WOMEN AND THE CONCEPT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP
Biblical Influences

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1. Introduction

Gender and religion are two critical factors that have a strong influence on people's lives. These two forces have a bearing on various facets of social life including the area of leadership. This paper seeks to examine the gendered nature and religious influences on women's leadership practices in general and specifically on the concept of servant leadership. Several perspectives have emerged in the contemporary period that have come to dominate the field of leadership but one of the central issues of concern in most of these perspectives is the moral imperatives driving the spirit of leadership. Amongst these emerging perspectives with a strong religious fervour is the notion of servant leadership.

It is important to note that the idea of women in leadership is not a new one. The biblical story of creation in the book of Genesis privileges Eve the first women in terms of creation for being a decisive influence on Adam and the subsequent direction of humankind's earthly existence. Both the Old and New Testament have stories of women who played a leadership role in their communities. For instance Deborah in the Book of Judges chapter four was a prophetess and judge. She was a leader of Israel and led by example even in war. Queen Esther in the Book of Esther was an ordinary Jewish woman who through an extra ordinary set of circumstances became Queen of the Persian King Xerxes. Queen Esther's grace, passion, sense of purpose, commitment, faith and willingness to die for her cause won the day for her as a leader at the service of her people. She was indeed prepared to put herself on the line for her people "I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16b). In the book of Acts 9:36 we are told of the story of a disciple named Dorcas in Joppa "who was always doing good and helping the poor." The impact of

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her work as a servant leader was demonstrated when she died and all the widows testified that she had made garments and other clothes for them. Through prayer by Peter she was brought back to life. In contemporary times Mother Teresa excelled in her selfless and humanitarian work. She empathised with the less fortunate and had a strong passion to help others. For her, "Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand."[1] Despite becoming a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1979 and world famous she remained committed to the spirit of service. What is it that the four women referred to above have in common? They are all servant leaders.

Gender is a concept that is critical to understanding servant leadership. Gender is culture specific and changes over time. Wood observed that gender

is defined by society and expressed by individuals as they interact with others and media in their society. Further, gender changes over time. We are male or female (sex), but we learn to act in masculine and/or feminine ways (gender). Gender is a social, symbolic construct that varies across cultures, over time within a given culture, over the course of individuals' life spans, and in relation to the other gender.[2]

Examining the relationship between gender, religion and leadership is potentially fruitful. Firstly it can deepen our appreciation of human complexity when it comes to the interplay of cultural influences on men and women's behaviour particularly leadership. It can also serve as a way of unmasking stereotypes that tend to construct leadership in male terms. Secondly studying gender, religion and leadership can contribute towards the development of new insights on leadership perspectives. Thirdly it enriches leadership studies and contributes towards the realisation that the spiritual and moral dimensions of humans is just as important as other dimensions in explaining various social life experiences and practices.

The paper draws on insights gained by the first author from a qualitative study of female primary school principals in one of the provinces in Zimbabwe. Personal experiences of the authors are also used to enrich the discussion in this paper. The second author has been in middle and top university management. The authors also share a strong Christian background which is implicated heavily in servant leadership studies. The next section foregrounds leadership within the realm of feminist critique. This is quite useful to our understanding of the rise and privileging of servant leadership perspective.

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[1] www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/m/mother_teresa_707.php November 22, 2004.

[2] J. T. Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*. Boston: Wadsworth, 2007, 23.

