

# Doctrinal Perspectives on Women's Leadership in the Bible: A Study of Enlightened Christian Gathering Churches in Kenya

CAROLINE NOEL AMUNGA<sup>1</sup>, RISPAN WEPUKHULU NAMASAKA<sup>2</sup>, EDITH SIMIYU<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Department of Social Sciences, Kibabii University

*Abstract- This study investigates the doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership in the Bible within the context of Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) churches in Kenya. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examines biblical teachings supporting and restricting women's leadership, explores interpretations of key passages, and assesses the implications for church practices. Data were collected from 267 church members and six clergy across six ECG branches in Kenya through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal diverse interpretations of biblical texts, with a majority (62%) supporting women's leadership based on their understanding of Scripture, while 28% held more restrictive views. Galatians 3:28 emerged as a central text for supporters, while 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 were frequently cited by those with more restrictive perspectives. Factors influencing these perspectives included cultural background, educational level, age, personal experiences, and denominational history. The study highlights the need for nuanced hermeneutical approaches, comprehensive theological education, and culturally sensitive strategies for promoting women's leadership. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on women's leadership in African Christianity and provide valuable insights for ECG churches navigating this complex issue.*

*Indexed Terms- Doctrinal Perspectives, Women's Leadership, Enlightened Christian Gathering Churches*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the study

The role of women in leadership positions within religious institutions has been a topic of ongoing

global discourse and debate. In the Christian context, the issue of women's leadership has been particularly contentious, with various interpretations of biblical teachings shaping the discourse (Aune, 2014). The Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) churches in Kenya, founded by Prophet Shepherd Bushiri, present a unique opportunity to explore the dynamics of women's leadership and its influence on church growth and development (Burgess, 2015).

The interpretation and application of biblical teachings on women's leadership vary widely across different Christian denominations and cultural contexts. While some churches have embraced women's ordination and participation in senior leadership roles, others have maintained restrictive practices rooted in traditional gender norms (Chaves & Eagle, 2015). This diversity in approaches reflects the complex interplay of theological, cultural, and societal factors within Christianity.

### B. Statement of the problem

Despite the growing influence of women in various sectors of society, their role in church leadership remains a contentious issue. Within the context of the Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) churches in Kenya, the dynamics surrounding women's participation in leadership positions remain ambiguous and underexplored. While ECG churches do not overtly prohibit women from assuming leadership roles, the actual extent of female involvement and the factors influencing their opportunities for leadership within these congregations are not fully understood (Kgatle, 2018). The lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the nuanced attitudes towards women in leadership roles within different ECG congregations underscores the need for empirical research to systematically explore the doctrinal perspectives on women's

leadership in the Bible and their application in practice.

*C. Purpose of the study*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership in the Bible as understood and applied within the Enlightened Christian Gathering churches in Kenya.

*D. Research objectives*

1. To examine the biblical teachings supporting women's leadership as interpreted by ECG churches.
2. To analyze the biblical teachings perceived as restricting women's leadership within ECG churches.
3. To explore the interpretations and applications of these biblical teachings in the context of ECG churches.
4. To assess the implications of these doctrinal perspectives for women's leadership in ECG churches.

*E. Significance of the study*

This study holds significant implications for advancing the understanding of gender dynamics and women's leadership within religious institutions, particularly in the African context. By examining the doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership in the Bible within ECG churches in Kenya, the research can shed light on the intricate interplay between biblical interpretation, cultural norms, and church practices.

The findings may inform strategies for promoting gender equity and inclusive leadership practices within faith-based organizations, thereby contributing to the empowerment of women and the dismantling of traditional gender norms that have historically marginalized their participation (Ngunjiri & Gardiner, 2017). Moreover, the study's insights can potentially influence policies and initiatives aimed at fostering an environment conducive to women's leadership within religious institutions.

