resolve anything, the pastors instructed them to summon their *ankhoswe* the following day. Fatsani stated that her husband sent her home, saying that both of their *ankhoswe* would meet with them in the village. Fatsani's husband never turned up until their *ankhoswe* gave up waiting. In this way he was showing contempt towards the traditional marriage counsellors, which was also the case with Akonda's husband. It is my opinion, that this action shows that *ankhoswe* have no power or control over religious leaders, especially when it concerns the homes of Christian leaders. While Fatsani's husband showed contempt of the traditional marriage counsellors, he responded to the second intervention by the LBAPF.

Evident from the above discussion are a number of issues requiring critical theological reflection from a feminist perspective to which I will now turn.

8.5. Feminist Reflections on Domestic Violence

8.5.1. Factors that Contribute towards Domestic Violence

First, there are socio-cultural factors that contribute to domestic violence. African women theologians are aware of the centrality of marriage in the African context. However, in the Circle's first publication edited by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro, *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Publications, 1992), and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Publications, 1995), African women theologians sought to examine how women have been disadvantaged by patriarchy especially in the area of marriage. They point to the rituals, proverbs, and myths which abound in most African societies that stereotype women as being inferior in status to that of men (Oduyoye 2006). More specifically, marriage as a rite of passage is seen as the channel through which women are socialized into accepting their lot in life as one of domestication and procreation. The significance of marriage and family is therefore seen in the way the African society prepares young people for marriage. In the instruction a young woman receives, the entire emphasis is placed on "sex techniques for pleasing her future husband; submission in every way to her husband; never to argue with her husband; and to treat

her husband like a king” (Phiri 1997a:34-38 *cf.* Mbano-Moyo 2009).¹⁷² On the other hand, the man is never taught how to intimately please his wife.¹⁷³ Traditionally, it is assumed that men instinctively know what to do all the time! This is succinctly captured in the local proverb: *Mwamuna sauzidwa!* (lit: ‘a man is not taught’).

When looking for a prospective wife, Phiri (1997a:37) observes that men look for qualities such as “obedience, skills in cooking, and a good reputation” because they want to emphasize their male superiority. This is why Akonda in her story above continued following her culturally prescribed ‘wifely’ roles for a good wife despite the abuse that she was experiencing from her husband. Men also look for women who are less-educated than they, so that the women remain dependent upon them. This was the case with Akonda. This kind of teaching is rooted in a complex set of beliefs integral to the process of socialization. This is what the Malawian theologian Fulata Mbano-Moyo (2009:22) identifies as “the one-sidedness process” that is a fertile ground for unequal power relationships between husband and wife. This teaching promotes and sustains the cultural and theological belief in sexist dualism which drives male superiority over female inferiority. Hence, by their actions, the husband of Akonda as well as the husband of Fatsani believed they were superior simply because of their gender, exerting their sense of power and control over the less powerful: their wives and children. This sense of male power includes the domain of decision-making and even having control over their wives’ sexuality. African feminist cultural hermeneutics challenges this social hierarchical ideology for it denies women’s full humanity and leads to violence (Oduyoye 1994c:51).

I will now turn to discuss those religious teachings of the church which contribute towards the scourge of domestic violence.

8.5.2. Religious Teachings that Contribute towards Domestic Violence

Speaking from the perspective of the churches in the Oceanic region, Joan Filemoni-Tofaeono and Lydia Johnson (2006:71) maintain that it is the “churches’ theology, biblical interpretations, church traditions and practices, and understandings of the

¹⁷² Note that in Christian marriage counselling, sex education is delayed until the actual marriage ceremony; before then, it is emphasized that a young girl is to remain sexually innocent until marriage.

¹⁷³ In more recent times, with the introduction of premarital counselling for both men and women, this situation is now beginning to change.

clergy...that have created an ecclesial fabric which has contributed to or condoned violence against women.” Similarly, African women theologians have identified that some of the teaching and beliefs held by the Christian church have also contributed to the suffering of women in marriage.

In her research on domestic violence in Christian homes in Durban, South Africa, Isabel Phiri (2000b:104-106) found that women in her study understood the role of religious teachings and beliefs with regard to abuse. All the women that Phiri interviewed agreed that their churches preached against violence against women. However, the women were also aware of the stark contradiction between the churches’ teachings and the violent behaviour of their husbands. In addition, some women expressed the belief that God suffers with them, while others did not believe that suffering is part of God’s plan for them. Furthermore, other women felt that God answered their prayers by removing them out of their abusive relationships.

In her analysis of the women’s responses Phiri (2000b:107), draws on the work of the Christian psychotherapist, Carolyn Holderread Heggen who identifies four teachings of religion that she holds contribute to Christian husbands abusing their Christian wives without showing any remorse.

8.5.2.1. Headship and Submission

The first teaching of religion that Heggen identifies as a cause of domestic abuse is the churches’ teaching on the husband’s headship and the wife’s submission (*cf.* Phiri 2000b:107). In chapter four of this dissertation, I stated that the biblical interpretation of the male headship and female submission in marriage held by the SBC and the BACOMA was derived from the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 and the Apostle Paul’s teaching in the New Testament (*cf.* Grudem1994:456-464). This form of teaching is illustrated in the story of Fatsani who when invited by LBAPF group did not seek to prove her own innocence, but instead willingly accepted forgiveness from her husband even though she knew that she had done nothing which deserved the forgiveness of her husband. Fatsani was simply showing submission and obedience to her husband’s headship. Consequently, while the BACOMA-affiliated churches are expected to play a significant role in solving marital problems, there is no

concomitant realisation that the church's teachings on women submission and male headship are the real source of the problem.

Carolyn Holderread Heggen points out that many preachers fail to emphasize the teaching that men and women are created as male and female in the image of God, and that both have a fallen sinful nature as described in Genesis 3 (Heggen cited in Phiri 2000b:107). Churches also fail to stress the voluntary mutual submission of both the husband and the wife which is the result of *agapē* love.

8.5.2.2. Moral Inferiority

The second teaching of religion that Heggen identifies as a cause of domestic abuse which was also reflected in the women's narratives is the belief that "woman is morally inferior to man and cannot trust her own judgment" (Heggen cited in Phiri 2000b:107). This type of understanding can be traced to Greek dualism that attributed the inferiority of woman's capabilities and ability to reason to woman's innate weakness.¹⁷⁴ Feminist theologians have observed how this kind of Hellenistic thinking also had significant influence on the Early Church's theological view of woman, whereby they held that a woman is inferior and therefore women did not fully bear the image of God (Lerner 1986:208; Rakoczy 2004:42; Slee 2003:38). This form of teaching is clearly seen in the story of Fatsani whose husband thought that all women were weak morally; hence his wife must have been having an affair with the male visitor to their home.

8.5.2.3. The Virtue of Suffering

The third teaching of religion that Heggen identifies as a cause of domestic abuse is teaching on the Christian virtue of suffering. As Phiri (Heggen cited in 2000b:108) can state that "suffering is a Christian virtue and women in particular have been designated to be 'suffering servants'". In Phiri's study, the majority of the women in her sample identified their suffering with Christ's suffering. This is different from Akonda and Fatsani of my study who did not relate their suffering to Christ. Natalie Watson (2002:46-47) points out that the servanthood metaphor for Christ's suffering

¹⁷⁴ See also chapter three of this dissertation.

and that of his church is often used to justify violence and abuse against women.¹⁷⁵ The traditional myth of *banja ndikupirira* (lit: ‘marriage means perseverance’) finds legitimacy in the teaching of the Christian virtue of suffering and endurance as the way of the cross and salvation; hence, this is seen by many women as a godly means of dealing with their pain and abuse, often to the point of death.

Akonda stayed in her abusive marriage for almost a decade probably because of what Marie Fortune (1998:85-91) calls “doormat theology”. According to Fortune, this teaches that it is God’s will that people suffer, and faithful endurance is the way to deal with it in a godly manner. Fortune argues that such a theology leaves no space to question or challenge the suffering that comes from injustice, or to act to change one’s circumstance. To do so would be to question the wisdom of God.

In the case of Akonda however, she challenged the system but did not have the courage to leave immediately. Fortune (1998:90) therefore concludes that such a theology leaves the victim powerless and victimized. She further argues that a male abuser must be challenged and held accountable for his sinful acts in order to bring him to repentance and redemption (Fortune 1998:91). Hence, the call that all forms of abuse must be resisted at all costs because abuse dehumanizes not only the abused, but the abuser as well.