2. Feminist Critique of Leadership Theory

History is replete with the stories told from exclusive male perspectives and the area of leadership is not an exception. The feminist critique of leadership theory according to Blackmore rests on the assumption that a 'masculinist model has been assumed to portray all experience and hence the universal individual central to this perspective of leadership is modelled upon men's experience.'[3] Enomoto argued that the field of 'leadership is gendered in favour of men,' and further observed that 'to argue that management is a gendered construction is to posit that there is one gender (male) that defines and dominates the discourse in the field of study.'[4] Feminist critics point out how the existing body of organisation and management theory assumes implicitly that managers and workers are male, with male stereotypic powers, attitudes and obligations.[5] While men are portrayed as fitting organisational behaviour, Ford observed that women are associated with the feminine characteristics of caring, nurturing and sharing that are allegedly more appropriate for domestic spheres. In Ford's thinking, charismatic and masculine models of leadership are still featuring in organisational analysis whereby macho, individualistic, assertive and dominant behaviours continue to take precedence over the more feminine qualities.

Enomoto[6] argues that early management theories were developed primarily by men for men giving examples of theories espoused by Taylor, Fayol, Barnard, Simon and Weber who dominated the field. Enomoto challenges the top-down hierarchy of control by identifying a female contributor to management, Mary Parker Follett, whose work in human relations challenged the bureaucratic emphasis established by Taylor and Fayol. On the other hand trait theory privileged traits associated with male leadership.[7] Leadership and management have focused on traits associated

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[3]J. Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction (a Feminist Critique)" in *Critical Perspective on Educational Leadership*, ed. J. Smyth, London: Falmer Press, 1998, 94.

[4]E. K. Enomoto, "Probing Educational Management as Gendered: An Examination through Model and Metaphor," *Teacher's College Record*, 102, 2 (2000), 376.

[5]J. Ford, "Examining Leadership through Critical Feminist Readings," *Journal of Health Organisation and Management*, 19, 3 (2005), 243.

[6]Enomoto, "Probing Educational Management as Gendered," 276.

[7]L. Smulyan, *Balancing Acts: Women Principals at Work*, Albany, New York: New York Press, 2000.

with males such as 'strength, toughness and decisiveness.'[8] It has been observed that although the trait theory model of leadership has been denigrated for its failure to differentiate between effective and ineffective male leaders, it has been duly resuscitated as an explanation for why women are not found in leadership positions.[9]

> According to Blackmore's observation women are in a double bind.
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> If a woman displays the culturally defined traits of femininity (being emotional, passive, dependent, nurturing, intuitive or submissive) she is perceived to be a poor leader. If she acts according to the male role definitions of a leader (being aggressive, achievement oriented, self-confident, forceful or competitive) she is condemned as being 'unfeminine.'[10]

Women leaders and feminist researchers[11] perceive the dominant discourse as denying individual differences, ignoring *context,* and giving little or no consideration to the influence of diverse settings within which managers, leaders, and subordinates operated.[12]

Feminist research shows that women who become leaders are increasingly breaking new ground, challenging the stereotype of what women leaders are 'expected' to be and giving value to their own skills; they are giving expressions to their own conceptions of leadership as service to others.[13] Literature shows that women leaders call for 'a reconstruction of a view of leadership which counters the emphasis on individualism, hierarchical relationships, bureaucratic rationality and abstract moral principles.'[14] In Blackmore's view 'leadership looks to empower others rather than have power over others,'[15] an attitude which would constitute a feminist reconstruction of the concept of leadership. These issues are pursued in the next section on servant leadership.

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[8]R. Eisler, "From Domination to Partnership: The Hidden Subtext for Sustainable Change," *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 7. 4, 1994, 38.

[9]Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 100.

[10]Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 100.

[11]R. Kark, "The Transformational Leader: Who is (s)he? A Feminist Perspective," *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 17. 2, 2004, 160-176; C. Shakeshaft, *Women in Educational Administration*, London: Sage, 1987.

[12]Ford, "Examining Leadership through Critical Feminist Readings," 19, 3.

[13]V. Soobrayan, "Gender Neutral leadership: A Myth Nurtured by Leadership," in Drake, P. and Owen, P., eds., *Gender and Management Issues in Education,* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books 1998, 38.

[14]Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 94

[15]Blackmore, "Educational Leadership and Reconstruction," 94.