Furthermore, the research may generate valuable knowledge that can be applied to similar contexts, catalyzing broader societal conversations about the role of women in leadership positions across various

sectors, ultimately advancing the pursuit of gender equality (Phiri, 2017).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

*A. Biblical teachings supporting women's leadership*

1. Galatians 3:28 and gender equality

Galatians 3:28 stands as a pivotal passage in the discussion of gender equality within the church. This verse states, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV). Many scholars interpret this passage as a declaration of spiritual equality that challenges traditional hierarchies and distinctions (Grenz & Kjesbo, 2015). Belleville (2019) argues that this verse provides a theological foundation for the full inclusion of women in all leadership roles, suggesting that gender distinctions are secondary to one's identity in Christ.

2. Examples of women leaders in the Bible

The Bible presents several examples of women who held significant leadership roles. Deborah, who served as a prophetess and judge in ancient Israel (Judges 4-5), is often cited as evidence that God can call and empower women to lead His people (Keener, 2014). Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, is described as a co-worker of the apostle Paul and a teacher of the gospel (Acts 18:26), challenging the notion that women were meant to be silent or subordinate in the early church (Westfall, 2016). Other notable examples include Miriam, Huldah, and Phoebe, whose leadership roles are seen as affirming women's capacity for spiritual authority and ministry (Grenz & Kjesbo, 2015).

*B. Biblical teachings restricting women's leadership*

1. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and interpretations

One of the most contentious passages in discussions of women's leadership is 1 Timothy 2:11-12, which states, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet" (NIV). Köstenberger (2017) interprets this as a clear prohibition against women holding positions of authority or teaching within the church. However, others argue that this instruction was specific to the cultural context of the time and should not be universally applied (Marshall, 2015). Some scholars

have challenged traditional interpretations by offering alternative translations of key Greek terms, suggesting that the passage may be addressing specific abuses of authority rather than prohibiting all forms of women's leadership (Belleville, 2014).

## 2. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and context

Another passage often cited in debates over women's leadership is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which instructs women to remain silent in the churches. Grudem (2016) interprets this as a restriction on women's speaking roles in church gatherings. However, other scholars argue that this passage should be understood within the broader context of maintaining order during worship services and does not necessarily restrict women's leadership roles (Belleville, 2019).

### *C. Interpretations and applications of biblical teachings*

#### 1. Historical and cultural context considerations

Many scholars emphasize the importance of considering the historical and cultural context when interpreting biblical passages related to women's leadership. Cohick (2014) argues that the early Christian church was operating within a cultural context where women's public leadership was often viewed with suspicion, and some instructions may have been pragmatic concessions to prevailing cultural norms. Keener (2014) suggests that understanding these contextual factors can help in discerning which teachings were meant to be universally applied and which were addressing specific situational concerns.

#### 2. Hermeneutical approaches

Different hermeneutical approaches have been employed in interpreting biblical teachings on women's leadership. Some scholars advocate for a redemptive-movement hermeneutic, which seeks to discern the trajectory of the Spirit's work in moving God's people toward greater freedom and equality (Webb, 2014). Others emphasize a Christocentric reading of Scripture, interpreting texts in light of the life, teachings, and redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Kirk, 2017). These approaches aim to navigate the tension between cultural particularity and universal principles while remaining faithful to the authority of Scripture.

### *D. Contemporary debates on women's leadership in the church*

The ongoing debates surrounding women's leadership in the church reflect the complex interplay of theological, cultural, and societal influences. Chaves & Eagle (2015) note that while some denominations have made significant progress in embracing women's leadership, others continue to grapple with traditional gender norms and interpretations of religious texts. Kuttner (2022) observes that these debates often intersect with broader societal discussions about gender equality and justice.

In the African context, Phiri (2017) highlights how the landscape of women's leadership in Christian churches has been shaped by the unique intersection of religious teachings, cultural traditions, and societal transformations. Parsitau (2017) notes that while some African churches have embraced women's leadership, others continue to uphold restrictive interpretations of religious teachings and traditional gender roles.