8.5.2.4. Quick or Biased Forgiveness

The fourth teaching of religion that Heggen identifies as promoting abuse against women is that “Christians must quickly forgive and be reconciled with those who sin against them” (Heggen cited in Phiri 2000b:108). The issue of forgiveness has been noted in § 4.2.2 above where it was shown that Fatsani’s husband forgave Fatsani as if she was the one who was in the wrong. In Fatsani’s case, the LBAPFs acceptance of Fatsani’s gesture of forgiveness towards her husband shows their biased and patriarchal attitude that they too believed that Fatsani was in the wrong. I agree with the observation of both Heggen and Phiri (2000b:109) that quick or biased forgiveness robs the male perpetrator of domestic violence the opportunity to be accountable for his behaviour, as was the case with Fatsani’s husband.

¹⁷⁵ See also chapter two of this dissertation where I provide an analysis of theological feminism.

8.5.2.5. Divorce as Answered Prayer

The fifth teaching of religion that some women in Phiri's research mentioned, but not reflected in the prior work of Heggen, is to see divorce as answered prayer. The women believed that they did not believe that their situation required godly suffering (*cf.* Phiri 2000b:106). Hence, they prayed for deliverance from their abusive relationships. In this, the women certainly did not get this teaching from their church but most probably from their faith and personal interaction with the Bible. Similarly, the BACOMA teaching on marriage precludes the dissolution of marriage through divorce. It is on the basis of this teaching that Akonda's husband assumed that his Christian wife will remain with him regardless of the way he treated her.

Some Christian counsellors also use the teaching that God hates divorce. Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2001:131) argue that "when we announce that the Lord hates divorce, we do not add that the same verse declares that God hates violence (Malachi 2:16)". Some conservative Christians have gone as far as preserving the marriage relationship even when a human life is at stake. This teaching needs to be critically revised especially in the context of abusive relationships as shown in the case study above of Akonda, because no meaningful marriage should be built on violence, bloodshed or wickedness (*cf.* Kroeger and Nason-Clark 2001:131). This is not God's purpose for marriage.

It is also argued that while it is the desire of all that troubled marriages be healed, the option of divorce should be recognized in order to save the lives of many who so often are affected by one person's abusive behaviour (Kroeger and Nason-Clark 2001:135-138). Divorce cannot take place where there is a loving and mutual partnership in a marriage.

Theologically, as long as Christian church denominations and groupings such as the BACOMA continue to promote teaching about marriage that supports the unequal relationship between wife and husband as one body, women will continue to suffer violence and abuse. Similarly, as long as religious teachings are used to legitimize domestic violence, there cannot be justice for women.

What feminist alternative models pertaining to marriage and that of the husband-wife relationship, which are just and life-affirming? It is to this question I now turn.

8.6. Feminist Alternative Models of Marriage

It is the cry not only of feminist theologians, but of all decent-minded humanity, that we resist anything in our society that perpetuates violence, domination and exploitation. African women theologians are seeking the transformation of all life-denying teachings and the establishment of a just environment where both women and men can enjoy life in its fullness and abundance (Phiri 2000b:110). Marriage in the African context is the space where such a life-fulfilling relationship can be experienced. An African women theologians' alternative models of marriage, according to Oduyoye (1995a:131-153), should be a space for gender-justice negotiations. How then can we move from injustice to justice? Several factors need to be taken into account for such a transition and transformation to take place.

8.6.1. Respect and Recognition

Oduyoye (1994c:50) proposes a model of marriage where the husband and wife affirm and respect each other's humanity and dignity. This is in recognition that both are equally created in the image of God. This entails, as Oduyoye suggests:

[The] banning of oppressive images and metaphors used to suggest that women are morally more dangerous than men, physically weaker, less stable, playing only a passive role in procreation, as suggested by some ancient theologians (1994c:50).

Oduyoye (1994c:50) argues that such virtues as "equality, mutuality, caring" are opposed to perpetrators of violence in marriage because the pattern of marriage that allows and even sanctions such violence is built on dualism while that built on mutual respect and recognition seeks inclusivity. Oduyoye vehemently argues that there can be no true mutuality between a husband and wife when violent images appear in the relationship (Oduyoye 1994c:50). The need for a paradigm shift in Christian marriage is thus overdue, whereby a focus on the teaching of voluntary mutual submission which emerges from *agapē* love actively replaces the earlier hierarchical paternalistic

model that supports and condones domestic violence. The Apostle Paul's vision of Christian marriage, which is also a feminist theological vision, is that of the innate equality of man and woman with each co-equally responsible for the other and each committed to meet the other's needs (Oduyoye 1986:136).

8.6.2. Mutual Partnership and Sharing Power

Oduyoye envisions a picture of mutual partnership where power is shared and works for the common good of all. Such is possible "if it arises from mutual love, respect and mutual responsibility" (1986:136). She sees that a move towards sharing power entails an aspiration towards the sharing of skills and abilities as well as the equal participation of all members for the common good (Oduyoye 1994c:50). It is a model of marriage where the woman and man bring their different gifts in equal honour and in equal exercise. For Mwaura (2010:116) such sharing of power can only begin when the men abusers confess their misuse of power and how they have benefited from the patriarchal system. She further argues that it requires a "willingness to give up the power and control over others" (Mwaura 2010:117). This image resonates with the egalitarian "discipleship of equals" model developed by Schüssler Fiorenza (1983) in which each member enriches the other with their different experiences. Oduyoye (1994c:50) notes that theologically this is part of the eschatological new creation and new humanity that Christ will bring to completion at the close of the ages.

8.6.3. Servanthood and Humility

Furthermore, feminist theologians also note the Jesus' voluntary model of servant leadership as an appropriate model for husbands to imitate. For example, Oduyoye (1995a:164) wishes that men would "voluntarily empty themselves of their privileges" in order that they can treat women with equal value. This model of leadership is to be exercised in meekness, humility and love. Jesus' leadership lay in his power not to dominate and control, but have the power to love. Ruether (1993:121) also points out that Jesus' servant model demonstrates that when a Christian man or woman becomes a servant of God, that person is freed from all bondage towards human masters. The Apostle Paul calls upon husbands to imitate Christ's *agapē* love in action in relation to their wives, and not to control them. In

addition, the model of the servant-husband found in Ephesians 5:25, reverses the image of the dominant and abusive male.

Finally, Oduyoye (1994c:50) acknowledges the blowing of the winds of change where more spouses are seeking relations of harmony through mutual responsibility and accountability. In particular, she observes that people are now recognising that “stability of marriage is the duty of both partners” (Oduyoye 1994c:50).

8.7. Chapter Summary

In this, the penultimate chapter of my dissertation, I have sought to demonstrate that gender-based violence in general and domestic violence in particular is a global problem. Through the narration and analysis of two case studies, I have also sought to show that domestic violence within the confines of Christian marriage is no exception, illustrated by its presence even in clergy marriages. I have further shown that it is difficult for pastors’ wives to get help as family traditional counsellors in Malawi do not feel competent enough to deal with domestic violence in the pastor’s home. From the two case studies, it became clear that the next level of help which comes from the LBAPF was neither helpful nor successful. What the LBAPF fails to do is to refer the couples to professional marriage counsellors. Isabel Apawo Phiri’s (2000b) research on domestic violence in Christian homes in Durban, South Africa revealed that Christian women who experienced domestic violence preferred to go to professional Christian marriage counsellors. However, professional marriage counsellors may not be available in Malawi because of the traditional structures that use *ankhoswe*. Further research needs to be done in this area to ascertain the presence or absence of professional marriage counsellors. Since the two case studies have shown that domestic violence experienced by pastors’ wives often has severe and negative implications for the Christian ministry, this particularly highlights the need for professional marriage counsellors for pastors’ wives.

From a feminist perspective, I have highlighted factors that contribute to domestic violence in the pastors’ homes. These include socio-cultural factors such as rituals, myths, and symbols, that promote the socialisation of men and women into hierarchical relationships; the theological teachings about the headship of men and submission by women; the supposed moral inferiority of women; the suffering of

abused women as a Christian virtue; the sanctioned quick forgiveness of men by women; and about the place of divorce in a Christian marriage. Finally, I examined alternative models of the husband-wife partnership as proposed by feminist theologians as a way forward.

In the next chapter, I will conclude my study with some final statements, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION:

THE PASTOR'S WIFE: A 'DIALOGICAL SELF'¹⁷⁶

9.1. Introduction

Through the means of a fieldwork research study, this dissertation has sought to examine and analyse the experiences of 'being church' of women married to pastors in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) both from their own perspective as well as that of the pastors, leaders, and church members. The intended aim of the study was to determine the ideo-theological and socio-cultural factors that contribute to the construction of the identity of a pastor's wife from an African woman's perspective.

What follows in this concluding chapter is to demonstrate to what extent I have achieved this aim. In order to present this concluding material in a logical yet comprehensive way, I have divided the chapter into the following five sections. In the first section, I re-set of theories and doctrines in context of women's experience. In the second section I will present a synthesis of the perspectives and experiences of pastors' wives in the BACOMA. In the third section I highlight significant issues that my study has contributed towards new knowledge. In the fourth section I provide suggestions for future research from the gaps that have been identified in this study. Lastly, I will conclude the chapter by presenting a summary of conclusions and final statement.