3. Servant Leadership Theory

This section examines the concept of servant leadership and tries to show how biblical influences have shaped the development of this concept. To some extent the paper tries to deepen and expand our understanding of key concepts such as transformational, authentic, and spiritual leadership. True and genuine leadership is premised on the principle of service to others. The story of the request by the mother of Zebedee's two sons James and John that each of them sit on the left and right in his kingdom cited in Matthew 20: 20-28. The secret to greatness and true leadership lies in Jesus' response, 'Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.' Munroe observes that servant leadership 'is the ultimate form of true leadership and protects the individual from the traps that entangles the power hungry, insecure, unqualified shadows who parade as leaders in many of our communities.' [16] For Munroe servant leadership sums it all, it is:

a. The discovery of one's purpose, gift, and talents and commitment to give them in service to mankind.
b. Being prepared to serve one's gift to the world at every opportunity for the betterment of humanity.
c. Serving oneself to the world.
d. "Self-distribution" to your generation.
e. The maximization of self-manifestation.
f. The pursuit of an inherent vision in order to serve others. [17]

With servant leadership there is no fear, no competition, no comparison, and no jealousy; instead there is greater personal fulfilment, intrinsic motivation, originality, and genuine confidence.

In his review of literature regarding values central to servant leadership Russell[18] draws pertinent attention to the concept as inspired by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990). Leadership should 'meet the needs of others'[19]and in addition 'motivation for leadership should be a desire to

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[16]M. Munroe, *The Spirit of Leadership*, New Kensington, Whitaker House, 2005, 100.

[17]Munroe, *The Spirit of Leadership*, 99.

[18]R. F. Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," *Leadership and Organisational Development Journal*, 22, 2 (2001), 76-83.

[19]R. K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1977; B. Lloyd, and L. Spears, "A

serve.[20] This advances the notion of the servant leader. Russell identified three attributes of a servant leader namely 'trust, appreciation of others, and empowerment.'[21] In discussing the importance of values in each of the identified attributes, Russell indicated that 'trust provides the foundation for people to follow their leaders,' since according to literature, 'the essential values of good leaders include honesty and integrity' – 'values' which 'build interpersonal and organisational trust.' How servant leaders appreciate others, according to Russell, is seen through their facilitation of positive images, by giving love and encouragement, inspiring hope and courage in others and by the application of love in order to transform the workplace into something that is better for everyone. He calls for 'all encompassing love;' that practices patience, kindness and forgiveness in work relations.[22]

In Russell's thinking, appreciation of others by servant leaders reflects fundamental personal values that esteem and honour people. Kouzes and Posner[23] similarly identified a shift in focus from self to others among important trends in managerial and leadership values, noting that concern for others – putting their needs and interests as priority – demonstrates empathy and elicits trust. Leaders demonstrate respect and appreciation of others by developing the capacity for listening thus demonstrating an attitude of concern for others. Empowerment – perceived as a central element in excellent leadership – is especially important in servant leadership,[24] entrusting workers with authority and responsibility and emphasises teamwork, reflecting the values of love. 'Servant leaders multiply their leadership by empowering others to lead.'[25] Oster cited by

New Approach to Leadership," *Leadership and Organisation Development Journal*, 17. 7, 1996, 29-32.

[20]Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 77.

[21]Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 78, 79.

[22]Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 80.

[23]J. Kouzer, and B. Posner, Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI): A Self Assessment and Analysis, San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co., 1993.

[24]D. R. Ebener, and D. J. O'Connel, "How Might Servant Leadership Work? *Management and Leadership*, 20, 3, 2010, 316; G. W. Fairholm, *Perspectives on Leadership: From the Science of Management to Its Spiritual Heart*, Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1998: P. G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2007; S. T. Rinehart, *Upside Down: The Paradox of Servant Leadership*, Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1998,

[25]C. G. Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Becoming a Servant Leader*, Nashville, TN: Life Ways Press, 1996, 25.

