

**WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT IN A BLACK
PENTECOSTAL CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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“I declare that the study titled “Women’s Leadership and Empowerment in a Black Pentecostal Church in South Africa”, is my work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have submitted the thesis to the originality detection system endorsed by Unisa and that it meets the accepted standards for originality.

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ABSTRACT

This practical theological study explores women's leadership and empowerment within African Pentecostal churches, specifically investigating Black Pentecostalism's stance on gender equity, women's empowerment, and the challenges posed by resistance to change. It also addresses the persistent marginalisation of women and the barriers to their ordination as pastors. Rooted in a reflective theory of practice, this research examines Christian praxis about human experience, aiming to articulate women's lived experiences and analyse the causes and implications of their non-ordination within South African Pentecostal churches. It also examines the evolving relationship between African Pentecostalism and gender, focusing on how contemporary Pentecostal movements engage with women's empowerment while raising awareness and promoting social justice activism to eliminate systemic prejudice and amplify women's voices. It employs a qualitative methodology, utilising a descriptive narrative case study approach with 24 senior pastors from the Assemblies of God Back to God (BTG) denomination across various provinces in South Africa. Though BTG serves as a case study, the research situates itself within the broader discourse on gender dynamics in African Pentecostalism. The study critically explores how Pentecostal theological frameworks, ecclesial structures, and socio-cultural contexts influence women's roles in leadership and agency. Thematic analysis is facilitated. Atlas.Ti software was applied to identify patterns in leadership perspectives, institutional practices, and theological justifications regarding women's ordination. Findings reveal significant tensions between progressive theological visions advocating gender inclusion and entrenched patriarchal interpretations that limit women's ministerial agency. While some Pentecostal leaders acknowledge the need for change, structural inefficiencies, rigid biblical hermeneutics, and prevailing cultural norms continue to obstruct meaningful transformation. The study suggests that meaningful change may require considerable time and effort, especially due to inefficiencies and leadership styles within African Pentecostal churches. By positioning gender as a critical lens for examining power dynamics in Pentecostal ecclesiology, this research contributes to the scholarly discourse on religion and social justice. It underscores the urgent need for sustained theological reflection and institutional reform to challenge systemic inequalities and foster inclusive leadership within African Pentecostal churches.

Keywords: African Pentecostalism; gender and ministry; women's ordination; patriarchal theology; biblical interpretation; marginalisation, ecclesial leadership; socio-cultural barriers.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my late mother, Patricia Makupula, who was a constant pillar of strength and support but passed before witnessing the completion of this endeavour. I also dedicate this study to my late brother, Nelson Skwatsha. Additionally, it is dedicated to all South African women in Pentecostal churches who courageously pursue success as ministers while confronting the injustices done by patriarchy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AOG	Assemblies of God
AOG-BTG / BTG	Assemblies of God - Back to God
AOGA	Assemblies of God Association
AOGG	Assemblies of God Group
AWT	African Women's Theology
CCAWT	The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
BTG EXCO	Back to God Executive Committee
HOK	Henley on Klip
NBTC	Nicholas Bhengu Theological College
P	Participants
RCC	Regional Council Committees
RO	Research Objective
TA	Thematic Analysis
TT	Teaching Team

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Research Title

Women's leadership and empowerment in a black Pentecostal Church in South Africa

1.2 Introduction

This practical theological study explores women's leadership and empowerment in African Pentecostal churches, focusing on Black Pentecostalism's approach to gender equity, women's empowerment, and the impact of resistance to change. Gender inequality is a global issue, and despite efforts like the United Nations' 2000 call for women's empowerment and gender equality (Norris & Inglehart, 2001), significant progress has yet to be made, particularly within religious contexts such as Pentecostalism. While global movements have advanced women's rights in various sectors, there has been limited focus on empowering women in the church, contributing to a slow pace of change. Gender inequality manifests differently across regions (Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015), and the church must address these issues to fulfil its mission effectively. In African contexts, cultural and religious factors intertwine to shape gender roles, often positioning women as subordinate to men in both society and the church (Oduyoye, 2001; Kanyoro, 2001).

Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on spiritual empowerment, has historically marginalised women in leadership roles, mirroring broader patriarchal cultural norms (Oduyoye, 1995). There is a growing call within the church for cultural transformation and theological revision to empower women and revise restrictive interpretations that limit their roles (Slater, 2016). This change is particularly important in Pentecostalism, which must adapt to new societal challenges and increase its members' capacity for empathy and experience (Noonan, 2020). However, resistance to change remains strong, with factions such as "deniers," "entitled," and "critics" opposing shifts in gender roles for ideological or personal reasons (Rainer, 2016). Despite these challenges, the need for change is undeniable, as the church must improve its practices to empower marginalised groups. Feminist movements have long advocated for women's inclusion in ministry, yet gender discrimination continues to hinder progress

(Sorokin, 2017). To foster genuine gender equality, new theological interpretations are crucial (Pali, 2016).

In the context of African Pentecostalism, Mogoane (2019) challenges cultural and theological norms by advocating for a theology that emphasises what God does for people, not just what they do for God. This shift encourages the church to evolve and ensure the full participation of both men and women in its mission. Discrimination within Pentecostal churches is evident in the restrictions placed on women's participation in leadership and ordination, which limits their ability to lead and contribute to the church's mission.

While female ordination has been embraced in many Protestant denominations, Pentecostal churches have largely resisted this change, perpetuating the marginalisation of women (Jacobs, 2022). Pastor Bhengu's vision for women is highlighted in this study and contrasted with "the Assemblies of God - Back to God (AOG-BTG / BTG)" (Jacobs, 2022) movement practice, which aims to maintain the status quo but falls short of achieving this goal. Women within the movement rarely challenge this, and few have achieved emancipation within this tradition. Situated within the African Pentecostal context, this study calls for further research into gender issues and the development of church communities that genuinely empower women.

1.3 Background to the Research Question

The primary theoretical framework in this study is the marginalisation of women in Pentecostal churches in Africa, which I introduce as a lens through which to examine the research problem. The focus is on "the Assemblies of God - Back to God (AOG-BTG" denomination / BTG) (Jacobs, 2022:3), a Pentecostal denomination within South Africa's black communities, established by Reverend Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu in the 1950s.

The Assemblies of God in South Africa is structured into three distinct branches, a division that Resane (2018:42) attributes to the enduring racial segregation shaped by the country's apartheid past, which continues to influence the church's socio-cultural framework. According to Resane (2018:42), the Assemblies of God Association (AOGA), encompassing Coloured and Indian churches, evolved from the Bethshan Gospel Mission, initiated by Norwegian missionary F.L. Hansen in the 1940s, and the ministry of Indian evangelist Stephen Govendor

in the 1950s. The Assemblies of God Group (AOGG) represents white churches, historically led by John Bond, while the Assemblies of God Movement (AOGM), also known as Back to God, emerged from Nicholas Bhengu's "Back to God Crusade" in 1950 and was officially formalised in 1990 to minister and bring the black communities across Southern Africa back to God.

This study looks at the difficulties that women in the BTG denomination confront, especially the fact that they are not allowed to be ordained or hold leadership roles. While global research has examined gender marginalisation in various Christian denominations, there is limited exploration of gender disparities within the South African context, especially within Pentecostalism, making this research particularly significant. More research is required to completely capture women's experiences in the African church, although a lot has been written about their participation, particularly through programs like The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) (Bongma, 2016: 293).

1.3.1 Gender Dynamics in Africa

The gender issue in Africa is not a recent development, yet its eradication remains a complex challenge. The patriarchal structures governing the home and the broader community have become deeply ingrained traditions and customs. Men are often raised in an environment that emphasises their superiority, and it has become normalized for them to command greater respect than others. In some cases, failing to adhere to these gender norms is perceived as a lack of respect for the husband, even if he is neglectful or irresponsible in his domestic duties. This cultural conditioning makes it difficult for men to understand the need for change, as they are reluctant to relinquish the privileges that have always been afforded to them. Furthermore, the demand for unquestioned respect and obedience from women, despite being undeserved, often causes emotional and psychological harm to those who are expected to submit.

The course of gender empowerment in Africa is greatly influenced by gender dynamics, especially in places of worship like the church. Women's primary aspiration is to be allowed to fulfil their calling and contribute to the church according to the spiritual gifts that they believe God has granted them (Alexander & Bowers, 2018:28). However, their progress is frequently obstructed by men, not due to opposition to their spiritual abilities, but because of a reluctance

to share leadership spaces with women. While women remain steadfast in their desire to use their gifts to advance the church's mission and promote social justice, they are often excluded from leadership roles, as these positions are predominantly reserved for men. Plaatjies Van Huffel (2011:7) argues that gender discrimination, coupled with deeply rooted societal values, legitimizes the unequal division of roles, thereby reinforcing the power imbalance between men and women.

1.3.2 Omission of Women in Church Leadership Positions

International Pentecostal churches have made strides toward embracing evolving perspectives on gender roles and sexuality, sometimes promoting new understandings of the roles of men and women in society. However, this shift has not been universally adopted, particularly in the African context, where women in Pentecostal churches continue to face significant discrimination and inequality. Many women perceive the church as an unsafe or unwelcoming space, where they are marginalised and excluded from key leadership roles (Mupangwa and Chirongoma, 2020:2). This sense of exclusion is deeply rooted in the historical and theological traditions of Christianity, especially the St Paul's epistles to Timothy (2:12) and the first letter to the Corinthians (14:34-35) where gender inequality has been entrenched for centuries and often results in women feeling undervalued and isolated within the church.

The marginalisation of women in churches occurs when they are excluded from decision-making processes and leadership roles, making them feel as if they have little value within the religious community. Gender inequality is not only a social and cultural issue but also has a religious dimension, rooted in traditional interpretations of religious texts (Musoni, 2020). These interpretations, often influenced by patriarchal systems over time, are frequently used to justify gender disparities

These systems have embedded cultural, theological, and societal biases that promote male dominance and limit women's opportunities for leadership, both in the church and in society. Patriarchal frameworks enforce rigid gender roles, often requiring men to conform to an ideal of dominant masculinity or to resist it (Kimmel and Coston, 2018:99) which can limit their freedom to engage with women as equals.

Despite the end of apartheid in South Africa and significant progress in racial equality, gender inequality continues to persist in religious contexts. Some men, even while expressing support for feminist ideals, continue to protect their privileges and resist dismantling male-dominated power structures (Pleasants, 2011). This reflects a broader societal issue where women, despite being actively involved in church participation, continue to be excluded from positions of authority and leadership. This exclusion further isolates them from the wider church community, reinforcing the belief that their contributions are less valuable than those of their male counterparts.

In response to this marginalisation, African feminist theologians established the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989, under the leadership of Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Mombo and Makena, 2024). The movement sought to confront the exclusion of African women from theological and religious practices, advocating for a more inclusive and life-affirming interpretation of scripture that would empower both women and men (Ayanga, 2016:1; Mombo and Makena, 2024:239-240). The Circle encourages African women theologians to reclaim their right to interpret the Bible from their own perspectives, challenging traditional, patriarchal interpretations that have long dominated religious discourse. A key aspect of this movement is the need to critically examine masculinity and the deeply ingrained beliefs about male superiority, which obscure the privileges that sustain gender inequality in both religious and societal contexts (Kimmel and Coston, 2018:99).

Religion, and specifically Pentecostalism, has historically shaped and reinforced gender dynamics, often reinforcing male dominance in both spiritual and social spheres (Attoh, 2017:159). Pentecostalism, despite its global reach and significant female membership, continues to be dominated by male leadership. Research has shown that women, despite outnumbering men in church participation, remain underrepresented in ordained leadership roles (Nadar, 2004:74). In many Pentecostal communities, leadership is still defined predominantly by men, reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics even within a religious movement that promotes democratic worship (Maskens, 2015:324-325). This contradiction reveals how deeply ingrained patriarchal gender ideologies are, even in churches that claim to offer spiritual equality.

Pentecostalism's influence on African communities, while often spiritually invigorating, tends to reinforce existing patriarchal norms (Kaunda, 2020). In these communities, the church,

which is supposed to be a space of spiritual empowerment, becomes another institution where male leadership is normalized, and women's leadership is marginalised. Feminist critiques of Pentecostalism point to the church's reinforcement of traditional gender roles, such as male leadership in the home and society (Soothill, 2015:191), as examples of how religious practices continue to support gender subordination. Cultural norms like monogamy and the domestication of women also contribute to maintaining these power structures, further undermining the rights and agency of women (Attoh, 2017:159).

While Pentecostalism has brought significant spiritual energy and community mobilisation to many African communities, it has also become entrenched in patriarchal leadership models (Sande, 2015:50). These models continue to limit the opportunities for women to rise to positions of influence, both within the church and in the broader society. As a result, African women continue to experience marginalisation in not just religious spaces but also in social and political spheres, where they are often excluded from leadership positions and decision-making processes (Musoni, 2013:78). Even though women may participate in worship in large numbers, their absence from leadership roles is a clear sign of the ongoing gender inequalities within the church (Jacobs, 2019:6).

Empowerment is key to challenging these deeply ingrained gender norms and ensuring that women's voices are heard and respected in both the church and the wider society. The continued marginalisation of women in church leadership positions represents a significant barrier to achieving gender equality within African Pentecostalism. Despite the progress that has been made in other areas, the church continues to hold onto patriarchal traditions that restrict the full participation of women in leadership. Empowering women in church leadership is not only a matter of fairness but is essential for the vitality and relevance of the church in modern society. Women's contributions should be valued, not only as members of the congregation but also as leaders who have the right to shape the theological and spiritual life of their communities. Until these leadership structures are reformed, the church will continue to limit its potential to fully embrace gender equality and women's empowerment.

1.4 Research Problem Statement

This practical theological study explores women's leadership and empowerment, focusing on Black Pentecostalism's approach to gender equity, women's empowerment, and the impact of resistance to change. It examines the marginalisation and disempowerment of women within this context, with a specific focus on the Assemblies of God Back to God (BTG) denomination in South Africa. While the church's founder, Reverend Bhengu, established a progressive vision that supported women's active involvement in ministry, the challenges women face in attaining leadership roles have been a persistent issue, even during his lifetime. This study argues that the exclusion of women from senior leadership positions in the BTG denomination is not a recent development, but rather an ongoing struggle that has deep historical roots, particularly in the tension between Bhengu's original vision and the church's patriarchal structures.

Reverend Bhengu's leadership and vision for the BTG denomination were groundbreaking in advocating for gender inclusivity. Under his guidance, women played a crucial role in evangelism, even though they were not formally ordained. Women were involved in significant activities such as fundraising and preaching in the Back to God Crusades, marking a radical departure from other Pentecostal churches of the time, where women were largely excluded from public ministry (Lephoko, 2008). However, despite these advances, Bhengu's support for women in ministry was limited in certain respects. Notably, while he encouraged women's participation in evangelism, he did not ordain them as pastors or allow them to hold formal leadership positions. However, some church leaders speculate that had Bhengu lived longer, he may have allowed women to assume influential positions within the church (Lephoko, 2008:124).

Even during Bhengu's lifetime, tensions surrounding women in leadership began to surface. While women played key roles in the church's growth, including evangelizing across South Africa and neighbouring countries, they were consistently excluded from top decision-making positions, highlighting the limitations of Bhengu's progressive stance. For example, despite Bhengu appointing a woman to the Back to God executive committee (BTG EXCO), her tenure was short-lived due to resistance from male leaders who questioned her qualifications based on her lack of ordination. This early resistance reveals that the barriers to women's leadership were already entrenched within the church's structures, even while Bhengu advocated for their involvement in ministry.

In contrast, many other Protestant denominations in South Africa and beyond have made significant strides toward gender inclusivity in leadership roles. According to Oosthuizen (1990), the Methodist Church and Anglican Church have historically ordained women, with historical examples like Susanna Wesley and Mavis Mbilini. However, the stagnation in the BTG denomination is a notable contrast to other denominations' broader trend towards women's ordination.

Eight decades after the founding of the Back to God movement, the ordination of women remains a contentious issue within the BTG denomination. Despite post-apartheid legal advancements promoting gender equality in South Africa, the church has consistently resisted ordaining women as pastors, confining them to roles within women's organisations. This exclusion continues to prevent women from attaining high-level leadership positions, limiting their authority and participation in shaping the church's future.

This study contends that the refusal to ordain women in the BTG denomination is not merely a modern issue but reflects a deep-seated, historical commitment to patriarchal structures that predated Bhengu's death and continues to persist today. These gendered practices are rooted in both cultural traditions and selective biblical interpretations, which reinforce male authority and marginalise women. This exclusionary practice not only limits women's spiritual empowerment but also perpetuates systemic inequities that hinder their potential and participation in church leadership.

Despite the ongoing challenges, many women within BTG denomination are beginning to question and resist the tradition of exclusion. The persistence of gender-based inequalities within the church raises a fundamental question: if Pentecostalism claims to challenge societal injustices, why does the church continue to perpetuate gender-based discrimination? This study seeks to explore these tensions, shedding light on the barriers preventing women from fully participating in leadership roles and decision-making within the BTG denomination while considering the broader implications of these dynamics within African Pentecostalism as a whole.

1.5 Main Research Question

How is Black Pentecostalism dealing with women's empowerment (particularly women's ordination), adapting to the modern era, as seen by the "Assemblies of God – Back to God (BTG) denomination" (Jacobs, 2019)?

1.6 Research Objectives

To address this overarching question of the study, the researcher focused on the following objectives:

1. To investigate the Back to God tradition, while establishing Reverend Bhengu's historical perspective on women's empowerment.
2. To understand the factors that lead to the exclusion of women's ordination in the development of the denomination.
3. To understand the implication of reluctance of the Pentecostal tradition to embrace gender change brought by modernity

The first object will establish if there is any inconsistency between the founding vision and the current constitution of the denomination because when the church was established more than 75 years ago it had the vision to include women, this discrepancy needs to be understood. It is important to understand the reasons for the lack of change. Traditional African culture and church (organisational) culture are two components to explore. Also, how the gospel was brought to traditional cultures and lived out impacted changes made in establishing a church as there is a dynamic relationship between the Christian message and culture or cultures.

Secondly, there could be various reasons for including women in church work yet excluding them from ordination. Some change is embraced, yet not a complete sign of empowerment. This raises questions as to what motivates change in the church, whether it is doctrinal or is it cultural, or scriptural, and whether the church should follow the traditional biblical conversations or the human rights constitution so that everyone can be included in church practice.

Thirdly, it is important to understand the consequences and implications of the change process on women's empowerment. Exploring the circumstances that prevent gender transformation is key, as the church positions itself for engagement with the community, it needs to be forward-thinking yet hold on to its biblical roots.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Kitchel and Ball (2014:190) describe the terms "theory" and "theoretical framework" as interchangeable, both referring to a complex argument or statement that seeks to explain or predict phenomena. The theoretical framework for this research is based on the marginalisation of women, using the work of Mercy Amba Oduyoye as a lens. Oduyoye's scholarship, particularly her exploration of gender, culture, and patriarchal structures, provides critical insights into the experiences of African women (Gathogo, 2010:16). This framework addresses the "what," "how," and "why" of women's marginalisation in Pentecostal churches, highlighting the intersection of culture, gender, and religion in the African context. Oduyoye's African women's theology examines how patriarchal structures, deeply entrenched in both culture and biblical interpretation, contribute to the continued marginalisation of women in contemporary church life (Oduyoye, 1995). While many scholars have explored gender issues globally, Oduyoye's work stands out for its focus on the communal, church, and organisational experiences of African women, highlighting the abuse and subjugation they endure within patriarchal systems (Gathogo in Jacobs, 2022).

Since the rise of feminism in the 1960s, gender has increasingly become a critical focus in the social sciences and humanities (Shapiro, 1981:446). Emerging in response to legal and social inequalities between the sexes, feminism advocates for gender equality and women's rights (Lorber, 2001:1). Despite these efforts, gender inequality remains deeply rooted in societies like South Africa, where men continue to hold disproportionate power, particularly within religious contexts. By designating female bishops and moderators, several Protestant denominations have achieved progress, including the Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian churches. However, Pentecostal churches have been slower to embrace gender equality, with most still excluding women from ordination and relegating them to lower-level positions, thereby limiting their participation in key decision-making roles.

The issue of women's ordination and inclusion in church leadership remains a contentious topic in many religious communities. This debate often provokes resistance, especially in traditionalist settings where established patriarchal norms are deeply ingrained (Osmer, 2016). As churches undergo periods of change, old leadership structures may become ineffective, yet new inclusive structures are not always fully realized. During this transitional phase, church leaders must adapt their behaviours to align with the inclusive leadership they aspire to promote. Failing to do so risks exposing contradictions within the church's teachings and practices, undermining the very values of equality and justice they claim to uphold.

Ultimately, the marginalisation of women in Pentecostal churches reflects broader societal gender dynamics, shaped by historical and cultural forces. By critically engaging with the works of scholars like Oduyoye, this research seeks to better understand the complex factors that sustain these inequalities and to explore pathways for greater inclusion and empowerment of women in church leadership. The challenge lies in overcoming entrenched patriarchal systems and creating spaces where women can fully participate in both religious and societal leadership roles.

1.8 Rationale for The Research

This study explored African Pentecostalism, with a particular focus on the challenges within its practice, especially the church's anti-intellectual stance and the limited research on gender. Mercy Amba Oduyoye's work is a crucial lens through which to see the theoretical framework for this study, which centres on the marginalisation of women. The significance of this study lies in the fact that, while there is considerable research on the marginalisation of women in other Christian traditions, such as Protestant denominations like Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and other mainline churches, there is a lack of studies specifically addressing Pentecostal churches in South Africa.

These issues are especially significant given the churches' deep ties to 'African traditions', as well as their reputation for rapid growth, innovation, and a strong emphasis on morality. Despite their importance, there remains a noticeable gap in research on this subject. Furthermore, these churches often exemplify patriarchal structures, as they are not integrated with other branches of the Assemblies of God and show strong resistance to change compared

to the broader Association and Group. However, it is worth noting that many of the leaders in these churches are pastors' wives and founders. While gender studies in Pentecostalism remain limited compared to other Christian traditions, there has been considerable growth in research on Pentecostalism itself.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study investigated women's leadership and empowerment, with a focus on the historical and structural barriers that have sustained gender inequality in African Pentecostal churches. The importance of this study lies in providing an example of how women are treated within an African Pentecostal denomination. In particular, it highlights the marginalisation of women in African Pentecostal churches, where they are often denied empowerment and excluded from ordination as pastors, preventing them from assuming positions of authority. This issue is illustrated in the case study of the “-BTG” (Jacobs, 2022), an African Pentecostal group. In addition to impeding women's empowerment, these obstacles hinder women's empowerment and have a detrimental impact on the church's vitality and growth.

Women's marginalisation reflects a broader issue where the church, rather than being a purely hierarchical institution, is a dynamic culture shaped by evolving beliefs and ideals. Church leaders and members interpret these components in response to changing social and cultural conditions, often reinforcing patriarchal norms that limit women's roles in spiritual and community development. The study highlights how outdated cultural practices continue to stifle women's empowerment, limiting the church's potential to engage meaningfully with its congregation and society.

The significance of this study is to serve as a vital example of the treatment of women in African Pentecostal denominations and how the church tradition responds and reflects broader trends within the African Pentecostal tradition. The study challenges the contradictions between the church's doctrinal affirmations of gender equality and its practical application.

1.10 Contribution to Practical Theology

The primary focus of this study was particularly on Black Pentecostalism's stance on gender equity and women's empowerment. It offers a significant contribution to the field of Practical Theology. Practical Theology is concerned with action and reflection, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and real-world applications, especially in religious communities. My theoretical contribution is the reflection I am making on African Pentecostalism. A key theoretical contribution of this study is the development towards a black Pentecostal feminist theological framework. While feminist theology has gained significant attention within various Christian traditions, the emergence of a black Pentecostal feminist theology is still in its formative stages. This work provides understanding and theories on how Black Pentecostalism, with its dynamic spiritual expressions, liberationist theology, and emphasis on the empowering role of the Holy Spirit—can become a site of gender empowerment, particularly for black women. It also challenges patriarchal structures and offers a new theological lens through which to reimagine women's roles in the Pentecostal church.

The study also contributes significantly to the ongoing conversation on the ordination of women within Pentecostalism. Despite the theological affirmation of gender equality, many Pentecostal communities, especially in African contexts, continue to restrict women's roles in church leadership. By reflecting on the intersection of gender, and spirituality, this study provides a unique perspective that champions women's ordination as a means of empowerment and justice. It calls for a shift in how Pentecostalism can embrace the full participation of women, affirming their leadership potential while fostering a more inclusive church culture that empowers Black women both theologically and spiritually.

1.11 Definition of Key Concepts

1.11.1 Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is a process through which women acquire the confidence and resources necessary to make choices, access opportunities, and exercise control over their lives (O'Brien & Whitmore, 1989). In Pentecostal churches, which uphold the belief in baptism with the Holy Spirit irrespective of gender, women also perceive this spiritual experience as a means of empowerment and a justification to participate in activities that have traditionally been

denied to them by societal norms. Consequently, women's empowerment serves to dismantle the barriers that sustain gender inequality, allowing individuals to assert their rights, challenge discriminatory norms, and engage in decision-making processes across various domains, such as education, employment, politics, and community life. This process provides women with a platform to voice concerns on issues that may otherwise be addressed in their absence, particularly those affecting the church or matters of personal importance. Furthermore, women's empowerment fosters collaboration between men and women in the collective effort to strengthen the church. The goal of women's empowerment is to transform power structures, ensuring equitable access to opportunities, resources, and recognition, while advancing social, economic, and political equality (Syed, 2010).

1.11.2 Ordination

Ordination is a solemn act of dedication and ministerial appointment (Marcy, 2007). As Marcy (2007:29) explains, ordination marks the initiation into ministry, while consecration refers to the formal appointment to a specific role within a particular church. It signifies that an individual has been chosen and set apart to fulfil a designated role or to serve more effectively within the community. During this sacred ritual, the ordained minister places their hands on the head of the candidate, praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit's gifts and the grace required to carry out the ministry. Along with a discourse or address detailing the roles and duties of the office, the event frequently consists of a public assessment of the candidate's preparedness (Britannica, 2017).

1.11.3 Pentecostalism

The essential tenet of Pentecostalism is the belief in the Holy Spirit's baptism (Sanders, 2017), after conversion. Pentecostals place greater emphasis on spirituality rather than intellectual knowledge, focusing on spiritual intimacy, the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, and the assurance found in being covered by the shed blood of Jesus (Meyer, 2020:243). Migwi (2016:10) highlights that Pentecost marked the first instance of individuals being baptised by the Holy Spirit. The roots of Pentecostalism can be traced back to Acts 2, where individuals were filled with the Holy Spirit. This also illustrates the inclusive nature of Pentecostalism, as the Holy Spirit's power was poured out on all people, regardless of gender. However, this study suggests that within certain Pentecostal churches, women are marginalised due to specific

interpretations of scriptures such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. This highlights the importance of this research.

1.11.4 African Pentecostalism

African Pentecostalism shares theological foundations with its Western counterpart, particularly the belief in a personal devil (Satan) and his demons (Nel, 2018:4). However, African Pentecostals, like many African Christians, have adapted the gospel to fit their cultural context, aligning it with indigenous values and practices. As Wariboko (2017) suggests, African Christians have "appropriated the gospel" to make Pentecostalism resonate with their lived experiences. This adaptation has been shaped by traditional African worldviews and spiritual practices, resulting in a version of Pentecostalism that is distinct from its Western origins. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between African Pentecostalism (as a localised expression of faith) and Pentecostalism in Africa (Nel, 2018:4).

1.11.5 Women's Leadership

Women's leadership refers to the ability and act of women to guide, influence, and manage others in various roles, organisations, or communities. It involves the use of skills, knowledge, and authority to inspire and lead, fostering change, development, and decision-making processes (Northouse, 2018:1). Leadership is influence, the ability by which an individual influences others to follow his or her lead to achieve a common goal (Sanders, 2017:16). Montgomery describes leadership as "the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence" (Sanders, 2017:16). To be considered a leader, one must have followers, and leadership is often defined as the ability to turn vision into reality (Kruse, 2013).

1.12 Introduction to Literature

The literature review will highlight significant patterns and approaches, areas of conflict and strife, and the gaps between relevant literature. It will offer perspective into the concepts of major themes that will form the basis of this study. The concepts that I will discuss in this study

are church, gender, cultural transformation, Pentecostalism, inculturation, and women's empowerment.

1.12.1 Church

There is often confusion surrounding the meaning of the term "church," with many people mistakenly believing it refers solely to a building or physical structure, rather than to the community it represents. The word "church" encompasses both a gathering of people and a place of refuge—a Holy space that offers protection and solace (Guardado, 2023). Theologically, the "church" is intended to be a sanctuary, a haven where individuals, particularly women who have been emotionally and physically wounded, can find healing and restoration. It is meant to be a place of comfort, where people can experience renewal in the presence of God. Yet, for many women, this is far from the reality. Instead of finding refuge, they often encounter an environment that exacerbates their pain. What should be a safe and nurturing space instead reinforces their feelings of worthlessness. Many women come to the church in a state of desperation, seeking a fresh start, believing they have entered a place of unconditional love and acceptance. However, they find that the same oppressive societal structures that marginalise them in the world are very much present within the church's walls.

As Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson (1956) point out, the church is the subjective realm of God's rule, where believers come together under the authority of Christ. The Greek term *ekklesia*, meaning "assembly" or "called-out ones," encapsulates the church as a gathered community of believers (Van Klinken, 2012:327). The church is composed of all people created in God's image (Gen. 1:26–27), and it serves as the temple where God's Spirit dwells. According to St. Paul, Jesus Christ is the head of the church, which is described as the body of Christ: "the fullness of him who fills all things in every way" (Eph. 1:22-23). The "body of Christ" is a central theological concept that signifies the profound relationship between Christ and his followers (John 3:16).

The church can be understood in both universal and local terms. The universal church consists of all believers who, through faith in Christ, become part of the body of Christ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Small, 2020). In contrast, the local church refers to specific assemblies of believers, as Apostle Paul mentions in his letters, such as in Galatians (1:1-2). Paul underscores that a believer's relationship with Christ cannot be separated from their connection with other Christians, highlighting the essential unity among believers. Jesus, as the head of the body,

plays a pivotal role in creation and redemption (Eph. 1:22-23). This underscores the need for unity and cooperation among all members of the congregation (Pali,2016).

However, the current state of Pentecostalism challenges this ideal of unity. While the church is supposed to be a united body (Kereszty, 2014:700), gender discrimination continues to hinder that unity within many Pentecostal communities.

The marginalisation and oppression of women, based on their gender, cause a significant rift. Christians' disunity is undoubtedly damage to the Church (Kereszty:707). But despite the church's call for unity, many Pentecostal churches exclude women from full participation, particularly in leadership roles and the use of spiritual gifts. Women are often not seen as qualified for ordination or for exercising their spiritual gifts, which diminishes the church's strength and collective mission. This lack of unity weakens the church's ability to face the challenges of society and to play its transformative role in the world (Kereszty, 2014:703).

The church's primary function should be to help transform society by upholding the dignity and equality of women, challenging the patriarchal structures that still dominate, and empowering women to fully engage in all aspects of life (Wood, 2019). Regrettably, the body of Christ, as seen in many Pentecostal churches, continues to suffer from division and conflict, mirroring the broader societal struggles for gender equality. It seems that the Pentecostal church has strayed from its foundational mission, and it may take significant time and effort to realign with its original purpose.

1.12.2 Gender

Gender refers to the social roles, behaviours, traits, activities, and opportunities associated with being male or female, shaped by cultural norms and power dynamics (Manandhar et al., 2018). While gender intersects with biological sex, it is distinct from it, as it is a social construct that evolves, influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors (Manandhar et al., 2018). The roles ascribed to men and women are often grounded in societal expectations, which perpetuate power imbalances. In this context, masculinity and femininity are cultural constructs that reflect societal values and norms, shaping self-expression, roles, and relationships (Connell, 2005). These identities are not static; they are dynamic and shaped by time, place, and culture.

Although gender distinctions are central to most societies, the concept of gender itself remains complex and continually evolving (Manandhar et al., 2018).

The term "gender" is highly politicised and often intertwined with power struggles between men and women. In many societies, including religious communities, traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched, with women often relegated to subordinate positions. For example, in many churches, women are primarily seen as supporters, echoing the roles they historically played in ancient shrines. These power dynamics, rooted in patriarchal thinking, continue to limit women's roles and opportunities (Mwaura, 2005). Patriarchal traditions, such as male inheritance of property and exclusive leadership roles, further entrench gender inequalities that disadvantage women across various spheres of life (Jayachandran, 2015).

However, it is important to recognise that both men and women are gendered beings. The problem the church has is that men and women are equally influenced by gender norms because their understanding of gender roles is taught to them. Individuals learn to talk, walk, and behave in ways that align with societal expectations of men and women, often through their parents or communities (Berkowitz et al., 2010:136).

Gender is a socialized experience, learned through interactions with family, social networks, and institutions, where individuals internalize norms and roles that define how to "do" gender (Berkowitz et al., 2010). This process is shaped by cultural, racial, and religious contexts, leading to diverse gender experiences and opportunities to challenge norms. Socialization begins in infancy and continues throughout life, with pre-adolescence and adolescence being particularly critical periods due to heightened sensitivity to social norms and peer influences (John et al., 2017). Gender, as a social construct, evolves, reflecting the dynamic nature of gender beliefs and schemas (Ryle, 2011). As Kimmel (2000) asserts, while men and women may differ biologically, they are not from different worlds instead, they complement each other and need each other to function effectively in society. Ultimately, men and women are more alike than they are different (Kimmel, 2000:xi).

The historical association of gender with restrictive roles, particularly within Pentecostal churches, has contributed to negative connotations surrounding the term, especially when linked to discrimination (Aïkhenval'd, 2016). In many Pentecostal communities, women are marginalised and excluded from leadership, despite their active presence in the congregation.

Church traditions, biblical interpretations, and educational standards have led to a leadership structure that fails to acknowledge the diminishing strength of the church, a situation that remains largely unchallenged by women.

Socialized to accept their subordinate status, many women internalize their roles as second-class believers, which perpetuates the normalization of their marginalisation. While some cultures encourage women to be assertive and competitive, others reinforce the notion that women are naturally passive and dependent (Kimmel, 2000:3). As a result, women in these contexts often encourage other women to accept submission to men, reinforcing the idea that women cannot lead within the church. However, as societal changes accelerate, more women are beginning to challenge these entrenched norms.

While women's material contributions are frequently acknowledged, their voices, leadership, and initiatives are often disregarded (Oduyoye, 1995:173). This marginalisation has led feminist scholarship to focus on social change within Christian communities, particularly in Africa, where churches often function as patriarchal institutions. The church's effective functioning relies on cooperation between men and women, addressing the issue of gender within the church. Thus, men must open up opportunities for women to become full partners in the mission of Christ, moving beyond traditional gender roles and contributing to a more inclusive and transformative faith community.

1.12.3 Culture

Culture encompasses the shared social behaviours, religious beliefs, moral standards, and symbols that a community or group collectively accepts (Eagleton, 2016:2). These cultural elements reflect the distinct ways in which people live, think, and interpret the world, and they can vary greatly depending on the cultural framework or common-sense prevailing in a given society (Eagleton, 2016:2). As a repository of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, and meanings, culture shapes not only individual lives but also societal structures. It influences laws, religion, temporal perspectives, social roles, worldviews, national identities, and even material realities (Eagleton, 2016:2). In essence, culture profoundly shapes how individuals and communities perceive and interact with the world, guiding their way of life (Dames, 2008:4).

Within the context of the Pentecostal church, there is a growing interest in fictional pseudoscientific claims, particularly those that seek to identify universal and unchangeable differences between women and men. These claims often serve as a justification for the entrenched gender inequality within the church (Kimmel, 2000:xi). The inclusion of culture in this study is crucial for advocating a contextual and functional approach to missional-practical theology—one that aims to transform Pentecostal culture. This transformation involves rethinking and reconstructing the foundational beliefs, practices, and operational modes within Pentecostal communities (Dames, 1998:166-193). Theology is deeply intertwined with the life of the church, and as such, the church must evolve, particularly in how it approaches the liberation and empowerment of women (Pali, 2016:5). Given the changing times, there is an urgent need for a reimagined theology—one that includes fresh interpretations of core theological concepts such as catholicity, adapting them to the contemporary context (Pali, 2016:5).

At the heart of culture are traditional belief systems, particularly the values embedded within them. These values serve as guiding principles that influence decision-making and shape how individuals and communities choose between different courses of action based on perceived benefits or drawbacks (Wachania & Ndengwah, 2017:426). Culture, therefore, functions as both a social and cognitive framework, categorizing and defining people into distinct groups. If we are to address gender inequality meaningfully, cultural change is essential. The relationship between gender inequality and societal development is often tied to broader economic and social processes (Jayachandran, 2015), yet many emerging nations still exhibit cultural traits that favour men, creating persistent biases that hinder gender equality (Jayachandran, 2015). As such, cultural meanings and practices are inextricably linked to material realities. Any meaningful effort to tackle gender inequality must take into account how these cultural and material forces intersect to perpetuate disparities.

1.12.4 Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism began with the advent of the missionaries in 1908. Pentecostalism is a product of the revival that broke out at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California in 1906 which spread quickly and made Africa one of the primary hubs for Pentecostal development, gaining power and re-establishing Christianity (Hackett, 2017:249). Pentecostalism can be described as a profound encounter with the Holy Spirit, as exemplified by the baptism of the Holy Spirit on

the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). Christianity was first introduced to South Africa in the 1600s (Clark, 2005:143), but Pentecostalism emerged much later, in the early 20th century, with the arrival of missionaries in 1908. Rooted in the revival that erupted at Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906, Pentecostalism rapidly spread across the globe, becoming one of the most significant movements in the history of modern Christianity. Africa, in particular, became a major centre for Pentecostal growth, playing a key role in the revitalisation of Christianity across the continent (Hackett, 2017:249). For Pentecostals, the early church, particularly the period between the original Pentecost and the first century, was seen as a time of faithfulness, but as generations passed, the church became increasingly unfaithful. Thus, the Pentecostals of the 20th century saw themselves as part of a contemporary restoration of the New Testament church, re-establishing the practices and spirit of early Christianity (Nel, 2018:20). Furthermore, the study of Pentecostalism has expanded into a significant academic field, exploring human societies, cultures, and their evolution, shedding light on the complex intersections of religion and culture (van Klinken, 2013:242).

The Assemblies of God, the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Full Gospel Church, the Elim church and many other Pentecostal churches were among the traditional Pentecostal denominations" that emerged in South Africa (Kgatle in Jacobs, 2022:44). These denominations share common theological principles, particularly the belief in the equality of all persons before God, asserting that every human being is created in God's image and, thus, is of equal worth (Alexander & Bowers, 2018:28). Pentecostal teaching places a heavy emphasis on the Holy Spirit's presence, which is believed to be active and inspiring all Christians to engage in church activities.

This includes dismantling barriers that prevent certain individuals, particularly women, from engaging in leadership roles or fully contributing to church activities (Migwi, 2016:10). However, in practice, the operations of many Pentecostal churches do not align with these egalitarian ideals. Despite the Pentecostal emphasis on personal empowerment and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, women within the church continue to face discrimination. Women are often excluded from leadership positions, and there is a marked lack of empowerment for women within many Pentecostal communities. This contradiction between the theological tenets of equality and the reality of women's marginalisation within church structures highlights a critical tension in Pentecostal practice.

It has been observed that Pentecostalism challenges African cultural norms that historically favour men and disrespect women, reinforcing a patriarchal structure that limits women's autonomy and power (Van Klinken, 2013:248). The authority of men within Pentecostal churches, much like in broader African societies, is often rooted in patriarchal cultural systems and a form of masculinity that is both exclusionary and discriminatory. Unfortunately, this cultural system often coexists with patriarchy, a social order that perpetuates misogyny by establishing male authority over both family and community, resulting in systemic vulnerability and discrimination against women (Jacobs, 2019).

This “patriarchal rule” justifies male dominance across various sectors of society, such as economic, religious, legal, and political domains, where male authority is deeply rooted and upheld. In the context of Pentecostalism, this patriarchal system often manifests itself in the unequal distribution of power, which diminishes the value of women and places them in subordinate roles. This results in the subjugation of women, who are expected to submit to the authority of men, particularly in leadership and decision-making processes within the church. The cultural and religious reinforcement of these power dynamics further exacerbates the marginalisation of women, limiting their potential to contribute meaningfully to the life and mission of the church.

1.12.5 Masculinity

Masculinity refers to the set of traits, behaviours, and societal expectations that are typically associated with men, influenced by cultural, social, and religious contexts (Medinger, 2000: xiii). Traditionally, masculinity has been seen as a singular concept, but masculinity studies challenge this view by emphasising the plurality of masculinities. This shift moves away from rigid, binary gender roles and acknowledges that masculinity is shaped by diverse cultural, historical, and social factors (van Klinken, 2011:123). This perspective challenges simplistic notions that position men as dominant and women as subordinate, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of gender.

In religious contexts, masculinity is often reinforced through societal structures like patriarchy, where men are seen as naturally suited for leadership roles. This is especially evident in conservative Christianity, which upholds hegemonic masculinity—the belief in men's inherent superiority and their right to authority in both the home and society (Van Klinken, 2011:111).

Religious teachings on masculinity often reflect and perpetuate these power dynamics, suggesting that men should embody leadership, protection, and provision, while women are relegated to supportive roles (Gerber, 2015). These beliefs not only shape social structures but also the theological understandings of gender, sustaining the idea that men are divinely appointed to lead.

Within Pentecostal communities, masculinity is central to theological and social structures, particularly concerning women's roles. Despite women's significant contributions to church life, they are often excluded from leadership positions, adhering to traditional gender roles that prioritize men as leaders and women as caregivers (Koopman, 2015:58). The complementarian view, which posits that men and women have distinct, complementary roles, reinforces this gender hierarchy, positioning women as submissive to male authority (Blacketer, 2021:189). This belief system limits women's participation in leadership and ministry, reflecting a broader societal tendency to marginalise women's voices and influence.