¹⁷⁶ The term 'Dialogical self' is used in psychology. It is based on the supposition that there are "many I-positions that can be occupied by the same person". I have used it in this section to show that a pastor's wife occupies many perspectives or positions as discussed in details in this chapter (*cf.* Hermans 2001:243-281).

9.2. Re-Setting Theories and Doctrines in the Context of Women's Experience

In this section, I wish to demonstrate how I situated my study within the context, theories and theologies of my chosen area of theological research. This was important for my study because women's experiences are unique to feminist theology. In the words of Ruether (1993:13), women's experience "has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past". Hence, that which in the past was regarded by the Christian church as traditional theology, was in actuality the reflections of "male" rather than "universal human" experience (Ruether 1993:13). As a result of this male dominance in Christian thought, women experienced exclusion, discrimination and oppression throughout the Christian era.

As a theological study, doctrines emanating from the *loci* of traditional systematic theology have therefore come under the scrutiny of feminist theologians as Pamela Dickey Young. Indeed Young (1990:14) rightly argues that "feminist theologians seek to revise various doctrines in ways that take account of women's presence and women's experience". She further argues that "they also revise these doctrines so that they will not contribute to the continued oppression of women" (1990:14).

In chapter two of this dissertation, I sought to situate feminist ecclesiology within the global feminist theoretical framework. The question that I sought to answer in that chapter was: "What does it mean to be church in relation to the experiences of women globally?" In the first section of chapter two, I demonstrated that various feminist theologies of liberation emerged during the third wave of the feminist movement as a response to various oppressions by church and society that women experienced worldwide. In the rest of the chapter, I examined first, the emergence of feminist ecclesiology as a response to the way the church has discriminated against and denied women meaningful participation in church life. Second, I highlighted issues that are of concern to feminist ecclesiology such as: the meaning of 'church' and of *ekklesia*; the writing of church history; the position and ministry of women; theological education; and biblical authority and interpretation. I also examined some of the traditional images of church that feminist ecclesiology find alienating to women, such as: the church as the Bride of Christ; the church as the Body of Christ; the church as Servant, and finally, the church as the family of God. In my quest for a feminist ecclesiology that is inclusive of both women and men, I concluded the chapter by

examining alternative models that feminist scholars have offered, namely: the church as a discipleship of equals (Schüssler Fiorenza); the church as roundtable (Russell); the church as hot-house or safe space (Russell), and finally, the church as *koinonia* (Ritchie and African women theologians).

While the concern of feminist ecclesiology has been on women's experience of 'being church', how society has constructed the personhood of women throughout the ages and how such constructions have impacted the understanding of what it means for women to be fully human is the stated concern for feminist theological anthropology. In chapter three of this dissertation, I situated feminist theological anthropology within the global feminist theoretical framework. The question that I sought to answer in this chapter was: "What does it mean to be fully human in relation to the experiences of women globally? Because my study is located within the *loci* of African women's theologies, it was important that I first outlined the socio-historical development of African women's theologies, of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle), and of African feminist cultural hermeneutics in general.

In chapter three, I further demonstrated that African women's theologies were developed as a response to the inability of the African liberation theologies to deal with women's issues. I also explained that the Circle emerged as an academic platform where African women theologians reflect critically and theologically on issues of injustice to women. Furthermore, I recounted how African women theologians developed African feminist cultural hermeneutics as a tool to analyse African culture because of the way African societies have defined women into subordinate positions to that of men. I therefore highlighted issues of concern to mainly African feminist anthropology such as: the oppressive and dehumanizing role of ritual; the processes of socialization; the role of communal ideology; the double-sided nature of hospitality, and the use of androcentric language. I also examined the religious roots of women's subordination that have shaped theological thinking throughout the centuries and which have contributed to the thought that women are not quite made in the image of God and thereby sanctioning patterns of relationship in which men dominate women. In a quest for alternative models of anthropology that affirms the full humanity of women and men from a feminist perspective, I examined

a relational model that recognizes that women and men are people interconnected in a web of relationships not only between human beings, but with nature as well. These were the Trinitarian model of mutuality, and the interconnectedness of humanity and nature.

Having examined women's experiences at a global level through the doctrines of ecclesiology and anthropology, the focus of chapter four was on the Baptist doctrines that undergird the experience of the BACOMA women. As has been mentioned above, it is the task of feminist theologians to examine anew every theological doctrine and concept in order to expose Christian traditions and interpretations of the Bible which have had a negative impact on the status of women and find alternative models that fully affirm women. The question that I sought to answer in this chapter was: "What are the Baptist-held doctrines and teachings that prevent the BACOMA pastors' wives from experiencing the freedom and equality that is enshrined in the Baptist-held doctrine of the priesthood of all believers?"

In response to this question, I demonstrated that doctrinally the principle of the priesthood of all believers resonates with principles advocated by feminist theologians. In particular, I identified five features or distinguishing marks of the principle of the priesthood of all believers: A universal priesthood for all Christians, irrespective of gender; all Christian believers are on an equal or level footing; all Christian believers are accorded the right of religious liberty; it gives the idea of the competency of the soul in religion, and finally, it is the duty of every Christian believer to serve as a priest in relation to others. Within an inclusive understanding of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, freedom is a key benchmark not only of Baptist teachings, but with respect to the role and position of women. I further examined three SBC doctrines and teachings that the BACOMA inherited from the North American SBC which impinge upon women's freedom: the authority of the Bible, the doctrine of the church, and the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit.

On the authority of the Bible as the "Word of God", I argued that the BACOMA ignores three issues. First, it fails to take into account the translation process; second, it ignores the importance of context when interpreting the text; and third, it ignores the multiplicity of voices—not all of which are authoritative—in the Bible.

Concerning the doctrine of the church, I argued that the BACOMA has not translated its democratic governance accorded by the principle of the priesthood of all believers to mean the inclusion of women in its leadership positions. In addition, although the priesthood of all believers places all believers on an equal level, a hierarchy exists in the ecclesiastical structures of the BACOMA. Thus, instead of it being one gift among others, the pastor becomes an office of power and authority over the laity as well as a gendered office. This in turn, has created a gendered role hierarchy whereby members of the congregation and women can exercise various roles in the church except the office of the ‘pastor’. Furthermore, I also showed that having an all male leadership means that women are denied administering of the two Baptist ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper’ (Turner 1987:16). This agrees with Schüssler Fiorenza’s (1983; 1997) observation that a contradiction exists in that the democratic *ekklesia* of the “discipleship of equals” has turned into a hierarchy in the form of “male clericalism” which is heavily guarded through the (mis)use of the Bible (Ruether 1993).

Regarding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I argued that the BACOMA has failed to equip pastors to recognize and utilize the spiritual gifts present in women. Practically, the BACOMA inherited from the SBC the complementarian view of different roles for women in ministry, in theological education, and in the family. The BACOMA also takes seriously the complementarian view that affirms the husband’s headship both in church and in the family. It was noted that there is a paradigm shift taking place within theological education in that most of the BACOMA women are seeking to be theologically trained in their own right.

Because of the important role that the Bible has played in the SBC and the BACOMAs position on women and women’s participation in ministry, I concluded the chapter by highlighting one alternative model that the feminist scholars have offered to promote transformation in women’s participation in the church and in the family. That is from the work of the feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, Azila Talit Reseinberg, who has offered an alternative interpretation of Genesis 2 that challenges the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of the family.

According to feminist theological models and doctrines discussed in chapters two through four of this dissertation, what became clear in the over-arching problem with

regard to women's experience of church and society was the presence of structural injustices through the ideologies of sexism, gender-prejudice, clericalism, and androcentrism; all of which inform those societal and cultural prejudices that promote maleness as the norm for human life, while those who are female are secondary and inferior (*cf.* Clifford 2001:265-273). What is important to note here is that the patriarchal androcentric walls of society and the church are slowly crumbling as more and more women and men become engaged in the struggle for women's rights. This study seeks to contribute towards this struggle for gender-justice.

Having navigated the objectives and outcomes of chapters two through four of this dissertation, in which I sought to set out the context, theories, and theologies for my research study, what follows is a synthesis of the various perspectives and experiences of pastors' wives in the BACOMA.

9.3. A Synthesis of the Perspectives and Experiences of Pastors' Wives in the BACOMA

In this section, I will present a synthesis of the perspectives and experiences of pastors' wives in the BACOMA. I will also highlight issues of significance and how I believe they contribute to establishing new knowledge.