Russell perceived the goal of empowering as creating many leaders at all levels of the organisation and argued that 'empowerment is the opposite of historical management practices that emphasised manipulation.'[26] In this sense servant leadership resemble the notion of distributed leadership.

Keith identified seven key practices by servant leaders.[27] The seven practices involve an increased self-awareness by the servant leaders who recognise their strengths and weaknesses. They surround themselves with people who can fill the gaps in their skills. They are good listeners, enabling them to give thoughtful responses. A servant leader is mission driven and seeks to develop colleagues so that they can grow and become servant leaders too. Servant leaders act as guides, as mentors and coaches to colleagues. The servant leader creates an enabling environment that allows colleagues to use their skills, energy and passion. Lastly effective leaders have foresight of things to come and how to get there.

4. A Brief Look at Women in Leadership
According to Shakeshaft,

> There are scores of great women whose stories lie buried in school historical societies, and in the archives of national organisations. Learning more of their lives may help to shape and understand the knowledge base; at the very least, such research will provide a fuller explanation of the legacy of their early courage and sacrifice.[28]

What Shakeshaft is asking for, in effect, is an alternative discourse on leadership as depicted in Hurty's works. Hurty[29] cites writings by Charlotte Perkins Gilman who argued that the instruction of a child by its mother has been largely neglected in our 'man-made' world where the dominant class views education as that which is organised in formal institutions such as schools and universities and slowly filters downward. For Gilman, 'The mother is the first co-ordinator, legislator, administrator and executive. From the guardian and guidance of her cubs and kittens up to the longer, larger management of human youth, she is the first to consider group interests and correlate them.'[30]

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[26]Russell, "The Role of Values in Servant Leadership," 80.

[27]K. M. Keith, *The Case for Servant Leadership*, Westfield: The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2008.

[28]C. Shakeshaft, *Women in Educational Administration*, London: Sage, 1987, 114.

[29]K. S. Hurty, "Women Principals: Leading with Power" in P. Schmuck and D. Dunlop, eds., *Women Leading in Education*, New York: SUNY, 1995, 399.

[30]C. P. Gilman, *The Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture*, New York: Charlton, 1911, 183.

Hurty also draws on the work of Mary Parker Follett to demonstrate a concept of power that was intended for practical, participatory strategising in the business community. Follett devoted her life to the study of how people treat each other. Her theoretical work included studies of human interaction, conflict resolution, and decision-making in organisations. She believed that people grew and changed by talking through conflicts and differences, searching for what each party really wanted. In Hurty's view the groundwork for a process of negotiation that discards the adversarial aspects of collective bargaining in favour of collaborative problem solving is found in Follett's work.[31] Accordingly, 'such processes of negotiation do not rely on traditional notions of power as control or as the domination of decision-making.'[32]

The authenticity and integrity of female experiences, often hidden or missing from the public historical record can be appreciated as contributions to more fully accountable stories of human development. Women in Hurty's study got tired, angry, frustrated, and shared those feelings honestly with their subordinates. It is through the leaders' idealised influence – that is, putting others' needs first and demonstrating high moral standards – that motivated the colleagues to perform beyond their expectations.[33] The concept of synergistic leadership which means working together is a critical aspect of effective leadership.[34] Synergistic thinking in terms of understanding school leadership is important because people work together in administrative meetings, faculty meetings, parent-teacher associations and with the community.

5. Descriptions of Women and Their Approaches

The key to a comprehensive understanding of women principals' lives as servant educational leaders goes beyond just perceptions of their roles. This section highlight descriptions of experiences presented by

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[31]M. P. Follett, *The Creative Experience*, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924.

[32]Hurty, "Women Principals: Leading with Power," 396.