1.13 Research Methodology

This research investigates the state of religious praxis at the BTG denomination and describes fully and accurately as possible a particular field of experience (Osmer, 2004:150). Praxis is described as a deliberate and imaginative effort driven by thoughtful analysis that promotes both transformation and understanding. It is exemplified by practical theology which attempts to situate empirical research within a more comprehensive explanatory framework (Osmer, 2004:150) as an interpretive activity (Osmer, 2008:4). The subject of why women are not ordained in the BTG denomination is especially addressed by using this method to investigate the causes of these trends. In this case, I use the word ordain instead of empowerment because in my view, the ordination of women is the first step towards women's empowerment, since only ordained pastors are acknowledged to hold leadership positions. Hence, the equality issue can be argued constructively as part of ordination because these women have no aim of being tokens but need full empowerment so that Oduyoye's metaphor of the "one-winged bird" must not continue to resonate and that there can be balance and inclusion in entirety (Njoroge, 1997:79).

1.13.1 Research Paradigm

The first section of the chapter discusses the research paradigm guiding the study, with Alharasheh (in Jacobs, 2023:18) noting that a research paradigm is a set of assumptions about problems and the methods for investigating them. It covers the selection of topics, data collection and analysis techniques, research population, sampling strategies, sample size, instruments, and ethical considerations. There is also a discussion of issues like validity, reliability, triangulation, and study limitations.

The study's research design, which is essential for drawing conclusions and recommendations, is grounded in Saunders et al.'s (2019) "research onion" model. This model outlines six layers of decisions in developing research methodology: research philosophy, approach, strategy, methods, time horizon, and procedures. The first layer, research philosophy, deals with the foundational assumptions of the study, viewed through ontological (the nature of reality) and epistemological (the nature of knowledge) perspectives, determining whether reality is objective or subjective.

This study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, also known as the phenomenological approach which emphasises the importance of subjectivity in understanding human experiences. The primary goal of this approach is to gain insights into people's lived experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2008:28). Interpretive researchers view reality as subjective and context-dependent, shaped by individual perspectives. They argue that no universal truth exists, and that knowledge is not objective or independent of human thought and reasoning (Aliyu et al., 2014:82). This view has allowed me to explore and interpret the complexities of human experience in a more nuanced and flexible manner. The interpretive paradigm incorporates two key concepts: ontological and epistemological inquiry (Creswell, 2009).

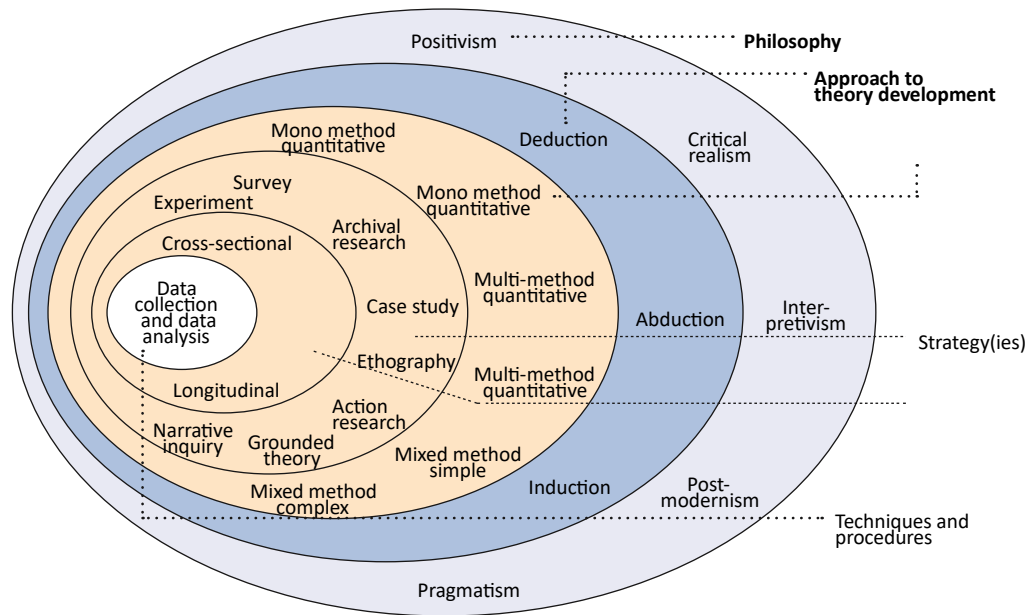


Figure 1.1. Saunders et al (2019)

1.13.1.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology concerns the nature of existence, exploring whether a phenomenon truly exists independently of our knowledge, perception, or assumptions (Symon & Cassell, 2012:75). In my ontological investigation, I sought to understand the reality of the BTG denomination, examining its structure and the nature of what is happening within it. This inquiry addressed the fundamental question, “What is real?” (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Ontology investigates the nature of social reality and existence (Sławecki, 2018:8, 10-11), and in this study, it guided the exploration of factors contributing to the marginalisation of women from leadership roles in the BTG denomination.

Epistemology, on the other hand, focuses on how knowledge is acquired and understood (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019:1; Sławecki, 2018:12). It emphasises the subjective process of data collection to explore the social constructs that influence women’s empowerment. Together, these ontological and epistemological inquiries form the foundation of my investigation into the dynamics of change and their impact on women’s empowerment.

From an interpretive perspective, knowledge is constructed through social processes such as language, shared meaning, tools, and records, all of which are shaped by the social contexts in

which they are created and reproduced through participants' activities (Wagner, Kawulich, & Garner, 2012).

This study adopts an interpretivist approach, which emphasises the subjective and cultural context of social phenomena (Al-Ababneh, 2020:80; Alharahsheh, 2020:41). As an interpretive researcher, I recognise that understanding the context is crucial, and I interpret the world through my own perspective (Aliyu et al., 2014:82). Consequently, hermeneutics was employed to interpret relevant biblical texts for this study.

The research adopts a relativist and subjective view of reality, acknowledging that multiple interpretations can coexist. It also recognises the inherent biases and subjectivity involved in the research process. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and qualitative analysis was used to interpret participants' experiences (Aliyu et al., 2014:82). The interpretive paradigm proved essential in this study, as it facilitated the discovery of reality through language and shared meanings, as expressed in the personal experiences of participants (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:41). Through this approach, socially constructed knowledge was developed.

1.13.2 The Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach to construct socially meaningful knowledge, focusing on gaining deep insights into the subject (Makombe in Jacobs, 2021:16). As outlined by Saunders et al. (2019), the qualitative approach aims to examine phenomena, identify patterns, and develop conceptual frameworks (Saunders et al., 2019:152). It emphasises understanding the lived realities of individuals or groups in specific contexts (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:43). Data collection predominantly involved interviews, a narrative-focused method suited to exploring participant experiences (Greeff, 2011:342). Qualitative research involves a systematic, inductive, and interpretive process. It aims to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and worldviews; while also understanding the meanings they assign to these experiences (Liu in Jacobs, 2022:16).

1.14 Practical Theology Methodology

Practical theology is a critical, reflective discipline that seeks to examine the world through a theological lens to promote faithful thinking and Christian practice (Swinton, 2019:5). This study is based on the field of practical theology. Osmer describes practical theology as a hermeneutically reflective and participatory process that interprets and engages with the practices of God and the church's mission in society (2008:4). Practical theology as a critical, reflective discipline that seeks to examine the world through a theological lens to promote faithful thinking and Christian practice (Swinton, 2019:5). Practical theology serves as a framework for understanding and engaging with the text and context, combining philosophy, epistemology, methodology, and analysis (Osanloo & Grant, 2016:12-13). This methodology provided the foundation for exploring the marginalisation and disempowerment of women in African Pentecostal churches in South Africa.

Osmer (2016:6-7) emphasises its goal to help individuals faithfully engage with both the divine and the world. Dames view it as an interaction between the Trinity and humans in both sacred and secular contexts (Dames (2017:4). As a result of its reflective nature, practical theology was well-suited to exploring women's lived experiences in the church (Pieterse, 2010:6). This method proved especially beneficial for investigating gender issues in Pentecostal churches and determining its impact on women's empowerment.

This study adopted Osmer's framework for practical theological interpretation, focusing on two key tasks: the descriptive-empirical task and the interpretive task (Osmer, 2008:4). The descriptive-empirical task sought to answer the question, "What is going on?" The researcher interviewed 24 men from the BTG to understand their lived experiences, reasons for excluding women from senior leadership roles, and the impact of this practice on women and the denomination at large. As Osmer asserts, it is through these interviews that patterns and dynamics in the church's gender-related activities are identified, providing insights into members' attitudes and the larger cultural background (2008:33).

"Why is it going on?" (why are women marginalised in Pentecostal churches) was the question that the interpretative task addressed (Osmer, 2008:4). This task involved analysing the identified patterns to understand their underlying causes. Drawing on practical theology and other theoretical frameworks, this task encouraged critical reflection and sought to reveal the

truth behind the church's gender dynamics (Osmer, 2016:10). Both tasks were guided by Osmer's concept of "sagely wisdom" which highlights the importance of being thoughtful, interpreting theories, and making wise decisions (Osmer, 2008:82).

Thoughtfulness involves being considerate of others, particularly how men treat women in this denomination. Theoretical interpretation acknowledges human imperfection and the limitations of knowledge, reminding individuals of their reliance on divine wisdom (Osmer, 2008:83-84). Wise judgment, in turn, includes discerning relevant details, ethical principles, and effective means of addressing challenges within the constraints of specific contexts (Osmer, 2008:83-84).

By studying the phenomena in their natural setting, this qualitative research illuminated the meanings participants attributed to the leadership's experiences, contributing to a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics within the BTG denomination. The study demonstrated the value of practical theology in addressing social issues and fostering reflection on ethical and spiritual dimensions of leadership and inclusion in faith communities.

1.15 Case Study Design

This study utilised a case study research design, which is a comprehensive approach that predominantly employs qualitative methods (Saunders et al., 2009:3). The "BTG" was selected as the case study for this practical theological research. The case study methodology was chosen to provide insights into the BTG leadership's perspectives on the marginalisation of women within the denomination (Saunders et al., 2009:4). Specifically, the researcher used this method to explore an identified issue that was substantiated through prior research. BTG is a Classical Pentecostal denomination with its roots in black communities in South Africa.

Using the case study methodology allowed for a greater understanding of the factors impacting women's marginalisation within this denomination. This particular denomination was chosen because, despite being an African Pentecostal church, it does not ordain women. The leadership of the church remains exclusively male, and there are no indications that the denomination will begin ordaining women soon. To gather relevant data on the subject, interviews were conducted

with 24 male leaders within the church to capture their views and to learn about the experiences of women regarding their marginalisation in the denomination.

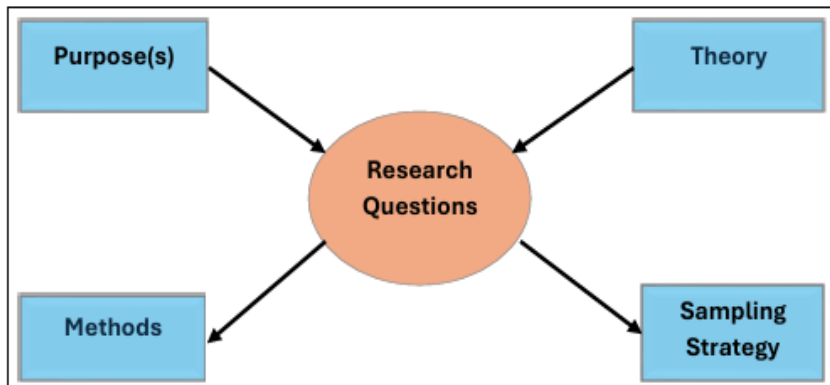


Figure 1.2. A Framework for Research Design (Robson, 2002:82).

1.16 The Sample

This study used a case study approach to explore the dynamics of women's marginalisation within the “BTG”, focusing specifically on Black communities in South Africa (Jacobs, 2019). The BTG, with approximately two million members, has a presence in every township and rural area across the country. A purposive sample of 24 participants was selected for the study, drawn from key leadership groups within the BTG denomination. My sample provides a comprehensive representation of the church and extends beyond being merely a case study. Women are not being interviewed in this study because I have already done a study on women’s voices in my masters' dissertation.

The “BTG operates under two main leadership committees: the Executive, which serves as the highest administrative body responsible for decision-making between conferences, and the Teaching Team, which oversees doctrinal matters and guides the broader church through their Apostolic office. This is a national sample as these committees are leaders for the entire country. Additionally, the Regional Council Committee represents the BTG denomination's top decision-making authority across all South African regions. All participants were engaged to address the main research question, which aimed to examine the dynamics of the change process and its impact on the empowerment of women within the church.

1.17 Data Collection Methods

The term 'data' refers to the raw materials collected by researchers from participants (Greeff, 2011:399). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, enabling broader conclusions, patterns, and theories to emerge inductively. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:28).

These interviews were designed to explore the complex nature of the topic and gather rich, personal data, providing a detailed understanding of the participants' perceptions (Baškarada, McKay, & McKenna, 2013:8). The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to respond in their own terms, offering them the freedom to expand on their thoughts and provide more nuanced insights (Jacobs, 2022:19). This flexible format not only enabled participants to express a broad range of views but also allowed both the researcher and the participants to explore emerging themes and interesting threads during the interviews (Baškarada, McKay, & McKenna, 2013:8).

To guide the process, an interview schedule was developed, containing a set of predetermined questions that served as a structured tool for engaging with participants (Greeff, 2011:352). Throughout the interviews, the researcher asked questions, actively listened, and took detailed process notes to capture the essence of the conversation and ensure that no important insights were missed. This method of data collection allowed for a dynamic and open exchange, fostering a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and views on the topic under investigation.

1.18 Data Analysis

During data analysis the researcher organised and structured data, trying to make sense of complex qualitative data to uncover meaningful insights (Swinton & Mowat, 2006:57). It involved transforming raw data into conceptualized knowledge by identifying key themes, patterns, and constructs through systematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021:1). Thematic analysis (TA) was employed as the primary method for analysing the data. This method was flexible and applicable to a wide range of research questions, and it made it suitable for analysing the data, reflecting the realities and experiences of the participants

The researcher conducted a six-stage thematic analysis, starting by thoroughly familiarising herself with the data through repeated readings of interview transcripts and field notes. Atlas.Ti, a computer-assisted qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), was used to identify meaningful patterns throughout the data pool (Jacobs 2022). Atlas.Ti facilitated data familiarisation, coding, and theme generation by organising the data and improving the efficiency and accuracy of the analysis. These themes were reviewed for accuracy, with some refined and merged and some discarded. After defining and naming the themes, a report synthesising the findings and providing an interpretation of the research question was extracted from Atlas.Ti.

1.19 Ethical Principles

Ethics serve as the foundation for guiding the behaviour and actions of researchers, assistants, and participants within a specific context (Strydom, 2011:114). The following principles informed the ethical approach in this study:

Participants' autonomy was prioritised through transparent communication of the study's purpose, processes, and expectations. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants were aware of their rights, including the freedom to withdraw partially or entirely at any stage (Strydom, 2011:116).

Participation was entirely voluntary, and no coercion was applied. This principle underscored the importance of empowering participants to make their own decisions about involvement in the study. The privacy and confidentiality of participants were safeguarded by securely managing data and anonymising personal information. All collected data were handled with strict confidentiality to protect participants' identities and sensitive details (Strydom, 2011:117). Ensuring the safety and well-being of participants was a priority. Steps were taken to create an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences without fear of harm or judgment.

The researcher maintained a commitment to transparency and trustworthiness by clearly outlining the study's objectives and ensuring that participants understood the implications of their involvement (Strydom, 2011:116). The research approach remained flexible and

responsive to participants' needs and changing circumstances, fostering a respectful and adaptive environment (Saunders, 2009:149).

Data management adhered to rigorous ethical standards, ensuring secure storage, long-term preservation, and protection against unauthorised access or misuse. The principles of rigour, reflexivity, and transparency guided the handling and analysis of qualitative data, including interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and audio recordings (Lin, 2009:133).

The research was underpinned by a commitment to diversity, reflexivity, and ethical integrity in all aspects of the study. This included ensuring that data were collected, preserved, and reported responsibly and in ways that respect the dignity of all participants.

1.19.1 Rigor

To ensure rigor, this study follows principles of credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability (Cypress, 2017:257; Lincoln & Guba in Jacobs, 2021:18). Strategies like triangulation, member checks, and an audit trail were employed to ensure objectivity and validity (Cypress, 2017:273). The researcher, a BTG denomination member with firsthand experience of gender discrimination, maintained professionalism and neutrality, focusing on participants' perspectives.

1.19.2 Credibility

Credibility was established through extended engagement, triangulation, and participant feedback, ensuring the findings accurately reflect participants' experiences (Shufutinsky, 2020:258).

1.19.3 Dependability

Consistency was achieved by using uniform interview guides and declaring any potential biases. While specific to the BTG denomination, methods can be applied to other Pentecostal contexts (Morse in Enworo, 2023:273).

1.19.4 Conformability

Data accuracy was ensured through triangulation and participant validation of transcripts (Enworo, 2023:374).

1.19.5 Transferability

Purposive sampling and detailed descriptions of participants ensured findings could be applied to similar contexts. Data saturation guaranteed a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Liamputtong in Enworo, 2023:374). This approach ensured a nuanced exploration of women's empowerment in the BTG denomination, providing robust and transferable insights.

1.20 Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:56). This role necessitates a high degree of reflexivity, which involves an ongoing process of self-reflection to acknowledge and address the influence of the researcher's perspectives, biases, and assumptions on the research process (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:57). Reflexivity also highlights the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the subject of the study, as Symon and Cassell (2012:73) point out, how the research environment both influences and is influenced by the researcher

For this study, reflexivity was crucial in helping me identify and navigate my own biases while making decisions throughout the research process. As a female researcher in Practical Theology, I approach knowledge subjectively, interpreting it through the lenses of context, gender, and sexuality. This perspective underscores the multiplicity of truths, acknowledging that individuals may see and experience the world differently. Such differences in interpretation, however, do not diminish the value or legitimacy of any one perspective.

Women's silencing in African Pentecostal congregations—brought its own challenges. Women in such spaces often experience marginalisation, which Patricia Hill Collins describes as a form of epistemic violence (Naidoo, 2023:3). Historically, women's knowledge has frequently been dismissed as inferior or substandard in gender-related literature. Within the BTG, I experienced

this form of epistemic injustice during the research process. As a woman conducting interviews, I often felt intimidated and struggled with feelings of inadequacy. This sense of marginalisation not only challenged my authority as a researcher but also made it difficult to engage with participants freely.

Despite these challenges, I remained committed to addressing these dynamics with sensitivity and integrity. Reflexivity allowed me to critically examine how my positionality shaped the research, ensuring that the voices of marginalised women were centred and treated with dignity. While conducting this study, I was acutely aware of the systemic barriers that continue to silence women in religious spaces, further underscoring this work's importance.

1.21 Chapters' Outline

1.21.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter examines the marginalisation and disempowerment of women within Black Pentecostalism, with a particular focus on the Assemblies of God - Back to God (BTG) denomination in South Africa. It highlights the research problem, which centres on the marginalisation of women in Pentecostal churches.

1.21.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review engaged with existing research and scholarship, contributing to the ongoing academic conversation by addressing gaps and expanding upon previous studies.

1.21.3 Chapter 3: Fieldwork

This chapter explored the fieldwork and key themes within a descriptive-interpretive framework, employing a case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the change process regarding female ordination in the Pentecostal church. It outlines the research design and methodology, sampling strategy, data collection techniques, measurement instruments, data analysis approach, and the study's limitations.

1.21.4 Chapter 4: Summary and Discussion

This chapter provided a discussion of the practical investigation, connecting the key findings to the existing literature. The relationship between the research's primary topics, findings, data processing, and final data interpretations was also examined.

1.21.5 Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presented a summary of the conclusions and recommendations regarding the stance of Black Pentecostalism on gender equity and women's empowerment and also addressed the limitations of the research. It also proposed new theoretical insights and suggested areas for further exploration in the field.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature review, which is a systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, assessing, and synthesizing the body of work produced by academics, practitioners, and researchers (Fink, 2019:6). My literature review will be organised into three main themes: first, the relationship between the church and women; second, African Pentecostalism; and third, gender discourse. The primary aim of this literature review is to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the field's development. This will be achieved by documenting, defining, summarising, critically evaluating, and clarifying the previous scholarly work in the area (Ridley, 2012:1).

1. The first discussion investigates the relationship between the church and women, addressing issues such as the abuse of power, the role of industrialisation in shaping gender roles, and the evolving presence of women in Christian ministry. By analysing legitimate, informational, and coercive power within church leadership, this section traces the progress, contributions, and challenges faced by women across various Christian traditions. It also considers the corporate world as an example of cultural transformation, illustrating how shifts in societal structures have influenced gender dynamics within the church.
2. The second discussion shifts focus to African Pentecostalism, examining Pentecostal hermeneutics and exegesis, the Africanization of the gospel, cultural transformation, and the experiences of Pentecostal women in ministry and leadership. This section unpacks how African Pentecostal hermeneutics and gospel inculturation have shaped gender roles, influencing to the marginalisation of women within African Pentecostal churches. It further explores how these dynamics are reflected in the case study of this research.
3. The third discussion critically engages with gender discourse within Pentecostalism, addressing the role of gender in shaping social structures, the church's involvement in

gender-based violence, and pathways toward a more inclusive church and society. This is the key focus of my dissertation. This section explores social injustice, the role of feminists in cultural transformation, and women's empowerment while interrogating concepts of manhood and the contributions of African Women's Theology. It highlights how gendered social hierarchies have perpetuated inequality and examines the deep interconnections between gender-based violence and systemic power imbalances. These are the critical issues in this section and this study.

For the church to play a transformative role in addressing gender-based violence and fostering gender equality, it must first dismantle the patriarchal structures embedded within its institutions. Critical practical theologians and feminist scholars highlight the role of power dynamics in social justice, particularly in challenging male-dominated institutions that perpetuate women's subordination. African Women's Theology emerged in response to the gender blindness within African theology, amplifying women's perspectives and lived experiences. By engaging with scholarship on women's leadership and empowerment in African Pentecostal churches, this literature review provides a nuanced analysis of the historical and contemporary forces shaping gender roles. It situates these discussions within the broader context of Black Pentecostalism's struggles for gender equity, resistance to change, and social justice.

2.2. The Church and Women

The concept of the church, derived from the Greek word "ekklesia" meaning "assembly" or "called-out ones" (Van Klinken; Jacobs, 2022), initially referred to public gatherings of Jewish citizens in the Classical era (Britannica Editors, 2019). In the Septuagint, the term often denoted religious gatherings for public worship, particularly in the context of accepting the Law (Ryan, 2019). Over time, "church" has come to represent not only a physical building but also a Christian community—the assembly of believers (Matt 16:18; Acts 5:11). Early Christian gatherings emphasised teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking of bread (Acts 2:42), often occurring in private homes (Rom 16:5). The concept of the church is centred on a people called by the Spirit to actively witness Christ's message (Peterson, 2012).

Historically, women in the early church held leadership roles, though not on equal footing with men; however, the feudal system's rigid hierarchies evolved into monarchies that entrenched gender discrimination, which, in turn, influenced church governance. As church structures became more hierarchical, women were increasingly excluded from leadership roles, especially during the medieval period (Hunt & Sherman, 2017).

However, the second half of the 20th century marked a shift in ecclesiology, as theologians began to focus more on the church as a whole, emphasising not just pastoral roles but broader functions like church management, pastoral care, and mission (Wepener, 2017:137). This vision contrasts with the early Christian communities, rejecting societal gender and status norms in favour of an egalitarian vision rooted in the baptised community (Gal 3:28). This vision of equality calls for a theology of mutual respect and empowerment, especially for women (Novenson, 2018).

The church is often referred to as the "Body of Christ," symbolising the interconnectedness of believers. In this framework, Paul teaches that Christ is the head of the church, and believers, as its members, must cooperate and edify one another (Eph 1:22-23; 1 Cor 12:26). As Dingemans (1996) asserts, the Holy Spirit empowers all members to serve the body of Christ. For the church to thrive, all members, regardless of gender, must contribute their spiritual gifts to its mission.

Despite this, discrimination against women in many churches, often rooted in dogma and tradition, hinders the full participation of all members (Jacobs, 2021). The global church still faces significant challenges related to gender equality, though some denominations, like the Methodist Church in South Africa, have made significant strides in ordaining women and empowering them in leadership. In contrast, Pentecostal denominations, including the Back to God church, remain resistant to women's leadership roles, excluding women from ordination despite their active participation in missionary work (Jacobs, 2021).

While the church's mission, rooted in the Great Commission (Matt 28), emphasises relationships, community, and evangelism, it often struggles to address contemporary social issues such as gender inequality. The example of the sons of Issachar (1 Chr 12:32) calls for the church to discern the times and act accordingly, particularly in addressing structural issues

of male dominance and power. As Wood (2019) notes, the church must strive to restore the dignity of women and promote equality. To move forward, the church must engage in cooperation and dialogue, ensuring that all members can contribute fully to the body of Christ.

2.2.1 Abuse of Power

The abuse of power is a central theme in this study, particularly in the context of legitimate, informational, and coercive power within church leadership. The Greek word *exousia*, often translated as "authority," plays a significant role in understanding Christian authority (Carter, 2009:187). Christian authority is viewed as a divine stewardship entrusted by God, which must be exercised in alignment with His will (Gen 1:26-28). Jesus affirms this authority in Matt 28:18, where He declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This establishes that power and authority are divinely appointed, and those in positions of power must exercise it following God's will (Surtz, 2016).

In both societal and church leadership, power and authority are closely intertwined. Leadership, as Carter (2009:186) suggests, often involves the exercise of power, which is rooted in human nature and behaviour. However, Christians may be uncomfortable with the notion of leadership as power because it contrasts with the divine power that they believe is granted by God.

Deacon and Parsitau (2017:12) observe that while Pentecostalism often empowers women to defend themselves, it does little to challenge the gendered hierarchies within which they operate. This creates a leadership vacuum in which women are excluded from decision-making processes, thereby reinforcing the unchecked authority of male leaders. Abraham Lincoln's famous assertion, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power" (Carter, 2009:186), highlights the negative impact of unchecked power on marginalised groups, particularly women, who are excluded from influencing decisions that affect their lives.

This power imbalance is sustained by deeply rooted hierarchies, where financial interests often take precedence over the principles of vocational integrity (Alexander and Bowers, 2018:75). The unequal distribution of opportunities and resources results from social structures that favour those already in power, leading to exclusionary practices that grant privileges to certain groups while marginalising others (Deacon and Parsitau, 2017:11). In their efforts to

consolidate authority, churches often establish rigid hierarchies, but these structures can become counterproductive, limiting their effectiveness and overall growth (Purpura, 2021). Carter (2009:186) contends that the misuse of power, especially against women, reflects a lack of justice and echoes Lord Acton's warning: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

This power imbalance is further perpetuated by entrenched gender norms, which are deeply institutionalized and continue to shape who holds leadership roles, whose contributions are valued, and whose needs are prioritized (Heise et al., 2019:2441). These norms sustain power hierarchies that divide people by gender, reinforcing discriminatory systems. Deacon and Parsitau (2017:10) highlight that African culture and religion have historically been hierarchical, reinforcing gender stereotypes that place women in domestic or caregiving roles, thus perpetuating gender inequality. In churches, these entrenched gender roles not only harm women but also hinder the development of the church as a whole, since these power dynamics are influenced by interpretations of biblical texts and denominational doctrines (Jacobs, 2021).

The abuse of power, particularly concerning gender, is corrosive and toxic, even though power is deemed necessary for effective leadership (Kessler, 2010:527). Despite their significant presence and apparent contentment in Pentecostal churches, women often endure oppressive roles imposed by male dominance and control. This disparity has prompted researchers to question what benefits Pentecostal affiliation offers women, given its seemingly patriarchal and restrictive ideology (Maskens, 2015:325). French and Raven's Taxonomy of Power offers a clear framework for understanding the types of power employed by those in positions of authority.

French and Raven's Taxonomy of Power (including Raven's later revision)	
Type of Power Description	Description
Coercive	The power to force someone to comply against their will. The follower complies to avoid threats or punishments by the leader.
Reward	The power to dispense rewards for the follower's compliance. The follower complies in exchange for the rewards offered by the leader.
Legitimate	The power that comes from the formal authority of a leader related to his/her role or position. The follower complies because the leader has the right to make the request. The follower views it as his/her responsibility to comply.
Expert	The power comes from the specialized knowledge and ability of the leader and the desire of followers to benefit from this. The follower complies because he/she believes the leader knows best.
Referent	The power comes from the attractiveness of the leader and the follower's desire to be like the leader. The follower complies because he/she wants the leader's approval.
Informational	The power that comes either from the leader's control of the sources of information or from persuasive communication used to influence followers

Table. 2.1. French and Raven's Taxonomy of Power (Including Raven's later version)

However, Christian leaders must learn to wield authority responsibly, recognizing that when misused, power can cause significant harm. As Von Stiegel (in Branson and Martinez, 2023:107) argues, leaders must remain grounded in their communities' needs and perspectives to avoid detachment and the negative consequences of unchecked power

2.2.2 Corporate World as an Example of Cultural Transformation

Industrialisation has played a significant role in expanding women's access to paid employment and reducing fertility rates, as women were historically associated with childbearing and often relegated to religious functions (Kretzschmar, 2001:45). The post-industrial era, however, brought a cultural shift toward greater gender equality, with women advancing economically and gaining increased political influence. Despite this progress, such cultural changes have not yet been fully realized in many parts of the world, and even some leading industrial companies are still working toward implementing gender equality strategies.

In Christian churches, particularly Pentecostal congregations, these shifts are even more challenging due to the traditionally conservative views on women in leadership roles. While there has been some progress, especially in South Africa after the 1994 political transformation,

women still face barriers in attaining leadership positions within both the church and wider society. The South African constitution enshrines equality, but women still encounter significant obstacles, especially in terms of political representation and influence, despite growing educational opportunities and rights (Norris & Inglehart, 2001:126).

2.2.3 Women in Christian Ministry

This section explores the evolving role of women in Christian ministry, tracing the progress, contributions, and challenges they face within various Christian denominations. Though this is still a major problem, particularly in Pentecostal contexts, churches like the Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational have long made great progress in empowering women and ordaining them as ministers of the Word (Jacobs, 2022:35).

2.2.3.1 Ordination

Ordination signifies a church worker's full inclusion in ministry, and ordained women are recognised as such. However, the ordination of women, particularly in Pentecostal churches, remains a central issue in this study. Macy (2007:7) points to the ancient Greek rituals where deaconesses were ordained using rites similar to those for male deacons, signifying that the concept of women's ordination is not new but has faced historical resistance. This historical precedent demonstrates that women's ordination is not a novel concept but one that has encountered considerable opposition over time.

2.2.3.2 The Global Recognition of Women in Ministry

Globally, the ordination of women has become more widely accepted, particularly within mainline denominations. Many Protestant churches, like the United Methodist Church, have made significant strides in allowing women into ordained roles. However, ideological and institutional resistance continues to impede further progress (Van Klinken, 2013:253). As Professor Bassett (1993:12) notes, ordination is not a right but a discernment of gifts and calling. Fiedler (2016:57) further argues that women's leadership will not differ significantly from men's and should not be a reason for denial of the opportunity to serve.

Christian denominations across the globe have progressively acknowledged the role of women in ministry. For example, the Church of the Nazarene has ordained women since 1908, and currently, a fourth of the pastors in the church are women (Sanchez in Jacobs 2022:37). Similarly, the Methodist Church officially permitted women to become clergy members in 1956. Early female leaders such as Susanna Wesley, Sarah Crosby, and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher were key figures, following a long struggle (Troxell, 1999:124). Similarly, the Anglican Church began ordaining women in 1917, with Constance Coltman and saw further advancements in the 1960s and 1970s (Holmes & Min, 1987:1). The Lutheran Church followed suit, with its first female ordinations taking place in the late 1960s (Lutheran World Federation, 2016:12). These milestones reflect the global movement toward gender equality in Christian leadership

2.2.3.3 Women's Ordination in Africa

In Africa, Christianity is marked by a diversity of denominations, and the ordination of women has faced significant cultural and theological barriers. Despite women being the majority in many churches, they continue to play a subservient position in these churches. While they make up the majority of the church membership, their needs and presence are still not completely acknowledged (Mombo, 2019:21). Women have long been relegated to subordinate positions, often remaining silent in the pews while men were entrusted with leadership roles. As Hendriks et al. (2012) note, although women outnumber men in church attendance, they have been overlooked in leadership positions. Nevertheless, women have been the driving force in maintaining church activities and sustaining the faith.

Despite these historical challenges, significant progress has been made in several African countries, including Kenya, Zambia, and Ethiopia, where women have been ordained as deacons, priests, and pastors (Mombo, 2019:198; Gathogo, 2019:5). For instance, the Anglican Church in Kenya began ordaining women in 1983, with Lucia Okuthe becoming the first female priest. In 2021, Rev. Emily Onyango made history as the first female bishop in the Anglican Church of Kenya (Masai, 2021). Similarly, other African regions such as Burundi and Rwanda have seen progress in female ordination, although the pace has varied across the continent. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa ordained its first female minister, Rev. Nyambura Njoroge, in 1980 (Gathogo, 2019:5), and the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia followed suit by ordaining its first female pastor, Dr. Bekure Dhaba, in 2000 (Lutheran World Federation,

2016:9). However, challenges persist, particularly in regions like Nigeria, where women continue to face significant resistance to ordination (Mombo, 2019:216).

2.2.3.4 Ordination of Women in Southern Africa

In Southern Africa, mainstream Christian denominations have progressively embraced the ordination of women, while Pentecostal churches remain more conservative. Despite initial resistance, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the Anglican Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Jacobs 2022:41) have paved the way for women's leadership in ministry, including full ordination and sacramental roles. Jacobs claims that:

The ordination of women in Southern Africa has progressed over time, albeit with resistance in some denominations. Peggy Hiscock became the first female pastor in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) when she was ordained by the Methodist Church in 1968. It was in 1890 when the first known female deacon was ordained in South Africa, though full ministerial ordination was delayed. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) ordained its first female minister, Rev. Ziphozihle Siwa, in 1976, and later elected Rev. Purity Malinga as its first female presiding bishop in 2019. Other Protestant churches followed after. However, some Anglican provinces, such as the Church of the Province of Central Africa, still do not ordain women (Mombo, 2019:213). While Botswana's religious landscape appears theoretically open to female ordination, challenges persist.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Women in mainline churches still face significant obstacles in their leadership roles, and their progress in the ministry continues to be hindered by cultural and theological resistance. The focus shifts to Pentecostal churches, where these challenges are even more pronounced.

2.3 African Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism, a Christian movement that originated in early 20th-century America, has grown rapidly across the globe (Anderson, 2014). However, despite its expansion, it continues to grapple with issues of gender discrimination rooted in patriarchal traditions. Leadership roles within Pentecostalism are predominantly reserved for men, marginalising women despite their substantial contributions (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). While emotional Protestantism, associated with spontaneity and emotional expression, is often linked to feminine religiosity, women in

Pentecostal churches experience triple marginalisation: exclusion from leadership, academic discourse, and feminist studies (Maskens, 2015).

Feminist and gender studies have significantly contributed to uncovering women's resistance to patriarchal norms, particularly through the concept of agency as documented in socio-anthropological research. Walter Hollenweger, a pioneer in Pentecostal studies, identified three primary categories within Pentecostalism: Classical Pentecostals, the charismatic renewal movement, and Pentecost-like independent churches (Anderson, 2014). In Africa, Pentecostalism is deeply influenced by local traditions and cultural norms, often blending church practices with cultural beliefs that perpetuate the marginalisation of women. Scholars have noted the persistent gender inequalities within African Pentecostalism, shaped by this cultural contextualization (Kalu, 1978).

Global feminist movements and theological advancements have prompted some Pentecostal denominations to ordain women and recognise female leadership (Alexander, 2009). However, progress remains uneven, constrained by cultural and doctrinal factors (Martin, 2002). Pentecostal interpretations of scripture, heavily influenced by local cultural contexts, often uphold traditional values that reinforce patriarchal structures. Although Pentecostalism distinguishes itself from African traditional religions, the integration of cultural values sometimes contradicts its egalitarian gospel principles. This results in gender inequalities reflected in church leadership, where women are excluded from decision-making roles despite their active participation (Sande, 2015:50).

In many patriarchal African societies, women are systematically denied equal rights, a reality mirrored within religious organisations. Empowerment is seen as a pathway to restoring dignity and enabling women to navigate societal challenges (Musoni, 2013:78). Social stereotypes and cultural traditions often perpetuate gendered divisions. For instance, in communities where male initiation rites are practiced, women are typically excluded from these spaces of knowledge, reinforcing their subordination. This separation of roles and expectations further entrenches harmful practices and inequalities.

Pentecostalism in South Africa emerged in 1908 alongside the broader spread of Christianity in the region (Clark, 2005:143). Rooted in the narrative of Acts 2:1-13, Pentecostalism emphasises a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit, particularly through the "baptism in the

Holy Spirit" and the practice of speaking in tongues (Jacobs, 2022:15). Following the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, Pentecostalism rapidly spread across Africa, revitalizing Christianity in many regions (Hackett, 2017:249). However, while African Pentecostalism continues to flourish, it often prioritizes global Christian teachings over localized expressions of faith, which can limit its contextual relevance (Kroesbergen, 2019:248).

A core Pentecostal doctrine is the baptism in the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues and the use of spiritual gifts (Biri, 2020:37). This doctrine is viewed as an empowering force for all believers, breaking down barriers, including those of gender, and encouraging active participation in the church. Nadar (2009:360) argues that a more inclusive theology of the Holy Spirit could significantly improve the status of women within the church by affirming the full humanity of both women and men. Such an approach would promote interpretations of scripture that empower rather than oppress, affirming the complementarity of physical and spiritual realms.

However, the patriarchal norms upheld within Pentecostalism often contradict this theological potential, restricting women's opportunities to fully serve in leadership roles. As Jacobs (2019) notes, Pentecostal theology frequently relies on literal interpretations of scripture that reinforce hierarchical structures and hinder women's advancement in the church. Passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 have historically been used to justify the exclusion of women from preaching, teaching, and leadership, often without considering the cultural and historical contexts of these texts (Archer, in Vondey, 2020:36).

This reliance on literal scriptural interpretation has marginalised women, perpetuating systemic gender inequality. Despite biblical affirmations of the equal dignity of men and women, Pentecostal churches often perpetuate practices that undermine this principle. As a result, the church's ability to address pressing issues such as gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide is compromised. Wachania and Ndengwah (2017) argue that patriarchal cultural beliefs within these churches obstruct progress and limit women's empowerment. Instead of providing a sanctuary for the marginalised, Pentecostalism sometimes reinforces the oppressive systems it should challenge.

2.3.1 Pentecostal Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Hermeneutics—the study of interpretation—and exegesis—the critical interpretation of texts—are central to understanding biblical teachings and their application to contemporary life (Emmett, 2003:523; Stolze, 2012:31). In Pentecostal churches, there is an emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal divine truths. This often leads to a de-emphasis on formal hermeneutical methods. While Pentecostals regard the Bible as divinely inspired and authoritative, their literalist approach to scripture frequently reinforces traditional gender roles and excludes women from leadership and decision-making within the church.

Literal interpretations of passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12 (“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet”) and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (“Women should remain silent in the churches...”) have been used to justify the exclusion of women from leadership roles (Frahm-Arp, 2015:2; Wood, 2019:5). These interpretations often overlook the cultural and historical contexts of the texts, which are critical for sound biblical exegesis (Archer, in Vondey, 2020:36).

Despite the egalitarian principles of the gospel, Pentecostal theology often perpetuates patriarchal norms, undermining women’s full participation in church life. This perpetuation of systemic gender inequality reflects broader societal patriarchal structures. As a result, Pentecostal churches risk failing in their role as agents of healing, transformation, and justice. Wachania and Ndengwah (2017) argue that traditional cultural beliefs, including patriarchal gender norms, hinder progress and empowerment within Pentecostal communities.

This study calls for a transformative shift within African Pentecostalism, urging congregations to adopt a proactive stance on gender justice, accountability, and women’s empowerment. Women’s contributions have historically been excluded from church narratives, perpetuating gendered marginalisation. Empowerment, in this context, involves enhancing the spiritual, social, political, and economic agency of individuals and communities (Musoni, 2013:78). By addressing entrenched patriarchal norms, Pentecostalism in Africa has the potential to be a transformative force for societal change.

2.3.1.1 Example of Restrictive Scriptural Interpretation

In Pentecostal circles, scriptures like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 have long been interpreted as "texts of terror" that confine women to subordinate roles. The verses, which call for women to remain silent in church, are often used to restrict their involvement in leadership. Resane (2024:1) points out that this kind of selective Bible reading creates a gap in interpretation, making it hard to accept more inclusive approaches that support women in pastoral roles.

Resane's assertion is also echoed by scholars such as Westfall (2016), who argue that these verses must be understood in their historical context. Paul's teachings were shaped by the cultural norms of the Greco-Roman world, which often subordinated women. Resane (2024:1) argues that a socially aware and context-based interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34–38 views the passage as culturally bound rather than universally binding. Supporting this view, Westfall (2016:12) emphasises that such texts should be understood as specific instructions for a particular context and not as timeless commandments.

In contrast, a more liberating reading of scripture would emphasise the roles of women in the early church. Examples of women like Junia (Romans 16:7), who is acknowledged as an apostle, and Phoebe (Romans 16:1), who is referred to as a deacon, for example, defy conventional wisdom that limits women's leadership. These examples from the New Testament suggest that women played significant leadership roles in the early Christian community, which is at odds with the restrictive interpretations that have dominated certain Pentecostal circles.

Dingemans (1996:89) calls for a reading of the Bible that amplifies the voices of the oppressed, offering alternative interpretations that challenge gender hierarchies. Unfortunately, many Pentecostal churches continue to perpetuate a "theology of injustice," interpreting scriptures in ways that reinforce male dominance. As Jacobs (2022:45) explains, this rigid interpretation has led to the systematic exclusion of women from church leadership roles, further entrenching gender inequality within Pentecostal communities.

2.3.2 A Call for a More Contextualised Hermeneutic

The challenge, however, is not just the literal interpretation of certain passages, but also the failure to engage with the broader context of scripture. As McDill (2014) suggests, sound biblical interpretation requires considering factors such as the genre of the text, the author's intent, and the cultural context. By neglecting these interpretive principles, many Pentecostal churches have reinforced patriarchal structures that limit the role of women. McDill's (2014) seven principles for biblical interpretation—such as understanding the historical and social context, discerning theological themes, and interpreting the text with a God-centred perspective—are crucial for moving beyond a literal reading and embracing a more inclusive theology.