My study sought to determine the socio-cultural and ideo-theological factors that contribute to the construction of identity and roles of pastors' wives in the BACOMA. It is evident from this study that being and becoming a pastor's wife is both a social as well as gendered construction. In other words, the identity of a pastor's wife should be understood not in terms of a unitary self. Instead, my study has sought to show that a plurality of perspectives and worlds, which psychologists call 'polyphonic'¹⁷⁷ can greatly contribute to the self-understanding of the pastors wives in the BACOMA.

A critical listening at the narratives reveals that the pastors' wives' self-understanding is populated with the voices of 'others'. It was observed that these 'others' include: Baptist doctrines and teachings (chapter four); church community, which includes

¹⁷⁷ This is a metaphor derived from the polyphonic novel proposed by the Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). The principle feature of the polyphonic novel is that it is composed of a number of independent and mutually opposing viewpoints embodied by characters involved in dialogical relationships (See, Hermans 2003:89-130; Hermans et al. 1992:23-33;).

both members and the pastors (chapters six through eight); and strands of Malawian culture that have appeared throughout this dissertation. Moreover, it was further observed that the voice of God also permeates the life and ministry of a pastor's wife (chapters six through eight). Borrowing from the language of psychology, therefore, it was noted that a pastor's wife bears a 'multi-voiced' and 'dialogical' self because there are many 'I-positions' occupying her understanding of her self-identity.¹⁷⁸ It is argued that through narratives, people arrive at an understanding and ordering of the world and the self (Hermans et al. 1992:23). Thus, the conception of 'Self' with regard to their experience as pastors' wives is shaped by the numerous ideological and socio-cultural factors or perspectives as will be shown below. In this study I have also demonstrated, from a feminist perspective, that these multi-voices are embedded in patriarchal ideologies and theologies which deny women full participation and their full humanity.

In what follows, I will continue highlighting the feminist voices. In addition, I will highlight issues of significance to the contribution of new knowledge. I have divided the various perspectives into five sections, namely: doctrinal (biblical), ecclesiastical, congregational, cultural, and self-perspective.

9.3.1. The Doctrinal Perspective

From a doctrinal perspective, I discussed the BACOMA position on the authority of the Bible. The research findings have shown that the Bible plays a central role in the experiences of the BACOMA pastors' wives. While there were not many direct biblical quotations in their narratives, the activities in which the pastors' wives were involved indicated how much they used the Bible. It is clear that the pastors' wives in my study knew the Bible from their own personal study and their theological training at the BTSM. As leaders, the BACOMA pastors' wives use the Bible in teaching at the meetings of the *Umodzi wa Amayi*; teaching Sunday school classes in their congregations; and teaching at various Bible study groups, including their own children. In addition, pastors' wives preach from the Bible at meetings of the *Umodzi wa Amayi*; some even preach at Sunday worship services, at funerals, and at other Christian gatherings, as well as reading and studying the Bible devotionally for

¹⁷⁸ The Dutch psychologist, Hubert Hermans (2001:243-281) argues that the dialogical self is based on the supposition that there are "many I-positions that can be occupied by the same person".

personal spiritual nourishment (chapters six through eight). Thus, the claim that African Christian women own and make the maximum use of the Bible is true when one is judged by the lives and duties of the pastors' wives in my study. Doctrinally, therefore, the principle of the priesthood of all believers gives the pastors' wives freedom and autonomy to read and use the Bible.

I have however argued that while the Bible has been liberative for the pastors' wives in my study, the same Bible has been used to deny the pastors' wives the freedom to exercise their call to ministry and leadership roles, as shown in chapters six and seven.

I have argued in chapter four that the BACOMA, following the North American SBC, inherited the nineteenth century patriarchal Western missionary models of interpreting the Bible. Utilising such texts as 1 Timothy 2:12 and a literal interpretation of the creation accounts in Genesis 1-2 the Bible is thus used to justify the exclusion of women from the ordained ministry. In chapter six, my study revealed that there were pastors' wives who were specifically called into the pastoral ministry, but failed to fulfil their dreams and visions on the basis of this understanding of the Bible. Doctrinally, pastors' wives in this study have been psychologically conditioned into accepting support roles to their pastor-husbands. This is regardless of whether they have their own calling or not as noted in chapter six. Biblically therefore, the patriarchal understanding and interpretation of the Bible held by the BACOMA impinges upon the spiritual freedom of the pastors' wives to be and to do according to God's will for them.

I have also argued that the BACOMA failed to take into account a number of factors with regard to the authority of the Bible. One major factor at the heart of feminist theologians' debate is the patriarchal context of the Bible itself. In this regard, Ruether (1993:22) states that:

There is no question that patriarchy is the social context for both the Old and the New Testament and that this social context has been incorporated into religious ideology on many levels.

Similarly, Oduyoye (2001a:12) observes that the Bible itself is steeped in the culture and life experiences of those communities that produced them and that the biblical

narratives are also embedded in multicultural layers. As a result, it is dangerous to uncritically approach the biblical text as authoritative. In this study therefore, I have purposely used a cultural “hermeneutics of suspicion” to enable the BACOMA and the pastors’ wives in particular to view the Bible through African women’s eyes in order to distinguish and extract from it what is liberating and life-giving (*cf.* Oduyoye 2001a:11-12).

9.3.2. The Ecclesiastical Perspective

From the ecclesiastical perspective, the pastors’ wives in my study all belong to the BACOMA-affiliated churches. Although the issue of church affiliation was not part of the themes for this study, the pastors’ wives indicated that they became members of the Baptist denomination either independently or by following the lead of their husbands. In addition, they all indicated that they had experienced a personal conversion by confessing their faith in Jesus Christ. This is in accord with the BACOMA teaching of a regenerate church membership.

This study has further shown that, through their spiritual regeneration and commitment, the pastors’ wives love and serve in the church. Since doctrinally a pastor’s wife is pre-defined as a supporter of her husband in ministry she therefore serves in the church through that role. I noted in chapter seven that many pastors’ wives and church members in this study understood this support role to mean supporting their husbands in ministry first and then at home. Thus, in chapter seven, I show how a pastor’s wife fulfils this role. She is a leader in the *Umodzi wa Amayi*. This involves, among other things, weekly teaching responsibilities, inducting new members, pastoral care, training instructors of initiation rituals, and providing guidance over funerals and other activities. In addition, the pastor’s wife also supports her husband’s ministry by teaching Sunday school class, preaching—especially when he is unavailable—and supporting him in providing pastoral care to the members of the congregation either in their homes or in the pastor’s home. With regard to her role in the home, my research findings revealed that pastors’ wives’ provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual support of their husbands. The second is providing a nurturing environment for their children.

The pastors' wives' involvement in the above roles are in accord with the BACOMA teaching on role differentiation. Through the Western missionary heritage adopted from the SBC, the BACOMA follows a complementarian view which teaches separate roles for men and women and male headship both in the church and in the family. This is also based on interpretations of the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 and the Apostle Paul's teaching in the New Testament. In addition, the BACOMA places great emphasis on the 'wifely' roles of women in general and of the pastor's wife in particular; this being disseminated through teaching contained in the church manuals as well as within the curriculum of the Spouses' course at the BTSM.

According to feminists, the teaching on male headship and female subordination, which unfortunately has long been entrenched in both Christian tradition and the doctrinal perspectives of many historical Western (and Eastern Orthodox) mainline church denominations, has been the cause for much of the violence against women (Ruether 1993:195). For example, in chapter eight of this study, I have demonstrated that pastors' wives have personal experience of such abuse and domestic violence perpetrated by their own husband-pastors.

9.3.3. The Congregational Perspective

From the congregational perspective, in chapters six and seven of this dissertation, I have shown that all the church members in my study affirmed the important leadership role that pastors' wives play in their congregations. I have also shown that the congregation's perspective on the role of pastors' wives is influenced by the ecclesiastical teachings as well as the entrenched biblical interpretations discussed above. In addition, the congregation, together with the pastors, acknowledged that the success of the husband's ministry depended on the wife's support. They were therefore expected to work together as one body. The congregational perspective is reflected in the procedure for engaging the professional services of a pastor. I have shown that a congregation communicates all the procedures with the pastor candidate and employs him without involving his wife in the negotiations, except to accompany him in some cases. The terms and conditions, including the remuneration package is paid exclusively to the husband for he is the recognized ordained minister. Thus, the congregation calls, employs and remunerates the husband while the wife accompanies him, and submits obediently without given or being asked to give her contribution.

All the decisions are made on her behalf by the church and her husband. She gracefully accepts whatever the church offers them as a family. The congregation assumes that engaging the pastor automatically means the wife as well. The congregation therefore expects the wife to support the husband in ministry as shown in chapter seven. This assumption is never made explicit in many cases. In terms of theological education it was noted that the wife's education is in a supportive role and yet the demands in the field are the same for the husband and wife team.