[33]K. Boehnke, N. Bontis, J. J. Distefano, and A. C. Distefano, "Transformational Leadership: An Examination of Cross-National Differences and Similarities," *Leadership and Organisation Development Journal*, 24. 1, 2003, 6; F. Geijsel, and P. Sleegers, K. Leithwood, and D. Jantzi, "Transformational Leadership Effects on Teachers' Commitment and Effort toward School Reform," *Journal of Educational Administration*. 41. 3, 2003, 228-256.

[34]B. J. Irby, G. Brown, J. A. Duffy, and D. Trautman, "The Synergistic Leadership Theory," *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40. 4, 2002, 304-322.

three women principals selected in the 2003/2004 study. Pseudonyms are used to refer to these women principals. The three women principals had a strong Christian background and attributed their success to God's grace. The information obtained from the interviews conducted is rich and illuminating. In-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were utilised as the data gathering tool.

5.1. Brief Biographical Sketch of Enita

Enita, a widow, is principal of a big primary school in Marondera town, a provincial capital of Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. She completed her O levels in 1972 and worked as an untrained teacher for six years. She completed a three year teacher's training programme in 1980. Six years after training she was appointed deputy head at a small rural school and in 1996 she was promoted to a position of head at the same school on retirement of the male head. Enita noted 'my parents were very poor and I grew up from a very poor background, but anyway, I got my inspiration from my father.' At school she only took interest in drama and public speaking. Enita's mother was very supportive. Her mother had sponsored her father at school. 'My father was accepted at a mission school because of my mother's strong Christian background. I myself am a strong Christian and this has an influence on my leadership.'

5.2. Description of Enita's Leadership

Enita's leadership is relationship-oriented and risk taking. When first promoted, she received a great deal of resistance from the previous acting deputy and the head. She was sidelined from school administration. Enita was promoted to head when the head retired. She experienced fewer problems. She started a garden project, and her story goes:

> Parents were very supportive... We worked well and there was good relationship. The garden project was successful and both the community and the school benefited from it.

> ... [W]e used [the money from the garden] for improving the school. We bought textbooks and stationery for the pupils. Other improvements were fencing the school with the fence donated.

She left this school on promotion to head a larger boarding school. Most of the kids at this school were bullies. She observes,

> ... I had to play a mother's role... I managed to reduce the bullying of other kids. What I experienced is 'children need love.' Even if kids make mistakes, 'give them love,' 'that motherly love,' they need it and I had to provide.

Enita created family like groups which were identified as houses for the children. The purpose of these houses was to 'let the pupils have a sense of belonging' and for the teachers easy monitoring and also 'a sense of ownership.' Enita observes, 'both the teachers and the pupils were motivated to improve their houses and there was a big change hence the progress of the school.'

Enita believes in team work and hence she brings in the pupils, community, teachers and parents:

I see myself as someone who shares power because when you delegate duties you actually are sharing responsibilities and letting somebody be accountable. I see myself as a facilitator, a team builder and also a learner. I am a role model for others.

Enita experienced that a leader needs to be more informed to be able to assist people accordingly: 'Sometimes a teacher comes in crying, my husband took my child from me. You are already a legal advisor. You need to be supportive. You cannot chase her away.'

5.3. Brief Biographical Sketch of Linda

Linda is married, with four children, and is a principal of a small school (farm school) outside Marondera. She completed a teacher's training certificate after form two in 1966. She completed O level studies in 1989. She upgraded her professional qualifications and completed the diploma in teaching in 1992. She got promoted to a deputy head post in 1997. She completed a degree in educational administration in 2000. Linda is the third born in a family of eleven, five girls and six boys. Her father, in her words, 'trained us to be responsible by giving us duties, delegating different responsibilities to each child and rotating the duties.' Linda was once a class monitor, a prefect and a leader at church. She feels that she is a role model for her relatives: 'they look at me as a big aunt with leadership skills.' She always wanted to be a leader who serves people.