One crucial point that McDill (2014) emphasises is that interpretation must not be influenced by preconceived ideas. However, many Pentecostal interpretations of scripture are heavily influenced by patriarchal ideologies, which is why they tend to uphold traditional gender roles. If Pentecostal leaders and scholars were to adopt a more nuanced hermeneutic, informed by both the cultural context of the early church and the liberating teachings of Jesus, they could empower women by recognising their full humanity and leadership potential.

Furthermore, as Gabaitse (2015) and Hendriks et al. (2012) suggest, the Holy Spirit's work in Pentecostal churches should be a catalyst for ending oppressive practices, including the marginalisation of women. A Pentecostal theology that affirms both men and women as equal partners in ministry, grounded in a contextualised and liberating reading of scripture, could pave the way for a more inclusive church.

2.3.3 Africanization of the Gospel

The concept of inculturation is understood through Waliggo's (1986:12) perspective, which defines it as the deliberate effort to make the message of Christ and salvation significant and applicable across various cultures, times, and contexts. The integration of the gospel into African cultural contexts fosters a dynamic relationship between African culture and the Christian message, ensuring that Christ's teachings resonate with African worldviews and remain relevant (Tesso, 1999:130). This process has reshaped Christian doctrine and practice to align with the customs and thought patterns of various African cultures.

However, despite this integration, the intersection of African culture and Christianity has not always facilitated the liberation of women. In many cases, Pentecostal groups continue to interpret certain biblical texts in ways that reinforce traditional African cultural practices, perpetuating the oppression of women.

Scholars like Bediako have called for African theologians to examine the intersection of African identity, culture, and Christianity (Tarus & Lowery, 2017:313). African theologies focused on self-identification and cultural relevance emphasise that African consciousness and identity are integral to a contextualised Christian faith (Naidoo in Jacobs, 2023:17). These theologies also raise important questions about how religious systems can align with African worldviews, especially concerning the empowerment of women. Many African Pentecostal churches, however, have struggled to address women's empowerment effectively, as they continue to uphold cultural practices that restrict women's roles, particularly in leadership.

2.3.4 Cultural Transformation in Pentecostal Churches

Cultural transformation within Pentecostal churches is an essential process for ensuring that the faith remains relevant and responsive to contemporary issues, especially concerning gender dynamics and women's empowerment. Culture, as a system of shared beliefs, values, and social norms, shapes how individuals and communities behave and interact. In the case of Pentecostalism, cultural transformation involves a reassessment of both theological frameworks and social practices to address evolving societal needs, particularly in terms of gender equality and the role of women in church leadership.

As Eagleton (2016:2) and Few et al. (2021:2) argue, cultural transformation is a multifaceted process that touches on the social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of community life. In Pentecostal contexts, the cultural norms that dictate the roles and status of women within church settings often reflect broader societal hierarchies that prioritize male authority. However, as Pentecostalism grows, there is an increasing need for churches to rethink how these entrenched cultural patterns can be transformed to better align with the inclusive teachings of the Gospel.

Hofstede (1994:5) suggests that organisational culture, including gender dynamics, plays a pivotal role in shaping how institutions, including churches, operate. In Pentecostal churches, the cultural norms that govern leadership, worship, and fellowship are deeply influenced by both local traditions and the global Pentecostal movement. These norms often reflect patriarchal values that limit women's participation in leadership, thus reinforcing gender inequality within the church. While women remain the backbone of many Pentecostal communities, their involvement in decision-making processes, preaching, and leading worship is often restricted by these rigid gender roles.

The social role theory, as articulated by Kiser (2015:559), underscores the power imbalance that results from hierarchical structures, with higher-status groups (typically men) holding more authority. This gendered authority dynamic is deeply ingrained in Pentecostal church culture, where theological teachings often justify male-dominated leadership structures. Despite the large number of women in Pentecostal congregations, many churches continue to resist women's full empowerment within the church hierarchy. This paradox of a gendered power structure within a faith tradition that emphasises the inclusivity of the Holy Spirit presents a significant challenge for the cultural transformation of Pentecostalism.

Furthermore, as Attah (2017:158) points out, religion often intersects with patriarchal values, and in Pentecostalism, this intersection can reinforce cultural norms that hinder women's access to leadership roles. The perpetuation of these norms not only affects women's ability to lead but also impacts their overall participation in church life. Even when women are allowed to assume leadership roles, they are often relegated to less visible positions, such as overseeing women's ministries or children's programs, rather than engaging in executive decision-making roles.

Cultural transformation within Pentecostalism, therefore, requires a re-evaluation of these traditional practices. This process involves not just changes to leadership structures, but also a rethinking of theological perspectives, such as the interpretation of key biblical passages related to gender roles. Cultural transformation must begin with a critical engagement with scripture, acknowledging that interpretations that support gender inequality are rooted in historical and cultural contexts rather than divine mandate. By embracing a more inclusive hermeneutic, Pentecostal churches can begin to dismantle the patriarchal structures that have long restricted women's leadership.

Ultimately, cultural transformation in Pentecostal churches is about more than simply changing roles or titles. It is a holistic shift that seeks to align the practices of the church with the fundamental principles of justice, equality, and love that undergird the Gospel. As Van Klinken (2013:248) observes, Pentecostalism has the potential to critique and challenge cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality, but it must first undergo its own transformation to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for women. This shift, however, requires not just theological reflection but also intentional social action within the church community to ensure that women's voices are heard and their contributions fully valued.

As the researchers (Few et al., 2021) suggest, cultural transformation within Pentecostalism can lead to a deeper, more authentic experience of faith that reflects the diverse and dynamic nature of God's Kingdom. It is only through such a transformation that the full potential of Pentecostalism can be realized, with women standing alongside men as equal partners in ministry and leadership.

2.3.5 Pentecostal Women in Ministry

Pentecostalism, which became highly popular in Sub-Saharan Africa from the 1980s onwards, often presents a patriarchal structure that limits women's involvement in church leadership. Introduced to South Africa in 1908, Pentecostalism grew rapidly and reshaped Christianity on the continent. However, unlike the mainline churches, Pentecostal denominations, including the Assemblies of God, tend to restrict women's roles in church leadership, typically reserving positions of authority for men.

In many Pentecostal churches, where women are ordained, it is often due to the influence of church founders or co-founders, with women being appointed to leadership roles only as "co-pastors" alongside their husbands. Generally, Pentecostalism adheres to a traditional interpretation of Scripture, which has contributed to the marginalisation of women in church roles (Masengwe et al., 2019). In some cases, women are confined to less visible roles, such as overseeing other women or children. The theology of Pentecostalism, shaped by patriarchal interpretations of Scripture, often excludes women from positions of power, reinforcing gender inequality (Frahm-Arp, 2015:2; Wood, 2019:5).

Women in Pentecostal churches experience discrimination similar to their counterparts in other African countries, as the hierarchical structures of these churches tend to push women to the margins (Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020:2). Despite Pentecostalism's emphasis on empowerment through the Holy Spirit, women's participation in leadership remains limited. Their exclusion is often justified by traditional cultural beliefs that reinforce gender inequality (Idang, 2015:107).

Some academics argue that, despite these challenges, Pentecostal churches should adopt a feminist ecclesiology that appreciates women's contributions and allows them to fully participate in church activities, thereby taking back the church as a welcoming environment that values the voices and presence of women (Watson, 2002:102).

2.3.6 Women's Leadership in Pentecostal churches

The role of women in church leadership has been a subject of significant debate across generations. As Classical Pentecostal churches became more structured, formal systems for recognizing, training, and ordaining leaders were established. This process of institutionalization contributed to the marginalisation of women within Pentecostal structures (Langford, 2017:75). The Assemblies of God (AOG), as one of the key Classical Pentecostal denominations, saw a decline in female leadership as these structures solidified—a trend that was evident on a global scale (Langford, 2017:78). By the 1930s, AOG in the United Kingdom had become almost exclusively male-led. However, as seen in the rise of Neo-Charismatic movements, there has been a recent shift toward increasing the recognition of women in leadership roles (Langford, 2017:78).

As Langford (2017:79) notes, Alan Hewitt's *The Gender Revolution* captures this evolving perspective. Hewitt recounts his personal journey, moving from opposition to women in ministry and leadership to becoming a passionate advocate for their full inclusion. Langford further observes that John Partington, former National Leader of AOG GB, echoes this change, stating, "*For too long, the Church has failed to fully recognise and empower women in all areas of Christian ministry, including leadership.*" This marks a growing movement toward empowering women in leadership within AOG GB (Langford, 2017:79).

In many Christian contexts, including in African traditions, women already serve as leaders, primarily within women's fellowships. However, this form of leadership remains insufficient, as women should be allowed to fully realise their callings in the church without facing barriers, particularly those rooted in gender. Mampane study highlights how women in Alexandra Township's Pentecostal churches not only lead in these spaces but also actively shape and contest gendered identities within their communities (Mampane, 2023). Through Black feminist autoethnography, Mampane reveals how these women negotiate authority, spirituality, and femininity, often challenging patriarchal norms while navigating complex intersections of culture, religion, and gender.

Women often outnumber men in many churches, but in Pentecostal congregations, they remain significantly underrepresented in positions of power and influence. Mapuranga (2013) argues that women's leadership should not be confined to traditional or gender-specific roles but should extend into broader areas of church leadership. This ongoing imbalance highlights women's leadership as an act of resistance against patriarchal structures within the church. Leadership in the Christian context is understood as a divine calling for all believers (Rom. 1:1; Acts 13:2; Heb. 5:4). Sanders (2017:8) asserts that spiritual leadership is not appointed by human institutions but by God, with its authority stemming from the Triune God rather than earthly systems (Isa. 42:1). Spiritual leadership incorporates both natural and spiritual qualities, transcending personality traits and innate gifts (Sanders, 2017:17).

The role of spiritual leadership is to nurture, empower, and support the spiritual gifts of others within the congregation, thereby strengthening the faith community. This perspective aligns with the biblical principle that no human is greater than God (Sanders, 2017:15). Leadership within the church encompasses a variety of ministries, including apostles, teachers, evangelists, prophets, and shepherds (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11). Acts 2 affirms that Christian leadership is inclusive and does not discriminate by gender.

However, this form of leadership remains limited, as women should be able to fully realise their callings without barriers rooted in gender. As Mampane (2024:572) argues, drawing on Black woman-centred feminisms, there is a need for spaces that offer both liberation and transformation for women who exist in religious and social contexts that remain resistant to change. In her study of Pentecostal churches in Alexandra Township, Mampane (2024:571) shows how women often feel discomfort with Pentecostal discourses that attempt to define

their womanhood. Through Black feminist autoethnography, she reveals how these women negotiate authority, spirituality, and femininity, challenging patriarchal norms while embodying a theology that brings the lived realities of Black Pentecostal women into the centre of feminist scholarship.

Viewing leadership as a divine calling elevates all believers to the roles of servants of God (Col. 1:23), priests in God's royal household (1 Pet. 2:9), and heirs of God's promises (Col. 1:12). While all Christians are equal, they may have distinct callings (Sanders, 2017:13). Spiritual leadership requires divine empowerment beyond human effort (Sanders, 2017:17), as leaders are guided by the Holy Spirit rather than by their own strength. This model encourages collaborative leadership, emphasising equality, shared responsibility, and relational ministry.

Despite these theological principles, African Pentecostalism continues to restrict the ordination of women as pastors, limiting their recognition in the ministries outlined by the Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, many women remain committed to serving in Christian ministry, despite facing significant challenges. Osmer (2008:18) highlights that Christian leadership often involves struggle—whether through opposition, resistance, or the personal demands of one's calling. Jesus exemplified servant leadership by declaring, *"I am among you as one who serves,"* offering a model for all Christian leaders (Sanders, 2017:13). Consequently, leadership in Christian ministry requires humility, perseverance, and a steadfast spirit (Heb. 3:14, 10:19-39; Rev. 12).

2.3.7 Women and Property Ownership

Historically, African traditions have denied women the right to own property, with land and property being reserved for men (Resane, 2021:1). This discriminatory practice was also evident in marriage, where women were often regarded as property of their husbands and were prohibited from marrying outside their family or clan, further entrenching their lack of property rights (Resane, 2021:5). This gendered inequality also has biblical roots, as women rarely had the right to inherit land. In Jewish tradition, for instance, land ownership was a male prerogative, and inheritance rights were typically reserved for men (Resane, 2021).

For too long, silence and submission have been the expectations placed on women, which have hindered their progress. Women must now challenge these cultural and religious norms that

suppress them, actively fighting for their rights. A powerful biblical example of this resistance is the daughters of Zelophehad, who, despite their father having no male heirs, boldly demanded the right to inherit his land (Numbers 27:1–11). Their courage in challenging patriarchal norms offers a timeless model of resistance to gender-based inequality (Resane, 2021). Their actions led to a significant victory, securing their rightful inheritance and challenging the tradition that excluded women from property ownership.

The story of Zelophehad's daughters exemplifies the power of challenging discriminatory practices, showing how women can resist oppressive systems and demand their rightful inheritance (Tarlow, 2018:1). Resane (2021) urges women today to adopt the same courage, standing up to gender-based discrimination and fighting for equality. Attoh (2017:159) argues that this biblical narrative is foundational in advocating for women's legal rights and freedom from social constraints.

In Africa, where such discriminatory practices persist, there is a growing need for social and legal reforms to ensure women's property rights are recognised. African women must continue to challenge these entrenched cultural norms and fight for equal rights in land and property ownership. As Swanson (1998:127) suggests, the church must also engage in self-reflection and critique to overcome gender stereotypes and actively support gender equality in the 21st century.

2.3.8 Assemblies of God- Back to God (BTG)

This section explores Pentecostalism's church structures and their impact on gender roles and women's empowerment, focusing on the Assemblies of God - Back to God (BTG) denomination in South Africa. Founded in 1936 by Reverend Nicholas Bhengu, the BTG denomination is an example of African Classical Pentecostalism, influenced by Pentecostal missionaries and the Azusa Street Revival. Reverend Bhengu exemplified this holistic view, stressing both the evangelistic and organisational roles of the church, particularly its societal role as Christ's witness. He emphasised both evangelistic and organisational roles in the church, particularly advocating for the Five-Fold ministry and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in leadership (Jacobs, 2021).

Reverend Bhengu made significant strides in including women in ministry by founding the mothers' ministry and supporting revival efforts (Lephoko, 2018:140). According to Lephoko (2008:124), even though Reverend Bhengu founded the mothers' ministry no women were ordained as pastors. However, Lephoko argues that Reverend Bhengu believed the time was not yet right for women to take on pastoral roles and that if he was still alive women would have been ordained by now. While Reverend Bhengu did not outright reject African culture, he challenged traditional norms that positioned men as superior. This stance however has contributed to the church's slow acceptance of women in leadership roles. However, after his death, gender discrimination became more pronounced within the church, leading to a widening gender gap in leadership roles (Jacobs, 2022).

While Pentecostalism is gradually evolving globally, with some Pentecostal denominations becoming more inclusive of women, the BTG denomination still faces significant barriers to the full participation of women in ministry, particularly in obtaining positions of influence within decision-making bodies. The power within the BTG denomination is concentrated in men who possess all the positions of power and control decisions about eligibility for ministerial positions. Thus, women have been barred from participating in evangelism, and the church has adopted a more stringent interpretation of Paul's letters, particularly those that discuss women's roles in leadership (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

This practice is critically examined by Resane (2023), who identifies a hermeneutical inconsistency in the Assemblies of God – Back to God (AOG-BTG) tradition. He argues that the denomination habitually reads 1 Corinthians 14:26–33 and 39–40 in its liturgical settings—passages that emphasise orderly and participatory worship—while deliberately omitting verses 34–38. The latter verses, which are often cited to justify the exclusion of women from public ministry, are thus applied selectively. Resane contends that this deliberate bypassing of key verses reveals a theological tension within the denomination: it simultaneously advocates for open participation in worship while sustaining structures that prevent women's active engagement.

Such a selective hermeneutic reinforces gendered exclusions and perpetuates patriarchal control within the church's governance and worship practices. Despite their active involvement, the experiences of Black women have often been silenced, oversimplified, or misunderstood (Mampane, 2023:579). Consequently, discussions around gender equality and

women's empowerment have stagnated, with no advancement in the ordination of women or in giving them a voice in church governance. This shift mirrors broader trends within Pentecostalism, where leadership is often structured to prioritise male authority, rather than fostering inclusive leadership (Chand, 2010:50).

This marginalisation of women is reinforced by the church's lack of critical engagement with Scripture and an overreliance on direct translations of biblical texts that tend to perpetuate patriarchal interpretations. Passages considered "texts of terror," such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, are often cited to justify the limited roles of women in church leadership (Archer, 2017:45). While some Pentecostal settings seem to have seen more women rise to pastoral roles, they however, still face substantial challenges in accessing senior leadership positions or influencing church decisions (Archer, 2017:45). Their limited empowerment means that ordination does not necessarily grant them the authority to participate in executive decision-making, where real power resides (Archer, 2017:45). The hierarchical structure of the church and the broader Pentecostal theology, which often restricts women's leadership, reflect a wider cultural and theological pattern within the Pentecostal movement (Alexander & Bowers, 2018:93).

2.4 The Church

Gender, as understood in feminist and sociological traditions, is a social construct that organises society by differentiating between men and women, allocating power, wealth, and status based on these distinctions (Heise et al., 2019:2441). This social structure has profound implications for various aspects of life, from personal identity to institutional systems, including religion. The emergence of gender studies as a significant academic field in the 1960s coincided with the rise of feminism, which sought to challenge the legal and social inequalities between men and women (Jacobs, 2022:14).

Feminism's central aim was to achieve gender equality, especially in terms of legal rights and social roles, advocating for the recognition of both men and women as equally capable (Jacobs, 2022:14). However, despite visible progress in some areas, many gender systems—especially those rooted in patriarchy—continue to prioritize masculinity over femininity, reinforcing entrenched power imbalances (Heise et al., 2019:2441). Gender inequality often manifests as

a rigid adherence to societal norms that predominantly favour men, marginalising women who deviate from these norms (Rutherford, 2021:7).

These gender disparities are not confined to the broader society but are also deeply embedded in various institutions, particularly religious ones. Despite the global struggle for gender equality, religion, as a major social institution, has often been a site where gender inequality persists, especially in leadership roles. In many churches, particularly within Pentecostal denominations, women continue to face significant barriers to assuming positions of power and authority (Jacobs, 2019:3). The exclusion of women from religious leadership, a long-standing issue, has sparked ongoing debates about the intersection of faith, culture, and gender. International scholars, along with women's rights movements, have consistently advocated for gender equality within theological circles, emphasising the need for churches to address these inequities if they are to remain relevant in the modern world (Heise et al., 2019:2441).

2.4.1 The Role of Gender in Shaping Social Structures

Gender inequality is not a static, biologically determined phenomenon, but rather a dynamic social construct shaped by cultural, societal, and religious norms (Rutherford, 2021:19). Feminist and sociological perspectives highlight that gender is a structural force that reinforces the differentiation between men and women, shaping the distribution of power, resources, and societal roles (Heise et al., 2019:2441). According to scholars like Lorber (Jacobs, 2022:14), gender is not just about biological differences but also about how societies interpret and assign roles based on these differences, which has a direct impact on both individual behaviour and broader social structures. This differentiation often results in a social hierarchy, with men at the top and women relegated to subordinate positions.

The persistence of gender inequality in religious institutions illustrates this broader social phenomenon. In many churches, gender roles continue to be defined by rigid, patriarchal interpretations of scripture and tradition, contributing to the ongoing marginalisation of women. Jacobs (2022:14) points out that gender relations in religious settings can vary greatly, with some congregations embracing women in leadership, while others continue to uphold traditional gender hierarchies. However, in both cases, gender inequality is still pervasive, often justified by interpretations of religious texts and long-standing cultural practices that reinforce the belief in male superiority (Wollstonecraft, 2014:68).

2.4.2 Gender and Gender-Based Violence: The Role of the Church

The relationship between gender inequality and gender-based violence (GBV) is deeply intertwined. Women, particularly those in vulnerable social positions, are disproportionately affected by physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Gender-based violence is fuelled by traditional practices, prejudices, cultural norms, and denominational stereotypes (Resane and Mudimeli, 2023:2). The church, as an institution with significant moral influence, faces a unique challenge in addressing these issues. Despite this potential, many religious communities remain silent on matters of gender-based violence, failing to intervene effectively. Department of Statistics and the Commission for Gender Equity inform us that the domestic violence statistics in South Africa are notoriously high. According to the Department of Statistics and the Commission for Gender Equity (2024), combating GBV requires a multi-faceted approach, with women's empowerment at the forefront. However, for the church to effectively lead in this area, it must first address its internal gender issues. Table 2.2 below shows the percentage of households that reported all or some incidences of sexual offences to the South African police. The percentage increased from 59,9% in 2019/20 to 88,7% in 2020/21 and further increased up to 92,3% in 2022/23 before it declined in 2023/24 (78,4%).

Indicator	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of incidences ('000)	13*	8*	12*	12*	25
Number of households that experienced sexual offences ('000)	13*	6*	12*	11*	22
Number of households that reported all or some incidences of sexual offences to the police ('000)	8*	5*	11*	10*	17
Percentage of households that reported all or some incidents of sexual offences to the police	59,9	88,7	90,0	92,3	78,4

Table 2.2. Summary of statistics for sexual offences, 2019 - 2024: Department Statistics South Africa

The diagrams below presents the gender-based violence situation in South Africa, as outlined in the 2024 State of the Nation Address.

Government continues to intensify its fight against gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), which President Cyril Ramaphosa has described as the country's 'second pandemic'.

The NPA has played an critical role in terms of prosecuting GBV cases and being the voice of vulnerable groups.

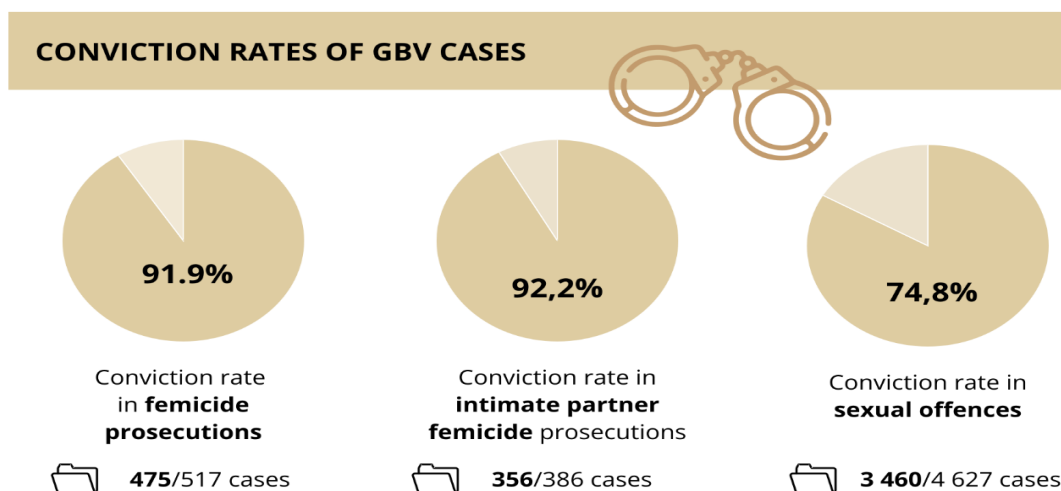


Figure. 2.1. Demonstrates the GBV in South Africa: State of the Nation Address 2024



Figure. 2.2 shows five ways to end gender-based discrimination: Garden Route District Municipality

Women in many religious communities face the additional trauma of being abused by men who hold positions of spiritual authority. Koopman (2015:264) notes that many women, abused both at home and in church, have nowhere to turn for help, as the justice system often fails them and the church remains largely silent. Jacobs (2023:19) highlights how some pastors treat women who seek support for issues like domestic violence with indifference or even advice to "submit" to their abusers, rather than offering concrete assistance. This reflects a broader societal attitude

that reinforces harmful gender norms, suggesting that women's suffering is either a private matter or, worse, a result of their own failings.

The widespread acceptance of these harmful attitudes is not only damaging to the women involved but also undermines the growth and potential of the church. Women constitute the majority of church congregations, and their marginalisation in both leadership roles and discussions about gender issues weakens the collective voice and moral authority of the church (Jacobs, 2021:74). The church's complicity in perpetuating gender inequality whether through silence, or inadequate response, to GBV or theological interpretations that reinforce patriarchal power dynamics—undermines women's dignity and contributes to the normalisation of gender-based violence in the broader society (Gerhardt in Magezi, 2019; Resane & Mudimeli, 2023).

Despite their significant presence in congregations, women often remain vulnerable to GBV, prompting urgent questions about the church's role in offering meaningful coping strategies and transformative support (Resane & Mudimeli, 2023:1). Without intentional theological reflection and practical intervention, the church risks reinforcing structures that keep women in cycles of subjugation and harm. Theologically, this raises profound concerns about the church's witness and fidelity to the Gospel, which affirms the equal worth and dignity of all human beings created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). A liberative theology that challenges oppressive systems and prioritises justice, healing, and restoration is essential if the church is to become a sanctuary rather than a site of silent complicity.

2.4.3 Toward a More Inclusive Church and Society

For the church to play a transformative role in combating gender-based violence and promoting gender equality, it must first dismantle the patriarchal structures within its own walls. As Jacobs (2021:13) asserts, addressing gender biases that prevent women from assuming leadership roles is essential for creating a more inclusive and effective ministry. Both men and women must work together to achieve the divine purpose of the church. This involves recognising that gender inequality harms everyone and that true spiritual growth can only occur when both genders are empowered and respected equally.

Empowering women requires more than just rhetoric; it demands concrete action. Men, in particular, have a significant role to play in advocating for and respecting women's rights

(Schuler, Islam & Rottach, 2010:12). Both men and women must engage in ongoing conversations about gender roles, challenging outdated norms and working together to create a church that fully reflects the values of equality and justice. For the church to effectively address the broader issue of gender-based violence in society, it must first model the kind of inclusive, respectful relationships that it advocates for in the world.

2.4.4 Social Injustice

Critical practical theologians often examine social justice in terms of power dynamics and social practices, emphasising that social standing is shaped by systems of power. These systems, in turn, influence individuals' positions relative to others, based on factors such as gender, race, and class (Dingemans, 1996:92; Heise et al., 2019:2443). As Srilatha and Deepa (in Jacobs, 2023) observe, when women advance in various professions, it can threaten men's sense of identity and status, often provoking aggressive reactions. Despite these challenges, empowering women remains a crucial priority for societal progress.

West and Zimmerman (in Rutherford, 2021:7) argue that gender is not a static identity, but one that is continuously constructed through daily social interactions. This perspective challenges earlier theories that viewed gender norms as fixed once learned. From a young age, children are exposed to societal messages about gender roles, and many begin to question these stereotypes by the age of 10 (Heise et al., 2019:2441). However, despite this awareness, patriarchal structures persist, often placing men in positions of leadership while relegating women to subordinate roles—especially in religious settings (Jacobs, 2019).

In Pentecostal churches, men occupy all leadership positions, and women are frequently excluded from decision-making processes. This gendered inequality is perpetuated through socialization, where women are taught to submit to men, further restricting their ability to pursue social justice (Krull, 2020:84). Despite this, women must be recognised not only as equals but as spiritual beings deserving of equal leadership opportunities (Resane, 2021:6). Justice, therefore, must address these historical wrongs to challenge the discrimination and oppression women have long endured.

Historically, African cultures have oppressed women, contributing to their marginalisation and dehumanization (Mahlatsi, 2020:197). Women must no longer accept this status quo but should

fight for equality, including the right to ordination and leadership roles. The resilience of early women missionaries, who defied societal norms despite strong male opposition, offers a powerful example for marginalised women today (Benson, 2005:183).

In church contexts, women's voices are often silenced due to entrenched male-dominated hierarchies (Mudimeli & Van der Westhuizen, 2019:119). Manus & Ukaga (2017:66) warn that such systems not only limit women's agency but also expose them to potential harm. Therefore, women must unite to challenge and overcome these patriarchal structures (Oduyoye, 1995; Resane, 2021:6). Building solidarity and teamwork among women is key to this struggle, as it enables collective action without confrontation (Oduyoye, 1995).

Liberation theology, as explored by Dingemans (1996:88), provides a useful framework for understanding the intersection of oppression and patriarchal systems, particularly those that are reinforced by educational institutions. Women must advocate for their rights, affirming their identity, dignity, and freedom from patriarchal oppression (Resane, 2021:2). These discussions resonate with post-feminist perspectives, which seek to understand how men can also contribute to gender equality (Kelan, 2020:604).

Men are required to play a significant part in this change. As allies, they must advocate for gender equality and work actively to challenge patriarchal norms. Madlala-Routledge (2009:6) argues that men, too, must internalize the necessary changes to break the cycles of violence, both personal and political. This process can be guided by fundamental human values such as love, respect, and empathy. Male leaders, especially, should adopt leadership styles that promote gender equality and actively dismantle the structures that perpetuate inequality (Kelan & Wratil, in Kelan, 2020:605; De Vries, in Kelan, 2020:605). As Christians, men should model Jesus' egalitarian approach, empowering rather than diminishing others (Mudimeli & Van der Westhuizen, 2019:124). The church, as a community, must lead the way in addressing these gender issues if it is to be a true advocate for social justice.

2.4.5 The Role of Feminists in Cultural Transformation

Freire (1996:45) highlights that in the early stages of liberation struggles, the oppressed often internalize the role of their oppressors, seeking to emulate them rather than fight for genuine liberation. For women in Pentecostal communities, this dynamic may manifest in the desire to

adopt masculine roles, thereby reinforcing the status quo. Feminism aims to dismantle male dominance by challenging the institutions that uphold women's inferiority, including patriarchal family structures, national systems, and cultural norms embedded in religion, laws, and societal practices (Maltz, 1993:186–187). Gender inequality creates divisions, hindering genuine cooperation and love between individuals. Therefore, the church must build a new culture of equality by first identifying and dismantling the old cultural norms that perpetuate mistrust and discrimination (Chand, 2010:81).

Cultural transformation is a slow and complex process that requires a deep understanding of the issues at hand and a commitment to systemic change. As Chand (2010:41) notes, the greatest challenge is that many churchgoers lack the awareness to even question the inequities they face. Without this awareness, they remain in a state of ignorance, unable to initiate change until something forces them to recognise their circumstances. Over time, however, as society progresses, gender roles do evolve, and conditions change in response to cultural shifts. The next concept to explore is women's empowerment and the dynamics of manhood.

2.4.6 Women's Empowerment and Manhood

Women's empowerment is an essential human rights issue that profoundly influences the health, well-being, and agency of women, as well as the lives of their children (Richardson, 2017:539). At its core, empowerment seeks to provide equal opportunities to all genders, while also considering the impact of gender diversity on an individual's ability to thrive. Empowerment is not only a human rights goal but a mechanism through which women's decision-making power is enhanced. The church has an indispensable role to play in advancing this cause, particularly by creating an environment that fosters empowerment and opens new possibilities for women (Jacobs, 2023:17). Historically, the empowerment of women in Christian ministry has been a subject of theological contention, yet the very act of empowering women extends far beyond gender equality—it entails broadening women's opportunities and making space for them in areas of leadership and influence.

At the heart of this issue is the relationship between women's empowerment and traditional notions of manhood. Medinger (2000) asserts that manhood encompasses certain inherent qualities and behaviours that are aligned with God's design for men. These ideals, however, often perpetuate rigid gender norms that frame masculinity as the dominant force in both church

and society. The discussion of gender roles in churches, particularly in conservative theological contexts, is frequently centred on the defence of traditional masculinity.

As Gerber (2015) points out, conservative religious groups are particularly invested in protecting hegemonic masculinity—a form of masculinity that upholds a male-dominated social hierarchy and justifies orthodox religious and socioeconomic systems. This form of masculinity often demands that men retain authority, power, and leadership positions, particularly in church structures where women are frequently prohibited from preaching or teaching. Jacobs (2022:18) highlights the women’s challenges in pursuing ordination or ministry roles in Pentecostal churches, where cultural and theological biases continue obstructing their progress.

The struggle against toxic masculinity is one of the most pressing concerns when analysing traditional conceptions of manhood. Toxic masculinity is often characterised by competitiveness, aggression, and the need for domination, which are traits that many religious communities condone as part of their understanding of what it means to be a man (Byrd, 2020:36). In many church settings, these qualities are valorised, and women’s potential is systematically suppressed.

Deacon and Parsitau (2017:3) argue that patriarchal teachings in churches mandate women’s submission to male authority, which severely limits their freedom, participation, and expression within the faith community. Women may find themselves relegated to supporting roles, rather than being able to take on leadership responsibilities that are commensurate with their spiritual gifts and callings. Jacobs (2023:18) adds that the ongoing reinforcement of masculinity and male dominance exacerbates the marginalisation and discrimination of women within the church. Despite women constituting a significant portion of church congregations, their involvement in leadership is often confined to auxiliary or gender-specific roles, denying them opportunities to serve in broader ministry capacities (Koopman, 2015:58).

This dynamic is often reinforced through complementarianism—a theological stance that insists upon men as leaders and women as submissive supporters. Complementarianism, which asserts that men are divinely ordained to lead while women are to follow, has gained prominence in certain Christian circles, including many Pentecostal communities. Blacketer (2021:189) highlights how complementarianism teaches that women are inherently inferior to

men, and this belief is supported by certain biblical passages such as Genesis 1-3, Ephesians 5, and 1 Timothy 2.

These texts are frequently cited as a theological foundation for limiting women's roles in church ministry, particularly in leadership and teaching capacities (Shorter, 2021:218). While complementarianism allows for men's leadership, it effectively circumscribes the opportunities available to women, often reducing them to a subordinate status within the ecclesial structure (Shorter, 2021:224). As a result, many women face barriers in their efforts to serve in positions that align with their gifts and callings, and they are often forced to navigate the complex and restrictive expectations set by traditional gender roles.

Richardson (2017:541) notes that women's empowerment is shaped not only by societal factors but also by family dynamics and the power relations between men and women. Unlike other marginalised groups, women's empowerment cannot be detached from the context of intimate relationships and societal expectations. Gender inequality often operates on multiple levels, from the home to the workplace to the church. Jacobs (2022:18) addresses how traditional gender roles persist in many cultures, where men are still positioned as the dominant breadwinners and women are expected to bear the responsibility of household duties and childcare. This dynamic continues to shape the empowerment of women, as it often generates insecurity in men when their wives or female counterparts succeed professionally or gain greater independence (Koopman, 2015:58).

The tension between men's dominance in public spheres and women's growing independence in private spheres can hinder progress toward gender equality, as men may feel threatened by women's success or leadership. However, it is essential to return to the fundamental Christian teaching that all human beings, regardless of gender, possess inherent dignity as image-bearers of God (Sindo, in Williams & Williams, 1989:10). While women are often treated as inferior in both secular and religious spaces, the gospel challenges such notions by calling all believers to treat one another with love, respect, and equality. Swinton (2019:11) argues that the true essence of human existence is found in Christ, and Christians are called to reflect this truth in their relationships with others. Gender inequality and discrimination in the church undermine this vision, perpetuating divisions that hinder the body of Christ from fully reflecting God's love. The church must embody this love by creating an environment where both men and women can fully express their God-given identity and authority.

Finally, it is crucial to recognise that silence equates to powerlessness, and as long as women are excluded from decision-making processes, their voices will be stifled (Solnit, 2017). Empowerment, in this context, involves giving women a platform to speak, contribute, and lead within the church. When women's voices are valued, it fosters a culture of mutual respect, brotherly love, and collaboration—key components of a healthy and effective Christian community. Gratton (in Branson & Martinez, 2023:109) underscores that equal gender representation is not only a matter of fairness but is also essential for unlocking the creative and innovative potential of church communities. When both men and women contribute equally to leadership and ministry, the church's capacity for transformation and growth is significantly enhanced.

2.4.7 African Women's Theology (AWT)

African Women's Theology (AWT) formally emerged in 1989 in Accra, Ghana, with the founding of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. This landmark event was marked by a keynote address from Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye, who has been widely recognised as a pioneering voice in African feminist theology (Mombo and Makena, 2024:235). The establishment of AWT was a direct response to the gender blindness within African theology, which, until then, had largely excluded women's perspectives and life experiences. In reaction to these disparities, the Circle was created to amplify women's voices and engage critically with African culture and religion through a gendered lens. This initiative reflects the experiences of those whose human rights have been systematically violated (Oduyoye, 2001:24).

Schüssler-Fiorenza describes gender-focused theology as a critical liberation theology that exposes how male-centred language, theological concepts, and academic work support patriarchal systems in society and the church. By investigating women's experiences of discrimination and oppression in social and theological contexts, it seeks to expose the repressive elements of patriarchal theology (Mudimeli, 2011:24).

The roots of AWT, however, extend well beyond the Circle's founding. Early historical figures such as Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita (1684–1706) in the Kongo and Afua Kuma (1908–1987) in Ghana sought to contextualise Christian theology within African sociocultural frameworks.

Despite these early efforts, African theology remained largely dominated by male perspectives. It was not until the late 20th century, with Mercy Oduyoye's seminal book *Hearing and Knowing* (1986), that feminist theological discourse gained significant traction. Oduyoye and her contemporaries highlighted the urgent need to include women's voices in theological scholarship, arguing that theology without the inclusion of women's perspectives would remain incomplete and unbalanced (Oduyoye and Kanyoro, 2005).

Building on these foundations, AWT critically examines African culture, recognising women as a distinct yet diverse group. It integrates women's lived experiences to analyse and challenge systemic subordination (Maseno, 2021:1). In this way, AWT does more than simply critique oppression; it seeks to transform African Christianity by addressing the intersection of gender, culture, and religion. Mercy Oduyoye's foundational role in the creation of the Circle represents a significant contribution to African Christianity.

Through her leadership, feminist theological approaches among African women began to gain traction in the late 1980s. John Parratt identifies *Hearing and Knowing* as the earliest comprehensive feminist theological exposition by an African woman (Maseno, 2021:1). This progress was facilitated by increasing access to advanced theological education for African women, which had previously been limited. After serving as the Circle's coordinator from 1989 to 1996, Oduyoye passed the leadership to Musimbi Kanyoro of Kenya, who led until 2002 (Gathogo, 2010:5).

The Circle's work focuses on addressing the exclusion of women from theological discourse. Swahili word *AMKA* (meaning "awake") was used by the Circle to encourage women to engage actively in reshaping African theology. According to Njoroge (1997:78), the Circle's mission is a wake-up call to the African church, which has historically marginalised women, its most faithful members. Oduyoye critiques this exclusion, arguing that entrenched social and religious traditions have limited women's participation in theological education and leadership (Van Klinken, 2016:30). She advocates for cultural hermeneutics, calling for a dialogue between African traditions and Christian scripture to develop a theology that restores women's dignity and agency (Njoroge, 1997:81).

Mercy Amba Oduyoye, provided visionary leadership by fostering a collaborative theological community among African women and securing educational opportunities through ecumenical

networks. She was succeeded by Musimbi Kanyoro of Kenya (1996–2001), a scholar of biblical and cultural hermeneutics, who deepened the Circle's engagement with contextual biblical interpretation (Njoroge, 2005:31). Isabel Apawo Phiri of Malawi (2002–2007) furthered the cause of women's ordination and contributed significantly to theological responses to HIV/AIDS as a holistic mission of the Church (Fubara-Manuel– 2022:22). Her successor, Fulata Lusungu Moyo (2008–2013), also from Malawi, expanded the Circle's research and outreach on gender and ecclesial roles, particularly beyond institutional and denominational confines (Fiedler and Hofmeyr, 2011:3).

From 2014 to 2019, Nigerian theologian Kunbi Labeodan emphasised faith-based solidarity with the marginalised and advocated for the Church's role in addressing the socio-spiritual dimensions (Fubara-Manuel, 2022:75). Musa Dube of Botswana (2019–2024), a prominent biblical scholar, advanced liberationist readings of Scripture in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and authored transformative liturgical resources for pastoral care (Fubara-Manuel – 2022:22). The current coordinator, Molly Manyonganise of Zimbabwe, who assumed leadership in 2024, continues to uphold the Circle's commitment to justice, inclusion, and theological reflection rooted in African women lived experiences.

Despite these efforts, patriarchal cultural practices continue to position women as subordinate, sidelining them from leadership and scholarship. Oduyoye challenges these norms, asserting that women must fulfill their divine calling by participating in all aspects of church life, including theological discourse (Alexander and Bowers, 2018:28). Her metaphor of a “one-winged bird” critiques male-dominated African theology, emphasising that it cannot “fly” without the inclusion of women's contributions (Njoroge, 1997:79).

The Circle has become a vital platform for African women theologians to explore issues of faith, culture, and gender from their unique perspectives. Through their work, they have reinterpreted oppressive cultural practices and developed strategies to overcome them (Labeodan, 2016:1).

Oduyoye's commitment to liberation theology that tackles the combined oppressions of "poverty, race, and gender" is further supported by her leadership within the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). Beyond scholarly discussion, her

theological contributions seek to uplift African women's dignity and give them the confidence to tell their stories (Masenya, 2017:146).

2.4.7.1 Exclusion of Women from Theological Discourse

African women's exclusion from theological discourse stems from entrenched patriarchal norms in both culture and religion. The Circle's mission is to challenge these norms by creating spaces for women to engage in theological scholarship and leadership. Oduyoye has consistently critiqued the marginalisation of women's voices in African theology, describing it as a disservice to both the church and society (Van Klinken, 2016:30). She argues that women must not only participate but also lead in shaping theological discourse to reflect their experiences and perspectives.

Njoroge (1997:81) highlights the importance of cultural hermeneutics—the reinterpretation of African traditions in dialogue with Christian scripture—as a tool for developing a theology that is both liberating and inclusive. Women's leadership roles in the church have historically been relegated to auxiliary functions, limiting their influence on theological education and ministry. Oduyoye emphasises that this marginalisation undermines the church's mission and calls for gender-inclusive practices that empower women to harness the gifts that God has given them (Alexander and Bowers, 2018:28).

Through the Circle, African women theologians have developed a theology that critiques the gender-based discrimination pervasive in African culture and religion. This work has inspired women to become subjects of their own stories, challenging oppressive cultural practices and advocating for transformation (Labeodan, 2016:1). Oduyoye's metaphor of the “one-winged bird” continues to resonate, symbolising the need for balance and inclusion in theology (Njoroge, 1997:79).