While, ecclesiastically, the support role of the pastor's wife is not a paid position, at a congregational level, this study has shown that many congregations give, in addition to the husband's stipend, gifts to the pastor's family in terms of groceries, clothes, or food items, or sometimes in terms of cash. Similarly, the *Umodzi wa Amayi* periodically gives gifts to their pastors' wives as a token of appreciation. However, from the feminist perspective, it has been argued that employing the pastor's wife without recognizing her individual contribution to the church is a form of economic violence. In addition, it obliterates and undermines her humanity by exploiting her services. The BACOMA policy of seeing the wife through the eyes of the pastor and his calling and therefore not recognising nor rewarding her is a form of institutional injustice and violence against women.

9.3.3.1. Women's Marginalization, Oppression and Exclusion

The above section has shown conclusively that doctrinally, BACOMA pastors' wives in this study have been psychologically pre-defined into providing a support role to their husbands' ministry, for the calling to the ordained ministry is considered solely a male domain. This is regardless of whether pastors' wives have their own calling or not, for their calling is subsumed into the husband's call. Similarly, ecclesiastically, the BACOMA teaching on ministry assumes that once the husband is called to the ordained ministry, his wife is automatically called into a support role. The congregational perspective is influenced by the doctrines and teachings of the church. It has therefore been argued in this study that pre-defining pastors' wives into support roles has resulted in their marginalization, oppression and being excluded from any meaningful experience of 'church.'

9.3.3.2. The Eruption of a New Church for Malawi

It has further been argued that it is the quest of feminist ecclesiology to transform these long established traditions and practices of injustice against women for new understandings of what it means to be church. A new church needs to erupt in Malawi that is gender-inclusive in terms of its language, theology and praxis. It is a new church that validates the other and affirms individuals as a collective of the whole. It is also a church where both men and women are given the opportunity to say ‘yes to God’ and their ministry. It is a church where women’s dreams and visions are seen as one half of the whole, which means without the equal participation of men and women, the church’s vision is incomplete.

9.3.4. The Cultural Perspective

From the cultural perspective, I have demonstrated that, being a pastor’s wife does not exempt her of her cultural milieu. I refer in particular to one example in chapter seven, where pastors’ wives are expected to fulfil cultural roles such as that of an instructor(ess) (*mlangizi*). Although this was more evident among the rural pastors’ wives, the urban participants of my study were equally expected to fulfil this role but in a more liberal or ‘Christianized’ way. In addition, in chapter one, I mentioned that although the percentage of Christians in Malawi is higher than that of traditionalists, Malawians, as with most Africans, are influenced more by their traditional culture than their secondary religions. Similarly, African women theologians have observed that African women read their Bible through the eyes of their culture. Thus, the BACOMA pastors’ wives in my study were born, grew up and socialized as Malawians and Africans. The congregations they serve are also made up mainly of Malawians and other Africans. The fact that over half of the pastors’ wives in my study serve in rural churches shows how much cultural influence there is.

It has been noted that a woman’s social status in the religio-cultural society of African is circumscribed by her femaleness, which is rooted in her being a wife and a mother as discussed in chapter three. Thus, the title *Amayi (busa)* (lit: ‘mother’ or possibly ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’) is very important in Malawian culture. The pseudonyms that the pastors’ wives agreed to be given were also to be in the vernacular language; this being a validation of the value they place on their cultural identities. Thus, when

calling them by name, one would still prefix the name with the title *Amayi*. It has been demonstrated however that even the congregation calls her ‘the mother’ of the church, while the members are ‘children’. The implication here for a pastor’s wife is that she works sacrificially in the church as an extension of her household work where she works tirelessly for her husband and children. Similarly, the congregation treats the work of a pastor’s wife in the church as an extension of her housework that does not require any payment. However, in some ways, the work of the pastor’s wife in the church is also regarded as ministry, or more specifically as a support ministry to her husband-pastor. That is why some pastors’ wives were wary of conducting business or other (secular) work outside of the pastorate. Nevertheless, failure in remunerating her for her services is a socio-theological ideology that requires challenging and being deconstructed because it exploits and undermines the dignity of all pastors’ wives.

It was also noted that some members in my study likened a pastor’s wife to *mzati* (lit: ‘a pillar’) of the church. The use of idioms, proverbs, or myths of African culture abound as Oduyoye (1995a) attests is the case within the Ghanaian languages. While African women theologians recognize the negative impact of such language on women, they also recognize the positive elements that promote the dignity of women. In a similar vein, *mzati* should be seen from the significant work that a pastor’s wife does as one whose role it is to hold the church together in partnership with her husband. Similarly, some pastors’ wives called themselves *khosi* (lit: ‘neck’), while their husbands were the heads. The idea comes from the fact that while the Christian tradition has often told them that they are the ‘ribs’ of their husbands, which positions them farther away from the decision-making ‘heads’, they see their role to be in partnership with the husbands where they make decisions and work together. These cultural descriptions are a means of challenging, as Philip Payne (2009:44) has pointed out that the assumption has always been that the term “helper” is “naturally under the authority of those they help, and therefore denotes an inferior status”. Yet, as he goes on to argue “helper” as used in the Bible, signifies “‘saviour’ ‘rescuer,’ ‘protector,’ or ‘strength/might’” all of which describe God (Payne 2009:44). Similarly, the Holy Spirit, Christ’s “other self” is described as “the helper” of Christians.¹⁷⁹ Thus, according to Payne (2009:45), the role of the pastor’s wife as the

¹⁷⁹ John 14:16-17: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (mg. helper), to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees

husband's supporter "corresponds to that of the rescuer or helper of the man; or as 'a strength corresponding to him,' and therefore does not imply that the woman is to be under the authority of the man, but as an equal".

It was also noted that as a wife, the pastor's wife has to fulfill her 'wifely' and 'motherly' roles in the home, as well as being a spiritual and emotional support to her husband. Issues of submission, perseverance, respect for her husband, and secrecy therefore are not only from the Christian tradition, but are cultural values expected of a 'cultured' wife. Secrecy concerning family matters is a character trait required especially of a woman even in the face of abuse or violence. The cultural demand for secrecy is compounded when the woman in question is a pastor's wife especially in the case of domestic violence as shown in chapter eight of this dissertation. The processes of socialization especially in marriage, even though they have been Christianized, still aim at pre-defining women into subordinate roles and positions. In Africa, tension is especially evident when cultural roles conflict with the ministry roles of the pastors' wives. This was seen when some pastors expressed concern when they had to perform 'wifely' roles at home while their wives' were away on ministry duty elsewhere.

9.3.5. The 'Self' Perception

Another issue of significance to the contribution of new knowledge is that of self-perception (which in this dissertation I have called the 'Self'). It is evident that the self-understanding of the pastors' wives' in this study has largely been influenced by the above mentioned socio-theological factors, i.e., doctrinal, ecclesial, congregational and cultural factors. In this section, I will discuss the self-perception of the 'Self' in relation to areas of resistance as a resource for transformation in addition to the feminist alternatives proposed elsewhere in this study.

9.3.5.1. Hearing God for Oneself

The first factor concerning the 'Self' is about hearing God for oneself, especially in the call to the pastoral ministry as discussed in chapter six of this dissertation. It was

him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides in you, and he will be in you" (New Revised Standard Version).

noted that there were pastors' wives who, knowing that God speaks to individuals, resisted to accept their husband's calling until they heard from God themselves. The point I want to emphasize here is that despite the socio-cultural forces that had socialised her into a subjective position of always obeying and respecting her husband's decisions, the 'Self' of the pastor's wife in this case displayed a position of self-empowerment which challenged the established cultural stereotypes. She made a decision by which her husband simply had to wait or to comply.

9.3.5.2. Theologically Equipping Oneself as God's Agent for Change

The second issue concerning the 'Self' is observed in the area of theological training. Instead of being confined to the established theological education, as for example in the Spouses' curriculum at the BTSM, some pastors' wives have seen that the 'Self' can reach its potential in the service of God by equipping herself with further theological studies, up to and including PhD level at other higher institutions of learning both within Malawi and internationally. A pool of such professional female theologians together with men of feminist persuasion will be able to challenge the patriarchal structures that continue to subordinate women's experiences. Similarly, those who had little basic education realise that self-advancement in basic education is a tool for empowerment and that by improving their education, they can make a greater contribution to the work they are called to do. They recognize that being satisfied simply with their spouses' theological training will keep them in a perpetually inferior and subordinate position. Since these are adult women who are joining the young people in basic education in primary and secondary schools, their action is a challenge to the societal stereotypes that basic education is solely for young people.