5.4. Description of Linda's Leadership

What characterises Linda's communication with her world is the notion of service, challenge and risk taking. For her, being a school head is not easy. Most of the children who come to her school have no parents. They stay with either a guardian or grandparents and have a high incidence of absenteeism. Some children come to school with torn clothes, some barefoot. She feels that it is not worth reprimanding them about the issue since they cannot avoid it. So she asks for assistance from organisations: 'The Red Cross gives us food and money. They promised to give us uniforms.'

She consults and delegates work to teachers. Linda lets everyone work on an area comfortable to them or that they are good at: 'I try to involve all the staff in the discussions on how we can improve the school.' All her teachers are involved in school activities. She noted: 'I lead by example. I make sure I do not divide the teachers. ... They need to be treated as humans!' Linda describes how she treats her colleagues:

When a teacher comes with a problem ...discuss. Assist them. Do not ignore their plight. Assess the problem but before that, first talk to the person. Ask the teacher, what do you think about your problem? If the child is sick ask her, do you want to take your child to hospital? Give them emotional support. Sympathise with the teacher and take into consideration their individual differences. By so doing you are already someone acting like a mother. You are a counsellor. You are a mentor.

When she first arrived, her problems with the community were severe: 'They uprooted the plants and flowers from the school yard and used the school property without permission.' Linda struggled to convince them to change their behaviour: 'It was through continuous dialogue and interaction with them that they came to understand... They now respect the school property. My prayers were answered.'

Linda has her own class to teach: 'when we discuss some of the problems ... it's not like I am talking theory.' She uses the work plan from the Education Office as a guide from which she makes her master plan: 'I ... discuss the work plan with teachers.' Linda sees communication as twofold: 'we interact, I delegate power.' Linda stresses: 'you should have a shared vision, create a good climate and good tone of the school.' She observes that teachers should feel included and have a sense of ownership. Linda feels satisfied with the progress she has made at the school and in her working environment.

5.5. Brief Biographical Sketch of Shelly
Shelly is a head-teacher of a big school in Marondera town, Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. She completed a certificate at a teacher's training college in 1978 and started teaching in 1979. She has never been married but had two dependents – her daughter and her child. In 1989, she was promoted to the post of deputy head one. She had obtained a degree in educational administration. Her leadership has been influenced by the knowledge she got from the administration degree programme and her personal experiences as a teacher and an educational leader.

5.6. Description of Shelly's Leadership

What characterises Shelly's leadership is a life of service and ability to involve others in decision making. Shelley received a warm welcome at her first school as deputy head. Shelly's major turning point emerged when she transferred from this school.

Shelly applied for a lateral transfer. She became a head of a smaller school. Shelly thought that the only challenge would be of decision-making. There was no hand-over take-over: She had this to say,

> Everything was in shambles. The school was dysfunctional everything in disorder. The water taps were locked, electricity disconnected and the buildings were falling... I worked very hard. The responsible authority was very supportive ... the water was unlocked and the electricity reconnected.

There were no financial records. Shelly asked for permission from the responsible authority to start her own new records and was authorised. Children at this school came from surrounding farms. They were not contributing anything to the school including paying fees. Shelly tried to find out what exactly was happening: 'I ... talked to the farm owner first being the owner of the school, I then moved on to farmers surrounding the school.' The first time Shelly approached farmers she talked to them individually. She then called parents to a meeting.

Both the farmers and the parents indicated that there was no communication with the school, and that things were not transparent that was why they were quiet and not supportive. From there Shelly communicated: 'I involved the 'feeder farmers' (the surrounding farm owners) and the parents.' Parents were taking the children to work in the farm fields leading to frequent absenting of children from school and some were baby-sitting while parents go to work:

> I had to approach the farmers again to discuss the issue of child labour ... I ... planned to introduce a pre-school to cater for the under five so that this could solve the issue of baby-sitting.

She approached the farmers and they agreed. The school used to have 'hot sitting' i.e. double session a morning and an afternoon session, because there were not enough classes. When she left the school after three years, the school had built enough classrooms and there was no more 'hot sitting.' She left for a head grade one post at an urban larger school.