2.4.7.2 Cultural Challenges and the Need for Transformation

Cultural norms in many African societies have historically restricted women's autonomy, often viewing independent women as threats to patriarchal structures. Oduyoye critiques these norms, arguing that they perpetuate gender inequality and hinder the church's mission to embody justice and liberation (Oduyoye, 2001:13). She calls for a transformative approach to

African theology—one that critically engages with oppressive cultural practices and advocates for the full inclusion of women in all aspects of church and society.

Oduyoye's work within the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) emphasises the importance of addressing the intersectionality of poverty, race, and gender in liberation theology. By highlighting the compounded oppressions faced by African women, she advocates for a theology that is both contextually relevant and transformative (Joseph, 2015). Her vision extends beyond theological scholarship to practical efforts that restore dignity and agency to African women.

The Circle's mentorship initiatives have also played a significant role in supporting emerging theologians. Through regional networks, established scholars like Musimbi Kanyoro and Madipoane have mentored younger theologians, ensuring the continuity and growth of AWT (Kanyoro, 2006:23–31). This collaborative spirit underscores the Circle's commitment to building a community of scholars dedicated to transforming African theology and society.

Oduyoye's contributions to AWT exemplify her commitment to empowering African women and redefining their roles within theology and the church. Her work challenges both cultural and religious barriers, advocating for a theology that embodies justice, equality, and liberation for all.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed key literature relevant to the study, focusing on theories and critiques surrounding the marginalisation of women in churches, particularly within Pentecostal contexts. It highlighted the contributions of Oduyoye, a distinguished Methodist theologian from Ghana and a pioneer in African women's theology (Oredein, 2017:64). In her influential work, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, Oduyoye critiques the patriarchal structures embedded in African culture and the church, which often restrict women's participation in leadership and theological discourse. As a response to these inequities, she founded the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology and the fieldwork in light of the main research question: How is the BTG denomination evolving and shaping women's empowerment? The study aimed to explore the exclusion of women from pastoral ordination, examining the founder's historical views on women's empowerment to understand the causes of women's marginalisation within the Pentecostal tradition. Thus, this chapter employs the descriptive-empirical task (Osmer, 2008:4), to gather information and identify patterns by asking, “What is happening with women’s empowerment in the BTG denomination?”

Additionally, the chapter outlines the research methodology, the findings and key themes that emerged, as well as the context in which the research took place. A case study design and comprehensive analysis were applied, with a focus on the theoretical foundations of the qualitative approach. Background data on the study participants is provided. The research involved interviews with each participant, and the process of analysing, presenting, and reconceptualizing the data is explained.

3.2 Research Process

The research process is a systematic approach to exploring, analysing, and discovering information about a problem or research question. This study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews as part of a qualitative research approach. Appendix D comprises the complete transcriptions of these interviews. An organised sequence of steps was followed to ensure the generation of reliable data, the formation of valid conclusions, and the contribution of valuable knowledge to the field (Saunders, 2009:10)

3.2.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethics refers to a set of principles that guide an individual’s behaviour, while values are the enduring beliefs that influence preferences and decisions (Evans, 2019:333). Ethics serves as a system of moral principles, guiding decisions about what is morally correct or incorrect. In

contrast, values stimulate thinking and influence behaviour, forming a foundation for ethical decision-making.

This study explored women's leadership and empowerment in a black Pentecostal Church in South Africa. The focus was on the marginalisation of women within the Pentecostal tradition, focusing on the historical and structural barriers perpetuating gender inequality in African Pentecostal churches. Since the research involved collecting data from church leaders on the marginalisation of women in the BTG denomination, adherence to ethical principles was paramount. Approval for the study's ethical clearance was secured through an application to the College of Human Sciences (CHS) at the University of South Africa (UNISA). This ensured compliance with ethical policies and safeguarded the dignity, privacy, and rights of participants. Additionally, permission to conduct the study was granted by the BTG denomination, See Appendix A for both approvals.

Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were assured of their right to withdraw partially or completely at any stage. Informed consent was obtained, and a schedule detailing interview times and venues was shared with participants (Strydom, 2011:115). The researcher remained flexible and responsive to participants' needs, accommodating changes to interview appointments when necessary (Saunders, 2009:149).

The researcher prioritized confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Personal information provided by participants was protected against loss, damage, or unauthorized access, per the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act of 2013. Anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms, especially in sensitive contexts (Wiles, 2012:7, 41). Confidentiality was further maintained by conducting interviews in safe locations and securely storing all data (Strydom, 2011:115–118). Participants' contributions were acknowledged, and their rights to withdraw consent without penalties were respected (Dooly et al., 2017:352).

Effective data management was a critical aspect of this research process. The semi-structured interviews yielded rich qualitative data, including transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings, all of which were securely stored. A reflective approach, incorporating detailed notetaking and review of audiotapes, was employed to enhance the quality and depth of the data.

To ensure rigor and transparency, Atlas.Ti software was utilized for data analysis and interpretation. This facilitated the systematic organisation and examination of qualitative data, contributing to robust and reliable findings.

3.3 Case Study

This case study examines the Assemblies of God Back to God (AOG-BTG / BTG), a Classical Pentecostal denomination based in South Africa's black communities. Founded in the 1940s through missionaries influenced by the Azusa Street Revival, the church adheres to Pentecostal teachings that prevent women from holding pastoral and leadership roles, referencing biblical passages (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12). Despite efforts by the founder, Reverend Bhengu, to include women in ministry—such as appointing (Mrs Qhina) to the Back to God, Executive Committee—male leaders' resistance reinforced a patriarchal structure, limiting women's roles to serving other women. The reason I selected the BTG denomination for this study is that I am a member of the church and have direct access to its leadership, which facilitates the process of securing interviews with them.

To understand the underlying dynamics and reasons for the exclusion of women from church leadership, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 senior church leaders, all males. These interviews aimed to gather rich, personal insights and provide a detailed understanding of participants' perceptions (cf. Baškarada, McKay, and McKenna, 2013:8). Permission was secured from the BTG denomination leadership. Participants were given an information sheet outlining the study's objectives, interview process, and key details. They were informed of their rights, including voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw or withhold information without repercussions.

This descriptive study aimed to present an accurate account of people and situations (Al-Ababneh, 2020:84). To investigate women's leadership and empowerment in Pentecostal churches, questionnaires were used. Key questions included: What hinders gender transformation in church leadership? What factors have led to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions? What obstacles prevent women's ordination within the church? These inquiries facilitated the identification of patterns and dynamics in specific contexts and situations (Osmer, 2008:33).

3.3.1 Research Population

The study population refers to the entire group of subjects the researcher aims to study, from which a sample is drawn (Stockerer, 2019:57). The BTG is recognised as one of the largest Pentecostal churches in South Africa comprising approximately two million members and maintaining a presence in every town across the country, including more than 30 local congregations in Soweto, Johannesburg alone. The Assemblies of God in South Africa can be described as an umbrella organisation encompassing three distinct entities: the Group, the Association, and Back to God (BTG). While each of these entities operates independently and follows its own structure, they maintain a relationship with one another. Although individuals from all racial backgrounds are present in each entity, BTG is predominantly Black. The leadership of the overarching organisation, however, is elected from representatives across all three entities.

This population includes the individuals or cases upon which the study is focused, and the findings are intended to apply to this group (Creswell, 2018). For this research, the target population comprised 24 pastors, all over the age of 50, each with over ten years of senior leadership experience, including some who had retired but had previously held such roles. This selection was critical for examining how the church's development has impacted women's empowerment (Saunders et al., 2016:212). The population was specifically defined to ensure the study's scope and relevance (Strydom, 2011:223). Women are not being interviewed in this study because my master's research focused on women's voices. Non-probability sampling was employed to select participants for the study.

3.3.1.1 Non-Probability Sampling

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-random, intentional method where participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research question (Flick, 2022:165). This approach allowed the researcher to target individuals and settings most likely to provide valuable insights into the processes under investigation (Strydom, 2011:391). All participants were senior male leaders from the BTG Church, all chosen using pre-determined criteria, selected to address the research question: *How is Black Pentecostalism dealing with women's empowerment (particularly women's ordination), adapting to the modern era, as seen by the*

BTG denomination? This method ensured credible, resource-appropriate data collection aligned with the study's objectives.

3.3.2 Sample Size

The study's target sample consisted of 24 senior male pastors over the age of 50 from the BTG denomination, a predominantly black Pentecostal wing of the Assemblies of God. Women are not ordained as pastors in the BTG denomination, and thus, all participants were male. The sample consisted of the national leadership of the church, including former members of the Teaching Team, the Executive Committee, and the Regional Council Committees (RCC). These leaders were selected based on their extensive experience, having served in senior leadership roles within the BTG denomination for over ten years. The researcher assumed they possessed a comprehensive understanding of church matters, including its constitution, procedural rules, polity, and the rationale behind senior leadership decisions.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the rationale behind the exclusion of women from being ordained as pastors, which is a requirement for positions of leadership in the denomination. The first objective was to investigate fully the Back to God tradition, to establish the historical vision of Reverend Bhengu toward women's empowerment. The second objective sought to understand the factors that lead to the exclusion of women's ordination, as an example of empowerment and change, in the development of the church. The third objective aimed to assess the implications of the Pentecostal tradition's reluctance to embrace gender changes prompted by modernity. Additionally, the study aimed to evaluate whether the church is actively contributing to the empowerment of women in ministry.



Figure. 3.1. AOG -BTG Denomination Structure

3.3.3 The Collection of Data

The data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews, also known as in-depth interviews (Flick, 2022:195). These interviews were guided by a series of prepared, open-ended questions designed to direct both the conversation and the interviewer's approach (Flick, 2022:195). Semi-structured interviews are a key method of data collection in qualitative research. Scheel and Groeben emphasise that these interviews help reconstruct subjective theories, offering a more nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives (Flick, 2022:211). "Subjective theory" refers to the detailed insights participants have about the topic being explored (Flick, 2022:211). The interviews focused on the research objectives concerning the evolution of the church and its impact on women's empowerment.

Semi-structured interviews were preferred to gather detailed, rich data about the research problem (Greeff, 2011:351). The interviews were conducted face-to-face, aiming to understand the world from the participants' viewpoints and to uncover the meanings they attached to their experiences (Creswell, 2018:179). Interviews were held at different locations as chosen by the participants, such as their offices, mission houses, churches, or restaurants, ensuring confidentiality and safety (Strydom, 2011:115). All 24 interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure rigor, verification, validation, and validity checks were applied throughout the process.

3.3.3.1 Data Collection Tools

The primary tool in this qualitative research was the researcher (Swinton and Mowat, 2016:56). Participants' opinions were voiced in casual talks during semi-structured interviews, which were used to gather data. The interviews were based on the objectives and questions of the research (Flick, 2022:212), concerning how Black Pentecostalism is addressing women's empowerment, particularly women's ordination, and adapting to the modern era, as exemplified by the BTG denomination. The researchers could evaluate individuals' attitudes, actions, and perceptions through interviews (Flick, 2022:211). Additionally, a questionnaire was created and employed as a useful tool to direct the researcher throughout the interview. Two recording tapes (one as a backup) and field notes were used to record the interviews.

3.3.3.2 The Study's Interview Questions

3.3.3.2.1 Questions for Objective 1

- 1.1 Please tell us what Reverend Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual empowerment.
- 1.2 How well does the church's constitution reflect the Reverend Bhengu's determination to empower women?
- 1.3 How relevant is Reverend Bhengu's vision for the church today?
- 1.4 Reverend Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Reverend Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?
- 1.5 How has the position of women changed following Reverend Bhengu's departure?
- 1.6 Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for the Back to God Crusade.
- 1.6a What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women
- 1.6b Why has Reverend Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment?
- 1.7 What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church?

3.3.3.2.2 Questions for Objective 2

- 2.1 What is the current status of women's roles in the BTG denomination?
- 2.2 Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

- 2.3 What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it comes to church positions?
- 2.4 What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?
- 2.5 Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary period like their male counterparts.
- 2.6 What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church? -
- 2.7 By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the church adapting to the times?
- 2.8 What do you think should be done to change this situation?

3.3.3.2.3 Questions for Objective 3

- 3.1 Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender change in the BTG denomination?
- 3.2 Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the Cape to Cairo vision?
- 3.3 Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and to the outside society.
- 3.4 What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this church?
- 3.5 What were the implications of resistance in the past?
- 3.6 What are the current implications of resistance?
- 3.7 What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

3.3.4 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted with a senior church leader to pre-test research instruments, and to evaluate the feasibility of the study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002:33; Majid et al., 2017:1073). The interview, consisting of 24 open-ended questions, provided feedback on the clarity and appropriateness of the questions, helping to refine the interview process and address potential flaws (Greeff, 2011:351). Based on the feedback, minor revisions were made to the interview questions, detailed in Appendix C and above.

3.3.5 Procedures for Analysing Data

The data analysis method employed in this study was thematic analysis (TA), chosen for its flexibility in addressing diverse research questions and analysing various data types, such as interview transcripts, focus groups, and secondary sources (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:807). Important themes and trends were found in the qualitative data (Flick, 2022:440). Analysis was done using Atlas.Ti, a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) tool, supporting the process (Jacobs, 2021). The analysis of data was done following Braun and Clarke's six-stage framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Flick, 2022:441).

In the familiarization phase, verbal data were transcribed, and transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to gain an understanding of participants' responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193). Field notes were organised, and initial coding identified patterns and connections, categorizing data into semantic (explicit ideas) and latent (underlying meanings) codes (Saldana, 2021:5; Flick, 2022:441).

Codes were then grouped into themes, representing significant aspects of the data aligned with the research questions. Themes were refined, organised into subthemes, and irrelevant ones removed (Flick, 2022:441). Final themes were defined, named, and visually represented using thematic maps to illustrate relationships (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:808). The process concluded with a report summarising findings (Flick, 2022:441).

This analysis identified meaningful patterns that addressed the main research questions and provided insights into the challenges faced by women in the BTG denomination. Findings were systematically categorized, enabling conclusions aligned with the study's objectives (Schurink et al., 2011:409; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:808).

3.4 Reconceptualisation of Data

This section illustrates the reinterpretation of data into themes or findings. The study drew from interviews with 24 individuals, all of whom were part of the church's all-male leadership. To clarify the rationale for why women were being debarred from holding leadership positions, pertinent codes were found for each of the three study objectives.

From the data collected, 21 codes emerged from the 24 interviews, which were then organised into seven overarching themes. Appendix B provides a detailed code list, illustrating how the data was formulated into themes. For example, the code that showed the restriction of women to lead other women only, occurred 63 times, highlighting how little women participate in larger religious events. Similarly, codes like “the predominance of African tradition and culture” (37 occurrences), “patriarchal culture” (25), and “spiritual stagnation syndrome” (79) provided further insights into cultural and spiritual barriers.

Other significant codes included “Leadership lacking a vision for church growth and overlooking the founder’s legacy” (97), “the vision has been misinterpreted and misconstrued” (30), and “male dominance and denominational culture” (49). Additional themes reflected practical and theological dynamics, such as “fundraising through handwork” (22), “questions of biblical interpretation” (27), and “the church is deprived of the blessings that come through women's gifts” (12). The code “women as second-class believers,” which appeared 58 times, further emphasised the marginalisation of women in the church context. For a visual representation of how these codes were clustered into themes, refer to the diagrams in Appendix B (the code list and the themes and major codes with frequencies).

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3.4.1 Referencing Used in Quotes

The study's 24 participants were selected from the church's all-male leadership. The following reference system was employed. The participant's ID was indicated by the letter 'P,' followed by a number (P1–P24), representing the participant’s classification from 1 to 24. This was followed by the letter 'L' and a number, which referred to the line number in the transcript. Finally, an index number was included to indicate the paragraph where the quotation was found.

3.5 Summary of the Major Emerging Themes and Subthemes

The primary focus of this study is particularly on Black Pentecostalism's stance on gender equity and women's empowerment. The study investigates the reasons behind women's exclusion from pastoral ordination and the consequences of the Pentecostal tradition's unwillingness to the gender shift of modernity. The following diagram illustrates the exclusion of women in the church.

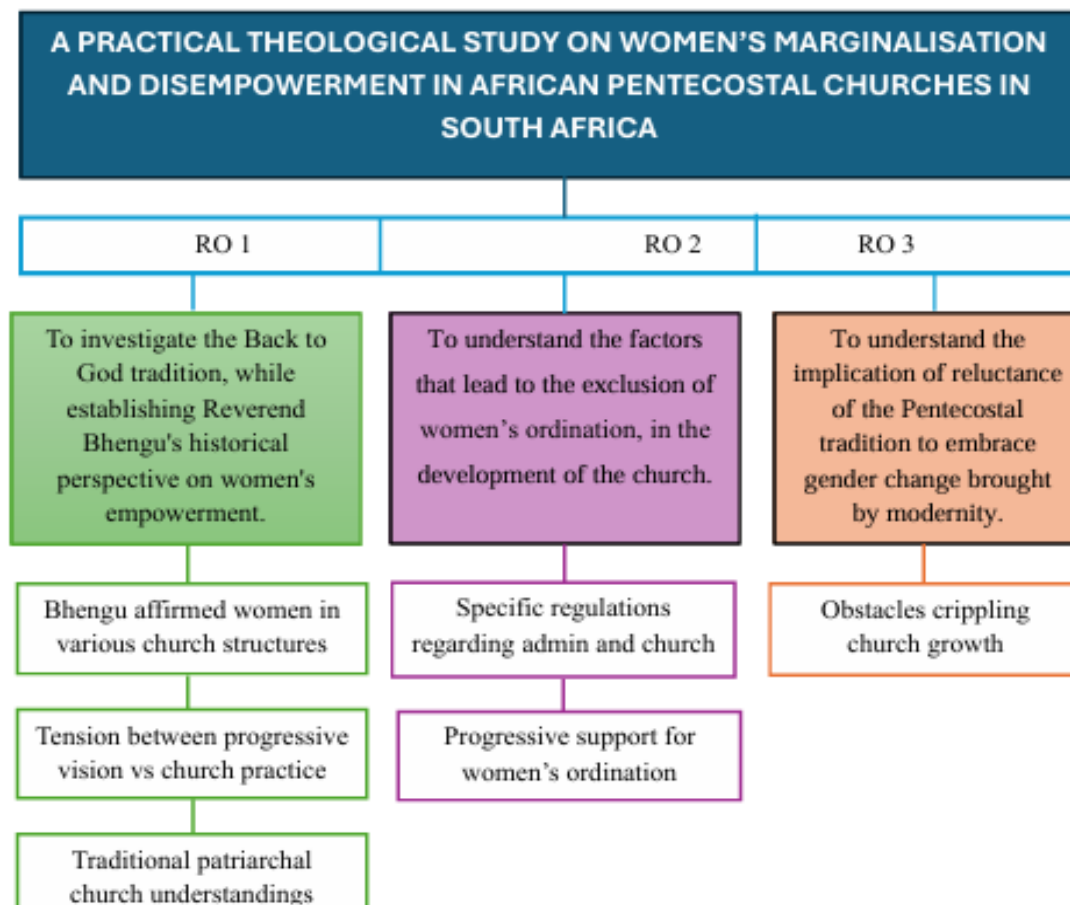


Table 3.1. Outlining the themes that illustrate women's marginalisation in the church

3.5.1 Findings of Objective One

To investigate the Back to God tradition while establishing Reverend Bhengu's historical perspective on women's empowerment. In the above diagram, this objective is highlighted in green colour. In an attempt to ascertain the founder's historical perspective on women, the male leadership answered to the question. Three themes surfaced from the data: Reverend Bhengu's affirmation of women in various church organisations, the tension between progressive vision vs church practice, and traditional patriarchal church understandings continue.

3.5.1.1 Theme One: Reverend Bhengu Affirmed Women in Various Church Structures

The historical perspective of Reverend Bhengu on women's empowerment was examined in this part. This was to understand how Reverend Bhengu empowered women and to determine whether the church's current practices are consistent with the vision of its founder. A church's practice is its methodical approach to conducting business. Church practices often adhere to the written body of theology, constitution, or rules of procedure, constituting the church's commonly recognised and obligatory teachings. Investigating the differences between the BTG denomination's historical vision and current polity was consequently essential. The BTG denomination contains church procedures and doctrine that outline qualifications for church leadership. The findings implied that the founder wanted women to participate in all church-related activities. The founder's intentions regarding women in the church system were reflected in the following major codes:

1. Reverend Bhengu affirmed women as bearers of the Good News.
2. Formation of women's organisation
3. Fundraising through handwork

3.5.1.1.1 Reverend Bhengu affirmed women as bearers of good news

Participants suggest that Reverend Bhengu sought to empower women in the church but faced challenges in balancing this with the expectations of men, who traditionally believe women should not hold leadership roles. Men, raised with the notion that women should adhere to gender-specific roles, were uncomfortable with women preaching or asserting authority. While Reverend Bhengu did involve gifted women alongside men in preaching within the BTG denomination, his ability to act freely was limited by the social context in which he operated. This major code appeared in 10 instances.

Participants were asked to characterize Reverend Bhengu's historical vision for women's spiritual empowerment. In response, participants stated that Reverend Bhengu never had a problem with women preaching the gospel. He viewed women as capable and hardworking individuals, and he gave them a chance to use their God-given gifts to build the church, but circumstances were limiting him.

P12: *History tells us that pastor Bhengu had no qualms with the gender. He worked with women, he used them in revivals, and some started preaching while they were still schoolgirls. Yet many female workers came out of his hands, they were not called pastors, but the word worker was used. So, this means that, positionally, these girls were workers, they went to work full time, they did revivals and some planted churches with the revivals that they ran. So, that shows that Baba Bhengu used everybody, as long as they were gifted. [12:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 12](#)*

Though they were never formally acknowledged as pastors, the church founder included women in leadership roles. They were limited in their ability to participate in church leadership since they were viewed as workers rather than pastors. According to some participants, this restriction prevented women from fully participating. In contrast, Bhengu believed that women were capable and diligent, to help the church expand.

P4: *I assume that Reverend Bhengu had this idea that women had a pivotal role to play in the church, although he never stated openly that women should do this and that. How do we see that? we see it because Reverend Bhengu for instance, here in the former Transkei there are churches that were planted and led by unmarried women but Reverend Bhengu never said she was making them pastors but he called them female workers and by interpretation, you will find out that these were pastors. [4:1 ¶ 7 in Participant 4](#)*

The above response indicates that because Reverend Bhengu was resisting the oppressive pressures of leadership, social stereotypes and tradition served to perpetuate the status of women. This participant indicates that if Reverend Bhengu had been alive, he would have unquestionably ordained women as pastors an assertion echoed by Lephoko (2008:124).

Bhengu struggled to negotiate with African men who traditionally viewed women as inferior in leadership roles. He employed gifted women to preach in the BTG denomination, but living conditions limited his autonomy. Social stereotypes and tradition perpetuated women's status, and if Bhengu had been alive, he would have ordained women as pastors. The participant believes that Bhengu's resistance to oppressive pressures contributed to his success.

P5: *First of all, I would like to say that pastor Bhengu's vision was about preaching the gospel from Cape to Cairo. Number two, Pastor Bhengu did not have a gender issue. He believed in the calling regardless of whether it was a man or a woman, as a result, many churches that are run by pastors today were started by females. There was that thing in the church that was called a worker, besides the organisers* [5:1 ¶ 3 in Participant 5](#)

The subsequent response validates the participants' earlier assertions, adding that despite the challenging circumstances, Reverend Bhengu made use of women and gave them leadership roles inside the churches. These women would approach him bearing visions they had witnessed, and Reverend Bhengu would appreciate them.

P3: *Reverend Bhengu would sometimes leave the work with women, he trusted them and he understood the gifts that were vested upon them.* [3:2 ¶ 15 in Participant 3](#)

According to the response above, the founder valued women's contributions in the Crusades, aiming to ensure salvation. Women led the Back to God Crusade with courage and empathy, fulfilling Reverend Bhengu's vision. However, men often opposed women, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

[3.5.1.1.2 Fundraising Through Handwork](#)

This major code had 22 frequencies. Even though some men believed Reverend Bhengu validated women as carriers of Good News, some participants claimed that women's role was to raise money for the church by doing and selling hand work. These participants state that Reverend Bhengu who was a student in America at the time also started looking for financial support for his Back to God Crusade work.

These participants were asked to convey what Reverend Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual empowerment. The participant states that Reverend Bhengu received a vision from God telling him to return to South Africa and approach women who cover their heads with long veils because they would be the ones to provide him with financial support. After his return, Reverend Bhengu founded a women's organisation in the church and taught its members

how to create crafts, which they would subsequently sell to generate money for church crusades.

P1: *God showed him a mother wearing a big headscarf, and said to him, go to that mother and that is where you will get the money. He returned from abroad, gathered mothers, and explained the vision he saw so that he could conduct his revivals. Then in the 60's, 1962, the movement of mothers started. [1:5 ¶ 7 in Participant 1](#)*

The participant's response above demonstrates how the women continued to support the Back to God Crusade and nurture the idea of empowering other women by teaching them handicrafts so that they can earn income to help Reverend Bhengu realize the vision. The corresponding responses below also echo that Reverend Bhengu received a vision while attempting to obtain financing abroad, that directed him toward women as the source of funding for the Back to God Crusade.

The next participant responded to the relevance of Reverend Bhengu's vision for the church today. This participant feels that Reverend Bhengu's vision is still very relevant because women are raising the funds for the church.

P14: *Reverend Bhengu had been shown a vision by God that women are the ones who will be able to make the money needed for revivals to win souls. Now in the days of our lives that does not happen, if it does happen, it happens occasionally, but the women still hold the vision of Baba Reverend Bhengu. Even now these women take millions to Thaba Nchu, and how that money is used now, is not their problem anymore. [14:5 ¶ 55 in Participant 14](#)*

The above response traces Reverend Bhengu's vision for women's empowerment to his alleged financial struggles, which prevented him from fulfilling his evangelistic task. Therefore, these participants perceived fundraising as a crucial part of the Back to God Crusade and as Reverend Bhengu's historical vision for women's spiritual empowerment. The above participant argues that even though women continue to raise the funds but there are no revival tents taking place.

3.5.1.1.3 Formation of Women's Organisation

Following the vision God gave him, Reverend Bhengu founded a women's organisation after his return from America. The ladies taught each other how to sew, knit, and create various handicrafts to sell and collect money for the Back to God Crusade. Reverend Bhengu imparted knowledge to the women by teaching them about the good and bad women found in the scriptures. Upon observing their maturity, He nominated the women's leadership as the one to instruct in their services.

Participants were asked to characterize Reverend Bhengu's historical vision for women's spiritual empowerment. People had different views on Reverend Bhengu's historical vision of women's empowerment. Participant 1 below stated by founding the women's organisation Reverend Bhengu empowered women.

P1: *He then chose four mothers, and he trained them on how to do the work, and the mothers started doing handwork, sewing, and selling, and money was collected - it was then deposited in our bank and when the revival was to start the money would be withdrawn. [1:7 ¶ 11 in Participant 1](#)*

Some individuals had a different perspective on Reverend Bhengu's historical vision of women's empowerment. Women were perceived as belonging solely to their organisation, and they were forbidden from ascending to positions of leadership in other spheres of the church that were reserved for men only.

Based on Participant 14 assertions, it was revealed that some men were concerned that if women were to be ordained as pastors, they would offer prayers for the men by placing their hands on their heads, which they believed would diminish their dignity even in their homes.

P14: *when it comes to empowering women spiritually, baba Reverend Bhengu tried, even though the time was not allowing for women to be in leadership, because the moment a woman becomes a pastor, she would have to lay hands on men and this could lead to women wanting to lead their husbands at their home as well. [14:1 ¶ 12 in Participant 14](#)*

Based on the responses provided by the participants above, it is evident that Reverend Bhengu founded the organisation exclusively to allow women to work in it and not be involved in the overall activities of the church.

However, it appears that the women's movement was applied to church leadership for distinct purposes, based on the comments that follow. As per the next participant, Reverend Bhengu brought female evangelists and preachers to the organisation since he knew that they would be discriminated against and excluded from other things once he passed away.

P5: *But when he was about to leave, Reverend Bhengu said to all those who were female workers that he knew that when he passed on, they would be ill-treated, and he said they should move to the organisation, although some could not survive because a calling is a calling. So, I am trying to say that he did not have a gender problem in his time. [5:2 ¶ 61 in Participant 5](#)*

The response above demonstrates how Reverend Bhengu had fortified the women's organisation so that they could function independently without interference. The supervisors that Reverend Bhengu appointed produce new organisers and supervisors every time one of them passed away.

The participants' perspectives on Reverend Bhengu's motivations for founding a women's organisation differed, which sums up this subtheme. Some claim that Reverend Bhengu gave women more influence when he founded the women's organisation. Conversely, some claim that the organisation was established expressly to enable women to hold leadership positions there rather than elsewhere. On the other hand, others said that Reverend Bhengu included all the preaching women in the group to shield them from prejudice and marginalisation even after his exit. Some claim that granting women the ability to become ordained would result in them losing their sense of dignity as males.

3.5.1.2 Theme 2: Tension Between Progressive Vision Vs Church Practice

In trying to discover Reverend Bhengu's historical vision of women's empowerment, the findings were that there is a contradiction between the progressive vision and the church practices. The participants indicated this discrepancy in perceptions like:

1. Leadership lacking a vision for church growth and overlooking the founder's legacy
2. The vision has been misinterpreted and misconstrued

3.5.1.2.1 Leadership Lacking a Vision for Church Growth and Overlooking the Founder's Legacy

For a leader to be valuable to an institution, it is thought that they must exhibit visionary behaviour and have visionary leadership skills as essential personal traits (Karwan et al, 2021:431). There is a belief that in places where people reside and in places led by visionary leaders, God is active and present (Stache, 2020:55). The concept of the lack of visionary leadership was consistent throughout the interviews. Participants have explained why women are not being empowered in the church. Participant 2 asserts that there is a divide over how to employ women on a national scale, which is the root of the leadership's dispute over how to use women in the church. The following participant was responding to the question of why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary period like their male counterparts and he stated that it is the responsibility of the Teaching Team to perform ordination.

P4: *Well, I think again the Teaching Team will be qualified to answer this kind of question. The one lady who was known to be a pastor in Cape Town has left our church. She got so frustrated with the way she was treated by the regional leadership. She was more than a pastor, and she proved that women could do wonders. I understand that there were male pastors who would say to her that we do not have female pastors in the church* [4:16 ¶ 131 in Participant 4](#)

As per the above participant's statement, the Teaching Team is the appropriate body to handle and settle the matter of women's ordination.

The next participant mentioned the rigidity and conservativeness of other church leadership members. He perceives the restriction on women's ordination as a cultural obstacle and thinks the church requires instruction. However, he mentioned that the Teaching Team is currently focused on creating a document to assist them moving forward.

P21: *The rigidity or the conservativeness of some people who would say no you*

cannot have women in the forefront, [21:22 ¶ 186 in Participant 21](#)

This participant argues that some of the current senior leadership members and pastors are very rigid.

When asked about the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church, the following participant states that the church has not taken any lessons from the change that happened in 1994 when South Africa attained democracy.

P11: *We as the church, as I have said before, have not taken full advantage of the new political landscape. Reverend Bhengu did what he could within the confines of his own time, [11:10 ¶ 114 in Participant 11](#)*

According to the above participant, the leadership has not learnt from the democratic transition that happened in South Africa in 1994.

3.5.1.2.2 The Vision Has Been Misinterpreted and Misconstrued

The major code "the vision has been misinterpreted and misconstrued," alludes to how poorly understood and misinterpreted Reverend Bhengu's vision has been. This major code had 30 frequencies and serves to illustrate how the leadership especially those tasked with overseeing the doctrine of the church comprehended and interpreted the founder's vision.

When the following participant was asked: Why has Reverend Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment? As per the response of Participant 2 below, the initial followers of Reverend Bhengu either did not understand the vision or misinterpreted it.

P2: *If the followers do not catch the vision and I disappear out of the face of the earth as the leader having my vision not been caught fully by those who followed me the chances are close to zero that the vision will be extended, progress, and move to greater heights, instead, I will die with my vision.... [2:11 ¶ 114 in Participant 2](#)*

In this case, it seems as if the followers of Reverend Bhengu never caught the vision he shared with them; instead, they were following some elements of it but not the entire vision.

What the participant above is saying is something that Reverend Bhengu prophesied about.

P2: *...he spoke very openly about the fact; what he did about that time, he passed on many will misconstrue to construe him. He said many will misconstrue what I do, and indeed, he was misconstrued thoroughly.* [2:4 ¶ 51 in Participant 2](#)

According to the participant above, the church's activities were known even before Reverend Bhengu's passing. However, while the church was still in disarray, some of the new members who joined after Reverend Bhengu's passing took advantage of the situation and changed things.

P5: *The problem is that people come in and dilute a thing.* [5:16 ¶ 140 in Participant 5](#)

According to this participant, it seemed this is how they lost the vision as they allowed those who took advantage of the situation and got away with it.

Having been asked; why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary period like their male counterparts. He complained that the leadership does not agree on this issue. That means the conference must decide...

P2: *...nationally there is this disjuncture that I think is the reason because there is no universal agreement on a national scale on how to utilize these Christian women.* [2:47 ¶ 279 in Participant 2](#)

Asked: What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church? The following participants argued that they could not change something that did not belong to them.

He died without explaining why he had never ordained women or without establishing the ordination of women [7:15 ¶ 127 in Participant 7](#)

From these responses it is evident that there are significant challenges regarding the issue of women's ordination because one said that Reverend Bhengu left the church to the Holy Spirit while others said that he instructed that the church's pillars must never be removed, however no one of the participants explains what these pillars that Reverend Bhengu was talking about. Additionally, almost all the participants complained about the ineffectiveness of the senior leadership (Teaching Team) that they are not doing their work. Others went to the extent of accusing them of not knowing their job.

3.5.1.3 Theme 3: Traditional Patriarchal Church Understanding Continues

Religion and culture significantly influence gender roles in African countries, as they uphold male hegemony in households, worship places, and society (Chisale, 2020:4). Traditional patriarchal church understanding continues to hinder Reverend Bhengu's vision towards women's empowerment. This study reveals that the African cultural norm of excluding women from leadership roles impacts the church's perspective on women's eligibility for such positions. The church hierarchy is impacted by how society views women, and leaders disagree on the rationale for treating women due to differing views on women's empowerment. Tribalism is a problem that the church is grappling with, as no tribe is willing to adhere to the conventions of another due to their distinct cultures. The church and women suffer from pride and lack of compromise, and the belief that salvation is predicated on one culture, Christ, is adversely affected by individuals' distinct habits. The following major codes, which were most frequently used by the participants, are characteristic of this theme:

1. Male dominance and Denominational culture
2. Women as second-class believers

3.5.1.3.1 *Male dominance and Denominational culture*

Male dominance in the church refers to the power held by men, while denominational culture includes the church's constitution and rules. This study highlights how leadership practices have marginalised women, creating divisions within the church. Male dominance influences both administrative and ecclesiastical governance, supported by material and ideological factors. Traditionally, gender roles have been hierarchically structured, with men holding authority over women.

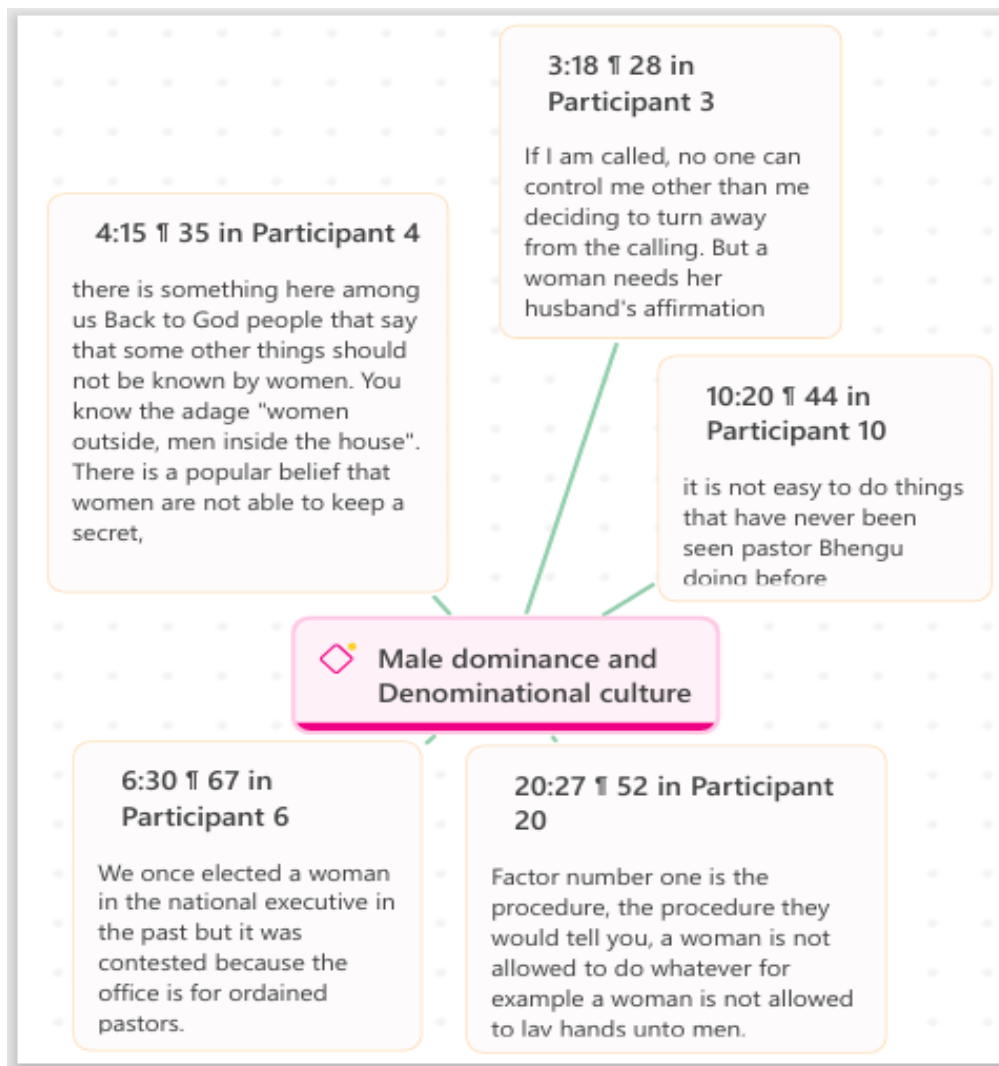


Figure 3.3. demonstrates quotations from Male Dominance and Denominational

To ascertain the effects of male dominance on Reverend Bhengu's historical vision toward women's empowerment, participants were asked what issues are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church. Participants were asked what obstacles stand in the way of women's ordination in the church, to determine the effects of male dominance on Reverend Bhengu's historical vision toward women's empowerment. In response, the next participant stated that there is a belief that some roles are exclusively appropriate for men.

P1: *It is maleness my child, that mentality that some things are not suitable for women. However, this is what I have just said, Reverend Bhengu saw it and tried to fix it, but we still do it* [1:21 ¶ 133 in Participant 1](#)

This suggests that since only men are eligible pastors, the church elects its top leadership from the pastors, meaning that women do not have a say in the church business.

When asked how they feel about women's ordination in their church, this participant was concerned that their spouses would be abused by churchgoers.

In response to: what are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church? It sounded as though guys have secrets that women should not be aware of.

P4: *there is something here among us Back to God people that say that some other things should not be known by women. You know the adage "women outside, men inside the house". [4:15 ¶ 122 in Participant 4](#)*

According to this participant BTG denomination men think women should not know everything.

3.5.1.3.2 Women as Second-Class Believers

This section presents the concept of women as second-class believers, as one of the main codes that form the theme, specific regulations regarding admin and church governance. With 58 frequencies, it is founded as one of the factors that lead to the exclusion of women's ordination on a denominational level, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church. The diagram below demonstrates quotations that show why women are perceived as second-class believers.

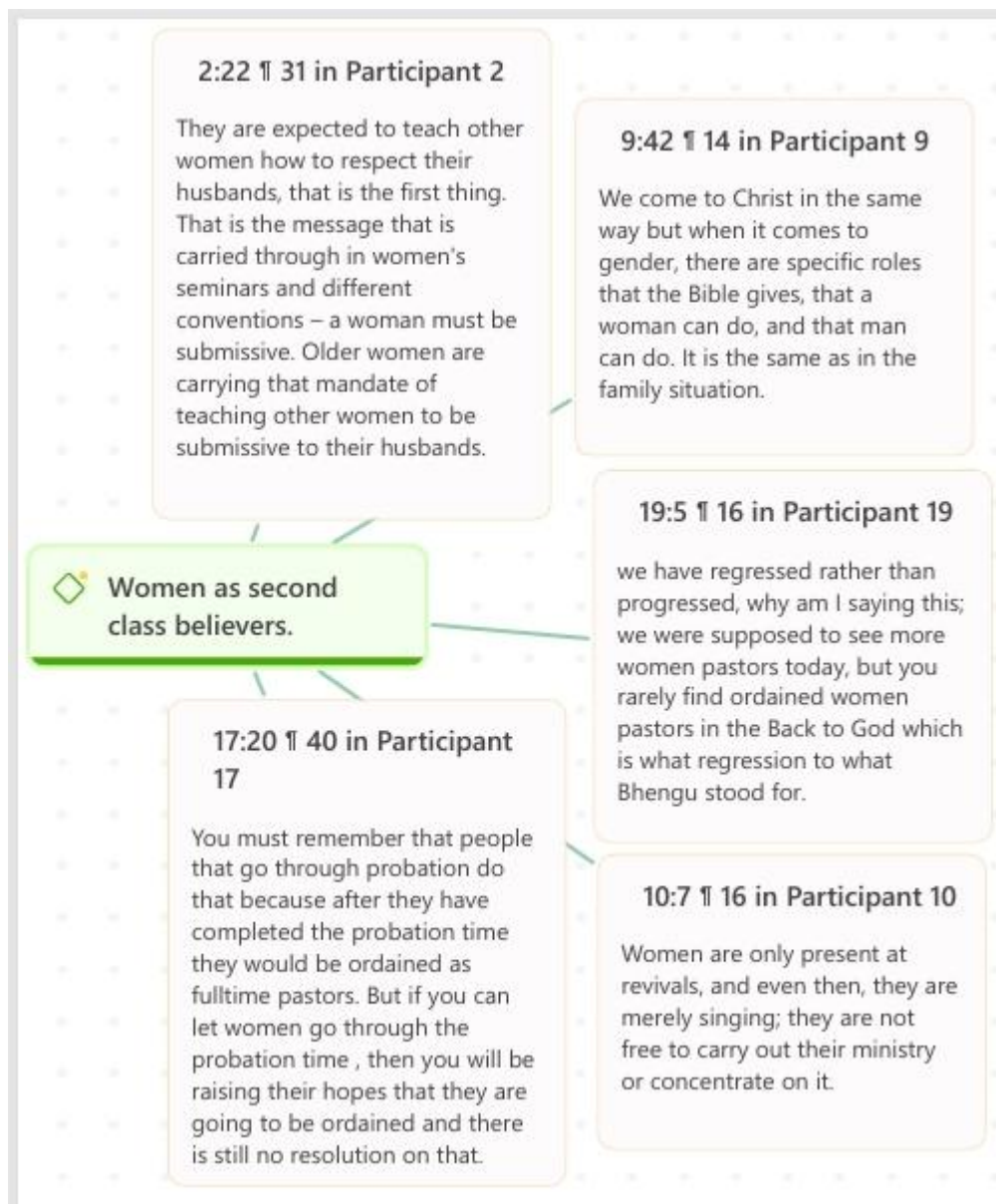


Figure 3.4. demonstrates quotations on women as second-class believers

To determine how women are treated as second-class believers, participants were asked, why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary period like their male counterparts. The following participants claimed that they are not acknowledged as fully-fledged pastors since they operate under the direction of senior pastors and are referred to as "workers" rather than "pastors".