9.3.5.3. Resisting Self-Confinement and Going Beyond Barriers

The third factor concerning the 'Self' of the pastors' wives is that instead of being restricted to defined church roles to the church women's organization and supporting the husband, the 'Self' of a pastor's wife resists such confinement. As discussed in chapter seven of this dissertation, she goes beyond her congregation, to answer her own call in providing leadership in the wider community where she organizes and leads ecumenical prayer groups, establishes income generating projects, provides

adult literacy classes, and other important skill-sets to the community. The actions of such pastors' wives in this regard resonate well with Mary McClintock Fulkerson's observation that faith traditions create "subject positions" or roles that hinder or limit women instead of liberating them. McClintock Fulkerson argues that in such cases "the faith of a woman can enable her to resist such powerful oppressive messages and help her find the strength to preach and lead others and exercise a high degree of autonomy" (cited in Graham et al. 2005:150). Thus, the pastors' wives in this study are able to resist the way the patriarchal faith community has shaped and determined their identity by creating spaces for themselves to function in accordance to their gifting and full human potential as God originally intended.

9.3.5.4. The Power of Questioning and Self-Reflection

The fourth issue concerning the 'Self' of a pastor's wife is the question that one pastor's wife asked in my study: "Who is a pastor?" The suggestion that a pastor's wife may also be called a pastor was raised by some pastors in the focus group as reflected in chapter seven § 2.2.2. What is of particular significance with this question is that it was asked by a pastor's wife. What this question shows is that in self-reflection, a woman can see that the work she does qualifies her to be a pastor. The way the 'Self' works shows that she positions herself on par with her husband-pastor. Although this was not a comparative analysis of the respective roles of a pastor and wife couple, my analysis in chapter seven has nevertheless shown that often the wife holds more roles than that of her husband. Such questioning is a sign of awareness that things are not right.

9.3.5.5. The Actions of Resistance of a Local Church

Related to the issue of who is a pastor raised in the section above, the fifth factor concerns the actions of a local church. Distinctively, this concerns, not the 'Self', but the actions of resistance of a local church. It was mentioned in chapter four § 4.2. that one local BACOMA-affiliated church already had a woman as their pastor. This was not the first church to have a female pastor in the BACOMA, as earlier research conducted by NyaGondwe-Fiedler has confirmed (2002:181-202). The fact however that it is happening at a time when the BACOMA is being openly challenged at its Annual General meetings on the same issue, demonstrates a knowledge that things

need to change. This local church had also exercised its ecclesiastical freedom. In terms of Baptist principles of self-governance and ecclesiastical autonomy, the local church has the freedom to make its own decisions and actions (Sullivan 1983:25). Consequently, the actions of this local church show that it is possible to resist the dominant ideologies which are considered by others as divinely sanctioned, especially when people say: “this is not according to our tradition”.

In search of a liberated ministry and community from patriarchy, Ruether (1993:201) suggests that liberation from sexism means “both freeing oneself from the ideologies and roles of patriarchy and also struggling to liberate social structures from these patterns”. She sees that transformation initiated by a new leadership and theology become vehicles for exploring new ways of being church (Ruether 1993:201). She further envisions that “these kinds of changes can begin in denominations of relatively free polity where local churches do not face constant intervention and coercion from hierarchical authority” (Ruether 1993:202). The autonomy of the local church is therefore a good resource for a liberated community from sexism and patriarchy.

It is important to note here that the BACOMA churches that have accepted women leadership are located in the rural areas. It is my observation that most Malawians, especially from traditional matrilineal societies such as those in Central and Southern Malawi, accept female leadership. This fact leads to the inevitable conclusion that the ideology of male leadership comes mainly (if not exclusively) from the inherited teaching of Western Christianity (such as that present in the SBC) which resiliently forbids women to be pastors. It shows that African male pastors have characteristically bought into the same ideology. Some tension can be observed among the senior leadership of the BACOMA which does not know what to do as experienced in the BACOMAs Annual General meetings where the issue of officially recognising female pastors has been tabled without a real decision being made. This becomes confusing for many people because Christians are torn between the BACOMA biblical teaching that women cannot become pastors and its praxis, where some congregations have been established by lay women who end up pastoring local churches. It is thus clear: there is much advantage to be gained in local church autonomy when it can decide on its own freedom.

9.3.5.6. Resources for Transformation and Change

Through recognising the actions of the ‘Self’, I have attempted to show in this section that there are possible clues in the BACOMA that can be used as resources for transformation and change. These include: hearing God for oneself; theologically equipping oneself as God’s agent for change; resisting self-confinement and going beyond barriers; the power of questioning and self-reflection, and finally, the actions of resistance of a local church in deciding on its own freedom.

9.4. Contributions to Establishing New Knowledge

In this section, I wish to conclude this study by highlighting significant issues that I believe my study can contribute towards new knowledge. I will also provide some suggestions on areas of further research from the gaps that I have identified throughout this study.

9.4.1. An Empirical Study

While this has been an empirical study, it has also been built on existing knowledge and associated literature emanating from the academy. While it has been observed that the experiences of pastors’ wives have been well documented in the global North, the experiences of pastors’ wives in Africa have either been left undocumented or conducted in a very limited manner. An inspection of Circle literature which documents experiences of African women in their quest for gender justice reveals the same conclusion. It was also a conclusion of this study that while the experiences of pastors’ wives are sparsely documented, it was the stated intention of the researcher to contribute a well-documented research project that would go some way to reverse this disturbing trend. Hence, the main claim of this study was that the BACOMA pastors’ wives were operating within religious and socially constructed inequalities of freedom and privilege compared especially to their pastor-husbands within the Baptist-held doctrinal teaching of the priesthood of all believers.

9.4.2. An Academic Contribution

This study seeks to make an academic contribution to the debate in the struggle against the myriad of injustices carried out against women. Furthermore, an

examination of the extant literature on pastors' wives, especially in the West, revealed that there were many well-documented studies from a socio-psychological perspective, while only a few were conducted from a historical perspective. There was also limited literature on the theological reflection of the experiences of pastors' wives, especially from the Global South. It is in this latter regard, that this study seeks to make a significant theological contribution towards this gap in knowledge.

9.4.3. African Feminist Research

A third observation worthy of consideration is the fact that because women's experiences have been marginalised throughout the ages of the Christian tradition, any research on the experience of even one individual woman is of significance to African feminist theological research. In this regard, the researched experiences of pastors' wives in the BACOMA presented in this study, are both significant and unique.

9.4.4. The Construction of Identity

The fourth observation is that while there are a multiple number of socio-cultural and ideo-theological factors that conspire and contribute towards the construction of the identity of the pastors' wives and their roles, such research as presented here is significant and unique in terms of the experience of pastors' wives who face multiple oppressions. The particular use of the metaphor of "the dialogical self" that has been purposefully borrowed from the Dutch psychologist, Hubert Hermans, to describe the BACOMA pastors' wives' experience is an important part of this study's original contribution to knowledge.

9.4.5. Feminist Empirical Research

In terms of methodology, this study was a feminist empirical research project. Feminist research is about women researching women. This research is about an African (Malawian) woman feminist theologian researching BACOMA women pastors' wives. The research benefitted from a combination of methods of data generation which included a woman interviewing men. This, in feminist research, is unique and therefore a contribution to new knowledge in terms of methodology for a woman to conduct and manage interviews with male interviewees in order to obtain

substantial data pertaining to the experiences of women. A comparative analysis of what the pastors' wives in my study said about their self-perception and that of the congregation contributes to the uniqueness of this study.

9.4.6. New Knowledge

The analysis of the findings on the theme of the roles of pastors' wives was also of importance. In this regard, it is significant to note that the pastors who participated in this study acknowledged that without the support of their wives, their ministries would not have been successful. In addition, almost all the pastors' wives' in my study 'owned' their husband's calling and declared this ministry as their own. This was reflected in the roles and activities that the pastors' wives were responsible for. This is a unique contribution to new knowledge because previous studies have shown a growing separation of wives from their husband's ministry.

9.5. Identifying the Gaps and Suggestions for Future Research

In terms of gaps identified for further research, it is noted that since no study can exhaust all that can be known about the experience of pastors' wives, this study has identified gaps in the following areas: 1) domestic violence in pastors' families; 2) financial concerns in pastors' families; 3) the experience of the children of pastors; and 4) professional marriage counselors in Malawi.

9.6. Summary of Conclusions and Final Statement

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate the extent to which I have achieved the purpose of my study which was to determine the ideo-theological and socio-cultural factors that contribute to the construction of the identity of a pastor's wife in the BACOMA.

By presenting a synthesis of the various perspectives on the experiences of pastors' wives, this study has demonstrated that a plurality of perspectives contribute to the construction of the identity of a pastors' wife. This causes her to be identified as a 'dialogical self' because of the many positions that contribute to her understanding of her own identity. These perspectives include: doctrinal or biblical, ecclesiastical, congregationally, culturally, and the 'Self'. I have also shown that the areas of conflict

and tension between the 'Self' and the 'others' can provide clues towards transformation and change. This is in addition to the alternatives suggested by feminist theologians cited in this study. This study has also identified the following issues for further research: domestic violence in pastors' families; financial concerns in pastors' families; the experience of children of pastors; and the issue of professional marriage counsellors in Malawi.