Shelly says regarding headship:

> It needs patience ... sometimes ... calm... I discovered that the role needs transparency and talking to people. The more people

understand what is going on, the more they become supportive. Since becoming head now I pray every day and God is with me and answers my prayers.

Shelly sees openness and frankness as important aspects that contribute to her progress as head. When Shelly makes proposals for projects, she involves teachers. She incorporates their ideas and learns from them. Teachers feel free to discuss personal problems:

Sometimes teachers come and close the door to discuss their personal problems. A mother comes in and sit down and tells me what exactly the problem she is encountering. Sometimes I feel that the respect I get is due to the motherly role that I offer... I do mentoring and counselling.

She feels she is someone who is caring, and able

to create an environment that is welcoming. I need to understand the people whom I work with ...to know how to handle their problems ... I also feel I am a role model there to serve the people.

6. The Way Women Lead

There is need to disseminate information on women role models' experiences, especially in the field of educational leadership. Enita, Linda and Shelley all worked hard as school principals to improve the situations within their schools. They adopted the role of the servant leader who makes great sacrifices for the good of the people one serves. By listening to people's problems and empathising with them, the women sacrificed their time which reflects the biblical concepts of sacrifice and of giving, for it is not only tangibles in the form of material and financial means that one can offer for the Lord. Informal counselling occurred in the process of listening thus fulfilling Paul's message to the Galatians "carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (6:2-3). They adopted an interactive approach to leadership which in turn opened up opportunities for colleagues to develop and become leaders. Paul encouraged Jesus' followers to lead by example and evangelise followers to preach the word thus embracing the principles of distributing leadership. This is what Enita, Linda and Shelley did. They were interested in serving people 'instead of being focused on controlling events and people, retaining power, the principal needs to share power.'[35] Allowing people to

[35]M. Crogan, and S. Roberson, "Developing a New Generation of Educational Leaders by Capitalising on Partnerships," *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 16. 7, 2002, 314.

participate in decision-making does enhance the smooth running of the school.[36] The women recognised that the school is a unit in which everyone is an expert in something, and as a member within the school community each person's contribution was valued. Servant leaders appreciate Paul's concept of 'one body, many parts'. Women find it easier to embrace servant leadership as it connects well with their everyday lived experiences. Most women live a life of service to their male counterparts and within the strictures of the family environment. Women are socialised to work hard, to be submissive and respectful and not to be in the driver's seat. It is therefore much easier for women to adopt and successfully negotiate their leadership roles as servant leaders. This particularly feminine quality proves to be a useful tool to women school heads.

The experiences of the women principals reflect a concern with shared decision making.[37] Some of the benefits of shared decision making include, (a) creation of a pool of knowledge, which meant that better decisions tended to be made because ideas came from different people with different experiences; (b) possession of different perspectives so that individuals with varied experience and interests help the group to see problems from different angles, and hence bring more alternative solutions; (c) greater understanding of the purpose behind decisions; (d) a sense of ownership and increased acceptance of decisions by the group. While servant leaders tend to share experiences with others and although it can be acknowledged that the concept can be applied even by male leaders, the issue of gender neutrality is quite contested especially in the field of educational leadership. Gender is a social construct, and the argument that Taylor's concept of scientific management and the trait theory privileged traits associated with males situates the males in a less comfortable zone as far as servant leadership is concerned. The notion of influence drives effective and successful leadership.[38] Thus although servant leadership is uniquely Christian, data show that its Biblical influence seems to have more positive impact on females than with males due to the structures and practices of organisational life. Although information sharing and the empathetic engagement with school

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[36]F. O. Walumbwa, C. Wu, and L. A. Ojode, "Gender and Instructional Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Leadership Style," *Journal of Management and Development*, 23. 2, 2004, 124-140.