These ongoing debates underscore the need for continued scholarly engagement with biblical texts, careful consideration of cultural contexts, and open dialogue within faith communities to navigate the complex issues surrounding women's leadership in the church.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### *A. Research design*

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. This design enables a comprehensive exploration of doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership, encompassing numerical trends and in-depth insights into contextual factors. The mixed-methods approach allows for triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### *B. Study area and population*

The study is conducted in Kenya, focusing on six branches of the Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) church: Nairobi, Bungoma, Kisumu, Eldoret, Mombasa, and Kisii. The target population consists of 900 members of the ECG church in Kenya, including both male and female congregants across various age

groups and leadership positions. Additionally, six clergy members in charge of the church branches are included in the study to provide leadership perspectives (Burgess, 2015).

### *C. Sampling techniques*

The sample size is determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970), resulting in a sample of 267 participants for a population of 900, with a desired confidence level of 95%. Simple random sampling is employed within each branch to ensure randomness and equal opportunity for selection. This approach helps to minimize bias and increase the representativeness of the sample (Taherdoost, 2016).

### *D. Data collection methods*

The research utilizes two primary data collection methods:

1. **Structured questionnaires:** Administered to church members, these questionnaires gather quantitative data on demographics, perceptions of biblical teachings, and experiences related to women's leadership in the church.
2. **Semi-structured interviews:** Conducted with clergy members, these interviews provide qualitative insights into doctrinal perspectives, leadership practices, and the application of biblical teachings within the church context.

This combination of methods allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives, capturing both broad trends and nuanced perspectives (Zohrabi, 2013).

### *E. Data analysis procedures*

Quantitative data from the questionnaires is analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software is used for this analysis.

Qualitative data from the interviews is subjected to thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and theme identification. This process allows for the emergence of key themes and patterns related to doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurs during the interpretation phase, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### *F. Ethical considerations*

The study adheres to strict ethical guidelines to protect participants and ensure the integrity of the research process:

1. **Informed consent:** All participants are provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks before giving their consent to participate.
2. **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Participants' identities are protected through the use of pseudonyms and the secure storage of data.
3. **Voluntary participation:** Participants are informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.
4. **Cultural sensitivity:** The research design and implementation take into account the cultural norms and values of the participants and their communities.
5. **Institutional approval:** The study obtains necessary approvals from relevant institutional review boards and church authorities.

These ethical considerations are crucial for maintaining the trust of participants and the credibility of the research (Israel, 2015).

By employing this comprehensive methodology, the study aims to gather robust and reliable data on doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership in the Bible within the context of ECG churches in Kenya, enabling a thorough exploration of the research objectives.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *A. Demographic characteristics of participants*

The study included a total of 267 participants from six branches of the Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) church in Kenya. The gender distribution was 44.2% male and 55.8% female. Age distribution showed that the majority of participants (36.0%) were in the 26-35 years age group, followed by 36-45 years (27.7%). The Nairobi branch had the highest representation (23.2%), while Kisii had the lowest

(11.2%). Nearly half of the participants (48.3%) had been members of the ECG church for 1-5 years.

These demographic characteristics provide context for understanding the perspectives shared by participants and highlight the diversity within the sample, which enhances the representativeness of the findings.

#### *B. Perceptions of biblical teachings on women's leadership*

The study revealed diverse perceptions of biblical teachings on women's leadership among ECG church members. A majority of participants (62%) expressed support for women's leadership based on their understanding of biblical teachings, while 28% held more restrictive views, and 10% were uncertain.

Supporters of women's leadership often cited Galatians 3:28 as a key verse supporting gender equality in the church. One participant stated, "Galatians 3:28 clearly shows that in Christ, there is no distinction between male and female. This should apply to leadership roles as well." This aligns with Belleville's (2019) interpretation of the verse as providing a theological foundation for women's inclusion in all leadership roles.