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APPENDIX I

SAMPLE OF PASTOR'S WIFE PARTICIPANTS

Name	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
1. Abale	13/07/2009	Lilongwe
2. Akonda	04/07/2009	Lilongwe
3. Akondwere	22/01/2009	Lilongwe
4. Alinafe	13/07/2009	Lilongwe
5. Apatsa	14/07/2009	Lilongwe
6. Chigwirizano	29/07/2009	Lilongwe
7. Chikondi	17/01/2009	Lilongwe
8. Chilungamo	08/07/2009	Lilongwe
9. Chikhulupiro	10/07/2009	Lilongwe
10. Chisomo	15/07/2009	Lilongwe
11. Chitsimikizo	28/07/2009	Mzuzu
12. Chiyanjano	08/07/2009	Lilongwe
13. Chiyembekezo	31/12/2008	Lilongwe
14. Chiyero	11/01/2009	Lilongwe
15. Fatsani	16/01/2009	Lilongwe
16. Kondanani	01/01/2009	Lilongwe
17. Kuseka	15/01/2009	Lilongwe
18. Kuyere	14/07/2009	Lilongwe
19. Madalitso	21/11/2008	Lilongwe
20. Mtendere	29/12/2008	Lilongwe
21. Odala	27/11/2008	Lilongwe
22. Tadala	19/07/2009	Lilongwe
23. Tigawane	17/07/2009	Lilongwe
24. Tikhale	13/07/2009	Lilongwe
25. Tisekere	27/01/2009	Lilongwe
26. Tiyanjane	26/01/2009	Lilongwe
27. Ulemu	29/12/2008	Lilongwe
28. Walani	30/12/2008	Lilongwe
29. Ufulu	11/07/2009	Lilongwe

APPENDIX II

SAMPLE OF CHURCH MEMBER PARTICIPANTS

Number	Code	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
1.	YFR	13/07/2009	Lilongwe
2.	YFU	19/11/2008	Lilongwe
3.	YFU	07/07/2009	Lilongwe
4.	YFU	21/01/2009	Lilongwe
5.	YMR	29/01/2009	Lilongwe
6.	YMR	13/07/2009	Lilongwe
7.	YMR	13/07/2009	Lilongwe
8.	YMR	14/07/2009	Lilongwe
9.	YFU	15/07/2009	Lilongwe
10.	YFU	15/07/2009	Lilongwe
11.	YMR	16/07/2009	Lilongwe
12.	YMR	16/07/2009	Lilongwe
13.	YMU	16/07/2009	Lilongwe
14.	YMU	16/07/2009	Lilongwe
15.	YFR	16/07/2009	Lilongwe
16.	YFR	16/07/2009	Lilongwe
17.	YFR	17/07/2009	Lilongwe
18.	YFR	17/07/2009	Lilongwe
19.	YMU	10/07/2009	Lilongwe
20.	YMU	20/07/2009	Lilongwe
21.	PUA1	18/07/2009	Lilongwe
22.	PRA2	15/07/2009	Lilongwe
23.	PRY3	02/12/2008	Lilongwe
24.	PUA4	27/11/2008	Lilongwe

Number	Code	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
25.	PUA5	15/01/2009	Lilongwe
26.	PRA6	01/12/2008	Lilongwe
27.	PRY7	06/12/2008	Lilongwe
28.	AFR	19/11/2008	Lilongwe
29.	AFU	19/11/2008	Lilongwe
30.	AFR	19/01/2009	Lilongwe
31.	AFU	19/01/2009	Lilongwe
32.	AFU	20/01/2009	Lilongwe
33.	AFR	22/01/2009	Lilongwe
34.	AFR	22/01/2009	Lilongwe
35.	AFU	02.01/2009	Lilongwe
36.	AFU	15/07/2009	Lilongwe
37.	AFU	15/07/2009	Lilongwe
38.	AFU	15/07/2009	Lilongwe
39.	AFU	16/07/2009	Lilongwe
40.	AFU	12/07/2009	Lilongwe
41.	AFR	12/07/2009	Lilongwe
42.	AFR	12/07/2009	Lilongwe
43.	AFR	10/07/2009	Lilongwe
44.	AFR	26/07/2009	Lilongwe
45.	AMR	20/07/2009	Lilongwe
46.	AMR	12/07/2009	Lilongwe
47.	AMU	14/07/2009	Lilongwe
48.	AMU	30/12/2008	Lilongwe
49.	AMU	14/07/2009	Lilongwe
50.	AMU	12/07/2009	Lilongwe

APPENDIX III

CONSENT FORM FOR PASTORS' WIVES TO BE INTERVIEWED

Study Topic	Role Conceptualization of Pastors' Wives in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)
Investigator	Molly Longwe, DipTh., BTh., MTh.
Affiliation	Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi / University of KwaZulu-Natal

Purpose

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research study designed to explore and analyse the role of pastors' wives in the Baptist churches.

Before giving your consent, I outline below the procedures, risks and benefits that will help you to make a decision as to whether or not you wish to go ahead and be part of this research study.

Description of Procedures

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be required to give your story about what you understand to be your role as a pastor's wife; what are the successes and challenges you have experienced. I will record your story and write some notes as well. Following research ethics, I will not use your real name but the one you will invent yourself. I will ask you questions during the interview for clarification before I go and type the notes. I will arrange with you the suitable time and place for the interviews, which may take about one hour.

Risks and Benefits

The study involves giving information about yourself, and you may feel uncomfortable to share your private life. You will be free to give whatever information you wish. You may also withdraw your participation at any time and you will not be blamed for it, and should that happen you will have to inform me in good time so that I will look for a replacement. I realize that the study will take some of your valuable time. I will therefore make sure I adhere to the agreed time. If, for any reason, we fail to meet, I will try to reschedule for another meeting.

Your participation in this study will also be a learning process for you. You will be sensitized to how issues of our culture and the Bible impact people's attitudes towards women. You will receive feedback on the research findings. Your contributions will assist the Baptist Convention to acknowledge the role and position of pastors' wives.

Confidentiality

As mentioned above, the study involves giving information about yourself; I will therefore make every effort to keep your story confidential. I will keep all the notes and tapes under lock. We will use substitute names to your stories for confidentiality purposes. You will also be expected to keep strict confidentiality about any information you share with me or come across during the interviews.

Voluntary Participation

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are therefore free to decline to participate, or to withdraw your participation any time for any reason without feeling bad, and that our relationship will continue to be friendly.

For any enquiries you may contact:

Molly Longwe

School of Religion and Theology

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X01

Scottsville, 3201

Republic of South Africa

Cell: 0789859823

Email: 200279558@ukzn.ac.za

Or

Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi

P O Box 249

Lilongwe

Malawi

Tel: 01727207

Agreement to Participate

I _____ hereby confirm
that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the
research study, and I agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX IV

CONSENT FORM FOR CHURCH MEMBERS TO BE INTERVIEWED

Study Topic	Role Conceptualization of Pastors' Wives in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)
Investigator	Molly Longwe, DipTh., BTh., MTh.
Affiliation	Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi / University of KwaZulu-Natal

Purpose

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research study designed to explore and analyse the role of pastors' wives in the Baptist churches.

Before giving your consent, I outline below the procedures, risks and benefits that will help you to make a decision as to whether or not you wish to go ahead and be part of this research study.

Description of Procedures

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be required to be interviewed by myself as a researcher. I will be asking you questions and writing the answers you will give. I will read to you the answers for any clarification before I go and type the notes. I will arrange with you the suitable time and place for the interviews, which may take about one hour.

The questions will be about what the church understands to be the role and position of pastors' wives. You will therefore be expected to provide information to all the questions asked. You will also be free not to answer if you do not feel like doing so.

Risks and Benefits

The study involves giving information, not about yourself, but the life and ministry of somebody's wife and you may feel uncomfortable. I also realize that the study will take some of your valuable time. I will therefore make sure I adhere to the agreed time. If, for any reason, we fail to meet, I will try to reschedule for another meeting.

Your participation in this study will also be a learning process for you. You will be sensitized to how issues of our culture and the Bible impact people's attitudes towards women. You will receive feedback on the research findings. Your contributions will assist the Baptist Convention to acknowledge the role and position of pastors' wives.

Confidentiality

Since the study involves giving information about the role and position of the pastor's wife, I will make every effort to keep your responses confidential. No name, except the name of your church, will appear on the forms. You will also be expected to keep strict confidentiality about any information you share or come across during the interviews.

Voluntary Participation

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are therefore free to decline to participate, or to withdraw your participation any time for any reason without feeling bad, and that our relationship will continue to be friendly.