P6: *No, they are not considered as pastors, I think they are considered as workers. So, probation does not mean anything to them because once you go on probation then you need to be ordained. Once they can go for probation, it means it should be passed by*

*the General Counsel, and the General Counsel is not authorized to do that. [6:17 ¶ 305](#)
[in Participant 6](#)*

Responding to the question: “non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and the outside society” This participant said they do trust women that is why they were given the organisation.

P23: *I think that the leadership has confidence in the women, and that is why they allow them to manage their organisations independently and without any interference. [23:22](#)
[¶ 140 in Participant 23](#)*

Although this answer acts as though he does trust women, he is still limiting them to the organisation and claiming to trust them, which proves that women are not needed as pastors. This indicates his avoidance of the issue of their ordination.

3.5.1.4 Summary of Objective One

Objective One examined four key themes: The founder of the church Reverend Bhengu affirmed women in various church structures, the tension between progressive ideas and traditional practices, and the persistence of patriarchal views. Bhengu aimed to empower women in leadership, fundraising, and women’s organisations. However, 40 years after his death, power struggles, politics, and jealousy have hindered women’s progress. Tensions exist between his progressive vision and the church’s practices, including a lack of visionary leadership, viewing women as secondary believers, and resistance to women in leadership. Patriarchal views continue to dominate, restricting women to leading only other women, influenced by African cultural norms and biblical interpretation debates.

3.5.2 Findings of Objective 2

Understanding what contributed to women's prohibition from being ordained in the development of the church was the goal of this objective. These themes are highlighted in purple in the diagram above. Questions were asked to understand the factors behind the

exclusion of women's ordination at the denominational level. The findings are categorised into two main themes, which are:

1. Specific regulations regarding admin and church governance
2. Progressive support for women's ordination

3.5.2.1 Specific Regulations Regarding Admin and Church Governance

One of the most fundamental and significant issues in the continuing heritage of Pentecostal and charismatic churches is the struggle for women's agency and voice. The primary issue is that this subject has not gotten enough attention up to this point, particularly when examined independently (de Alminana, 2017: 1). The anti-intellectual stance within the Pentecostal tradition has contributed significantly to the discrimination against women. Many within this tradition tend to interpret the 'Word' literally, often resisting collaboration with mainstream churches and academic institutions, that have addressed this issue through research and other scholarly methods. Some women of different religions are said to have succeeded in overcoming obstacles, but many more have been suppressed and prevented from participating fully by both overt and covert measures (de Alminana, 2017: 1). This these was formed by the following major codes:

1. Patriarchal culture.
2. Predominance of African tradition and culture
3. Question of Biblical Interpretation of Women's Role
4. Women are restricted to Leading Women Only (Jacobs, 2022)
5. Power Conflicts and Division in the Church
6. Some men feel threatened and intimidated by women's gifts

3.5.2.1.1 Patriarchal Culture

In patriarchal environments, religious justifications are frequently employed to excuse the mistreatment of women (Wood, 2019:5). Pentecostals often grapple with the inclusive implications of the daughters' prophecy, which is rooted in a radical eschatological gospel of inclusivity (Tackett, 2017:85). Many Pentecostal leaders lack formal training in Bible Colleges and social justice culture, leading to a lack of awareness on gender issues, thereby perpetuating

these issues. ‘Patriarchal culture’ influences biblical interpretations of women’s roles, with men defending their status to avoid losing their positions. Some participants believe that men, who drive this process, make it challenging for women to be ordained. Below is a diagram with some of the quotes that explain this major code.

When the next participant was asked - what should be done to change this situation, he said it must not change.

P9: *It must not change; one must operate within the parameters of God’s ordained platform. I am saying again if you are called by God – just do what the Lord said you must do.* [9:30 ¶ 282 in Participant 9](#)

The participant suggests that women should follow the Lord’s instructions without seeking ordination, which seems unfair to aspiring female pastors. This limits them to preaching outside of church settings and prevents them from being recognised as valid pastors or holding positions of authority

The following participant responded to the question that; by not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the church adapting to the times? The next participants affirm that the church is conservative.

P20: *Back to God is not amenable, to adaptation on the issues of women’s participation, let us be frank about that Back to God is very conservative, very patriarchal very religious, and is very procedural to the extent that sometimes though we are a Pentecostal church some other people may view us as liturgical so to speak because everything has to be done according to the book.* [20:30 ¶ 377 in Participant 20](#)

It would be challenging to address sexism at BTG denomination because some of the leaders cannot hide their disdain for women in leadership positions. Because of this, it is difficult to convene and discuss a solution, unless the conference decides as some participants have suggested.

3.5.2.1.2 Predominance of African Tradition and Culture

African tradition and culture typically dictate the roles of men and women in society, often refuting women's claims to leadership positions in the church (Jacobs, 2022:27). According to Wachania & Ndengwah, this cultural influence accentuates divisions that lead to discrimination against women, confining them to lesser roles (Jacobs 2022:93). Such behaviour is perpetuated across generations, making it difficult to change (Smith & Chetty, 2018). Participants believe that cultural and traditional views hinder the ordination of women, as they are perceived differently and not viewed as leaders like men.

When asked what the issues are that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church, Participant 21 expressed dissatisfaction at the disparate perspectives held by the different ethnic groups inside the church, which hinders advancement.

P21: *there are ethnic groups in South Africa who have this belief that a woman cannot lead men, and when it comes to women's ordination you will notice that women are given the right to go and study, to go to a theological school like the Henley on Klip, but when they come back they are not regarded as pastors* [21:12 ¶ 133 in Participant 21](#)

According to this participant, it appears that there is another significant issue for women: the diversity and incompatibility of cultures among different ethnic groups. This creates an even more complex barrier to the ordination of women, as no ethnic group is willing to subordinate itself to another.

The next participant was responding to the question - What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church? And he said even culturally there is a difference between women and men

P9: *Even culturally speaking there are issues that must be handled by men that women cannot handle, even if you say take this responsibility. They will not be able to. So, if the church now turns a blind eye to gender issues, then that is a big problem.* [9:24 ¶ 233 in Participant 9](#)

This participant seems to be expressing that they are unable to detach themselves from African culture because it is an integral part of their lives.

3.5.2.1.3 Question of Biblical Interpretation of Women's Role

The biblical interpretation of women's role also surfaced as a motif in the process of attempting to understand the factors that lead to the exclusion of women's ordination on a denominational level, as an example of equal treatment. With 23 frequencies, this major code was recurring throughout the interviews. Although respondents below acknowledged that the Bible contributed to excluding women from being ordained as pastors, their opinions on how the Bible should be interpreted differed. Some affirmed that they adhere to the scriptures, while some believe that the scriptures are misinterpreted. Below is the diagram showing some of the responses that show the question of Biblical interpretation of women's role.

The participants were divided in their views, with some arguing that the issue lies in a misinterpretation of the Bible, while others supported the verses that prohibit women from holding leadership roles. Upon being asked, what prompted the changes made regarding women, the next participant attributed it to Pentecostals' literal understanding of the Bible. These participants questioned how Paul's writings are understood and applied.

P19: *misinterpretation of the Bible, culture – how people interpret things based on how they understand culture, culturally, from home, you know that a man is a leader and is supposed to protect a woman and not the other way round. So, all these things combined become a stumbling block. [19:16 ¶ 144 in Participant 19](#)*

The participant believes that Pentecostal churches misinterpret scriptures to justify excluding women from leadership roles. They suggest that people should seek a deeper understanding of these passages beyond their literal reading.

The following participants support the texts that inhibit women.

Asked: What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church? Participant 1 said they are Pentecostals.

P1: Pentecostalism is governed by the Bible; it must not go beyond the principles of the Bible, it does not matter if you are highly spiritual - keep the principles of the Bible.

[1:17 ¶ 101 in Participant 1](#)

Participant 1 demonstrates that the Pentecostal approach to reading and interpreting scriptures significantly influences the decision not to ordain women.

3.5.2.1.4 Women are Restricted to Leading Women Only

The data revealed a recurring pattern (observed in 63 instances) in which participants suggested that women's leadership is predominantly restricted to other women. There were diverse opinions regarding women's roles within the church. Some participants argued that women do not require ordination, as they already have specific roles defined by Reverend Bhengu. Others contended that while Reverend Bhengu permitted women to preach, it was inappropriate for them to hold leadership positions beyond certain limits within the organisation. Overall, responses indicated that the church continues to uphold a patriarchal perspective, as women are neither ordained nor entrusted with certain tasks reserved for men. The diagram below presents quotations that underscore this restriction.

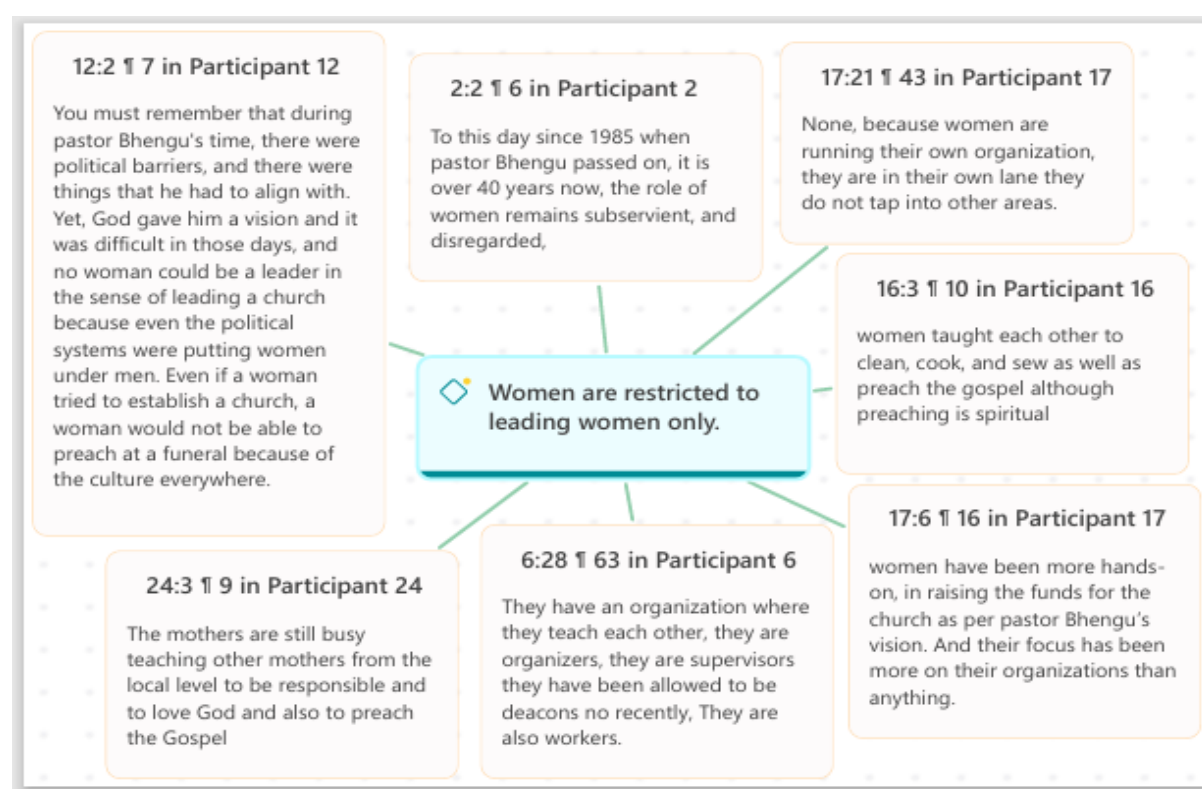


Figure 3.6. demonstrates the quotations that women are only allowed to lead other women only

Asking about the current status of women's roles in BTG denomination, this participant said women are being marginalised.

P11: *...their current status is still limited only to their services, be it girls' services or mothers' services. But in the broader running of the church, their role is still very limited* [11:13 ¶ 131 in Participant 11](#)

P5: *Their work is in the organisation because they do not recognise that they have a calling and that they are called by God. You can see that this one has a calling, and she has been converted to the organisation, and they get frustrated.* [5:13 ¶ 95 in Participant 5](#)

P17: *The issue of women's ordination came up at the conference, but I told you that our church is patriarchal. So, women at the moment are only concentrating on organisation.* [17:16 ¶ 111 in Participant 17](#)

P10: *They have entered local leadership as deacons, but that is not enough because at the moment there are no other ways for them to enter other structures without being ordained. That is a limitation to them.* [10:31 ¶ 273 in Participant 10](#)

The four participants mentioned above (Participants 11, 5, 17, and 10) share the view expressed by others, indicating that women's roles continue to be marginalised. They noted that, despite their aspirations to be ordained and take on leadership positions within the broader church, women are still restricted to leadership roles within women's organisations only.

In response to the question as to why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for the Back to God Crusade, the next participant stated that Reverend Bhengu founded an organisation for women to work in.

P2: *To this day since 1985 when pastor Bhengu passed on, it is over 40 years now, the role of women remains subservient, and disregarded, even those women who get called to the ministry are given very menial assignments. I still have to see to this day a church in this country, in the Back to God in particular, which is fully pastored by a woman.*

For now, it's either a woman is an organiser for women in most cases or for girls. [2:2 ¶ 37 in Participant 2](#)

According to this respondent, Bhengu's commitment to women's empowerment is not reflected in the church. In other words, women are still oppressed and are only permitted to lead other women, which indicates that the church still adheres to the old patriarchal view of the faith. These participants feel that men continue to look out for themselves and their needs, but women's roles are ignored.

The response below was based on the question of why Reverend Bhengu's vision has not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment. He responded that they are organisers and supervisors.

P7: *They are Organisers and supervisors of women's work and recently they started allowing them to be voted in as deaconesses in the local churches.* [7:11 ¶ 114 in Participant 7](#)

According to these respondents, men continue to look out for themselves and their needs, but women's roles are ignored.

3.5.2.1.5 Power Conflicts and Division in the Church

This section examines how power dynamics contribute to divisions within the church. Despite being coded only 12 times, this issue is significant because power often has negative effects on both church leadership and relationships within the congregation. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "Almost all men can withstand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power" (Carter, 2009:186). Carter suggests that this reflects the darker side of power, which must be considered when analysing leadership in Christian contexts (2009:186). Greenfield further notes that Pentecostal tradition lacks unity and that power struggles within the church can take many forms, including disagreements over the church's mission, financial difficulties, theological disagreements, moral failings, irrational expectations, and personality conflicts between pastors and churchgoers (Matshobane & Masango, 2018:1).

When asked why Reverend Bhengu's vision has not evolved, particularly regarding women's empowerment, some participants suggested that church leadership fears allowing women to

serve as pastors, worrying that it could result in an oversupply of pastors and a shortage of congregations to accommodate them.

P19: *one of the reasons is that man might be scared of being omitted from leadership*
[19:9 ¶ 82 in Participant 19](#)

The participant highlighted the political dynamics within the church, noting that during discussions, especially at the Conference, individuals tend to support each other through friendships, groups, and the various distinct ethnic groups, each with its views on women and their roles in society. Additionally, there is a political issue concerning the differences between the Teaching Team and the Executive Committee.

P10: *Once more, there is a component of church politics getting penetrated within our church. What I mean is that we first look at who is raising a point. Stated differently, we reject information from others, thus we will not trust anyone who approaches us claiming to have heard from the Holy Spirit.* [10:13 ¶ 102 in Participant 10](#)

The participants above identified internal power struggles as the reason behind the church's resistance to women's non-ordination.

However, Participant 17 introduces another perspective, claiming that women are not united. According to him, women are not cohesive and frequently contradict one another.

P17: *Women were allowed to give sermons on Sundays, before. The women who shut the door are the mothers' Supervisors. As I mentioned before, the Supervisors declared during a conference in Emadadeni, (women supporting patriarchy) saying women should no longer be allowed to preach on Sun* [17:12 ¶ 92 in Participant 17](#)

This participant stated that women often make self-defeating decisions out of jealousy for one another

3.5.2.1.6 Some Men Feel Threatened and Intimidated by Women's Gifts.

This was one of the significant findings of this study with 25 frequencies. This major code is one of the pillars of the theme, specific regulations regarding admin and church governance. According to participants, some men feel threatened and intimidated by women's gifts. It is thought that women can actively share the gospel even though they are not called to be pastors. Nevertheless, they are only allowed to become leaders in their women's group. This suggests that men feel threatened and intimidated that women might take over their positions should they be given an opportunity.

Participants responded to the question, "What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?" This participant stated:

P8: *African men are shy to be outshined by a woman. You take a woman and you put her on the pulpit – she moves – and the whole church moves in the spirit – then the following week you take one of the elders or deacons you put them in the pulpit and the work is dull. So, the approach of Saul, directly or indirectly comes because David outshined Saul because he was the man of praise and the spirit – and generally if you move in the spirit, you will be very high [8:22 ¶ 240 in Participant 8](#)*

Participant 8 above claims that when women are given the chance, men feel threatened by their gifts, highlighting the tension between the progressive vision that permits women and church practices that tend to exclude them.

This participant criticized the exclusion of women. Quoting from a sermon by another woman who once said that no one can stop a woman who wants to give birth whether the delivery room is there or not, she will continue and give birth. If a woman is ready, nobody can stop her

P21: *Well! You know as human beings when it comes to male and female human beings there will always be challenges. Some of the challenges are based on competition. Competition, not in the negative sense but in a positive sense. One of them is the one that I mentioned before – that women are getting more educated. I am talking about challenges that are caused by women to men because now we are becoming equal in*

the social space – I am educated – you are educated so what? Do you understand that?

[21:24 ¶ 203 in Participant 21](#)

Participant 21 declared that men's actions are motivated by jealousy because some women are getting educated.

3.5.2.2 Progressive Support for Women's Ordination

The theme, Progressive support for women's ordination is centred on the participants who indicated their support for women. While some participants voiced their objection to the ordination of women as pastors for various reasons, these participants protested the criticism, offence, and rejection of women by some men in the church and among the leadership members. The following responses demonstrate the support for women, who are thought to have been wrongfully marginalised due to cultural reasons. This theme had four major codes. Although the frequencies of some of the main codes do not appear to be very high, it is noteworthy that some members of the leadership support women's ordination and oppose discrimination against them. The codes were:

1. We need to educate the masses
2. Radical approach towards women support.
3. Advocating for Women's Ordination

3.5.2.2.1 We Need to Educate the Masses

This section explores how educating the masses could support women's ordination. Humans are often seen as rational, cognitive beings, and participants believe that educating others with factual information is essential for fostering logical, constructive interaction. It is suggested that the BTG denomination's theological school in Henley on Klip could play a key role. It is argued that theological schools should reconsider and refine their curricula to better equip future leaders who can drive change (Naidoo, 2010:352). Some younger men in their 50s expressed differing views on women's empowerment, showing that perspectives on the issue vary. These participants contend that, to prevent the church from obstructing women's empowerment, it is essential to challenge the church's ambiguous policies and educate people

about the value God places on creation. They stress the importance of teaching biblical principles regarding God and creation to help others recognise this intrinsic value.

When this respondent was asked what they think should be done to change this situation, these participants said the whole church needs to be educated.

P18: *I think a lot of teaching is needed for the church at large. Women should also study the scriptures, be encouraged to take short and even leadership courses and be empowered to gain confidence.* [18:20 ¶129 in Participant 18](#)

According to the next response, the church's problem is that the pastoral ministry is not ready to accept female pastors yet. Therefore, training is required to get them ready for this change. This respondent was responding to the question of why Reverend Bhengu's vision has not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment.

P11: *...the landscape of pastoral ministry within the church I sense that it is not yet ready. That landscape has not yet been prepared. I am not saying women are not ready to be pastors, but I am saying the environment still needs to be prepared, and that talks to education that talks to theological exposition of the biblical teachings on ministry.* [11:9 ¶ 96 in Participant 11](#)

The following participants contend that the church has to change its structure and that it needs to teach a variety of subjects. Women should receive leadership and assertiveness training, and males should be taught that women are also children of God.

P19: *it needs an overhaul. Training women – the church must have a plan, training males as well. You must train all parties. Train women to assert themselves. Train men to accept that women are people. They are children of God like any other person. It needs a lot of training and a lot of mind shift which is what the church is suffering from now.* [19:23 ¶ 159 in Participant 19](#)

This participant emphasised that pushing for women's ordination will not be effective while the church is still grappling with fundamental issues. He argued that a shift in the mindset of

current male pastors, as well as the attitudes of ordinary men and the broader church membership, is necessary first.

3.5.2.2.2 Radical Approach Towards Women's Support

The participants argued that a radical approach is a practical and necessary solution to challenge the existing ideological structures and address the neglect and marginalisation of women. They believe such an approach would bring common sense and effective solutions to the issues women face in the church. This major theme has 12 frequencies.

When asked for suggestions on how to improve the situation for women, the participants advocated for a radical approach. They pointed out that significant historical changes, like the 1976 revolution, were driven by the youth, and suggested that if young people raise these issues and involve senior pastors and other enlightened church members as a panel, leveraging their experience, it could lead to meaningful change. Some participants stressed that the problem must be tackled directly, while others believed that the youth could play a key role in leading the transformation.

P11: *I think the church needs to confront this issue head-on. I do not think the issue has been confronted. I think we have been tiptoeing around this issue, and I think it needs to be brought now right to the table, and we deal with it head-on, as the conference of the church, confront this question. Where do we stand?* [11:24 ¶ 229 in Participant 11](#)

The following participants believe that parishioners should take the lead, as senior leaders are resistant to change and claim they lack the authority to alter what does not belong to them.

P2: *Individuals must instigate. Change does not come from the top. The change will never come from an individual who is humble and high up there. God speaks to individuals who are sitting on the bench. God puts things in their hearts, and then they need to take those things forward for the correct forum. Even if sometimes they become sidelined,* [2:31 ¶ 342 in Participant 2](#)

When the following participants were asked what they think should be done to change the situation of women, they believed the 1976 youth approach to the apartheid government was the best course of action.

P8: ... people who usually bring good change like in the 1976 revolution, and we are free with them are the youth. If the youth can bring up these questions and they take senior pastors as a panel maybe enlightened people that we know, who would say in my experience in my local I have seen this. That would help the church. That would bring radical change. [8:35 ¶ 275 in Participant 8](#)

This suggests that the church is on the brink of losing its dignity unless it finds solutions to crucial issues like the empowerment of women. It risks becoming a place devoid of honour, much like the godless political conflict that unfolded in 1976.

The following interviewee claims that pastors benefit the most and will never support or spearhead transformation.

P17: *Why should pastors, not parishioners, be in charge of everything? The main issue with Back to God is that they have their sights fixed on the past and ignore the present. The monopoly of pastors over the church is the second issue with Back to God. I may remark that since pastors are at the heart of everything, members are merely observers of the decisions and actions of the pastors. That is not how things are meant to be* [17:23 ¶ 157 in Participant 17](#)

These participants believe that congregation members should take initiative to address the issue, rather than waiting for pastors who are unwilling to pursue change.

[3.5.2.2.3 Advocating for Women's Ordination](#)

These participants are in favour of women's ordination. They contend that since women's gifts are essential to the edifying of the church, there is no reason why they cannot be ordained. In this section, participants were asked to share their thoughts on the ordination of women in their church. This major code appeared with 20 frequencies from 15 participants, indicating that they supported the ordination of women

The next participant based his argument on the book St Paul citing the five-fold ministry and that Jesus gave some believers different spiritual gifts as he gave some to be prophets, apostles, pastors, evangelists, and teachers.

P2: *as I look at that statement it says he gave some – some believers, not some men, some believers the spirit of God – they are anointed by the spirit to become prophets, others apostles, others pastors, others evangelists and others teachers – believers, not men and that applies to everybody who is born again – that is my foundation. [2:23 ¶ 217 in Participant 2](#)*

This participant claims that God is the source of the calling. He added that women's work was essential to the ministry's foundation since Reverend Bhengu utilized them in the development of the church.

P5: *Women should be ordained; they are called by God. That is why Reverend Bhengu used them so much. This church is built on the work done by them because they are the ones that Reverend Bhengu used as workers. [5:14 ¶ 111 in Participant 5](#)*

The following participant believes that in the eyes of God the Creator, men and women are equal.

P20: *Personally, it is not a matter of feeling, it is a matter of must. It is not a matter of privilege it is a matter of right... [20:25 ¶ 289 in Participant 20](#)*

These participants believe that the church ought to ordain women since the church is not making enough progress. They believe that women should be ordained so that they can help the church. They believe the church needs the gifts of women since throughout Reverend Bhengu's tenure working with the women, the church made progress.

3.5.2.3 Summary of Objective 2

This section explores the reasons behind the exclusion of women from ordination, focusing on three main themes: administrative and governance regulations, Biblical interpretation of women's roles, and progressive support for women's ordination. Administrative regulations reflect male dominance, denominational culture, and the limitation of women to leading only other women. Men often feel threatened by women's gifts and prefer that women focus on fundraising for the Back to God Crusade rather than pursuing ordination. The study also finds

that the Pentecostal interpretation of the Bible plays a significant role in preventing women's ordination, with 'patriarchal culture', African traditions, and power struggles being key factors. However, some church leaders advocate for change, urging the church to address discrimination and embrace transformation to empower women.

3.5.3 Findings to Objective 3

This section presents the findings from objective three, which was to understand the implication of the reluctance of the Pentecostal tradition to embrace gender change brought by modernity. In the diagram above, it is highlighted in orange colour. The questions were posed to the senior leadership of the BTG denomination to understand the consequences of the reluctance of the Pentecostal tradition to embrace gender change brought by modernity. From the data collected, one theme emerged, which is:

1. Obstacles crippling church growth

3.5.3.1 Obstacles Crippling Church Growth

Obstacles crippling church growth was the first theme that emerged on objective 3 which sought to understand the implication of the reluctance of the Pentecostal tradition to embrace gender change brought by modernity. This theme was formed by the following major codes:

1. Spiritual stagnation syndrome
2. Gifted women and men leave the church
3. The church is deprived of the blessings that come through women's gifts

3.5.3.1.1 *Spiritual Stagnation Syndrome*

The Bible describes fire as a symbol of the Holy Spirit's presence. John the Baptist prophesied in Matthew 3:11 that Jesus would baptise people with both fire and the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:3–4 recounts the day of Pentecost as the fulfilment of this promise. This major code appeared 79 times and also highlighted the obstacles hindering church growth.

When the participants were asked to explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender change in the BTG denomination, the subsequent participant responded that the fire would die out.

P8: *The flame will be extinguished* [8:26 ¶ 284 in Participant 8](#)

Responding to the question of how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the Cape to Cairo vision, the subsequent participant associated the church's declining degree of the Holy Spirit with its disdain for women's gifts.

P7: *It could be one of the reasons that even in our crusades we no longer witness the power of the Holy Spirit - like the power that was working during the time of apostle Reverend Bhengu. Maybe it is because we do not appreciate the gifts given to women - to embrace them and work with them.* [7:23 ¶ 177 in Participant 7](#)

Asked, what were the implications of resistance in the past the following participants connected the church's lack of acceptance of women's gifts with the dwindling level of the Holy Spirit.

P15: *The spiritual level has decreased, and we are not winning souls as it used to be during Reverend Bhengu's time.* [15:22 ¶ 167 in Participant 15](#)

In response to the question regarding what the current implications of resistance are the next participants mentioned that there is blame shifting in the church.

P21: *And there will be blame-shifting. And all these lead to spiritual bankruptcy. In other words, the church will come together to worship but not in spirit but in flesh.* [21:38 ¶ 306 in Participant 21](#)

3.5.3.1.2 Gifted Women and Men Leave the Church

This section describes how the departure of gifted men and women cost the church of women's blessings. Responding to the question about the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender change in the BTG denomination, the respondent below stated that men and women alike are leaving the church because they are not happy with how the church is operating.

P14: *That is why you see many gifted women end up leaving the church to go and join other churches or start their own thing because they are repressed, on the other hand, the church loses.* [14:24 ¶ 206 in Participant 14](#)

As women are the ones who raise the crucial funds for the church, the participant's statement above illustrates his fear that it will be detrimental if the church continues to ignore women until a significant portion of them decide to quit or stay but decide not to raise money for the denomination.

Reflecting on the past, what were the consequences of resistance? This respondent said

P15: *...powerful pastors who we hoped would help this church have left.* [15:32 ¶ 170 in Participant 15](#)

3.5.3.1.3 The Church is Deprived of the Blessings That Come Through Women's Gifts

The deprivation of blessings through women's gifts was another crucial finding in objective three. This suggests that the church suffers when women are denied the opportunity to use the gifts God has given them to serve the church.

The participants were asked: "Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender change in the BTG denomination?" These participants believe that the church is not receiving the blessing of women's gifts.

P10: *First of all, we shall miss the blessing that God plans to give this generation if we judge people exclusively by their gender instead of by the gifts that God has bestowed upon them. As you may already be aware, events in the outside world have an impact on us as a church...* [10:27 ¶ 231 in Participant 10](#)

When asked about the implications of resistance in the past, the participants stated that this harmed the families and the church at large.

P2: *...most families got destroyed. Some got divorced, either the husband divorced the wife, or the wife divorced the husband* [2:38 ¶ 447 in Participant 2](#)

Respondents were asked about the current implications of resistance, and they stated some people are lost to hell because they were deprived of the relevant message that could have saved them.

P2: *...daily some people go straight to hell having not received the Gospel of Jesus.*

[2:39 ¶ 464 in Participant 2](#)

3.5.3.2 Summary of Objective 3

This section explores two central themes: barriers to church growth and aspirations for the church's future, particularly concerning women's roles. Participants identify male-dominated leadership, patriarchal culture, and lack of vision as major hindrances, leading many, especially talented women and men, to feel unsupported and leave the church. The refusal to ordain women and the undervaluing of their gifts are seen as weakening the church's mission and compassion. Leadership conflicts and spiritual stagnation further impede progress. Despite these challenges, there is strong hope for transformation through inclusive leadership and strategic planning. Participants warn that if the status of women remains unaddressed, external pressures may force change.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology used in the qualitative study, which aimed to explore the evolving role of women in the church and the shaping of their empowerment. Data was collected from a sample of 24 senior pastors within the BTG denomination. The population, sampling techniques, and research design were all discussed in this qualitative study, which used an interpretive research paradigm. The study utilized an interpretive research paradigm and discussed the research design, population, and sampling methods. Throughout the procedure of collecting the data, the ideas of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability—all crucial for guaranteeing quality and reliability in qualitative research—were taken into account. The chapter also addressed data analysis and ethical considerations. From the collected data, 11 key themes emerged, highlighting a conservative church structure and the marginalisation of women, which will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

4.1 Introduction

This practical theological study investigates women's leadership and empowerment in African Pentecostal churches, focusing on Black Pentecostalism's approach to gender equity, women's empowerment, and the impact of resistance to change. The previous chapter presented the emerging themes from the data collected. In this chapter, the data is analysed. Data analysis is the process of organising, structuring, and making sense of complex qualitative data to uncover meaningful insights (Swinton & Mowat, 2006:57). Data analysis provides meaning to the findings. It involves transforming raw data into conceptualised knowledge by identifying key themes, patterns and constructs through systematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021:1).

To interpret the findings, I will engage with relevant literature to deepen the analysis of the study. Oduyoye's work will serve as a critical lens, offering a framework for understanding the findings through the lens of African women's theology. Her insights will help contextualise the results, particularly concerning the intersections of the Bible, culture, and church denominational practices. The study results support Oduyoye's contention that the intricate interaction of theological and cultural limitations, which are deeply embedded and still restrict women's roles in the church, shapes women's marginalisation.

Below is a summary of the study findings.

- 1. The first research objective:** Objective one was to investigate fully, the Back to God (BTG) tradition, to establish the historical vision of Reverend Bhengu towards women's empowerment. This study found that Reverend Bhengu affirmed women in various BTG denominational structures. The study also revealed that there is tension between progressive vision vs church practice. Lastly, traditional patriarchal denominational understandings continue.

2. **The second research objective:** Objective two was to understand the factors that led to the exclusion of women's ordination, as an example of empowerment and change, in the development of the church. Two important conversations that shed light on the real-life realities of women in ministry were revealed by the raw data. The results of the study showed specific regulations regarding admin and church governance. The study also revealed that there was progressive support for women's ordination.
3. **The third research objective:** To understand the implication of the reluctance of the Pentecostal tradition to embrace gender change brought by modernity. The research findings revealed that there are obstacles that are crippling the church's growth. This highlights the detrimental effects of marginalising women, as their exclusion prevents the denomination from fully benefiting from the diverse talents and perspectives that could drive its growth and development. By failing to adapt to modern gender equity, the church risks stagnation and the loss of potential contributors to its mission.

Based on these findings, the overall study is pointing to one major issue, and it is underlying the exclusion of women. The analysis will be explored under two issues.

The first major analysis examines the sampled denomination BTG and how Bhengu's vision of the denomination appears to have deviated from the vision of its founding fathers. My analysis will be organised around two key concepts, which are: the vision has been misinterpreted and misconstrued and the leadership's failure to envision the church's growth and neglect of the founder's legacy. This study seeks to uncover the reasons behind this shift. The second part of this discussion examines the progressive support for women's ordination from some men within the BTG denomination. This progressive shift can be attributed to an increasing awareness of the structural inequities that perpetuate the marginalisation of women in the church.

Such support suggests a growing recognition among certain male members of the need to challenge traditional interpretations of scripture and denominational policies that have historically excluded women from leadership roles. This part of the discussion aligns with the overarching question by exploring how this emerging support reflects both a resistance to the historical marginalisation of women and an acknowledgement of their contributions to the church's growth and ministry. By analysing this shift, the study seeks to uncover whether this

progressive stance could signal broader cultural and theological changes within the denomination, potentially addressing the systemic barriers that have limited women's full participation in leadership.

This discussion unpacks marginalisation, which is the key research question, and it shows how a Pentecostal denomination puts this marginalisation into place. This research uncovers or unearths this marginalisation, which is important to note and accept if any change is forthcoming. Much of this marginalisation continues because these issues are hidden and there is little critical questioning of the church's practices.

The second major analysis delves into the Pentecostal church and gender issues, namely the underlying reasons behind the reluctance to ordain women, focusing on key concepts such as hermeneutics, 'patriarchal culture', and resistance. The second part of this discussion addresses the consequences of resisting gender-inclusive changes for Pentecostal churches, particularly how such resistance impacts the church's practices and beliefs. This discussion aligns with the research question as it provides concrete examples of marginalisation, ie, lack of ordination and the resultant consequences of this, which are perpetuated at the denominational level.

4.2 Analysis One: A Critical Analysis of Leadership, Legacy, and Women's Ordination in the BTG Denomination's Digression from Bhengu's Vision

In this section, the issues covered revolved around the BTG denomination of the Vision, which is central to leadership in creating change. It delves into how Black Pentecostalism deals with women's empowerment (particularly women's ordination), adapting to the modern era, as seen by this denomination. Historically, women were pivotal in advancing the church's mission, actively preaching and contributing to its growth. However, the movement gradually abandoned its inclusive approach.

Mwenje (2018) highlights that early Black Pentecostalism embraced transformative leadership and empowerment, but later shifted to uphold traditional norms, sidelining women to subordinate roles. This regression, rooted in misinterpreting the founder's vision and prioritising convenience, reflects leadership's failure to maintain its original inclusive

principles, compounded by limited advocacy for change from women. The research findings will be analysed through three key concepts: vision distorted, leadership failure and flickers of hope.

4.2.1 Vision Distorted: Misinterpretation and Misconception

The findings of this study make it abundantly clear that the vision of the BTG founder has been misinterpreted and misconstrued. Misunderstanding a vision often signals a failure to grasp its original intent, leading to distortions that can significantly alter an institution's practices and principles (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). In the case of BTG, this misinterpretation has manifested most noticeably in the treatment of women within the BTG denomination, particularly regarding their roles in leadership and ministry. This raises important questions about whether the BTG denomination truly grasps the founder's vision and prioritises women's empowerment, and whether it remains aligned with the broader mission of advancing the role of women within its spiritual and organisational framework.

The BTG, in its early formation, adhered to a vision that embraced an egalitarian approach towards gender, where both men and women were seen as equal in their capacity to participate in ministry and leadership roles. This vision aligned closely with early Pentecostal teachings, where spiritual gifts were viewed as accessible to all believers, regardless of gender (Mwenje, 2018:256). The founder of BTG, much like the Pentecostal leaders of the early 20th century, advocated for a church that reflected these inclusive principles. This vision was founded on the premise that the gospel was to be spread through the empowerment of all believers, and women, in this context, were seen as vital contributors to this mission. The founder's commitment to gender neutrality in ministry was not only a theological position but a revolutionary stance, especially in an African context where traditional gender roles were often strictly enforced.

However, as the study's findings indicate, this inclusive vision has gradually been distorted. The shift away from the founder's gender-neutral approach has not been a singular or abrupt change but rather a slow, subtle transformation. This change can be understood through the lens of the misinterpretation and misapplication of the founder's original teachings. Scholars have long noted that misunderstanding the vision of church founders can lead to the development of practices that diverge from the original intent (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). The findings from this study confirm this perspective, as they reveal that the BTG leadership

has increasingly strayed from its original commitment to gender equality. This shift has been driven by a variety of factors, including changing theological interpretations, evolving socio-cultural norms, and the influence of patriarchal structures, which have become deeply ingrained in the BTG denomination's institutional practices.

I believe that the influence of socio-cultural factors cannot be overstated in this context. The BTG denomination, like many African Pentecostal churches, is situated within a society where patriarchal norms dominate both social and religious structures. According to Frahm-Arp (2010), the growth of Pentecostalism in Africa has been inextricably linked to the broader cultural shift towards more conservative gender roles, which have reinforced male authority in both the church and the family. As the study's findings highlight, the church's leadership has increasingly adopted these patriarchal norms, leading to the marginalisation of women.

Initially, women were able to participate on equal terms with men in ministry, but over time, their roles were relegated to women's ministries and other auxiliary positions, reinforcing the notion that women could only serve in supportive, rather than leadership, roles. This shift represents a failure of leadership to recognise and challenge the deep-seated cultural attitudes that limit women's participation in the broader church community. This shift is compounded by theological changes within the church, where the emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit has become more selective, favouring men in leadership while sidelining women (Frahm-Arp, 2018:11).

The study's findings reveal that the misinterpretation of the founder's original vision is also due to a series of misunderstandings and misapplications of key messages. The example of the founder's quote, "never remove the strongholds," illustrates this point. While the founder's statement has been frequently cited to justify the exclusion of women from ordination, the findings suggest that this quote has been taken out of context and misapplied.

This reflects a deeper problem of theological disengagement and miscommunication within the leadership, where the original meaning of the founder's words has been obscured to align with contemporary patriarchal beliefs. Baker and Hart (2022) argue that such misinterpretations are often the result of unclear communication and a lack of effort to maintain a connection with the church's original vision. The findings suggest that the leadership's failure to engage deeply

with the founder's teachings has allowed for the growth of practices that marginalise women and restrict their roles within the church.

Theological misunderstanding is not the only factor contributing to the marginalisation of women in the church; socio-cultural influences have also played a significant role. I agree with Oduyoye's (1995) assertion that African churches often find themselves in a tension between the liberating potential of the Christian faith and the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that govern many African societies. The study's findings also support Oduyoye's argument, as they reveal that the leadership's failure to address the gender dynamics within the church reflects a broader unwillingness to challenge entrenched cultural norms (1995:485).

This reluctance to engage with cultural norms that limit women's empowerment is evident in the church's resistance to ordaining women and its continued focus on male leadership. As Pathak et al. (2021) suggest, the influence of patriarchal structures on religious institutions is pervasive, and this is particularly true within Pentecostalism, where male leadership is often seen as a divine mandate. The study highlights that this theological resistance to women's ordination is deeply intertwined with the cultural attitudes of male dominance that persist in African societies. Due to these issues, I contend that the church's resistance to women's empowerment cannot be fully understood without considering the broader socio-cultural context in which it operates.

In addition to the theological and cultural factors, the findings also point to the emotional and psychological dynamics that underlie the resistance to women's leadership within the church. The study reveals that some male leaders feel threatened by the rising prominence of women in ministry. This insecurity stems from a deeply ingrained belief in male dominance, where women's success in leadership roles is often seen as a challenge to male authority. As Weiss (2021) observes, this insecurity is particularly pronounced in Pentecostal settings, where the emphasis on the Holy Spirit's empowerment of all believers should, in theory, support gender equality.

However, as the study's findings reveal, this theological ideal often clashes with the reality of patriarchal resistance to women's leadership. The findings indicate that male leaders, particularly those in traditional or senior roles, may feel threatened by women who challenge the status quo and excel in ministry. This emotional response to women's leadership is not

always overt but is manifest in subtle ways, such as the reluctance to affirm women in leadership positions or to recognise their gifts. The study's findings suggest that this dynamic creates a climate of tension and discomfort within the church, where women's leadership is not fully embraced or celebrated.