[37]R. Kreitner, *Management*, 2nd ed., London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983.

[38]D. R. Ebener, and D. J. O'Connell, "How Might Servant Leadership Work?" *Management and Leadership*, 20. 3, 2010, 316.

community members led to the success story of Enita, Linda and Shelley, this was done in the framework of servant leadership. Servant leadership reflect and privilege the feminine attributes of caring and nurturing that for some are perceived as weakness, but for our women leaders this is what drives their success. The women did not separate themselves from those they led. Enita emphasised love, nurturance and playing the motherly role. Linda offers emotional support to teachers and pupils. Shelley listens with an empathetic ear and heart. Enita, Linda and Shelley adopt what Laible[39] calls a loving epistemology and an ethic of care in their life. A loving epistemology enables us to travel to other worlds. Travel implies both reaching out and connecting with others and also doing a self introspection of one's strengths and weaknesses. It is a way of coming to know one-self as well as others. Life is a journey in which we must reach out to others in order to come to a holistic and more informed understanding of others as well as oneself. Liable observes that "travelling to some one's world is a way of identifying with them because by travelling to their worlds we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes."[40] The idea of travel is well captured in the life of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels. Jesus travelling as he embraced and reached out to the marginalised and everybody. To some extend this is the story of the women discussed in this article.

The women principals cited above believed in dialogue to settle organisational issues and applied Paul's teachings to the Ephesians 4:26-27, that one should not hold on to anger and should not give the devil a chance in one's life. True love is seen by one's ability to embrace forgiveness. The women heads at some stage had been rejected and wronged by those in authority, they did not allow this to derail them from doing a good job in their schools. They were soldiers out to succeed in their schools. Not only did Enita, Linda and Shelley coach and mentor colleagues, they also inspired them. This is the hallmark of servant leadership. Listening and offering non-judgmental support are seen as key to successful servant leadership strategies. Mentoring can also be seen as

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[39] J. C. Laible, "A Loving Epistemology: What I Hold Critical in My Life, Faith and Profession," *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13. 6, 2000, 693-698.

[40] J. C. Laible, "A Loving Epistemology," 691.

counselling, as it gives room for a colleague to interact, thereby enabling him or her to see things from a positive perspective.[41]

7. Conclusion

The paper has shown a strong link between gender, religion and leadership. Successful and effective leadership in schools is linked to the adoption of servant leadership. When school leaders lead from behind as people's servants they are more likely to attain the organisational mission. Leadership also entails an element of service and sacrifice and strong commitment to the well being of others. Servant leadership as depicted by Enita, Linda and Shelley has a moral basis as it embraces an ethic of care and love. While it is clear that motherly love applied by women generated in them a strong sense of community partnership and caring, the notion of servant leadership if taken seriously and applied in schools would be successful irrespective of gender. The women principals discussed in this paper had a strong inclination to act as facilitators in their schools; they put a premium on relationships hence their emphasis on teamwork; they were prepared to learn and were open minded; they were less judgemental in their approach and had a strong spiritual orientation; and their leadership was underpinned by Christian values. It appears that the story of the three women school leaders discussed in this article confirm Cheung and Halpern[42] and Eagly and Carli's[43] observation that successful women leaders do lead differently from men. Successful women leaders embraced more democratic, participative, teamwork, relational and empathetic styles. It is also heartening to note that current thinking of leadership is shifting from rigid to flexible approaches and is beginning to embrace some aspects of gendered servant leadership.

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[41]K. Pocklington, and D. Weindling, "Promoting Reflection on Headship through the Mentoring Mirror," *Educational Management and Administration*. 24. 2. 1996, 175-191.

[42]F. M. Cheung, and D. F. Halpern, "Women at the Top: Powerful Leaders Define Success as Work + Family in a Culture of Gender," *American Psychologist*. 65. 3. 2010, 182-193.

[43]A. H. Eagly and L. L. Carli, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press. 2007.