For any enquiries you may contact:

Molly Longwe

School of Religion and Theology

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X01

Scottsville, 3201

Republic of South Africa

Cell: 0789859823

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Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi

P O Box 249

Lilongwe

Malawi

Tel: 01727207

Agreement to Participate

I _____ hereby confirm
that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the
research study, and I agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX V

CONSENT FORM FOR PASTORS' FRATERNAL MEMBERS

Study Topic	Role Conceptualization of Pastors' Wives in the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA)
Investigator	Molly Longwe, DipTh., BTh., MTh.
Affiliation	Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi / University of KwaZulu-Natal

Purpose

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research study designed to explore and analyse the role of pastors' wives in the Baptist churches.

Before giving your consent, I outline below the procedures, risks and benefits that will help you to make a decision as to whether or not you wish to go ahead and be part of this research study.

Description of Procedures

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be required to be involved in group discussions led by myself as a researcher. I will be asking you questions and writing the answers you will give. I will read to you the answers for any clarification before I go and type the notes. I will arrange that we hold our discussions during our scheduled monthly meetings for the month of January and February, 2010.

The questions will be about what you understand to be the role and position of pastors' wives. You will therefore be expected to provide information to all the questions asked. You will also be free not to answer if you do not feel like doing so.

Risks and Benefits

The study involves giving information, not about yourself, but the life and ministry of somebody's wife and you may feel uncomfortable, since not all pastors may be present at the meeting. I also realize that the study will take some of your valuable time. I will therefore make sure I adhere to the agreed time.

Your participation in this study will also be a learning process for you. You will be sensitized to how issues of our culture and the Bible impact people's attitudes towards women. You will receive feedback on the research findings. Your contributions will assist the Baptist Convention to acknowledge the role and position of pastors' wives.

Confidentiality

Since the study involves giving information about the role and position of the pastor's wife, I will make every effort to keep your responses confidential. If you so wish, no name will appear on the forms. You will also be expected to keep strict confidentiality about any information that is shared during the discussions.

Voluntary Participation

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are therefore free to decline to participate in the discussions for any reason without feeling bad, and that our relationship will continue to be friendly.

For any enquiries you may contact:

Molly Longwe

School of Religion and Theology

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X01

Scottsville, 3201

Republic of South Africa

Cell: 0789859823

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Or

Baptist Theological Seminary of Malawi

P O Box 249

Lilongwe

Malawi

Tel: 01727207

Agreement to participate

I _____ hereby confirm
that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the
research study, and I agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

APPENDIX VI

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR PASTORS' WIVES

Name Date

Age No. of years in ministry

Educational qualifications

Theological training (Seminary/Bible School)

Name of church

1. What does it mean for you to be a member of the Baptist church?
2. What does it mean for women to be members of the Baptist church?
3. Please tell me your story about what you think is your role as a pastor's wife.
4. In what activities are you involved in?
5. What training have you received to prepare you for those activities mentioned in question #2?
6. What are the most positive experiences you have had in your ministry?

7. What challenges have you experienced as:
 - a. A pastor's wife
 - b. A wife
 - c. A mother?
8. Has the church given you any conditions of service at any time?
9. What do you think should be done to acknowledge and reward a pastor's wife for the work she is doing?
10. In what ways do the biblical teachings of your church guide you in your ministry as a pastor's wife?
11. What is your vision of a pastor's wife?
12. What is your vision of being Church for Baptist women?

APPENDIX VII

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

Name of church Date.....

Position held in the church

Male/Female of interviewee

1. What does it mean for you to be a member of the Baptist church?
2. What does it mean for women to be members of the Baptist church?
3. What do you think is the role of a pastor's wife in your church?
4. What are the activities in which the pastor's wife is involved?
5. What are the conditions of service for your pastor?
6. And what are the conditions of service for the pastor's wife?
7. Do you think the pastor's wife deserves to be remunerated for her services?
8. What are the reasons for your answer to question #5 above?

9. What would you say to a pastor's wife who chooses not to work for the church?
10. What are the reasons for your answer to question #7 above?
11. What can be done to acknowledge and reward the pastor's wife for the work she is doing for the church?
12. What do you think are the problems that a pastor's wife faces as she serves the church alongside her husband?
13. What would be the appropriate way to solve the problems you identified in question #10?
14. What is your vision of a pastor's wife?
15. What is your vision of being church for Baptist women?

APPENDIX VIII

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Date

1. What does it mean for you to be a member of the Baptist church?
2. What does it mean for women to be members of the Baptist church?
3. What do you understand to be the role of a pastor's wife?
4. Why does she do what she does?
5. Why does the church employ only the pastor and not the wife?
6. What can be done to acknowledge and reward her for the work she does?
7. What are the challenges that you see the pastor's wives facing?
8. What is your vision of a pastor's wife?
9. What is your vision of 'being church' for Baptist women?

APPENDIX IX

DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE OF PASTORS' WIVES (PARTICIPANTS)

Age range	number
• 18-35	13
• 35+	16

Geographical location	
• Urban	14

Education level	
• None	9
• Primary	6
• Secondary	7
• Tertiary	7

Profession	
• Home maker	25
• Teachers	2
• Students	4
• Self employed	23

Types of theological education	
• None	2
• Spouses course	20
• Cert in theology	1
• Dip in theology	2

Marital status	
• Single	-
• Married	25
• Divorced	2
• widowed	2

Denominational affiliation	
• Baptist by marital conversion	24
• Baptist by choice	3
• Baptist by parental influence	2

Years as pastor's wife	
• 1-10 years	12
• 11-30 years	17

Ethnic grouping	
• Chewa	20
• Tumbuka	4
• Mang'anja	5

APPENDIX X

BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF MALAWI (BTSM) WIVES' CURRICULUM

Year	Term One	Term Two	Term Three
One	Old Testament Book Study Christian Family Healthy Family Literacy/English Handicrafts	Old Testament Book Study Christian Family Healthy Family Literacy/English Handicrafts	Old Testament Book Study Christian Family Healthy Family Literacy/English Handicrafts
Two	Old Testament Book Study Christian Family Healthy Family Literacy/English Handicrafts	Old Testament Book Study Christian Family Healthy Family Literacy/English Handicrafts	Old Testament Book Study Christian Family Healthy Family Literacy/English Handicrafts
Three	New Testament Book Study Leadership Skills Literacy/English Handicrafts	New Testament Book Study Leadership Skills Literacy/English Handicrafts	New Testament Book Study Leadership Skills Literacy/English Handicrafts
Four	New Testament Church History Preaching Communication Handicrafts	New Testament Church History Preaching Communication Handicrafts	New Testament Church History Preaching Communications Handicrafts

APPENDIX XI

LIST OF BOOKS FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF MALAWI (BTSM) WIVES' CURRICULUM

Chipulumutso ndi moyo wopambana (Salvation is the Greatest Life)
Kuthandiza aKhristu kukula mwa Yesu (Helping Christians to Grow in Christ)
Kulankhulana ndi Mulungu (Talking with God)
Mayankho seven a m'Bukhu Lopatulika okhuzana ndi Mzimu Woyera (Biblical Answers to Seven Questions about the Holy Spirit)
Amayi a mBukhu Lopatulika (Women of the Bible)
Effective Bible Teaching
Kuphunzitsa ana Sunday School (Teaching Children Sunday School)
Mkazi wosankhidwa ndi Mulungu: Mkazi wa mbusa (Chosen by God: The Pastor's Wife)
Bukhu lothandiza atsogoleri a mpingo (Church Leaders Manual)
Banja la chiKhristu (Christian Marriage)
Chikondi cheni cheni chimadikira (True Love Waits)
Bukhu la alangizi a Baptist (Baptist Instructress Manual)
Umodzi wa Amayi a Baptist m'Malawi (Women's Manual)
Kuphunzitsa atsikana a Baptist m'Malawi (Girls' Auxiliary Manual)
Kwayera 1 and 2 (Literacy)
Zakudya zoyenera zofunika ku thupi lanu (Nutritious Foods)

APPENDIX XII

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI (BACOMA)



BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MALAWI

P.O.Box 30212, Chichiri, Blantyre 3
Telephone Number: +265 01 871170
E-mail : bacoma@sdp.org.mw

7th January, 2008

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir,

MRS MOLLY LONGWE

I am writing to certify that the above named is a lecturer at Baptist Theological Seminary in Lilongwe and has been granted study leave to go for further training at the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) has also granted her permission to do research on the Role of Pastors' Wives within its confines. This research will help BACOMA in not only understanding what Pastors' wives go through but also, based on the research findings, be able to tackle and eliminate some harmful cultural practices which adversely affect women in ministry with the aim of improving their livelihood and their social standing in society.

The Baptist Convention will appreciate any assistance she may require to facilitate her studies at the University. May God bless you.

Rev. Fletcher Kaiya
CHAIRPERSON OF PASTORS' FRATERNITY



Please address all correspondence to the General Secretary