The emotional and financial implications of this resistance to women's leadership are also significant. The findings highlight that women, despite their contributions to the church, are often excluded from leadership roles and relegated to positions where their gifts are not fully utilized. As Kariuki (2024) suggests, the financial barriers to women's empowerment are particularly problematic in Pentecostal churches, where leadership roles are often closely tied to financial resources.

Women who are excluded from leadership positions may feel disillusioned or disconnected from the church, leading to emotional withdrawal or disengagement from church activities. This disengagement is not only detrimental to the spiritual vitality of the church but also has financial implications. The study's findings suggest that the exclusion of women from leadership roles may lead to a decline in church membership and resources, further exacerbating the church's struggles to grow and remain relevant in an increasingly gender-conscious society.

I concur with Nadar that the systemic undervaluation of women within the church is a reflection of broader societal gender inequalities. Nadar (2004) argues that women's marginalisation in society at large is reflected in their absence from positions of responsibility inside the church. The church, which should serve as a force for social transformation, has instead become complicit in reinforcing the very gender inequalities it should be seeking to address. The findings from this study reveal that the church's failure to embrace gender equality has hindered its ability to be a transformative force in society. As Oduyoye (2001) contends, the church must empower women not only to advocate for themselves but to actively participate in the theological and operational decisions that shape the entire church. Only through such empowerment can the church truly become an inclusive institution that reflects the egalitarian vision of its founder.

Consequently, the study reveals that the BTG denomination has strayed significantly from its founder's original vision of empowerment and gender equality. The church's current position

on gender, which excludes women from leadership roles and restricts their involvement to women's ministries, represents a fundamental misinterpretation of the founder's inclusive vision. This shift has been influenced by a variety of factors, including theological misunderstandings, socio-cultural pressures, and the dominance of patriarchal norms within the church and society. I, therefore, believe that to realign with the founder's original vision, the church must engage in a process of theological reflection and cultural transformation, challenging the patriarchal structures that limit women's participation in leadership. Only through this transformation can the church hope to fulfil its mission of empowerment, equality, and social transformation.

4.2.2 Leadership's Oversight: Failure to Foster Growth and Honour the Founder's Legacy

The findings reveal that the Back to God (BTG) denomination leadership has failed to adequately honour the founder's legacy, particularly in fostering the growth and inclusivity of the church. The failure to fully embrace the founder's original vision significantly hampers the church's capacity to fulfil its mission. Without a clear and forward-thinking vision, leadership tends to focus solely on immediate concerns, neglecting the church's long-term growth and sustainability. Visionary leadership requires a strategic outlook, not only addressing current challenges but also preparing for future development (Magezi, 2015:2). Without this foresight, the church risks stagnation, and its ability to engage meaningfully with both current and future generations becomes compromised.

One of the key aspects of the founder's vision was the inclusion of women in ministry, which was crucial due to the demographic shifts that saw many men move to cities for work, leaving women to carry the burden of spreading the gospel (Anderson, 2001:22). Despite this history, the leadership has failed to maintain this inclusive approach, marginalising women and limiting their potential to contribute to the church's growth. This reflects a disregard for the founder's intentions and misses a significant opportunity to foster the church's expansion. As Magezi (2015:2) asserts, ethical leadership should promote fairness and uphold the values of equality and inclusivity. Yet, these principles remain insufficiently emphasised within the leadership, particularly concerning women's empowerment.

Furthermore, the lack of visionary leadership is deeply interconnected with ethical considerations. As Williams (2005:14) argues, poor leadership not only diminishes the effectiveness of the church's mission but also leads to internal conflicts that hinder progress. Such conflicts arise from a failure to prioritise the church's founding vision, instead focusing on short-term goals and perpetuating exclusionary practices. A church leadership that neglects visionary direction risks not only spiritual decline but also a loss of credibility among its members (Palo, 2016:198). Without a shared understanding of the founder's vision, leadership becomes less trustworthy, particularly regarding the ordination of women, a critical issue that has been sidelined by many church leaders (Doten Snitker et al., 2020).

As a practical theologian, I believe that trustworthiness, a cornerstone of effective leadership, is crucial when navigating the challenges of ordaining women and integrating them into leadership positions. Respondents in this study identified that, without trust, leadership can falter in advancing these critical issues, exacerbating the marginalisation of women. The failure to ordain women stems from not only gendered power dynamics but also from a lack of leadership vision and a failure to recognise the contributions women have made throughout the church's history (Astner & Gaddefors, 2024). These issues are indicative of what Williams (2005:14) describes as "counterfeit leadership" — leadership that focuses more on personal power than on the well-being of the congregation. Such leadership fails to inspire and guide the church effectively, leaving key issues unresolved.

Moreover, Müller (2014:752) highlights the importance of visionary leadership, emphasising that blind or uninspired leadership misguides its followers, leading them astray. The lack of innovation within the church, particularly concerning the ordination of women, stems from a failure to prioritise long-term vision over tradition. As Hybels (2008) notes, churches without a growth plan risk stagnation, which further exacerbates issues such as the continued marginalisation of women. The focus on tradition over progress not only inhibits spiritual growth but also stifles the church's capacity to fulfil its original mission. McMillan (2021) adds that superficial worship and a lack of discipleship programs further hinder the church's growth, while the absence of leadership training prevents the development of future leaders.

Additionally, as Nanus (1995) points out, a lack of a unifying vision leads to conflict and division within organisations, with minor disputes escalating into major problems. This observation resonates with the challenges faced by the church, where leadership struggles over

positions and authority contribute to the marginalisation of women. Without a clear and shared vision, the church risks internal strife and stagnation. As Marshall (2018) emphasises, leadership must address competing values and responsibilities, particularly in ensuring that women are included in the leadership structures of the church.

Another finding was the power struggles among male leadership. The conflict between male leadership ambitions and the need for women's ordination is a critical issue within the BTG church. Power struggles among male leaders often overshadow the mission of the church, diverting attention from the ordination of women and their rightful role within the church. As Oduyoye (1985:485) suggests, hierarchical power structures in African cultures have found parallels in Christianity, where men dominate leadership positions at the expense of women. This dynamic reflects a broader societal issue that influences church practices, where leadership positions are often seen as a prize to be fought for, rather than roles that serve the church's spiritual mission.

Furthermore, personal ambitions among male leaders contribute to the exclusion of women, with some respondents pointing out that these ambitions often lead to stagnation in the church's progress. Matshobane and Masango (2018:3) argue that the failure to ordain women, coupled with power struggles, not only perpetuates gender inequality but also undermines the church's mission. Effective leadership must align with the values of inclusivity and equality, which are essential for fostering a thriving church community. Yet, these principles remain marginalised in the BTG church's leadership structure, with few male leaders stepping up to support gender equality actively (Du Toit, 2024:135).

Findings attest that some male leaders have expressed support for women's ordination, recognising the need for a radical shift in attitudes toward women's empowerment within the church. However, these leaders are still in the minority, and their progressive stance is often met with resistance from more conservative factions. This resistance underscores the ongoing power struggle and highlights the need for greater solidarity among both men and women within the church to ensure gender equity and fulfil the mission set out by the church's founder. The challenge of ordaining women is not just a theological issue but a matter of leadership vision and commitment to the church's foundational principles.

Therefore, as a Practical Theologian, I believe that the BTG church's leadership must reconsider its priorities, focusing on the long-term growth of the church and its alignment with the founder's original vision. The marginalisation of women, driven by power struggles and a lack of visionary leadership, impedes the church's mission and hinders its growth potential. Only by embracing a vision of inclusivity and empowerment can the church hope to fulfil its calling and honour the legacy of its founder. The church must strive to create a leadership structure that fosters unity, collaboration, and growth, where both men and women can contribute equally to the fulfilment of the gospel mission.

4.3 Flickers of Hope: Progressive Change is developing

In this section, I will examine the progressive support for women's ordination. Despite ongoing challenges, growing support for the ordination of women is evident within the BTG denomination, marking a significant shift in attitudes and practices.

Findings indicate that not all men oppose the ordination of women, signifying a positive step forward within the BTG denomination. This growing support aligns with feminist theology, which advocates for the transformation of religious practices to promote gender equality, benefiting the entire church community (Dweba et al., 2020:7). As Wilde and Al-Faham (2018:1) note, many progressive respondents have started advocating for women's inclusion in leadership roles, not only as a response to gender inequality but as a theological necessity grounded in scripture and the broader Christian tradition. This evolving support signifies a crucial step in reframing the role of women in leadership and the church's theological framework.

The findings suggest that the subject of church leadership roles is extremely delicate due to the privileges and power held by those in positions of leadership. Participants also shared the view that leadership cannot be expected to drive changes regarding the empowerment of women, particularly in terms of ordaining them as pastors. Since those in leadership positions benefit from holding these roles, they may be reluctant to lead such transformation, as it would mean losing the privileges associated with senior leadership. Consequently, these respondents suggested that transformation must originate from the congregation, with parishioners leading the charge, fostering change from the ground up. This highlights the importance of grassroots

movements in challenging entrenched systems of power and fostering a more inclusive environment for women in ministry.

For the church to successfully transform, it must remember that it is God's entity and, therefore, engage in theological reflection to find meaning in life by connecting experiences to God's activity. Scholars argue that transforming religious practices requires theological reflection, which is crucial to a feminist approach focused on change and transformative action (Osmer, 2008:157). This implies that women should not be denied opportunities or be limited by societal expectations, particularly when it comes to fulfilling their calling.

I agree with, feminist theologians who emphasise that inherent equality is linked to universal cognitive abilities, asserting that gender should not hinder one's capacity for reasoning or civic responsibility (Mogoane, 2019:30). These theological reflections advocate for a re-examination of the current practices that limit women's involvement and call for a shift toward greater inclusivity and equality within church leadership.

Actions begin with thoughts, and our thoughts guide our actions, shaping our lives. I believe that the mere thought of supporting women's ordination, as expressed by these respondents, marks a positive first step toward change. However, given that women may lack experience in pastoral leadership, there must be a structured process for training and facilitating a smooth transition, rather than simply placing them in positions without preparation. In this case the church must recognise that while support for women's ordination is growing, further educational efforts are needed to shift perceptions and foster broader acceptance of women in leadership roles.

Lyons et al. (2019:107) suggest that key initiatives to support women's ordination include advocating for women to serve as pastors, elders, and decision-makers, and addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within many Pentecostal communities. Educational programs focusing on equipping both men and women with the knowledge and skills necessary to work alongside one another in leadership roles could significantly support this transformation.

This progressive support among respondents is not solely about acknowledging inequality but also about fostering an inclusive environment where both men and women can equally

contribute to the church's mission. The ordination of women is not a new or radical practice within Pentecostalism. However, collaborative efforts across Christian organisations supporting gender equality could facilitate a systemic shift in BTG church practices. For instance, many Protestant churches, such as the United Methodist Church, have long endorsed and promoted women's ordination (McInally, 2019).

Methodist theology, particularly the teachings of John Wesley, offers a broader and more inclusive framework for understanding scripture, known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (McInally, 2019). This model could serve as a valuable reference for Pentecostal churches as they reevaluate their stance on women in leadership. By looking to successful models and frameworks that embrace gender inclusivity, Pentecostal churches can gain insights into how they can transform their own practices and support women in leadership.

The issue of women not being ordained is not just a concern for the BTG denomination but a challenge that affects the entire African Pentecostal church. A church that continually overlooks the implications of the gospel for the lives of women — as well as other marginalised groups — cannot remain an authentic voice for salvation. It is only when we recognise that what harms women also harms the whole body of Christ that we can truly speak of "one body" (Oduyoye, 1995:485).

The increasing support for women's ordination within Pentecostalism, along with the recognition of their equal standing in ministry, signals that meaningful change is possible. However, for this transformation to be fully realised, ongoing education and theological reflection on gender equality are crucial. As men and women work together to challenge patriarchal practices, denominations can progress toward a more inclusive and spiritually vibrant future. Therefore, transformation is unlikely to succeed without first educating the wider congregation, ensuring that everyone within the community is part of the process.

Findings affirm that change can be empowered through mass education. These findings of this study reinforce the importance of raising awareness and educating both men and women about the significance of gender equality within church communities to overcome resistance and drive meaningful change. The findings confirm that mass education is a powerful tool for driving change, particularly in promoting gender equality within church communities. Raising awareness among both men and women is essential to overcoming resistance and encouraging

progress, such as the ordination of women as pastors. Respondents highlight the pivotal role of Nicholas Bhengu Theological College (NBTC) in Henley on Klip (HOK) in this process. According to Resane (2018:5), NBTC was established as a correspondence college to train men and women for ministry, offering intensive, interactive theological education aimed at equipping individuals with practical ministry skills. While the college has its limitations, Resane acknowledges its value in shaping conduct and ethics among aspiring ministers (2018:8). Theological education in this institution can be central in transforming perceptions and fostering an inclusive environment for gender equity in ministry.

Transformative theological education, which integrates gender equality into church practices, is a vital tool in shifting deeply ingrained attitudes (Chisale, 2020). Participants in this study align with feminist theories that advocate for education as a means to help communities reshape their understanding of women's roles in the church. By empowering women, the overall health and growth of the body of Christ can be strengthened (Manyonganise et al., 2023:9). I suggest that these educational initiatives should be extended beyond formal theological training and encompass broader church community engagement to ensure that the message of gender equality resonates at every level of the church's operations.

However, these educational efforts should not rest solely on theological institutions; they must also be supported and endorsed by church leadership. According to study participants, education extends beyond formal schooling, and Pentecostal churches could benefit significantly from learning from other religious communities that have successfully promoted women's leadership. Seminars and conferences addressing gender equality from both women's and men's perspectives could be particularly beneficial. Such events would provide a platform for honest and open conversations, allowing the church community to confront uncomfortable truths and engage in collective action towards gender equality.

I believe that senior church leaders and pastors must recognise the importance of these initiatives and actively promote them as critical to fostering change. Events such as Women's Day could serve as a platform for church leaders to engage in open and constructive discussions about gender equality, helping to shift perceptions and encourage more inclusive practices. If church leadership fails to take an active role in supporting education on these matters, it risks triggering a more radical response from the congregation. This scenario may be less desirable

but increasingly likely as frustration with the status quo grows. The church must choose to act proactively and not simply react to external pressure.

As the need for change intensifies, some respondents are calling for a more radical approach to address the marginalisation of women. A radical approach, by definition, involves deviating from traditional methods and often requires significant changes or trying new strategies (Cambridge Dictionary). There is a growing sentiment that waiting for leadership to take action is no longer viable. Many argue that church leadership often has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, making meaningful change unlikely unless initiated by the broader community. As a result, the church may be forced to adopt a more proactive stance on gender equality, responding not just to internal discussions but also to external pressures. This shift could be essential for the church's long-term vitality. Without an intentional commitment to gender equality, the church risks being seen as outdated and irrelevant in the face of growing societal demands for inclusivity.

Schüßler (2024:142) highlights that deeply rooted gender stereotypes, especially within religious settings like Pentecostalism, are resistant to change. However, the growing frustration with the status quo has spurred some men to speak out against the discrimination and abuse faced by women in the church. Activists have started to advocate for more active participation in gender-related discussions, pushing for women's rights both within and beyond the church (Campion, 2020:1). These challenges have hindered church growth and highlight the harmful consequences of marginalising women.

As it has been suggested above, the education of the masses is not merely an academic exercise—it is a call to action. Respondents indicated that women should not remain passive; rather, they must actively participate to ensure that men, like themselves, join the initiatives initiated by women. This involvement is crucial to avoid the perception that men are advocating on behalf of marginalised women while women themselves appear indifferent to their marginalised status. Oduyoye (2001:37) urges African women to rise, reject victimhood, and actively challenge their marginalisation within both the church and society.

I concur with Oduyoye's call for empowerment because it is part of a broader theological shift that seeks to transform oppressive structures within the church and society. For Oduyoye, African theology must address injustice and marginalisation, particularly the systemic

oppression of women. She argues for a radical reimagining of theology that includes women's voices and contributions, allowing them to reclaim their rightful place as full participants in both the church and the broader society (Stoddard, 2014:18).

I believe that in embracing this vision, the church has an opportunity to redefine its theological discourse, ensuring that women's experiences are central to the faith community. Empowerment, in this context, is not merely about women's right to occupy leadership positions; it is about giving them the agency to transform their environments and to shape an inclusive theology, just, and representative of all members of the body of Christ. It is therefore essential to recognise that women are not passive recipients of change; rather, they are active participants in reshaping the church's mission and vision. In the following section, factors that have led to the exclusion of women's ordination in the church and how this reflects wider trends in its development are explored.

4.4 Analysis Two: Decoding Marginalisation: The Cultural and Theological Barriers Facing Women in the Church

In this section, I will delve into the complex factors that contribute to the marginalisation of women within African Pentecostal churches, particularly focusing on the exclusion of women from ordination. I will explore how these factors align with broader cultural and theological trends that shape the church's practices. To provide a deeper understanding, this discussion will examine the following key concepts: Decoding hermeneutics, patriarchal norms and masculinity under scrutiny.

In this study, the concepts of hermeneutics and patriarchal culture are tightly interwoven. The challenges in biblical interpretation often stem from deeply entrenched patriarchal mindsets, and these cultural norms directly influence how scripture is understood and applied within the church.

4.4.1 Decoding Hermeneutics: Unveiling the Path to Inclusion for Women in the Church

The findings of this study suggest that African Pentecostals frequently reinforce gender hierarchies through literal interpretations of the Bible. This approach often lacks the historical-critical perspective necessary to address contemporary issues of gender equality. The prevailing belief in male headship and female subordination as divinely ordained further perpetuates these hierarchies (Kariuki, 2024:7; Van Klinken, 2016:30).

Cultural resistance, particularly among men, plays a significant role in sustaining these views, with many clinging to traditional interpretations of scripture. Some respondents in this study highlighted that many African Pentecostals believe the Holy Spirit directly guides individuals in interpreting the Bible. However, there is also a tendency to take scripture at face value, without considering its broader theological implications.

This literal approach, while deeply rooted in tradition, limits meaningful theological dialogue and reinforces outdated, patriarchal perspectives on gender roles. For women aspiring to leadership roles within the church, this restrictive theology becomes a significant barrier, stifling their aspirations and reinforcing the notion that their marginalisation is biblically mandated.

Key biblical passages often cited to justify the marginalisation of women include 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, where Paul instructs women to remain silent in the church, and 1 Timothy 2:12, which asserts that women should not teach or have authority over men. These verses are regularly invoked to support discriminatory practices within Pentecostal communities. However, such interpretations fail to consider the historical context in which these scriptures were written. Churches should strive to understand the intent behind these verses and how they can be applied in ways that edify the body of Christ, rather than perpetuating division and discord.

Like Klingorová (2015) notes, I believe that the status of women in society is heavily influenced by how religious texts are interpreted. The practice of "proof-texting" — the tendency to quote scriptures out of context and apply them without theological reflection — further exacerbates this issue (Stackhouse, 2015:34). This simplistic approach to scripture can

lead to the socialisation of women into believing they are unqualified for leadership roles, thus accepting their marginalisation as an unchangeable aspect of God's will. As Oduyoye (1995:482) points out, many women have come to realise that they have not only been cast into a world created by men but that they have also been subjected to a God created by males who has decreed their exile from public life.

Traditional hermeneutics, with its emphasis on literal interpretations, often overlooks the pressing issues of modern society. This approach has drawn criticism, particularly from African theologians, who argue that it confines women to roles that limit their ability to fully express their humanity (Oduyoye, 1995:480). To address these limitations, scholars such as Parker (1996) advocate for a broader theological approach that engages with modern concerns, including gender equality.

A more critical and nuanced approach to scripture is necessary to move beyond the restrictive interpretations that have traditionally shaped Pentecostal thought. This calls for a re-examination of the value of formal theological education, especially in terms of addressing hermeneutical challenges. As Osmer (2008) suggests, Practical Theology serves as a "bridge concept," connecting lived religious experience with theological reflection. This framework provides an opportunity to reinterpret scripture in ways that are relevant to contemporary issues, including the inclusion of women in leadership roles.

As both a theologian and a feminist, I assert that the male-dominated leadership within African Pentecostalism is sustained through selective interpretations of scripture that emphasise male authority and female submission. While texts such as Galatians 3:26-28 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 highlight the radical equality of believers in Christ, these verses are often ignored in favour of others, like Ephesians 5:22 or 1 Peter 3:1, which reinforce patriarchal structures. This selective interpretation maintains traditional gender roles and places women in subordinate positions within both the church and family life.

However, I believe that these interpretations can be challenged through a more inclusive theology that promotes gender equality. Scholars like Gabaitse (2020) have pointed out the contradictions within Pauline texts, with some passages affirming women's equality in Christ, while others seem to reinforce male dominance. This inconsistency allows Pentecostals to

selectively interpret scripture in ways that align with their exclusionary practices, ignoring those advocating for women's empowerment.

Theologically, these contradictions reveal a tension between the Pentecostal experience of the Holy Spirit, which empowers both men and women, and the restrictive practices that often dominate church governance. African Pentecostals find themselves in a conflict, as they are unwilling or unable to critically reassess these interpretations from a contemporary gender-conscious perspective. This failure to challenge patriarchal norms allows the marginalisation of women to persist.

However, as Oduyoye (1995:486) emphasises, addressing these divisions requires identifying a starting point for healing. For generations, women have contributed to the life of the church, yet their experiences remain marginalised in theological discourse. As long as women's perspectives are sidelined, the theological discourse of the church remains incomplete. Furthermore, the hermeneutics of the Gospel and the language ideals of leadership in Pentecostal churches often reflect a masculine framework that mirrors corporate structures (Frahm-Arp, 2010).

This masculinised model perpetuates gender discrimination, which has drawn significant attention from both theologians and feminist scholars (Hackett, 2017). To address this, it is essential to engage with the hermeneutical loop — a process of navigating between "control texts" and secondary texts, as outlined by Stackhouse (2015:38). This approach can help challenge patriarchal thinking and offer a path toward the equitable relationships envisioned by God for both women and men.

Thus, a critical examination of biblical interpretation is crucial for understanding the gender dynamics within Pentecostal churches. The hermeneutical circle, which emphasises revisiting and reinterpreting existing knowledge, offers a potential solution to this issue. By applying this method, theologians can uncover new insights that promote inclusivity and equality in the church. However, this process is often hindered by the resistance of men in positions of authority, who may fear that embracing new ideas could threaten their status.

As a feminist theologian, I believe as long as the issue of hermeneutics remains unresolved, African Pentecostal churches will continue to marginalise women and exclude them from

leadership roles. This is compounded by the fact that these churches often adopt conservative Pentecostal attitudes toward women, heavily influenced by the conservative "Bible Belt" culture in the United States (Biri, 2020:37; Nadar, 2009:359). These influences shape the way women are perceived and treated within African Pentecostal communities, maintaining their exclusion from leadership roles and stifling their contributions to the broader church.

4.4.2 Patriarchal Norms: The Hidden Chains on Women's Progress

The findings of this study underscore the profound influence of patriarchal culture in shaping the experiences of women in African Pentecostal churches. Patriarchy, as a social system where men hold primary authority and women are subordinated (Attoh, 2017; Gabaitse, 2020:69), is deeply embedded within the church's organisational structure. In the churches studied, the leadership is almost entirely male, with men dominating decision-making processes. This exclusion of women from positions of authority is exacerbated by broader societal norms, where institutions such as the family, media, and even the church continue to reinforce specific behaviours and traits associated with gender roles (Gabaitse, 2020:69). The study reveals that this system of patriarchy is actively maintained by church leadership, further entrenching gender inequality within the religious space.

The findings indicate that the lack of ordination for women is a key barrier preventing full participation in church life. Women, though actively involved in church activities (Frimpong, 2022), are often relegated to subordinate roles. Their contributions are limited, and their leadership opportunities are obstructed by the dominant male leadership in these churches. This study reveals that while women contribute significantly to the spiritual life of their congregations, they face persistent disrespect in male-dominated spaces, which reinforces the perception of male superiority and women's subordination (Oduyoye, 2002:94).

Research in feminist theory suggests that the "glass ceiling" and gender stereotypes function as powerful barriers to women's progress in the church (Ojong, 2017:126). The findings confirm that these stereotypes persist in African Pentecostalism, with men perceived as inherently more competent and powerful, a view that justifies the exclusion of women from leadership roles (Attoh, 2017:159). This ideological barrier positions women as passive followers of male decision-makers, regardless of the outcome, as revealed in the study. This

reflects a broader critique from feminist theory, which views religion as an institution that often sustains patriarchal inequalities.

Additionally, the findings show that women are systematically excluded from meetings where crucial decisions are made, yet they are expected to abide by these decisions without question. The study found that the predominance of male leadership in these churches mirrors broader cultural practices, where gender inequality is deeply ingrained. Women, as revealed in the study, are confined to auxiliary roles and excluded from key spaces where authority is exercised. This exclusion is often justified through a literal reading of scripture, which reinforces the subordination of women (Frahm-Arp, 2010; Sande, 2017). The study highlights that these interpretations are further reinforced by traditional African cultural practices, which continue to shape the roles of women in the church.

Moreover, the impact of industrialisation on women's roles is significant. Findings show that as men migrated to urban centres for work during the industrialisation period, women were left behind in rural areas, tasked with maintaining households and caring for children. This division of labour significantly limited women's opportunities for education, independence, and public participation, as pointed out by Gouws & Kadalie (Resane, 2021:4). However, many women adapted by assuming leadership roles within their communities, with some founding churches or serving as evangelists. Despite their contributions, the findings indicate that these churches were often taken over by men, in line with broader cultural norms of masculinity, resulting in the removal of women from leadership positions.

The study's findings align with Kobo's (2016:4) assertion that the marginalisation of women in African cultures precedes industrialisation. Historically, women were excluded from spaces of power and governance, such as the *ebuhlanti* in the amaXhosa community, where decision-making about politics, ethics, and spirituality occurred. Women were relegated to domestic spaces, reinforcing their marginal status long before the economic and social changes brought about by industrialisation.

The findings of this study reveal that male dominance is maintained by societal expectations and denominational culture, which collectively uphold traditional gender roles. The study participants revealed that these expectations limit women's empowerment, both in the home and the church. Denominational culture further reinforces this imbalance, as African

Pentecostal churches do not ordain women as pastors, thus maintaining a male-dominated hierarchy (Handman & Opas, 2019). The study's findings reflect how denominational culture perpetuates gender inequalities, positioning men as natural leaders and women as subordinates.

Furthermore, Pentecostal hermeneutics, which emphasises a literal interpretation of scripture, plays a significant role in shaping these gender dynamics. Respondents in the study indicated that the interpretation of scripture in their churches often limits women's participation, reinforcing the traditional view that women should not hold leadership roles. This finding is consistent with Nel's (2019:515) assertion that such interpretations exclude women from leadership, focusing only on those passages that reinforce patriarchal norms. The study found that church leaders frequently resist any re-interpretation of scripture, thus preventing women from gaining ordination and leadership opportunities (Nel, 2015:9).

4.4.3 Masculinity Under Scrutiny: Reflections and Resistance

The findings of this study reveal how resistance to the ordination of women within African Pentecostalism can be understood through the lens of masculinity, which encompasses the various ways masculine traits, behaviours, and identities are perceived, constructed, and enacted within both religious and societal contexts. Masculinity, often associated with traits like dominance, aggression, and competition, can serve to perpetuate gender inequalities, especially in spaces like church leadership where power is predominantly vested in men (Kupers, 2005).

Respondents noted that such expressions of masculinity can lead to the abuse of power, fostering a culture of exclusion and harm in both domestic and religious contexts (Koopman, 2015:265). For me as a practical theologian, these dynamics suggest that the deeply ingrained structures of masculinity in African Pentecostal churches contribute significantly to the marginalisation of women.

A key finding in the study is that historical, cultural, and social norms dictate that women are expected to submit to men, both in the household and within the church. Respondents observed that empowering women in such contexts can be particularly challenging because men often perceive women's advancement as a direct threat to their own power and position. The fear of losing authority is central to the resistance many men exhibit toward female ordination.

According to participants, such resistance stems from the belief that women in leadership could destabilise the existing social order, leading to feelings of insecurity and a challenge to male supremacy in both religious and cultural spheres (Srilatha & Deepa, 2004:15).

The findings also emphasise the role of hegemonic masculinity in reinforcing male authority. Hegemonic masculinity, which privileges male authority and decision-making, creates tension between African cultural norms and church practices, as these two systems often uphold conflicting beliefs about gender roles. Respondents highlighted that specific biblical passages are often cited to support limiting women's participation in overall leadership roles, aligning with broader societal gender norms that prioritise male leadership in religious settings. For example, people often use the fact that Jesus and his twelve disciples were men to argue against allowing women to hold leadership roles, particularly in the context of the Eucharist. However, some respondents argued that African cultural perceptions of fatherhood and motherhood challenge this interpretation, suggesting that the masculine pronouns used to describe God and the maleness of Jesus need not exclude women from fully participating in Christian leadership. As Oduyoye (1995:483) asserts, the African cultural understanding of gender roles allows women to be equal partners in religious and familial structures, thus questioning the exclusionary readings of these biblical passages.

This highlights a broader issue within the church: the perception of God as male and the association of leadership with masculinity continue to marginalise women's roles. The idea of God as a father figure, coupled with the historical maleness of Jesus, has led to a deep-rooted belief in the church that only men can represent Christ in the Eucharist and hold leadership roles. This interpretation, according to Oduyoye (1995:482), limits the church's ability to recognise the equal spiritual worth of women, thus perpetuating an all-male priesthood. The findings suggest that such interpretations, often taken out of context, continue to reinforce male dominance and marginalise women, making it difficult for women to access leadership positions unless they seek approval from male authority figures. This environment deepens their subordination and restricts opportunities for genuine empowerment.

Respondents also pointed out that traditional gender stereotypes and societal expectations further exacerbate the marginalisation of women within the church. Women are often confined to roles such as Bible readers, choir members, or worship team participants, which, while important, do not equate to leadership or decision-making power within the church. The

findings suggest that this gendered division of labour not only limits women's opportunities for advancement but also reinforces the idea that men are the primary decision-makers within the church. Without opportunities to lead or influence church governance, women are left in subordinate positions, unable to fully realise their potential within the religious community.

However, the findings also reveal a critical insight: if women continue to rely on male leaders to advocate for their empowerment, true liberation may remain elusive. The study underscores the importance of involving men in promoting gender equality. Men, as the primary agents of patriarchal structures, have a unique role to play in dismantling these power dynamics and creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for women. By actively engaging men in conversations about gender equality, the church can work toward a transformation that benefits both women and men, fostering a more just and inclusive community.

The study's findings also highlight the significant negative impact the persistent gender gap in church leadership has on the church's growth and overall mission. Excluding women from leadership not only contradicts the inclusive nature of the Christian faith but also limits the church's ability to fully embrace its diversity and potential. As scholars like Nürnberger (2016:241) argue, the empowerment of women is essential for societal progress, as women bring qualities of cooperation and mutual care that can enhance leadership. The findings support this argument, emphasising that true empowerment can only be achieved when women are afforded equal opportunities to lead and contribute to the church's mission. In line with Oduyoye's (1995:485) critique, the exclusion of women from leadership roles is an affront to the biblical principle that both men and women are created in the image of God and are equally valuable in His eyes.

Therefore, the study's findings suggest that while the church has a long-standing history of marginalising women in leadership, there is a growing recognition that these practices must change. I therefore contend that by reinterpreting cultural, historical, and biblical narratives that uphold gender inequality, and by empowering both men and women to challenge patriarchal structures, the church can move toward a more inclusive and equitable future. The next section will explore the broader implications of women's marginalisation within the Pentecostal tradition, providing a deeper understanding of how these dynamics affect the church and its members.

4.5 The Cost of Resistance: How Gender Exclusion Shapes Pentecostal Beliefs and Practices

This section delves into the implications of women's marginalisation within African Pentecostal churches, highlighting the significant consequences that exclusion has on the growth and vitality of the church. The research findings suggest that the marginalisation of women obstructs the church's ability to harness the full range of gifts, talents, and perspectives necessary for its development. I therefore argue that by failing to embrace principles of gender equity, Pentecostal churches risk stagnation and the loss of valuable contributors to their mission. This, in turn, leads to a sense of spiritual stagnation, where the church's growth potential is stunted and the enriching contributions that women could offer are overlooked.

4.5.1 Lost Blessings: The Church Without Women's Gifts

One of the most profound consequences of resisting the ordination of women is the deprivation of their spiritual gifts, which could significantly enrich the life of the church. As highlighted by the findings, preventing women from becoming pastors or taking on leadership roles restricts their ability to share their unique gifts with the broader church community. This observation echoes Mombo (2019:1), who asserts that ordination is not simply a formal recognition, but a platform that allows women to contribute meaningfully to their communities and improve lives.

The findings indicate that this exclusion is rooted in cultural beliefs, especially those shaped by traditional African mindsets, which limit the full participation of women in church leadership. Respondents observed that these cultural norms, which are deeply embedded in both African Pentecostalism and society, impede the church's ability to benefit from the diverse and transformative contributions that women can make. This aligns with Kariuki's (2024:7) assertion that church teachings, often grounded in patriarchal interpretations of scripture, limit women's potential by adhering to traditional gender roles. Scholars argue that these interpretations should be revisited in light of the belief that God's gifts are bestowed on all people, irrespective of gender (Dei & Osei-Bonsu, 2015:47).

The findings suggest that when the church fails to recognise the gifts of women, it severely limits its potential for growth, innovation, and spiritual enrichment. Cultural expectations often shape and hinder the empowerment of women in leadership, reinforcing the traditional divide that places men in authoritative positions. Mudimeli (2021) further emphasises that these discourses, whether supportive or discriminatory, are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of society, which in turn shapes the church's outlook on gender roles.

Furthermore, respondents highlighted the unique qualities women bring to leadership—qualities such as empathy, nurturing, and strong interpersonal skills. These characteristics can enrich pastoral care, theological reflection, and community-building efforts within the church. Women's leadership can also infuse new perspectives into areas like social justice, education, and outreach, offering much-needed innovation. By excluding women from leadership roles, the church not only denies them their calling but also misses out on the blessings these gifts bring to the wider community. In this way, both men and women are deprived of the opportunity to be spiritually enriched.

4.5.2 Spiritual Stagnation: The Hidden Cost of Marginalising Women

The findings also reveal that the marginalisation of women is contributing to a phenomenon referred to as “spiritual stagnation syndrome.” Respondents pointed out that the church is already experiencing significant challenges in terms of growth and vitality, often linked to an inability to reconcile critical issues related to gender and leadership. They noted that some churches have faced similar consequences by excluding women from leadership roles, which has ultimately led to spiritual stagnation. These churches, they argue, offer valuable lessons in what can happen when gender equality is not embraced within church leadership.

Spiritual stagnation, as defined in the study, refers to a noticeable decline in a church's growth, vitality, and spiritual engagement. This aligns with Merrill's (2017:18) description of spiritually stagnant churches as those suffering from "spiritual hypertrophy," where the internal life of the church becomes rigid and inward-focused, hindering outward growth and mission. In this context, spiritual stagnation can be seen as a condition where the church's spiritual life becomes entrenched in routine, unable to adapt or evolve in a way that engages its members and fulfils its mission.

The study suggests that spiritual stagnation is not just a theoretical issue but a real problem affecting churches that fail to incorporate women into leadership. As Merrill (2017:18) argues, these "thickened walls"—metaphorically speaking—act as a fortress, keeping the church from reaching the broader community and fulfilling its calling. When women's gifts and leadership are excluded, the church risks becoming stagnant, focusing on past successes rather than moving forward to address contemporary challenges. This can result in mission drift, as the church becomes more focused on maintaining outdated traditions and practices rather than engaging in mission-driven activities that promote spiritual growth and renewal.

Furthermore, spiritual stagnation may also signal burnout within the church community. Henson (2016:86) highlights that burnout often results from a combination of poor communication, lack of support, conflicting values, and a breakdown in the sense of community. In a spiritually stagnant environment, these issues can be exacerbated, contributing to a decline in participation and innovation. Respondents in the study emphasised that churches that resist change and cling to outdated practices often become disengaged, and their members lose the energy and momentum needed for growth.

The study also found that churches that continue to marginalise women often find themselves clinging to past glories, relying on the memories of miracles and successes from earlier times rather than fostering new growth or vision for the future. This refusal to embrace change and innovation further entrenches spiritual stagnation, making it more difficult for the church to engage meaningfully with its members and the wider community.

Consequently, the research highlights the significant cost of resisting gender equality within African Pentecostalism. In my view, by marginalising women, the church not only misses out on the blessings their gifts can offer but also faces the risk of spiritual stagnation. I therefore call for a re-examination of gender roles within the church, emphasising that true spiritual vitality can only be achieved when both women and men are allowed to fully participate in the leadership and mission of the church. The consequences of continuing to marginalise women are clear: the church risks losing its potential for growth, spiritual enrichment, and its broader mission to be a transformative force in society, and this has been evident with many Pentecostal churches.

4.6 Summary of Chapter Four and Theoretical Contribution of the Study

In this chapter, I explored the marginalisation of women in African Pentecostal churches, focusing on how gender exclusion impacts church leadership, growth, and spiritual vitality. The resistance to women's ordination and leadership roles stems from deeply ingrained cultural and theological beliefs, particularly those tied to traditional African gender norms. These practices limit the full utilisation of women's spiritual gifts and contribute to a decline in church growth and spiritual vitality. The study also emphasises that societal expectations and cultural norms around masculinity and male dominance exacerbate the marginalisation of women in both religious and social contexts (Kupers, 2005; Connell, 2020). Contrary to and unpredictably, the study also showed that there are men who do support women's ordination.

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution to understanding the intersection of Pentecostalism, gender, and social justice within the African context. It examines how patriarchal interpretations of scripture, cultural beliefs, and societal norms intersect to shape religious practices, leading to the marginalisation of women. The study challenges the prevailing gender hierarchies in Pentecostalism, demonstrating how the church's potential for development and change is thwarted by the ban on women serving in general leadership. Drawing on feminist theology, the research critiques theologically and culturally entrenched patriarchal norms that limit women's roles, hindering the church's ability to fully embrace equality and justice. Oduyoye's (1995) call for a church that empowers women to contribute to broader theological and ecclesiastical decisions is central to this critique.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature on social justice by redefining it as the active inclusion of women in church leadership and ministry. The concept of "spiritual stagnation syndrome" is introduced as a theoretical framework that links gender exclusion to the decline in church vitality (Merrill, 2017:18). The study challenges traditional notions of masculinity and authority, informed by Oduyoye's (1995) critique of the African understanding of fatherhood. It calls for a re-evaluation of gender roles, advocating for women's empowerment to create a more dynamic and inclusive church environment. Ultimately, the study highlights how such an environment would foster growth and innovation, contributing to the church's broader mission of societal transformation (Dei & Osei-Bonsu, 2015:47).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This practical theological study examines the marginalisation and disempowerment of women in African Pentecostal churches in South Africa, focusing on the historical, social, cultural, religious, theological and structural barriers that have perpetuated gender inequality. The study primarily focuses on Black Pentecostalism's stance on gender equity and women's empowerment. Based on the study's findings and limitations, it summarises the main conclusions, suggestions for addressing the underrepresentation of women in Pentecostal religious leadership, insights for Pentecostal theological scholarship regarding women, contributions to practical theology, and ideas for additional research.

Previous research found that women in Pentecostal churches face marginalisation, which restricts their access to leadership roles (Jacobs, 2022) and is influenced by gender-related issues and various factors discussed in the earlier chapter. This study has illuminated the underlying causes of this marginalisation and the tradition's reluctance to fully embrace women's empowerment. I also critiqued the dominant Pentecostal conceptions of women's roles in the church, contending that there is a lack of consideration for marginalised women. This section emphasises the significance of the results, women's contributions to the field, and the new insights they offer. The limitations of this research are also acknowledged, and the findings and objectives are explored in detail.

5.2 Overview of the Study's Main Findings

To address the critical issues uncovered in this study on the marginalisation of women within the Pentecostal tradition, it is essential to acknowledge not only the historical and structural barriers that have perpetuated gender inequality in African Pentecostals but also the profound impact these limitations have on the church's vitality and growth. Women's marginalisation serves as a reminder that the church is not just a hierarchical organisation but also a dynamic culture, with flawed people, and core beliefs and ideals. Church leaders and members constantly interpret and apply these components in response to shifting conditions, which frequently impede women's empowerment. The findings reveal a troubling landscape where

outdated patriarchal norms stifle the empowerment of women, hindering both spiritual and community development. Next will be the implications of the study.

5.3 Implications of the Study

This study makes several important contributions to knowledge, theory, and methodology. Discrimination against women in churches is a longstanding issue. Feminists have long fought against gender inequality both globally and across Africa. In 1989, Mercy Oduyoye founded The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Accra, Ghana, aiming to amplify the voices of African Christian women and address gender marginalisation through various publications (Ayanga, 2016:1). While Oduyoye built upon earlier efforts, challenges related to gender marginalisation in Pentecostal churches persist. The following suggestions are intended to enrich the conversation around women's empowerment in Pentecostal churches in South Africa, while also providing a deeper understanding of the importance of ordaining women as valid participants.

In terms of knowledge, it enhances our understanding of the church's efforts to empower women. The church is positioned as a critical actor in multi-sectoral interventions, tasked with examining its role as a dynamic and evolving entity. This includes reimagining traditional norms while reaffirming its foundational identity as the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:14-15), highlighting the theological tension between preserving doctrinal continuity and the urgent need for contextual theological reform.

Furthermore, the study emphasises masculinity as a key issue that the church must confront to effectively address gender discrimination. This study reflects a church in transition, drifting from the founder's inclusive vision and struggling to adapt its theology and practices to engage women meaningfully. It highlights the state of African Pentecostalism and its gender challenge. This indicates that these churches are struggling to evolve alongside societal changes, which has significant implications for their future.

Moreover, the study highlights the need for the church to take part in solidarity campaigns, both locally and internationally, to raise awareness and promote change. By uniting with others in the struggle for justice, the church can play a pivotal role in challenging the cultural and

traditional norms that underpin gender violence. This includes advocating for reforms within the criminal justice system and ensuring that individuals convicted of GBV offences undergo meaningful rehabilitation before re-entering society.