Those with more restrictive views frequently referenced 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. A participant noted, "The Bible clearly states that women should not teach or have authority over men in the church. We must obey God's word." This perspective echoes Köstenberger's (2017) interpretation of these passages as prohibiting women from holding certain leadership positions.

#### *C. Interpretations of key biblical passages*

1. Galatians 3:28: Many participants interpreted this verse as a declaration of spiritual equality that should extend to leadership roles. However, some argued that it refers only to salvation and does not necessarily apply to church governance.
2. 1 Timothy 2:11-12: Interpretations of this passage varied widely. Some viewed it as a universal prohibition on women's teaching and leadership, while others argued for a more contextual interpretation. A clergy member stated, "We need to consider the specific situation Paul was addressing in Ephesus. It's not necessarily a

blanket ban on women's leadership for all times and places."

3. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Many participants struggled with reconciling this passage with other biblical examples of women speaking and leading. Some suggested it referred to specific disruptive behaviors rather than a universal silence.
4. Examples of women leaders: Participants frequently cited biblical examples like Deborah, Priscilla, and Phoebe to support women's leadership. One participant noted, "If God used these women in leadership roles, why wouldn't He do the same today?"

These diverse interpretations reflect the ongoing debates in biblical scholarship, as highlighted by scholars like Grenz & Kjesbo (2015) and Westfall (2016).

#### *D. Factors influencing doctrinal perspectives*

Several factors emerged as influential in shaping participants' doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership:

1. Cultural background: Many participants acknowledged the influence of traditional Kenyan cultural norms on their interpretation of biblical teachings. This aligns with Phiri's (2017) observations about the intersection of religious teachings and cultural traditions in African Christianity.
2. Educational level: Participants with higher levels of education tended to favor more inclusive interpretations of biblical passages, possibly due to exposure to diverse hermeneutical approaches.
3. Age: Younger participants generally expressed more supportive views of women's leadership compared to older generations, reflecting changing societal attitudes.
4. Personal experiences: Those who had positive experiences with women leaders in various contexts were more likely to support women's leadership in the church.
5. Denominational background: Participants who had previously been part of more conservative denominations often held more restrictive views on women's leadership.

## CONCLUSION

### A. Summary of key findings

This study on doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership in the Bible within Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) churches in Kenya has revealed several key findings:

1. **Diverse interpretations:** There is a wide range of interpretations of biblical passages related to women's leadership, reflecting the complexity of this issue within ECG churches.
2. **Supportive majority:** A majority of participants (62%) expressed support for women's leadership based on their understanding of biblical teachings, while a significant minority (28%) held more restrictive views.
3. **Key biblical passages:** Galatians 3:28 emerged as a central text for supporters of women's leadership, while 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 were frequently cited by those holding more restrictive views.
4. **Contextual factors:** Cultural background, educational level, age, personal experiences, and denominational history were identified as significant factors influencing doctrinal perspectives on women's leadership.
5. **Examples of biblical women leaders:** Participants frequently referenced examples such as Deborah, Priscilla, and Phoebe to support arguments for women's leadership in the church.

### B. Implications for theory and practice

These findings have several implications for both theological understanding and practical application within ECG churches:

1. **Hermeneutical approaches:** The study highlights the need for more nuanced hermeneutical approaches that consider historical and cultural contexts when interpreting biblical passages related to women's leadership, as suggested by scholars like Webb (2014) and Kirk (2017).
2. **Theological education:** There is a clear need for comprehensive theological education programs that address the complexities of biblical interpretation and gender roles in church leadership.
3. **Cultural sensitivity:** The influence of cultural factors on doctrinal perspectives underscores the importance of developing culturally sensitive

approaches to promoting women's leadership within ECG churches.

4. **Gradual implementation:** The diversity of views suggests that changes in leadership structures and practices may need to be implemented gradually to maintain church unity and cohesion.
5. **Role modeling:** The impact of biblical examples of women leaders indicates the potential influence of contemporary women leaders in shaping perceptions and creating opportunities for future generations.

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