In drawing on the example of Jesus' compassion for the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34), the study points to a model of leadership that is both strong and empathetic. Jesus' willingness to engage with and heal a woman marginalised by society offers a powerful reminder that true masculinity is not defined by dominance or exclusion, but by gentleness and care for those in need. The church, in following this example, is called to change its attitudes and practices, remembering its foundational mission to promote love, justice, and reconciliation for all people, regardless of gender. Ultimately, this study urges the Pentecostal church to reconsider its role in society, to ensure that it is a force for liberation and justice for women, and to embody the transformative power of the gospel in its stance on gender equality.

5.3.1 Pentecostal Tradition's Resistance to Gender Changes

This study adds to the growing body of evidence suggesting that the Pentecostal church must reevaluate its theology. As Parker (1996:11) notes, the theological reflection of the Pentecostal tradition should be constructive, moving beyond defensive exegetical and historical debates that merely seek to justify existing beliefs and practices. In this regard, Osmer (2008:152) emphasises that one effective approach to achieving the normative goal in practical theology is through “good practice,” which generates new understandings of God, Christian life, and societal ideals, offering fresh normative guidance.

Christian feminism has played a significant role in advancing gender equality within the Christian church, particularly by challenging the ways women are treated in theological and ecclesiastical structures. Furthermore, feminist theologians, especially within the context of Third World Theology, have made notable strides in questioning male-dominated theological frameworks and advocating for gender equality (Maluleke, 2009:33). Despite these efforts, however, Pentecostal churches continue to uphold patriarchal structures, resisting substantial changes to gender roles.

Pentecostal churches, particularly in South Africa, have been criticised for their treatment of women, leading to marginalisation, mistreatment, and trauma. Landman (2009:33), a

prominent South African theologian, has raised critical questions about the persistence of patriarchal structures within church life. This often results in women leaving the church or disengaging entirely or withdrawing from fellowship and community altogether. This withdrawal can lead to harmful consequences such as backsliding into previous destructive behaviours, health issues, and even death. A significant group of women remains in the church out of fear of distancing themselves from God's grace (Du Toit, 2024).

The root of this mistreatment lies in the male-dominated hierarchical structures within these churches, which perpetuate male supremacy and reinforce gender-based violence (GBV). GBV in South Africa is a grave and pressing issue, with women and children losing their lives daily, representing the most severe kind of discrimination and dehumanisation faced by these vulnerable groups. Men in Pentecostal settings, particularly in South Africa, are often implicated in domestic abuse, reflecting broader societal attitudes where women are seen as inferior or even as property (Gabaitse, 2020; Graaff and Heinecken, 2017). The church's failure to challenge patriarchal attitudes and sexual harassment reflects deeper societal issues (Rosida and Rejeki, 2017). Research shows that men in Pentecostal churches may mirror the abusive behaviours they display at home, complicating the church's ability to mediate or resolve domestic violence (Gabaitse, 2020; Musodza et al., 2015). The Pentecostal church faces a profound challenge: to transform its hierarchical structures, hold perpetrators accountable, and embrace a more inclusive, supportive approach to gender equality.

5.3.1.1 Cultural and Religious Norms and Gender Roles

The intersection of culture and religion in shaping gender roles is a dynamic process. Religious systems are shaped by and, in turn, shape social norms and patterns of organisation, creating a cyclical relationship with cultural practices (Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015:2). Women's roles within religious contexts often mirror their roles in broader society, reinforcing the idea that women are subordinate to men. As Holm (2015) notes, God is often conceived as male, while women's value is typically associated with their roles as mothers, especially sons. Consequently, women are often excluded from religious leadership and public roles, although exceptions do exist in certain religious traditions (Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015:2). Research by Young (2015) suggests that while religious life is often male-dominated, women are more likely to participate in religious practices than men, which underscores the complex relationship between gender and religion (Klingorová & Havlíček, 2015:3). While culture and

religion shape gender roles, the broader ideological system that sustains this inequality is patriarchy.

5.3.1.2 Patriarchy and Gender Inequality

Patriarchy, as an ideology, is a system of social organisation in which men hold power over women, often with women's consent shaped by cultural and religious conditioning (Madlala-Routledge, 2009:4). Patriarchal structures are entrenched in institutions like the family, the military, the academy, and the church, which have historically conditioned women to accept their inferiority to men (Madlala-Routledge, 2009:4). As Maluleke (2009:31) asserts, patriarchy is not merely an attitude but a comprehensive and repressive ideology that systematically subjugates women.

In religious contexts, patriarchy reinforces gender inequalities, preventing women from attaining leadership positions and limiting their agency (Wood, 2019:2). Patriarchy, as described by Jones (2019), refers to the rule of men over women, shaping economic, political, social, and religious ideologies that enforce male dominance. This ideology constrains women's freedom, particularly in religious communities where patriarchal structures serve as a significant barrier to gender equality (Wood, 2019:2). The pervasive nature of patriarchy across cultures and nations highlights its role in perpetuating gender inequality.

5.3.2 Masculinity and Church Leadership

The issue of gender within the context of church leadership is a deeply contentious one, and for many, reconsidering traditional views on gender roles can feel like an intellectual and ethical conversion (Stackhouse, 2015:27). In Pentecostal circles, this issue is particularly fraught, as there remains a strong belief that women are not equally endowed with the spiritual gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Schreiner, 2018:8). This belief is perpetuated from one generation to the next, making it difficult to challenge or dismantle. The persistence of this tradition can be attributed in part to the tendency among many Christians to assume that their established practices are the best or only way to approach theological matters.

This mindset leads to intellectual inertia where entrenched views are rarely questioned or examined at a deeper level (Stackhouse, 2015:39). It also separates men and women according

to hierarchical lines and makes males feel superior (Du Toit, 2024). God's people purchased with His blood and fortified by His Spirit are intended to have an impact on the world (Geiger and Peck, 2016:1). But because they have been harmed by the emotional anguish they experience from the church, which prevents them from being empowered, women lack the authority to accomplish this.

While it is evident that some women within the church are as mature, gifted, and pious as any of the men (Stackhouse, 2015:29), their contributions are often undervalued due to the persistent gender bias in church leadership. Cultural transformation is hindered by a tendency to cling to preconceived, established ideas. For many ministers and seminarians, gender is simply not seen as a relevant issue. This may be because predominantly male seminaries mirror a system that, while not intentionally discriminatory, lacks a gender-sensitive approach. As a result, individuals have adapted to believe what they do, but their limited capacity to embrace new perspectives has led to low cognitive flexibility.

Cognitive flexibility is the ability to quickly shift one's thinking, such as when switching between different tasks (Braem and Egner, 2018:470). In such environments, it is not appropriate to lay blame on individuals, as they are operating within a broader institutional framework that is not inherently gender inclusive. However, this is the challenge churches are facing, and unfortunately, these issues have detrimental effects on groups whose circumstances have historically been disadvantaged, such as women.

African Christians, in particular, might benefit from examining how churches in other parts of the world have addressed gender inequality in leadership. Over time, many mainstream Christian denominations have engaged in debates and discussions that have led to greater acceptance of women in leadership roles. As a result, the issue of gender discrimination is no longer as pronounced in many parts of the global Church. Mainstream Christian thought now generally holds that one's sense of hearing from God must be weighed against Scripture, tradition, and reason and that this discernment should take place in community with other believers. This process helps minimise the risk of misinterpretation or misguided actions, ensuring that genuine divine communication is properly understood (Stackhouse, 2015:24-25).

However, the significant progressive support for women's ordination reflects a shift in many men's attitudes toward the issue. However, gaps remain. One critical area of concern is the lack

of discourse in seminaries about masculinity and what it means to be a man. The liberty of individuals to think freely and actively participate in church affairs is essential. Yet, men often see themselves as the default standard, expecting women to conform. This entrenched power dynamic can make change seem unnecessary to those in control.

Even in multi-ethnic and diverse African Pentecostal churches, where unity in diversity is celebrated, fostering tolerance and shared vision remains crucial. The church must embrace its diversity, allowing all members to realise their potential and enjoy the gifts God has bestowed. To achieve this, the focus should shift from "women's empowerment" to "gender empowerment," promoting the empowerment of both men and women. Men must be empowered to recognise the importance of empowering women, while women must be conscientized to understand their true position and advocate for themselves.

To achieve meaningful transformation, the church must initiate and sustain dialogue about masculinity within Pentecostalism. Ignoring these issues will hinder progress. Lumumba (2018) argues that true emancipation for women cannot occur without addressing and changing men's perspectives. Pentecostal leadership frequently prioritises the growth and success of the congregation, often measured through metrics such as attendance and financial stability (Dengah, 2017). Neo-Pentecostalism, in particular, is characterised by its focus on "prosperity theology," which promotes the belief that economic success is attainable for the faithful. This often involves members giving monetary offerings with the expectation of future financial blessings (Dengah, 2017).

However, this financial emphasis tends to symbolise material success more than spiritual growth for the Kingdom of God. Leaders must also recognise that a significant proportion of their congregants are women and tailor their approach accordingly. By acknowledging and addressing the needs and contributions of women, the church can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. This shift in perspective could not only enhance the spiritual and social well-being of the congregation but also contribute to sustainable growth and success. How do you think the leadership can start making this change? The focus should be on the church as a whole, with liberation rooted in good governance. Ultimately, the gender challenges in African Pentecostal churches highlight the need for a mental liberation that paves the way for complete transformation (Lumumba, 2018).

5.3.3 New Biblical Interpretation

One common approach to theological reflection in practical theology is theological interpretation (Osmer 2008:139). Although Parker's book is almost twenty years old, it seems that the problems of Pentecostal churches are still the same in South Africa. Parker looks at Practical theology from the perspective of Pentecostal churches by involving the critical reflection upon its practices as a community of faith. However, he puts forward a few important issues that I think are still challenges for this tradition. Parker (1996:10) points out that:

Pentecostal positions regarding 'normativity' of Holy Spirit baptism has created some problems in Pentecostal theological reflection, first it has tended to narrow the focus of 'Pentecostal theology' to exegesis or, in some cases, historical studies; and secondly, it adopted a more traditional theological starting point of reflection upon the Christian tradition, including Scripture, which tended to neglect or even contradict the centrality of 'experience' in Pentecostal faith and life. For Pentecostals, theology arises from reflection on experience, yet these historical and exegetical dialogues have tended to reverse, if not abandoned altogether.

The Bible, as a complex and multifaceted text, often presents challenges, especially when addressing issues like gender roles. Theological and ethical interpretations, as suggested by Osmer, can help address the church's situation because Christian biblical studies emphasise interpreting theological texts and understanding the systematic relationship between church doctrines, while theological interpretation focuses on applying theological concepts to current episodes, situations, and contexts (Osmer, 2008: 139).

Many passages seem confusing, and some are contradictory or difficult to reconcile with modern values, leading to ongoing debates about their interpretation. For example, practices such as divorce by a simple writ from a husband were once acceptable but are now viewed as unacceptable. Similarly, the Old Testament sacrificial system is considered obsolete, especially in light of the epistle to the Hebrews (Stackhouse, 2015:43). Moreover, certain biblical texts about gender roles seem to conflict—women are instructed to remain silent in church, yet they are also affirmed in their right to pray and prophesy. Furthermore, women are referred to as the "weaker vessel," but the Bible also asserts their equality with men (Stackhouse, 2015).

5.3.3.1 The Bible's Inerrancy and Interpretation

While these apparent contradictions exist, I believe the Bible is inerrant and free from contradiction. The inconsistencies arise not from the text itself but from human misunderstanding. The issue often lies in selective interpretation, where individuals or communities focus on passages that support their existing beliefs, leading to gender-based discrimination. In his analysis of the selective reading of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40, Resane (2024:3) observes that there is a deliberate tendency within some Pentecostal circles to overlook or downplay verses 34–38, which contain the apostolic injunction for women to remain silent in church.

This selective engagement with the text creates a theological and practical tension within the African Pentecostal tradition, where corporate worship presumes the full participation of all congregants, regardless of gender. Resane critiques this hermeneutical approach as unjust, arguing that the marginalisation of women stems largely from Pentecostal hermeneutics characterised by literalism and proof-texting, often at the expense of the broader socio-historical context (Resane (2024:3). This interpretive stance not only distorts the intended meaning of the passage but also reinforces gendered exclusions from church leadership roles.

This highlights how Pentecostal interpretations are at times marked by selective engagement with Scripture, applying a literal reading to certain passages while seeking deeper or more contextual meanings in others. Resane (2020) alludes:

[Pentecostals are] the literalists who are emphatic on the authority, infallibility, inerrancy, and inspiration of the Bible. For them, the Bible is the complete truth and must be accepted as it is. To reject its completion is to reject God himself. They are well-versed in the biblicist-literalist method of Bible interpretation. (Resane 2024:3)

To address these inconsistencies, Stackhouse (2015) advocates against using Scripture to reinforce preconceived beliefs. Instead, he calls for a more inclusive and holistic approach to biblical interpretation—one that carefully considers the broader biblical narrative concerning men and women. Such an approach demands rigorous, context-sensitive exegesis that seeks to discern the intended meaning of the text without imposing interpretive bias.

5.3.3.2 Patriarchal Models in Biblical Theology

Stackhouse (2015) notes that the Bible presents a patriarchal model in the relationships between God and Israel, as well as between Christ and the Church. In this framework, God and Christ are seen as initiating and sustaining forces, while Israel and the Church respond in faith and gratitude. This hierarchical structure mirrors broader patriarchal narratives that permeate biblical texts (Stackhouse, 2015:49). However, many theologians argue that viewing certain theological teachings as universally applicable and unchangeable oversimplifies biblical interpretation. Stackhouse (2015:34) critiques this "arrogant theology," which stifles growth and meaningful dialogue. Instead, he advocates for interpretative humility—Christians should remain open to refining their understanding of scripture, embracing new insights as the Holy Spirit illuminates their minds.

5.3.3.3 The Need for Holistic Biblical Engagement

In practice, some individuals manipulate scripture to support personal agendas, reinforcing existing biases and prejudices. To address this, Christians are urged to engage with the whole Bible, avoiding selective readings that justify injustice. This requires humility and prayerful engagement with the text, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit and the church community. As Stackhouse (2015:32) explains, the task of biblical interpretation involves prayerfully seeking the best possible understanding of the text and then responding in faith, obedience, and gratitude.

5.3.3.4 The Role of Context in Biblical Interpretation

It is crucial to recognise that God's actions in the world are often shaped by human free will and the realities of a fallen world. While God is sovereign, He sometimes permits evil or allows situations to unfold in ways that do not immediately reflect His perfect will. According to Stackhouse (2015:53), this is often part of a greater good aligned with God's ultimate plan for creation. Therefore, historical and cultural context must be considered when interpreting certain teachings and practices in the Bible.

5.3.3.5 Patriarchal Discourses and Gender Inequality

A key factor in sustaining gender inequality within Christian communities is the persistence of patriarchal discourses in religious texts. Traditional interpretations of these texts have excluded women from leadership roles, citing ideas like the "body of Christ" being male and the requirement for women to remain silent in church (Landman, 2009:33). However, alternative readings challenge these interpretations, suggesting that many of these passages may be later insertions or misinterpretations of the original writings. As a result, the limitation of women's participation in decision-making in churches is a product of patriarchal readings of scripture, rather than an inherent mandate within Christian theology.

5.3.4 Women and Men as Equal Partners: Rethinking Christian Values

Gender equality remains a significant challenge in Pentecostal churches, particularly in the denial of women's ordination and the continuation of hierarchical structures where men rule and women are expected to obey. This raises important theological and ethical questions about the church's role in promoting gender equality, which goes beyond a superficial concern and touches on the fundamental idea of the "equal dignity and responsibility of women and men" (Cahill, 2019:11). This equality has profound theological implications, as both genders are made in God's image and called to share in the divine mandate (Stackhouse, 2015:44).

From the outset of creation, both man and woman were given the mandate to co-create the world with God—an equal partnership with neither gender considered inferior or subordinate (Stackhouse, 2015:44). Even Jesus, despite having a male-dominated inner circle, actively included women in his ministry, suggesting that gender should not dictate one's role in the kingdom of God (Stackhouse, 2015:49). The scriptural basis for gender equality is clear: both men and women were created as equal partners in stewardship, and this divine design has never been revoked (Stackhouse, 2015:48).

However, historical practices and institutionalized discrimination have perpetuated gender inequality in the church, with many churches, families, and communities maintaining gendered power structures. These entrenched views often lead to social pressure and resistance against alternative perspectives on gender equality (Stackhouse, 2015:25). Despite the biblical teaching that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female"

(Galatians 3:28), many Pentecostal churches continue to marginalise women, especially in leadership roles.

This issue is compounded by the broader societal norms that influence Christian communities. As Cahill (2019:21) notes, many Christians conform to cultural expectations rather than fully embracing the transformative teachings of the gospel. Instead of renewing its thinking, the church has often conformed to the patterns of the world, which inhibits its ability to live out God's will, particularly in terms of gender equality. As a result, women remain excluded from leadership and decision-making, reinforcing male-dominated structures within the church.

The centralisation of male leadership has led to stagnation in many churches. Men, particularly in leadership positions, have been unwilling to share authority with women, often because empowering women threatens their financial interests and established power dynamics. This resistance to women's ordination is not about the issue itself but about maintaining control over existing power structures and resources.

Despite this, gender theorists and social scientists like Cahill (2019:22) argue that gender socialisation is not an irreversible process, and change is possible. The church, called to embody God's vision for human flourishing, must empower both women and men to serve together in all areas of ministry. Without fully recognising women as equal partners in leadership, the church cannot fulfil its mission effectively.

For the church to truly embody the transformative power of the gospel, it must confront and dismantle the systems of inequality that have persisted for centuries. The church may make a lasting difference in the world and more accurately represent God's kingdom by adopting a paradigm of mutual empowerment and collaboration where men and women cooperate in leadership and ministry.

5.4 Recommendations to African Pentecostalism

The findings of this study reveal compelling insights into the marginalisation of women within Pentecostal churches in Africa, particularly in South Africa. These findings underscore significant gender challenges that necessitate transformative action for the church to align

better with societal progress and biblical principles. To move forward, African Pentecostal churches must confront deeply entrenched gender biases and align their practices with the inclusive vision of the gospel. By revisiting their original mission, fostering theological dialogue, empowering women, and embracing transformative leadership, these churches can overcome stagnation and thrive as beacons of equity and spiritual vitality

5.4.1 Revisiting the Church's Original Vision

The historical vision of the Pentecostal church emphasised inclusivity and equity, yet modern practices often reflect a departure from these ideals. This deviation has resulted in stagnation, particularly regarding women's empowerment. Restoring the original vision of the church is critical to fostering an environment where women can unite, amplify their voices, and contribute meaningfully to the church's development (Syed, 2010). Transformative leadership must prioritise inclusivity by engaging in theological dialogue and implementing reforms that dismantle patriarchal structures embedded within church practices (Few et al., 2021).

5.4.2 Addressing Patriarchal Structures

The exclusion of women from pastoral roles and ordination stems from entrenched patriarchal traditions and cultural norms (Attoh, 2017). These traditions often misuse biblical interpretations to justify gender inequality, creating barriers to women's full participation in spiritual leadership. Fostering theological education and dialogue about gender equity is essential for challenging these harmful practices. As Nadar (as cited in Jacobs, 2022) notes, the alignment of traditional African views with Christian scriptures has perpetuated male dominance, further marginalising women within the church.

5.4.3 Solidarity and Advocacy Among Women

Currently, women in Pentecostal churches are confined to supportive roles, such as fundraising and leading other women, with limited solidarity to challenge these constraints. Du Toit (2024) emphasises the importance of fostering unity among women through mentorship programs and advocacy groups. These initiatives can empower women to advocate for inclusion in leadership and dismantle the barriers that perpetuate inequality.

5.4.4 Structural Reforms in Church Governance

For meaningful progress, structural reforms in church governance are indispensable. Reassessing constitutions to eliminate discriminatory practices and creating pathways for women to assume leadership roles are vital steps. Without these changes, the church risks stagnation and irrelevance in a rapidly modernizing world. The suppression of women's spiritual gifts not only deprives the church of blessings but also alienates talented members who may seek more inclusive congregations (Biri, 2020).

5.4.5 Transformative Leadership and Male Participation

Achieving gender equality in Pentecostal churches requires transformative leadership and active male participation. Men must critically reflect on their roles and consider the broader implications of perpetuating the status quo (Penxa-Matholeni, 2024). Empowering progressive leaders committed to inclusivity can drive this transformation and align the church with modern values.

5.4.6 Overcoming Gender Barriers to Spiritual Gifts

Theologically, spiritual gifts are not gender specific. Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 12 and Acts 2 affirm that the Holy Spirit bestows gifts upon all believers for the edification of the church (Schreiner, 2018). Despite this, women are often excluded from clerical positions and leadership roles. Misinterpretations of Scripture, such as the misuse of Eve's role in the Fall, perpetuate these exclusions. As Phan (2016) argues, both Adam and Eve share accountability for the Fall, and it is inappropriate to disqualify women from leadership based on this narrative. The church must embrace the inclusive nature of the gospel, affirming that all believers, regardless of gender, are called to serve according to their spiritual gifts. Leaders must prioritise a theology that incorporates tradition, scholarship, lived experience, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to create an environment that reflects Christ's lordship and the gospel's inclusive nature (Stackhouse, 2015).

5.4.7 Restoring the Church's Moral Authority

Excluding women from leadership roles fosters harmful treatment and rejection, diminishing the church's moral authority and alienating congregants. It is essential to strategically include women in leadership roles to foster an environment of equality and compassion (Njoroge, 1997). The church must prioritise the equitable use of spiritual gifts to restore vitality and align with its mission to reflect God's glory and kingdom values.

5.5 Recommendations to the Sample

As a practical theologian, my role involved interpretive description. My primary research question focused on "how the BTG denomination is evolving and establishing itself as a catalyst for women's empowerment." This represents my new insights and contributions to the sample that real progress depends on tearing down long-standing structures and interpretations that marginalise women's voices and contributions.

This study highlights the importance of the church acknowledging the invaluable contributions of women. Historically, women have played a vital role in the church's mission, actively preaching the Gospel alongside the founder, Reverend Bhengu, and contributing significantly to its growth and success. The church must recognise that its current struggles stem from the persistent discrimination against the very individuals whom the founder identified as possessing the ability and spirit to build the church. Reverend Bhengu demonstrated his faith in women's leadership by involving them in his work in communities troubled by violence and despair, showing that their involvement in ministry was essential to the church's vitality.

The study calls for a re-evaluation of the church's history, particularly to how women's roles were historically marginalised. Women, despite their significant contributions, were often excluded from formal leadership due to racial and gender discrimination. However, Reverend Bhengu recognised their gifts and affirmed their vital roles in the church's growth. The church must now work to reclaim and recognise these contributions, acknowledging that African feminism calls for a restoration of women's roles and leadership, and ensuring that their voices are heard in the narrative of the church's history. As noted by Lerner, women were often written off, with their intellectual and spiritual contributions dismissed as "stupidity of [their]

disposition" 1986:34). This must be corrected, and African feminism works to restore these voices and achievements.

The study offers an opportunity for the BTG church to reflect on the spiritual vitality of the local churches during Reverend Bhengu's ministry. Women were integral to the church's growth and functioned as leaders in the planting of local churches. This historical collaboration between Reverend Bhengu and women serves as clear evidence of their leadership capabilities. The BTG church must recognise these historical precedents and evaluate what might be lacking in its current practices. This reflection can serve as a foundation for future leadership and spiritual revitalisation within the church.

The BTG church can look to its history of women's leadership during Reverend Bhengu's time as a model for empowering women today. Women were trusted with leadership responsibilities, which highlights their competence and potential. By revisiting these historical examples, the church can better understand the importance of gender-inclusive leadership and consider integrating more women into key positions within the church. This will not only honour the church's history but also strengthen its mission moving forward. Therefore, to BTG, I recommend:

1. Transforming the church: embracing the role of a learning community through theological education
2. The church must revisit bible translation: the significance of hermeneutics and exegesis
3. The church must challenge men's gendered presumptions about women's roles to handle the issue of women's ordination and mainstream gender equality in church activities
4. The need for a strategic and compassionate approach to women's inclusion in the church
5. Criminalising patriarchal practices

5.5.1 Transforming the Church: Embracing the Role of a Learning Community Through Theological Education

Many African Pentecostal communities face challenges when it comes to reconciling theological traditions with the need for spiritual vitality. Historically, there has been hesitation to embrace theological education due to its perceived emphasis on academic study rather than direct religious experience (Onyinah & Anim, 2013:398). However, I agree with Quampah and Naidoo (2020:301) that this reluctance highlights the need for education initiatives that engage with critical issues such as women's empowerment.

Due to some of these challenges, gender discrimination remains a significant issue in many African Pentecostal churches, however, the church holds the responsibility to acknowledge and take proactive measures to resolve them. The church environment should foster a culture of learning, where ongoing reflection, growth, and transformation are encouraged. By engaging with other Christian denominations, particularly those that have embraced women in pastoral roles, Pentecostal churches can learn from their experiences and adapt. One critical area for improvement is theological education, ensuring that all prospective pastors receive foundational training to equip them for ministry (Jacobs, 2022:37).

Theological education has undergone significant shifts, particularly in how we understand teaching and learning. Saines (2015:300) argues that church learning should embrace diverse perspectives, creating a deeper understanding that connects both the world and God. The church's curriculum must reflect this, focusing not just on scripture but also on the lived experiences of its members. This "world-involving" and "God-involving" learning aligns with the mission of discipleship and evangelism, ensuring that the church remains relevant and responsive to both spiritual and societal needs (Everist, 2010:9).

To fulfil its mission, the church must foster a culture of continuous learning and theological growth. By engaging with progressive theological ideas and reflecting on diverse cultural contexts, Pentecostal churches can better address challenges like gender equality and biblical interpretation. This process requires an openness to learn from both within and outside their own tradition (Everist, 2010:36).

In addition, theological education is vital for individuals in ministry, helping to develop leaders who remain connected to their communities and responsive to societal challenges (Naidoo, 2010:347). Historically, Pentecostalism has focused more on oral and experiential traditions rather than formal written education, but there is a growing need to integrate more structured theological training (Kay, 2004:4). This education must address both the proclamation of the gospel and social responsibility, aligning with the *Missio Dei*—the mission of God—which sees the church not just as an organisation with a mission, but as the vessel through which God's will is fulfilled (Cronshaw, 2011:91; Padilla, 1984:17).

Women have long played active roles in church missions, and theological education should reaffirm that all believers, regardless of gender, are called to participate in both proclamation and social service (Schroeder, 2018). By adopting this inclusive approach, the church will fulfil its mission more effectively, combining evangelism and good works in the name of the Triune God.

5.5.1.1 Educational Qualifications and Standards

The church must ensure that individuals ordained as pastors possess the necessary qualifications of the highest quality. Beyond the theological education provided by Bible schools, pastors need to undergo advanced theological training or education that fosters critical engagement, ideally through programs offered by universities.

5.5.2 Revisiting Bible Translation: The Significance of Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Interpreting biblical texts accurately is essential for understanding Scripture. It is equally important for leaders who serve as teachers to their congregations, as misinterpretation could lead to misleading the entire church. Exegesis focuses on specific passages, while hermeneutics involves the methods of interpretation, together forming a methodology for understanding (Emmett, 2003:523). The significance of these processes lies in their incorporation of both objective and subjective factors, contributing to a balanced interpretive theory (Vines and Allen, 1987:311).

In Pentecostalism, there is often a tendency to accept Scripture at face value without deeper interpretation. Gabaitse warns against this superficial approach, noting that selected verses are sometimes used to justify keeping women out of leadership roles (2015:4). Such discrimination can be framed as scriptural, rather than personal bias. Schleiermacher emphasises that interpretation must consider both subjective influences and objective judgments, highlighting a common issue in Pentecostal readings that lacks depth (Vines and Allen, 1987:329).

Vines and Allen (1987:329) argue for multiple readings of a text to grasp its overall meaning before delving into details, advocating a holistic approach to interpretation. This method could help address the marginalisation of women in Pentecostal churches, encouraging a re-evaluation of how texts have historically sidelined them. Vines and Allen (1987:329) contend that interpreters inevitably approach the text with their own perspectives, and therefore, biblical interpretation should not be regarded as an entirely objective exercise. These scholars contend that biblical texts should engage the interpreter's existence, suggesting that while Scriptures can speak to us, they do not possess a fixed meaning. Understanding the context, audience, and circumstances surrounding a text is essential for interpretation, as each passage serves a specific purpose (Emmett, 2003:527).

5.5.3 Addressing Men's Gendered Assumptions About Women's Roles

Confronting men's assumptions about women's roles involves identifying their knowledge gaps and attitudes, and encouraging them to critically examine their practices, particularly concerning biblical interpretations of women's roles. It is essential to integrate gender equality into all church activities. Roles and responsibilities should be assigned based on individual spiritual gifts, qualifications, abilities, and skills, rather than traditional gender stereotypes. The Bible does not suggest that certain spiritual gifts are better than others or exclusive to specific genders (Sanou, 2017:86), nor does it impose gender-specific criteria for receiving the Holy Spirit and His gifts (Sanou, 2017:86). Women bear the responsibility of fulfilling their calling, and a positive experience of Christian fellowship is only achievable when spiritual gifts are exercised with love and consideration for others (Rabens, 2012:151).

Furthermore, the collaborative spirit fostered through the use of spiritual gifts ensures that every community member is "edified," or strengthened and empowered for a religious and ethical life (Rabens, 2012:151). This requires men to consciously evaluate how they engage

with women. Various institutions, including the home, state, church, and communities, continue to perpetuate unequal dynamics between men and women (Magezi, 2019:2). However, the church has a crucial role in bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds in a spirit of unity (Musodza et al., 2015:124).

5.5.4 The Need for a Strategic and Compassionate Approach to Women's Inclusion in the Church

This study highlights the necessity for a strategic and compassionate approach to including women in the church. Contemporary churches face various challenges, such as declining membership, low morale, leadership conflicts, the exclusion of women from leadership roles, and financial difficulties. A well-thought-out, strategic and compassionate approach to include women can help congregations effectively tackle these issues, ensuring they remain relevant and resilient in difficult times.

While some men may hold the belief that leadership should be exclusively male, women can significantly contribute to the church's development by offering diverse perspectives and insights. Their involvement in strategic planning and decision-making is essential for shaping effective church policies and strategies. Neglecting women's contributions can lead the church to rely on extreme measures and view issues solely from a male perspective, risking the loss of its authentic, compassionate qualities.

Women have historically demonstrated profound compassion, especially during Jesus' time, when they supported him amid hostility from men. In contrast, some perceive men as inherently dishonest, acting on their desires without integrity (Muñoz García et al., 2:8). During his journey to Golgotha, Jesus was accompanied by women who mourned and wept for him, showcasing their commitment to his life (Lieber, 2016:278). He addressed them with a powerful message: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and your children" (Luke 23:28). Even today, women and children are often the primary victims of male violence, and they have to weep for themselves, and their children as suggested by this message.

“God’s commissioning of women to participate in His mission demonstrates that He entrusts them with responsibilities that may challenge prevailing social norms regarding gender roles. As Adams (2019:31) notes, on the morning of His resurrection—arguably the most pivotal moment in Christian history—Jesus chose to reveal Himself first to women and charged them with delivering the news to His disciples, as recorded in Mark 16:6–7. This act highlights the value and trust placed in women as bearers of divine revelation. Furthermore, Jesus acknowledged the difficulties women would face under patriarchal authority, as implied in Luke 23:31, reinforcing the idea that they are indeed worthy custodians of the Word. John 1:1 affirms the divine nature of the Word, and as White and Thomas Joseph White (2022:21) argue, the woman who bore the incarnate Word—Mary—participated in a profound theological reality, being integrally connected to the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Women are often seen as having strong connections within their communities (Cidro and Anderson, 2020), which can greatly benefit the church in its outreach efforts. By addressing community needs and leading outreach programs, women can amplify the church's impact, although they often find this challenging without ordination. Educational programs can serve as a vital solution to the church's challenges. By pursuing theological education and leadership training, women can gain essential skills for teaching, pastoral care, and administration.

In a context marked by discrimination, particularly in Pentecostal churches, women can advocate for gender equality, challenge biases, and promote inclusivity, ensuring their voices are heard and valued. Embracing these roles will allow women to make meaningful contributions to the church's growth and foster a more inclusive and vibrant community. Therefore, Pentecostal churches must reevaluate the inclusion of women in their leadership structures, as they currently miss out on the blessings that women's gifts can bring. This calls for ongoing dialogue within the church community regarding women's roles and empowerment, and further research could identify successful models of integration and empowerment, providing practical implementation examples.

5.5.5 Criminalising Patriarchal Practices

Patriarchal practices that perpetuate gender inequality must be criminalised. It is clear that men often benefit from gender discrimination and may resist efforts towards gender equality to

maintain their entrenched power. This resistance is evident not only in the home and community but also within religious institutions, where patriarchal traditions are upheld. According to Madlala-Routledge (2009:4), patriarchy is inherently repressive and needs to be actively challenged. While women's resistance has led to some political, legal, and economic gains, Pentecostals have lagged, and the patriarchal socialisation and role differentiation remain largely intact. Madlala-Routledge (2009:5) emphasises that achieving gender equality requires critical mass involvement in decision-making, though this alone is insufficient to dismantle patriarchal power structures. The inclusion of women in leadership positions can significantly alter the dynamics of these institutions, influencing the perspectives of both women and men in future generations.

In conclusion, a strategic and compassionate approach to women's inclusion can help congregations effectively address the various challenges churches face today, such as low morale, declining membership, leadership conflicts, exclusion from leadership roles, and financial difficulties. This approach will ensure that churches remain relevant and resilient in times of hardship. While some men may perceive women as non-essential in leadership, their diverse viewpoints and insights are crucial for the church's growth. A thoughtful and caring approach to women's involvement is essential for fostering an equitable environment that encourages greater participation in leadership roles. Finally, people who are discovered engaging in patriarchal behaviour ought to be treated as criminals and punished appropriately.

5.6 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes by providing an understanding towards the marginalisation of women for ordination and inclusion in leadership roles, ensuring their voices are heard and their talents are fully recognised. The study provides a crucial illustration of how women are treated in African Pentecostal denominations and how church tradition reacts to and mirrors larger patterns within the African Pentecostal legacy. Feminist Africa provides insightful analyses of the intersections between church, patriarchy, and gender (Klingorová, 2015). Feminist scholars have increasingly examined how patriarchal structures within the church contribute to the marginalisation of women. Women's voices have historically been suppressed in religious discourses due to the patriarchal cultures in which these religions developed, limiting their influence on the formation of religious norms (Klingorová, 2015:3). This would challenge the

prevailing patriarchal dynamics within Pentecostal churches and highlight the superficiality often present in scriptural interpretations.

5.7 Limitations in the conceptualisation of the study

This study faced several limitations. As it was a national study and required extensive travel, safety concerns arose, particularly for me as a woman travelling in South Africa.

Additionally, there were instances where participants rescheduled or shortened interviews, leading to challenges with consistency and data collection.

Gender dynamics also presented a challenge. As a female researcher addressing gender-related topics, I encountered negative attitudes from some male participants who viewed my role as unconventional, especially within the ecclesiastical context of the case study. Given the sensitive nature of the subject, this perception may have hindered my ability to obtain detailed information. It is possible that a male researcher could have faced less resistance and obtained more comprehensive data.

5.8 Future Research

This study has contributed to the understanding of how certain church traditions delay the transformation and progress of the church. As a practical theologian, I will use the pragmatic task to find the way forward and to bring about positive change (Osmer, 2008:4). Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several areas for further research are recommended. The recommendations are:

1. Churches should conduct social justice research to examine the relationship between social change, community, and faith. The emphasis should be on the ways that theological theories and church teachings impact social justice attitudes and actions. Understanding the theological underpinnings and real-world effects of church participation in gender-focused social justice movements and the effects of church-based initiatives can be beneficial. This type of research can yield significant insights for the church and society.

2. More research is needed on African Pentecostalism and gender in South Africa generally. Few theologically educated females in the tradition make research difficult considering power dynamics
3. It would be beneficial to explore the perspectives of youth, women, and potentially other pastors regarding solutions to improve the spiritual health of the church. The decline in spiritual vitality has led many to view churches as ineffective. However, when individuals leave the church and return to former destructive behaviours, it increases societal harm, and there is no institution available to offer correction or support except for jail or hell.
4. Investigating the role of education and theological qualifications in Pentecostalism in the hiring of ministers is essential. The church must prioritise hiring pastors with formal theological training to address various issues, including gender discrimination. Theologically informed leaders are better equipped to engage in meaningful discussions and avoid relying on uninformed beliefs or assumptions.

5.9 Concluding Remarks

This study underscores women's lack of leadership and disempowerment in a black Pentecostal Church in South Africa. The focus was on the marginalisation of women within the Pentecostal tradition, exposing the historical and structural barriers that sustain gender inequality. The findings indicate that outdated patriarchal norms hinder women's empowerment, which subsequently affects spiritual and community development. To address this, Pentecostal churches should consider practical theology, which involves reflective practice and internal self-examination of the theories behind their actions (Osmer 2008:6-7).

This approach entails scrutinising current practices, dynamics, and broader influences. Crucially, practical theology is seen as a catalyst for change, guiding congregations through transformative processes. For the church to progress, it is vital to dismantle entrenched structures and interpretations that marginalise women. The recommendations aim to spark transformative change and harness the full potential of the church's diverse gifts and leadership. The church is believed to possess a unifying and binding force that is instrumental in managing and resolving gender-based violence, reflecting God's love and expectations for humanity

(Magezi, 2019:2). These recommendations aim to create an environment where women's gifts are acknowledged and celebrated as essential to the church's mission and future.

5.10 Overall Summary

In conclusion, addressing gender inequality in religious contexts requires challenging patriarchal practices, reinterpreting religious texts, and ensuring women have equal opportunities in leadership roles. In Pentecostal churches, resistance to women's ordination often stems from deeply entrenched views about male authority, not just in the church but also in the home. While progress has been made, particularly through feminist theological movements and gender reconciliation initiatives, patriarchal ideologies remain persistent, necessitating continued efforts to promote gender equality within both religious and societal frameworks. As Madlala-Routledge (2009:4) asserts, true equality requires dismantling the patriarchal structures that restrict women's participation in all aspects of life, including religion. Though the issue of women's ordination remains contentious, ongoing discussions, especially with supportive men, offer hope for progress. The church must confront this issue directly, encouraging open dialogue among all members and engaging with other Christian denominations that have already embraced women's ordination. By exploring diverse perspectives and practices, the church can take meaningful steps toward gender equality.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE AND LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM BTG


UNISA | university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

02 November 2023

Dear Ms Phumeza Cordelia Nonnie Jacobs

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
32232977_CREC_CHS_2023

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 02 November 2023 to 02 November 2024

Researcher(s): Name: Ms. P. C. N. Jacobs
Contact details: 32232977@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Prof. M. Naidoo
Contact details: naidom2@unisa.ac.za

Title: A Practical Theological Study Exploring a Changing Church and its Impact on Women's Empowerment: A Pentecostal Case Study in South Africa.
Degree Purpose: PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The **low-risk application** was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



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confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (**02 November 2024**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:
The reference number **32232977_CREC_CHS_2023** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature: 

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP 

Prof ZZ Nkosi
Executive Dean: CHS
E-mail: nkosizz@unisa.ac.za
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BACK TO GOD CRUSADE
OPERATING AS ASSEMBLIES OF GOD (BACK TO GOD)



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26 July 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to confirm that the National Leadership of Back to God Crusade – operating as Assemblies of God (Back to God) have given permission to Phumeza Cordelia Nonnie Jacobs to conduct research in this organisation for the purpose of completing her PhD degree.


Name: PROF M. S. JACOBS
Reason: EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
Date: 26/07/2023 15:25:45 (UTC+02:00:00)

APPENDIX B: CODE LIST and Themes and Major codes with frequencies

	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P 10	Pa 11	P 12	P 13	P 14	P 15	P 16	Pt 17	P 18	P 19	P 20	P 21	P 22	P 23	P 24	Totals	
	G=20	Gr=33	G=28	G=25	Gr=27	G=27	Gr=22	Gr=25	G=29	G=33	Gr=29	G=26	Gr=23	Gr=25	G=27	G=27	Gr=22	Gr=28	Gr=23	G=34	G=34	Gr=35	G=24	Gr=20	G=21	
● Advocating for Women's Ordination. G=20	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	1	20	
● Anticipating a range of positive changes in the development of the church. Gr=14	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	14	
● Bhengu affirmed women as bearers of Good News. Gr=10	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	10	
● Formation of women's organization. Gr=17	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	17	
● Fundraising through handwork. Gr=22	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	0	1	1	1	22	
● Gifted women and men leave the church. Gr=11	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	11	
● Leadership lacking a vision for church growth and overlooking the founder's legacy. Gr=97	2	1	5	5	5	7	3	5	2	5	4	5	7	6	5	2	6	2	2	1	3	6	6	2	97	
● Male dominance and Denominational culture. Gr=50	1	1	1	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	2	7	2	2	4	3	3	2	1	1	4	3	2	0	50	
● Patriarchal culture. Gr=25	2	3	0	2	2	0	1	0	7	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	25	
● Power conflicts and division in the church. Gr=12	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	5	0	0	1	12	
● Predominance of African tradition and culture. Gr=37	0	2	1	2	2	0	0	3	1	5	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	3	4	5	0	0	2	37
● Question of biblical interpretation of Women's role. Gr=27	1	4	0	0	0	2	0	1	7	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	4	1	1	0	0	1	27	
● Radical approach towards women's support. Gr=12	0	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	
● Some men feel threatened and intimidated by women's gifts. Gr=25	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	2	0	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	25	
● Spiritual Stagnation Syndrome Gr=79	4	2	3	3	5	2	4	6	3	1	6	0	2	4	5	4	4	1	5	3	4	3	3	2	79	
● The church is deprived of the blessings that come through women's gifts. Gr=12	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	12	
● The Need for a Strategic and Compassionate Approach to Women's Inclusion in the church. Gr=6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	6	
● The vision has been misinterpreted and misconstrued. Gr=30	0	5	2	0	3	0	4	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	4	1	2	0	0	30	
● We need to educate the masses. Gr=20	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	3	0	0	1	20
● Women are restricted to leading women only. Gr=63	2	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	2	2	3	1	3	3	3	3	4	3	2	1	3	2	3	2	63	
● Women as second class believers. Gr=58	2	4	4	1	1	4	2	1	6	1	1	3	6	3	2	1	1	2	3	3	1	1	3	2	58	
Totals	20	34	28	26	27	23	25	29	34	30	26	24	25	27	27	22	30	23	34	34	35	24	20	20	647	

Themes and Major codes with frequencies

RO	Major Codes and Frequencies	Theme	Reasons
1. To investigate fully, the Back to God tradition, to establish the historical vision of Bhengu towards	Bhengu affirmed women as bearers of Good News: 10	1. Bhengu affirmed women in various church structures	1. women should be given a chance however in reality it is quite limited
	Formation of women's organisation: 17		
	Fundraising through handwork: 22		
	The vision has been misinterpreted and misconstrued 30	2. Tension between progressive vision vs church practice	
	Leadership lacking a vision for church growth and overlooking the founder's legacy: 97		
	Male dominance and Denominational culture: 50	3. Traditional patriarchal church understandings continue	Women's ordination prohibited due to African tradition and culture
	Women as second-class believers:58		
2. To understand the factors that lead to the exclusion of women's ordination, as an example of empowerment and change, in the development of the church	Patriarchal culture:25	1. Specific regulations regarding Admin and church governance	Reasons: Women's ordination prohibited by denominational culture
	Predominance of African tradition and culture:37		
	Question of Biblical Interpretation of Women's Role: 27		
	Women are restricted to Leading Women Only: 63		
	Power Conflicts and Division in the Church:12		

	Some men feel threatened and intimidated by women's gifts:25	2. Progressive support for women's ordination	Contradictory voices – NUANCE understandings
	We need to educate the masses: 20		
	Radical approach towards women's support: 12		
	Advocating for Women's Ordination: 20		
3. To understand the implication of reluctance of the Pentecostal tradition to embrace gender change brought by modernity.	Spiritual stagnation syndrome:79	1. Obstacles crippling church growth	Non-fulfilment of the Great Commission Poor Theology, the value of both genders created in the image of God The church deprived of women's gifts
	Gifted women and men leave the church: 11		
	The church is deprived of the blessings that come through women's gifts: 12		
	The need for a strategic and compassionate approach to women's inclusion in the church: 6		

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Date: 21 November 2023

Questions to all male leadership:

Questions for Objective 1

Question 1:1 Please tell us what Reverend Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual empowerment.

Question 1:2 How well does the church's constitution reflect Reverend Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Question 1:3 How relevant is Reverend Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Question 1:4 Reverend Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Reverend Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Question 1:5 How has the position of women changed following Reverend Bhengu's departure?

Question 1:6 Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for the Back to God Crusade.

Question 1:6a What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

Question 1:6b Why has Reverend Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment?

Question 1:7 What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church?

Questions for Objective 2

Question 2:1 What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

Question 2:2 Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

Question 2:3 What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it comes to church positions?

Question 2:4 What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

Question 2:5 Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary period like their male counterparts.

Question 2:6 What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

Question 2:7 By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the church adapting to the times?

Question 2:8 What do you think should be done to change this situation?

Questions for Objective 3

Question 3:1 Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender change in the BTG church?

Question 3:2 Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the Cape to Cairo vision?

Question 3:3 Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and to the outside society.

Question 3:4 What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in the church?

Question 3:5 What were the implications of resistance in the past?

Question 3:6 What are the current implications of resistance?

Question 3:7 What are the expected aspects of change in the future

APPENDIX D: Transcribed interviews 1-24

All questions are directed to the church leadership (all male).

Appendix D1: Interview with Participant 1 (P1)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 1:** First, he was in Port Elizabeth in 1945, and he left for East London in 1950. He
4 said his purpose was to call people to God – people had to return to God. He was going all over
5 preaching alone and he kept on going overseas to ask for money to conduct revivals. When he
6 was in the United States of America, he saw a vision. God told him that the money he needs is
7 here in South Africa. God showed him a mother wearing a big headscarf, and said to him, go
8 to that mother and that is where you will get the money. He returned from abroad, gathered
9 mothers, and explained the vision he saw so that he could conduct his revivals. Then in the
10 60's, 1962, the movement of mothers started. He told them that he wanted to conduct revivals,
11 and God had shown him that he could conduct revivals by working with them. He then chose
12 four mothers, and he trained them on how to do the work, and the mothers started doing
13 handwork, sewing, and selling, and money was collected - it was then deposited in our bank
14 and when the revival was to start the money would be withdrawn. The church grew, and due
15 to its growth, there was a place that was opened here in Bloemfontein where all the places met
16 in December. These four mothers would come to the meeting carrying the money they had
17 collected from all the places they had visited. After arriving in Bloemfontein, they would put
18 all that money in one bag. After Reverend Bhengu had prayed, they would verify which places
19 God had revealed to him to set up revival tents. Then the money would be allocated to build
20 the tents - then he would start the work in those places he has blessed, then send pastors to
21 carry out the work. Over time, other mothers were appointed as Organisers, and they expanded
22 the work, and it got where we are now. His goal was not to build a church, he wanted to bring
23 people back to God through evangelism, but God told him that the people would be lost, so he
24 should build a place for them, but his own goal was the Back to God Crusade. God showed
25 mercy to us through this man. Here marriages and mended. Even if a wife was about to take
26 her clothes and go back home, through the teachings of these mothers, she would stay. Even
27 when the husband had left home a long time ago, he would come back home, and the wife
28 would accept him because of the teachings of this church.

29 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
30 empower women?

31 **Participant 1:** Not necessarily the church constitution but the rules of procedure, my child.
32 Reverend Bhengu chose us as the Teaching Team. We are the ones who are pushing that vision
33 of Reverend Bhengu because he said that the Executive is elected by the people. He said that
34 God has shown him this team, saying that it will confirm his teaching and his vision – and instil
35 it because the Executive is changed often - yet the Teaching Team is not elected but appointed.
36 Therefore, we as the Teaching Team are in charge of his doctrine to instil and protect it. We
37 watch the administration when it veers off the road, say it does not go that way, and show them
38 the way. But we are patient with each other because others are not quick to see.

39 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

40 **Participant 1:** The church is still following the way Bhengu taught them, and the women are
41 also following the way Bhengu taught them - otherwise this work would not be where it is
42 today. We, the elders, try not to deviate from the principles of this church. What has kept this
43 thing alive is that we are still here, - because people who arrive here have their agenda, they do
44 not want a woman to stand in front of them these days and that is not the teaching of the Bible.
45 The Bible has no gender, it does not discriminate. The Bible accommodates everyone who has
46 been saved and received the Holy Spirit. We are still representing those principles as this group
47 that he appointed which is called the Teaching Team. We are doing what he told us to do, to
48 represent his philosophies, and I am in that group - we are here as the watchdogs of Bhengu's
49 doctrine so that it does not disappear. We are hoping, because we also bring in young people
50 that as we grow old, we can instil this doctrine in them, and they are gripping them.

51 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
52 vision reflected in this church?

53 **Participant 1:** Now, we are in the campaign to restore the vision of pastor Bhengu because the
54 things he had set, were being abolished. Women have been pushed to the back by some pastors,
55 but we are now in the campaign to restore the vision of pastor Bhengu. Women used not to be
56 elected as deacons in the past, but now we include them according to the Bible. We bring them
57 back to the bible. Women were not accepted to the deaconship, it is we who are letting them
58 in, we restoring what Pastor Bhengu stood for, - that the value of a saved person must be
59 acknowledged even if it is a woman.

60 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure -

61 **Participant 1:** When he was about to leave, due to realizing the behaviour of some of the
62 pastors he was working with towards women at the time, Reverend Bhengu called all the

63 leadership of the women and said to them, I have seen what the pastors are like. When I am no
64 longer there, they will deny you everything. So, the best thing is for me to make you organisers,
65 (but at that time they were not called organisers) so that they will not be able to remove you.
66 In the past, the women would go out and preach, and when the congregation had started, then
67 Reverend Bhengu would say take care of that church – that is how it was going. But when some
68 men arrived, they would want to remove that woman using their masculinity. And when
69 Reverend Bhengu saw that, he said that the best thing is for me to put you on this side where
70 they will not be able to touch you.

71 Reverend Bhengu preached with girls. Girls that God gave him but now they are grown up.
72 Two girls were saved when they were still in school, God blessed them. Reverend Bhengu used
73 one of the girls in every service. This girl stood up at the Convention and preached. So,
74 Reverend Bhengu had no gender problem. He was looking for someone with God. This one
75 girl was like his child.

76 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
77 for the Back to God Crusade.

78 **Participant 1:** When it developed, the growth led to the reduction of revival tents. The spirit
79 that broke out made us want to be like other denominations. As you hear the Bible saying
80 Israel wanted to be like other nations. We also wanted to be like other revival tents, but our
81 revivals are not like others. We do not when we set up a revival tent today, ask people for
82 money, not in our way. And because of that action, we chased God away - because of this
83 adoption of things we have seen in other places - the fruits or results were not there - the power
84 evaded our tents. We were struck because of copying. Here we preach Jesus who saves but
85 now things changed, and prosperity was preached, property was preached, and marriages were
86 preached but we are not people of that. We preach Jesus, and that when you die you go to
87 Heaven. So, those things that we did, made God angry - now, even though the tent has been
88 pitched there are no results because of these foreign things that we have brought in.

89 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

90 **Participant 1:** The women were still there but due to the discontinuation of revivals, due to the
91 lack of fruits from the revivals - because when the tent is pitched, they are looking to get tithes-
92 they see money and not souls. You see, that makes God angry. All in all, although the women
93 are there, they do not have a voice like the girls of old, who were bold, and knew that Reverend
94 Bhengu was there when they encountered problems.

95 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
96 women's empowerment?

97 **Participant 1:** The tents were discontinued, and they were moved to the organisation side to
98 carry out women's work. Yes, they were initially related to soul winning.

99 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
100 the church?

101 **Participant 1:** Pentecostalism is governed by the Bible; it must not go beyond the principles
102 of the Bible it does not matter if you are highly spiritual - keep the principles of the Bible. Some
103 Christian churches go beyond the principles of the Bible and meet God before he has spoken,
104 saying that he has spoken, this is where we clash. They also tend to give false prophecies
105 because they want to be above all people spiritually. Sometimes you find out that indeed they
106 were shown something but then in their prophesying, they add.

107 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

108 **Participant 1:** In Back to God Crusade, they were allowed to preach and now Reverend
109 Bhengu took some of them and put them in the organisation so that even if they were disbanded,
110 they would have the strength to carry out the work. Like this one girl, as they get older, they
111 do not stop doing what they were doing but now they are doing it in the name of this
112 organisation, - but it is still what they were doing. Now they cannot be in the tents because men
113 come and take their place, and it would be a matter of whose gifts are more powerful because
114 women of this church were gifted, they did not care if you were a man, they were powerful and
115 there were results. So, we are restoring that as this group, my daughter. We help each other
116 because as this vehicle is moving, we put other people as well, and some, got in it in the middle,
117 having not seen the previous things that happened before, therefore, we need to show them and
118 provide them with the information that Reverend Bhengu gave us, because there are things he
119 has written that are not shown to anyone.

120 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

121 **Participant 1:** We are on it my daughter as this Teaching Team, because now what we need
122 is a gift, we do not need a man. When we are finished, we will meet with the Executive and
123 inform them what our plan is. The calling has no man, it has no woman - so we are on it – so
124 that they be given local churches.

125 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
126 comes to church positions?

127 **Participant 1:** There were a lot of them, my child, as I said, Reverend Bhengu also
128 decided to change them for the way they used to work and made them organisers for mothers
129 and girls so that they would not be removed. However, the vocation has no man, that is why I
130 say we are busy with it, we are working on it as a Teaching Team.

131 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
132 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

133 **Participant 1:** It is maleness my child, that mentality that some things are not suitable for
134 women. However, this is what I have just said, Reverend Bhengu saw it and tried to fix it, but
135 we still do it.

136 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
137 probationary period like their male counterparts.

138 **Participant 1:** No, they were working under the pastors, and their report should have come
139 under the pastors. Even when there were fellowship meetings they would not be part of it. That
140 means that they are not really accepted as such, and now, those who are in charge of the
141 congregations, have their problems in their congregations, which they must report on. And we
142 say, these people are gifted, why are they limited in things, because these people can win souls
143 and take care of them - now we are on that.

144 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

145 **Participant 1:** No, my child, God gave women brains like men, it is just a matter of culture,
146 the traditions and customs of black people follow them. Apart from that there is no restriction
147 - it is the black culture, that nature of saying a woman is a woman and the Bible does not agree
148 with that.

149 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
150 adapting to the times?

151 **Participant 1:** With the way things are currently done, in our church we cannot run away from
152 being viewed as conservative. But we are trying to sort things out as a Teaching Team because
153 we are one people, and we need to cooperate. We are trying to adapt to times because I may
154 encounter a problem and when that happens, I should be able to approach a female pastor and
155 ask for help. In other words, we must be able to support one another. That is the right way, not
156 to say she must move back and there are other things she is not allowed to do.

157 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

158 **Participant 1:** As I have already said my daughter, we are on it, we are fixing it as the Teaching
159 Team. After that, we will meet with the Executive and show them what we have discussed.

160 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
161 change in the BTG church?

162 **Participant 1:** I can only give a small example - some mothers by their nature, their behaviour
163 is bad. Mothers are not the same, you cannot say because of someone's behaviour then you
164 reject all of them and say they do not behave well, it does not work like that. Even here, my

165 child, there are mothers with good character, I can count them. What I am trying to say is that
166 anything goes with character. As for men, they get kicked out of the churches because of their
167 character. Every time you are placed in a local you get kicked out because of your character.
168 When someone says they do not want me, only to realize that the problem is his character.

169 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
170 the Cape to Cairo vision?

171 **Participant 1:** This is why, my child, I am saying that we must bring back Bhengu's vision,
172 the things he used to do because women can call people, they have a gift. If we bring those
173 things back, the mothers will wake up and get to work. So, it depends on whether we return
174 them, how we return them, whether we pray or return them by positions. That being said, we
175 must be supported by people, and we must pray, that this Bhengu thing does not end because
176 if it does not happen the way it used to, it will end like other churches that existed before. Most
177 of the churches were not like what you see, but the vision came to an end. Some people
178 appeared and changed their vision, they talked about it but they did not live it.

179 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
180 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
181 to the outside society?

182 **Participant 1:** My daughter, the Teaching Team was appointed, to retain Bhengu's vision
183 because Bhengu said that there would be people who do not know his vision, and he said, I
184 have appointed you to keep the vision that God showed me alive. You see, if the women were
185 not there, this church would have collapsed long ago. It is driven by women to stand thus far.
186 Women pray that the church will not be in trouble because men like to be busy with positions.

187 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
188 this church?

189 **Participant 1:** Women are now allowed to go to Bible School and to be empowered. To be
190 clear about the scriptures. Forget about the normal practices that we do here in the church; our
191 main tradition is the Scriptures. And again, as I said, women are also elected now when deacons
192 are elected in the churches.

193 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

194 **Participant 1:** The church was struggling. We have seen here from the pastors who are
195 working with women. One pastor would say he is called, but when you get to their local, you
196 would realise that the person who is called is the wife. We can see that the reason the church is
197 standing is this woman, the man, does not have the mission he claims to be called for. So, we
198 saw that it does not help, women should not be left behind because they have something. You

199 see, I worked with my wife, we took turns in the pulpit. She was an evangelist, and I was a
200 pastor. I knew my role, and I knew her role, and if I saw that there were visitors in the church,
201 I knew that my wife was needed - many knew her. I allowed her to use her gift; I did not use
202 maleness. She knew what needed me, and I knew what needed her.

203 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

204 **Participant 1:** We delay the progress of the church. Many women are gifted, but we oppress
205 them, delay them and even delay the church because of maleness.

206 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

207 **Participant 1:** The church will return to its place, to its glory. We just need to be clear about
208 the Scriptures so that the church can return to its place. If we are not clear about the scriptures,
209 we will never get the church anywhere. It is the Word of God that will restore the church to its
210 rightful position, not the Constitution. The Constitution is just something to defend us from the
211 government, not to govern the church.

Appendix D2: Interview with Participant 2 (P2)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 2:** Let me first say three things concerning that, when pastor Bhengu was called,
4 after conversion, the first thing that God spoke to him about was that Africa has got to go back
5 to God. That was the message, which was very clear, very succinct, and very direct, but his
6 mission and his assignment was to call Africa to go back to God. Then, going back to God
7 simply meant that people have got to repent, people have got to forsake their wicked ways, and
8 people have got to be born again. People have got to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior and
9 have a personal relationship with God. That was the fundamental message and his calling. In
10 the second part, there seems to come the issue of how the Back to God Crusade as a ministry
11 had to expand from Cape to Cairo, that is how the whole of Africa had to receive the Gospel of
12 Jesus Christ. But now there is a way to how that would happen; that is, before you pitch a tent,
13 you have to know that there is electricity, there is equipment, musical instruments, and there
14 are trucks that are going to carry the equipment from one place to another. So, there was money
15 required to do that, to fund the gospel from Cape to Cairo. Then God revealed to him that
16 instead of going around the world raising funds, he must go back to South Africa and approach
17 the women. He then approached the women to raise the funds, and the funds that were going
18 to be raised by them would be utilised for the preaching of the Gospel from Cape to Cairo. In
19 this case, God saw women through pastor Bhengu as a source of income to enable the Back to
20 God Crusade to take place. In other words, there was no way that God showed women as
21 maybe less important than far human, less important than men, and the fact the assignment for
22 raising funds to preach the Gospel was given to women directly. For me, that was a very clear
23 indication that pastor Bhengu interpreted the message for God that women must be empowered.
24 You cannot empower somebody if you keep somebody in the corner, ignore that person, and
25 continue with your things in your way. So, the fact that he carried the message to them, that
26 God is calling them through him so that we can work together. Empowering women so that
27 they could be coworkers with him. In other words, they were not just substandard people who
28 were not important, who did not matter, and that maybe important people were men, NO. So,
29 in his mind, in his approach, in his way of operation, pastor Bhengu made sure that he works
30 with women so that they can be able to participate fully in the ministry of the Back to God
31 Crusade. So, for me, that is an indication that he knew that spiritually, they are connected to

God, and their mind is transformed, they would understand what God has revealed to them. So, he was very clear about women's ministry, women's role, and women's empowerment, and that is why they were coworkers with him.

Researcher: How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Participant 2: Badly, that's the first thing I can tell you. Very, very badly. To this day, since 1985, when pastor Bhengu passed on, it is over 40 years now, the role of women remains subservient and disregarded, even those women who get called to the ministry are given very menial assignments. I still have to see to this day a church in this country, in the Assemblies of God, Back to God in particular, which is fully pastored by a woman. For now, it's either a woman is an organiser for women in most cases or for girls. But when it comes to full-time ministry, out of all the plus-minus 6/700 pastors in the churches in the country, I have not yet seen or heard of full-time women who preach and evangelise. Their role is not taken very seriously. So, the church does not reflect the vision that Nicholas Bhengu had.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 2: Reverend Bhengu was ahead of his time. He lived from the time he was born, the 5th of September 1909, until 1985. He did the entire 70 years plus ministry. He was ahead of his time. Until he left, and 40 years down the line after his passing, to date, his vision has never been thoroughly captured and caught and understood comprehensively, it has never been. Even before his passing, he spoke very openly about the fact, what he did about that time he passed on many will misconstrue to construe him. He said many will misconstrue what I do, and indeed, he was misconstrued thoroughly.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 2: My personal view is that there is no progress reflected in the church concerning women's empowerment. It is my honest observation. Suppose you look, for instance, at the nature of the programs that women are involved in. In most cases, women are circumscribed to deal with issues that have to do with women. And even the women that are there, that are in the ministry; you go to conventions, most of the time, even those who are there they are psychologically conscientized, that when they preach, they will always select that in the Bible that talk about women only. Why can a woman not pull up this scripture that talks about empowerment or the fulfilment of the woman by the Holy Spirit? The transformation of a young boy and the movement of the young boy to manhood. I am spiritual now I am not talking about male issues. I am talking about the spiritual transformation of a young boy by the Holy Spirit.

66 Most women who find time to preach will select a verse: Sarah, Rebecca, Elizabeth. All these
67 verses talk about women. They are so programmed; they are so limited that they do not see the
68 whole Bible, and they cannot talk about the Bible as a whole. For me, that is not a very
69 wonderful thing because when God has called someone, God does not allocate certain verses
70 that you have to confine yourself to when you preach just because you are a woman. You must
71 only talk about a woman when you teach or when you preach; that is an indication that there is
72 something that has gone wrong and that is not getting transformed as we go by. So, the problem
73 of the narrowing of the space for women to participate and the confinement of women then has
74 matched to that kind of practice.

75 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

76 **Participant 2:** My observation is that the position of women from the time he left to this day,
77 things have reversed, things have gone backwards. You still have the Back to God Crusade as
78 the evangelical movement, but even in those crusades, you do not find women. In those
79 crusades, it is men who are leading, who are running, who are peaching, we are doing
80 everything. Some girls worked with pastor Bhengu directly in his ministry during his time, but
81 you do not have those people anymore. Women are now confined to the women's organisation.
82 You must go to monthlies, quarterlies, and women's conventions to hear them preach, and
83 when it comes to the preaching of the Gospel openly to the public, the women's role has taken
84 the reverse gear.

85 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
86 for the Back to God Crusade.

87 **Participant 2:** Because of how the role of women is understood broadly by the church
88 leadership. There is this verse that people believe in: women must keep quiet in the church; you
89 must be silent, you must go and ask your husband at home and all that; what Paul was saying
90 while Paul was addressing the crisis that was there in Corinth at that time. That thing has been
91 taken out of context completely, and it has been utilised as (igudu), a drug/medicine) to put a
92 woman back, to sit and keep quiet. For me, that is why you have very few male leaders who
93 transcend that type of mindset and can contextualise scriptures because the Bible has got to be
94 contextualised. You cannot just take a naked blanket statement that cannot be necessarily
95 applicable in a situation and apply it everywhere, in every place, in every situation without
96 actually checking the context of why that statement was made, who made that statement, where,
97 why, and what was he trying to correct then. In the case of saying, it applies to every Tom,
98 Dick and Harry. So, people have failed in most cases. We, as leaders and men in this case, have

99 failed to interpret the Bible contextually. Therefore, we utilise these kinds of statements to sit
100 women down.

101 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

102 **Participant 2:** Wrong interpretation of scriptures. Scriptures are taken out of context.

103 Also, we have dragged culture to interpret scriptures instead of doing this thing the other way
104 around. Culturally, a man is a man, and a woman must follow. A woman must be quiet, a
105 woman must listen, and this is how the culture pushes the whole thing. That thing gets dragged
106 out for more days in the way men are grown, and it is dragged right into the church and is
107 practised, then the Bible interpretation becomes the cultural application. The black culture has
108 adopted a Jewish culture with the same beliefs as them when it comes to women. Extremely
109 patriarchal. The master must lead, and the woman must keep quiet and follow.

110 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
111 women's empowerment?

112 **Participant 2:** There is something fundamentally important here that I need to mention to
113 answer your question. If a leader has a vision and a leader shares his or her vision with those
114 who follow him, the fundamental thing that needs to happen is for those with whom the vision
115 is being shared to catch the vision. If the followers do not catch the vision and I disappear out
116 of the face of the earth as the leader, having my vision not been caught fully by those who
117 followed me, the chances are close to zero that the vision will be extended, progress, and move
118 to greater heights. Instead, I will die with my vision if those who follow me do not catch my
119 vision while I am still with them. That is one problem. Failure to catch the vision, therefore,
120 determines whether the vision will be carried through or not. Sometimes, which is the second
121 part of this problem is that the vision can be caught but misunderstood and misinterpreted.
122 Catch it, but not as it is. So, if I am catching the vision but I am misinterpreting and
123 misunderstanding the whole thing when the leader is gone, I will continue with what I think is
124 the vision and yet is not – I have misunderstood the whole thing. So, those are the two things
125 in my view that I think are responsible for this thing, that sometimes the vision was not caught,
126 or it was caught but misunderstood and misinterpreted, then misapplied or incorrectly applied
127 as we go on.

128 **Researcher:** Follow-up: is the church following Baba Bhengu's vision?

129 **Participant 2:** We are following elements of it. Let me give you something just to expand on
130 what I am saying., 1984 – I was doing my third year at the University, and there was a youth
131 convention in the former Transkei in September 1984, I hitched-hiked from where I was
132 studying because I wanted to attend the Youth Convention. When I got to the convention, I

133 noticed that Baba Bhengu was the main speaker, and his theme was “The goals of the Back to
134 God Crusade”, and that theme was given to him by the youth in Transkei. He explained where
135 he came from with the Back to God Crusade, and he spoke a lot of things. Many things he said
136 – I want to quote here his last statement he said: “Young people – never remove the old
137 landmarks and put new ones – these are the landmarks of the Back to God Movement”. This
138 will make you faithful to God, and he will ... and use you”. Today, the devil has won many of
139 this movement, and Christians are saying Amen to demons because they cannot differentiate
140 between the voice of the evil spirit and that of God. Corruption, which one finds in the
141 movement, has become usual since Christians have gone back to their old nature. Now you can
142 see that in September 1984, He saw things that were not going right, and if by the time he was
143 still alive, he saw these changes and deterioration of the spirituality and spiritual alertness of
144 believers, do you think 45 years down the line things would have improved if things had got
145 worse when he was still alive? And he is not there now as he is not the one who is bearing the
146 torch to shine into the lives of the people who are born again. He sees the corruption that is
147 taking place in the Back to God Movement, and Christians have gone back to their old nature.
148 In fact, one said (akahambe sizowulungis’izinto), meaning let him go, and we will fix things,
149 that was before he passed on. They said those words celebrating; they wanted him to go -
150 disappear - die - go – so that they could do things their own way in this church. I am not talking
151 about people just born again; I am talking about men of God who were respected, who were
152 saying (makahambe sizokulungisa izinto – yintoni le ofuna ukuyilungisa) meaning let him go
153 and we will fix things – what is it that you want to fix. He must go so that we can fix things –
154 what is it that you want to fix? These are the people who were not there when Bhengu got the
155 vision, now tell me, how do you fix something that you do not know? Now they messed things
156 up and started chowing money. There is this fund that was raised every time people go to Thaba
157 Nchu to bring millions, somewhere, eating that money literally. If you talk about ANC that has
158 been cowing money – has been corrupt – mina, I have seen it directly, I have seen it with my
159 own eyes, people abusing funds. You talk about corruption I will tell you about 2002 when we
160 started unearthing things that were going on wrong in the Assemblies of God - Back to God,
161 people chowing money in millions. People buying properties left, right, and centre like there is
162 no tomorrow, buying cars, the very money (oomama abayiqokelela) collected by mother from
163 all over the country (bayise eThaba Nchu ezinyaweni zabaPostile) bringing it to Thaba Nchu
164 to the feet of the Apostles. They were literally eating it – we actually had to institute a forensic
165 audit in 2004/ 2005, and some people had to be suspended – with pastors. They were found by
166 an independent forensic investigation that they mismanaged money. That is what they wanted,

167 they said (makahambe sizowulungisa izinto) he must go so that we can fix things - that is what
168 they wanted. Some of those were part of the team that had been pushing to fix things. From my
169 side, I would not enjoy seeing a pastor being paid one thousand rand per month for a salary
170 when the church is making so much money and is being abused. Where there are human beings,
171 there will always be corruption. Where there is no integrity, there will always be corruption.
172 People will always be corrupt even if they speak in tongues, interpret them, and preach the
173 Bible, and people fall because of the Holy Spirit. If there is no spiritual integrity, things of this
174 nature will continue to happen, and people become very sensitive when you ask too many
175 questions, it should not be like that, people should be questioned directly.

176 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
177 the church?

178 **Participant 2:** The first thing is tradition and culture. There is this view that a woman cannot
179 be a pastor. That thing is more of a cultural belief system. That is one of the main things. The
180 second thing is the misinterpretation of the Word of God in terms of the role of women in the
181 church, and the third one is when you misinterpret the Bible when the Bible says women are
182 weaker vessels that is what Peter says. He says men have got to treat women with tender care
183 because women are weaker vessels. Now, the misinterpretation of that scripture to say women
184 are weaker vessels then gets dragged into this thing that a woman cannot be a pastor because
185 she is weak. What does that mean? This has nothing to do with the spirituality of a woman.
186 This has to do with the female physique, the body. Men have specific hormones, physically,
187 that make a man grow muscles, become strong, have a bigger body, have a stronger body rather
188 biologically, and all these things because of the hormonal difference. Women, even if you can
189 put, a man and a woman of the same weight and give them something to lift, you will find that
190 a woman might struggle because physically, the hormones that give strength to the woman are
191 different from the ones that give the man that kind of strength. That is the physical difference.
192 That is the weakness that Paul was talking about - women are weaker vessels. Then we take
193 those things: a woman cannot lead, a woman cannot be in front, a woman cannot give direction
194 because she is weak, and all those things are simple misinterpretation of scriptures that makes
195 women be put aside in most cases.

196 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

197 **Participant 2:** They are expected to teach other women how to respect their husbands, that is
198 the first thing. That is the message that is carried through in women's seminars and different
199 conventions – a woman must be submissive. Older women are carrying that mandate of
200 teaching other women to be submissive to their husbands. Second thing, teach the younger

201 women to work with their own hands and make money to feed their own families – which is
202 very important and very good – they must not be looking around for jobs, yet they have hands,
203 they have soil they can plant, they can do things. And that is what Baba Bhengu left for us, that
204 women must work with their own hands. That is where this handwork thing comes in so that
205 women can work with their own hands so that women can produce food and earn a living so
206 that they do not depend on their husbands' income because other women do not have husbands
207 to depend on and yet they have families that they are leading, and they have to provide for those
208 families. That is the second thing. The third thing that women are taught to do is that those who
209 are in marriage are taught how to bring their children up in a Godly way. The Bible says to
210 teach the child the right way to go so that when she/he has grown, they do not depart from the
211 right path. So, women are taught those things. So, in most cases, men are not at home, and in
212 most cases, women are the ones that are left with children. Those are three things that I think
213 are fundamental in women's ministry.

214 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

215 **Participant 2:** My view, I will base this on what Paul said when he was addressing the church
216 in Ephesus when he says he gave some to be prophets, apostles, pastors, evangelists, and
217 teachers. That is five specific leadership gifts, which are normally regarded as the fivefold
218 ministry. That statement is general. You generally said how do I feel – as I look at that
219 statement, it says he gave some – some believers, not some men, some believers the spirit of
220 God – they are anointed by the spirit to become prophets, others apostles, others pastors, others
221 evangelists and others teachers – believers, not men, and that applies to everybody who is born
222 again – that is my foundation. That is where I stand: a woman can be a teacher of the word of
223 God, can be an evangelist, can be a prophet – even in the Bible, if you go to the Old Testament,
224 many other women were in the five-fold ministry – women they were there. So, my view is that
225 - that is the standard. Women can be ordained – not based on the church procedure – that is
226 where the problem is. In the Assemblies of God, Back to God, people get ordained to become
227 pastors – that is one thing out of five. And if you become a pastor, it means you become
228 allocated to a local church, you go, pastor, it. People do not get ordained as evangelists,
229 teachers, apostles, or prophets. They get ordained in the Assemblies of God only to become
230 pastors, and that is where this problem that you are mentioning comes in – because this person
231 is a pastor. This is one ministry, and there are no other four ministries that should be ordained.
232 So, if we move from that and look at the general application of scripture and what Paul talks
233 about in terms of ministry, women could be ordained on different things. Ordination must be
234 based on your calling, not on what other people want you to do. If your ordination is based on

235 you doing evangelism, then go and evangelise. You have nothing to do with issues and
236 conferences and other things and be violated and messed up. Your role is out there to call people
237 back to God. – and it has got nothing to sit in the conferences and argue and all that, but we
238 only align ordination to people who must be based in a local church. So that is my view. Now,
239 because of how ordination is done, the church - is only for one pastoral ministry, and if you
240 allocate a local, then there will be all kinds of problems. If you are a pastor and you are a
241 woman – problems are not only in the conference, but they are also in the local church. You
242 will have all these men there, your elders and your deacons, and you are a woman – they will
243 tell you I will not listen to a woman. You will have all kinds of problems because the mindset
244 of most men is that women cannot lead.

245 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
246 comes to church positions?

247 **Participant 2:** Circumstances – I will keep on settling around this thing of patriarchy
248 and African culture because, for me, these problems and very fundamental issues prevent a lot
249 of things that would make women progress and intend them to strive in the church and do what
250 God has called them to do. For me, that is the main thing. Men will always see themselves as
251 leaders, and that is it.

252 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
253 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

254 **Participant 2:** Equal treatment, in my view, is theoretical – when you start digging deep and
255 dwelling deep in the way things are happening, you will find that this is just theory – it is not
256 happening the way people pronounce it. For example, the same thing of ordination – we were
257 looking at that thing – there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither female nor male – those
258 statements that Paul was making to the Galatians. You will find that we do have that kind of a
259 view – that we need to treat people the same, but at the end of the day, without distinguishing
260 based on the understanding that a woman is different from a man, so we cannot treat a woman
261 the same way as a man. So, because of some of the things we are going in and out of the Bible.
262 We go to the Bible when we want to justify something. We are going out of the Bible when we
263 want to run away from the truth. So, we are doing this in and out of the Bible so that we can
264 suit what we want. We do not use the Bible to transform us. We do not allow the Bible to
265 transform us, but we actually transform the Bible to suit us.

266 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
267 probationary period like their male counterparts.

268 **Participant 2:** There is no universal agreement in terms of the church's position when it comes
269 to women pastors. Universal agreement in the sense that – do we really want to have women
270 pastors At the same par with men pastors or church leaders? So, because there is no universal
271 agreement as far as the church is concerned, you will find that, honestly, different districts'
272 Regional councils have their way of handling issues like that, and when it comes to national/
273 international space, you find that there is no tangible agreement that we can have these people
274 you mention, then you find that if you have this pastor in the Eastern Reef region – you find
275 that when people are being allocated for appointments to assume different responsibilities
276 across the country, in most cases, those people are not part of the package. You will remain in
277 that region, and most of the time, people will get transferred – moved from one local church to
278 another very easily after three or five years, whatever period the business be. It is easier to do
279 that with men. It is a bit difficult that you will find women being moved around like that. It is
280 the region where the person is, is the one that will try to shift her, but nationally, there is this
281 disjuncture that I think is the reason because there is no universal agreement on a national scale
282 on how to utilise these Christian women.

283 **Researcher:** Follow-up question: What is the Teaching saying about this as the watchdog of
284 the church if the regions make their own decisions?

285 **Participant 2:** The region has a constitutional mandate to make a recommendation to the
286 national leadership in terms of moving people around. That is why I was saying in most cases,
287 the regions themselves find it a bit difficult to say we recommend that this woman be moved
288 from this local church to another region either because she has kids or a family. They consider
289 all other delicate and sensitive things – of which it is very easy to move a man from one place
290 to the other than to move a woman from one place to the other. So, they also look at all those
291 finer aspects, and you find that they are not recommended in the list of people that have got to
292 be transferred. So, they become more localised in terms of their ministry than men would be. I
293 would not be classifying that as a bad thing in terms of men disregarding that a woman can
294 move from Cape Town to Durban. I would not take it to mean that they are undermining their
295 capability to minister on a broader scale. My view is that it is more of a sentimental kind of
296 sympathetic view than anything else.

297 **Researcher:** Follow-up Question – Could that be the reason why they do not ordain women
298 as pastors?

299 **Participant 2:** Because in these regional councils, most people that are there are men, so a man
300 would think for himself that 'my wife be moved far from me, I should be moved than her', you
301 see that? People become more personal, as a man and a husband. That has, if now we are going

to recommend the movement of somebody's wife to be moved somewhere else, what if it was my wife? So, there are those kinds of personal sentiments.

Researcher: What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

Participant 2: The selfish human being who is a man with the mentality that says I am the one who should be doing better than a woman. You will find it extremely difficult when there is a woman who seems to be more anointed (if there is anything like that) than him. Take, for instance, some men who simply do the work, they do not make noise, they just get to the scriptures, they are quiet, they are very steady, and they are playing their role as preachers, not as evangelists and as loud. You put that man, and if that man is not mature to understand that my role is not to make noise and make people fall if there is anything like that, and to cast out demons and to heal the sick – and they understand that my role is just to teach the word silently and quickly as possible. If that man is not mature, then there comes this fiery woman who brings revelation after revelation, who sets the house on fire through preaching that becomes a challenge to the man because there is no competition here, but remember, I said the selfishness in the person, in the human man, that spirit if it has not been extracted and taken out and the person has not been delivered. The person might feel are being overshadowed. And if I am being overshadowed, I am selfish, then I am going to make my way out to get personal over this person. That is what challenge. And if we would understand as men, for instance, that every gift is important. There is no gift more important than the other. All the gifts that are there, God has granted them through the gift of the Holy Spirit for the benefit and edification of the entire church. But if I think my gift is less important than the other or my gift is better than the other, then there is a problem. That is where I see the challenge in some cases where sometimes you find that men are sometimes disregarding some of the things that God is bringing through prophecy from a woman. And we say NO! NO! NO! We will not be told by the woman.

Researcher: By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the church adapting to the times?

Participant 2: If you talk about the church in its broader sense, the church is not adapting, but if you talk to individuals within the church, you will find a variety of understanding. You will find men who are more open to that and who are amenable to those kinds of changes that are happening. You will find men that if you can talk to individuals, you will find that men will receive some of the things that are going to change. But collectively, this collective understanding which comes will only be pronounced through conference discussions and conference resolutions, which now become the law or the regulations of or procedures of the church. Then, in that kind of forum, that is where we will talk about the transformation of the

church or adaptation. Suppose there is no adaptation at that collective level through conference discussions and resolutions that are going to be passed and implemented. In that case, the transformation becomes wishful thinking because it is only contained in the individual members who are not putting this thing forward until it becomes the decision and the procedure of the church. So therefore, if we look in terms of the collective, overall, universal kind of position, then the church is not adapting.

Researcher: What do you think should be done to change this situation?

Participant 2: Individuals must instigate. Change does not come from the top. The change will never come from an individual who is humble and high out there. God speaks to individuals who are sitting there on the bench. God puts things in their hearts, and then they need to take those things forward for the correct forum. Even if sometimes they become sidelined, sidestepped for years, and ignored, if people persist in those who have caught, who have got these things that God has placed in them, then that kind of transformation for me in most cases is what I think would happen because people fear change and that is very natural phenomena. People fear something that is going to shift things around from the normal position. The natural reaction for people to change is either they run away, or they resist change, or they ignore it. So, if change comes from the top, obviously in most cases it comes as in position, people impose it from the top, then other people from the bottom say, oh we are being bullied here, because they are leaders, so, they are changing things without having a very crisp kind of discussion. And people just ignore some of the instructions that come from the top. But if things come from the bottom, it becomes a groundswell, and as it goes up, it gets discussed on a broader scale, and then it becomes a resolution that is binding to everybody. An idea can come from a person who is at the top, but even that person at the top must share the vision or the idea or the concept in conference spaces, then it becomes a debate until it becomes a resolution and agreement and all that. That is how I view it in an attempt to answer your question.

Researcher: Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender change in the BTG church?

Participant 2: One, there is extreme loss. The church suffers from benefitting from the gifts that women have. The Holy Spirit gives according to how He wants to give and to who he wants to give the gifts. So, if gender change is not made manifest, the church will be out for me, which is number one. Some people are supposed to be transformed in their own lives, but that woman is sitting there and doing nothing because the church is not recognising that that woman can do something. I believe very strongly in this one that every Christian has a group that God has assigned to them to minister. I am not even talking about pastors in this case or

370 evangelists. An ordinary person, when you are born again, there are people that God has
371 allocated to you that you must help throughout your lifetime until you go to the grave. You will
372 be impacted by the way how you live without saying a word to them. Others, you will impact
373 their lives by what you say to them, from the Word of God. So, it is double the impact. So now,
374 if there are people that God has allocated for me that I assist to transform their lives through
375 my way of life, then I must live like that, and there are people to whom I must speak the Word
376 over their lives and assist them that God may help them and transform their lives; if I do not
377 allow the space to do that, most people lose out. So this thing of lack of transformation, if there
378 is a woman who has a special anointing from God that God has arranged that this woman will
379 be an apostle or this woman will be an evangelist or this woman is a pastor or a teacher, but the
380 space does not allow this woman to perform; obviously, anybody who is in the category of this
381 woman's space – who needs to be impacted by this woman, that person loses out.

382 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
383 the Cape to Cairo vision.

384 **Participant 2:** Oh! Cape to Cairo vision is dead after the passing of Baba Bhengu. Pastor
385 Bhengu preached throughout the country utilising the Back to God Crusade and established
386 churches of close to 800 or 900 across the country, then he moved to Swaziland, Lesotho,
387 Zimbabwe, and partly in Botswana and Namibia, it was only after 1986 that he passed on when
388 the Back to God Crusade started moving out with other evangelists after him. At the beginning
389 of 2003, the church collapsed in Namibia because of the mischief of pastors chowing funds the
390 church split into two, and the people of Namibia were very angry that their tithes were taken to
391 South Africa. They are not utilised to expand the gospel in Namibia. In 2007, a delegation was
392 sent to work out reconciliation in Namibia. The church was split due to corruption by South
393 African pastors. At that time, the Back to God Crusade was trying to move into Angola. Then,
394 partly Malawi in 1987, but there was minimal support from the church in South Africa. When
395 I say the Cape to Cairo vision is dead, I actually mean even in places where it started, like
396 Zimbabwe, then Zimbabwe decided to move away and not become part of South Africa, in
397 Malawi, they decided to move away and not become part of South Africa. In Namibia, they
398 split, and one group decided not to be part of South Africa – so it never moved anywhere beyond
399 the SADEC Region. Cairo is very far.

400 **Researcher:** Follow-up Question: I am thinking if women like those who worked with Baba
401 Bhengu were ordained, how far would they be by now?

402 **Participant 2:** Oh, this would have moved millions of people into the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
403 but the **lack of understanding of the vision** has not yielded the propagation of the Gospel. The

404 Gospel would have gone very, very far because there are no people to strive on **petty politics**
405 when it comes to the Gospel. Men sometimes would sit and keep quiet and watch you and
406 disregard what you are saying and disregard even the gift that God has given to you. Women
407 are not necessarily crafted in that kind of way. If a woman has been moved by God, she moves
408 things.

409 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
410 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
411 the outside society?

412 **Participant 2:** The first thing is that people outside view the church as a very bad place, a very
413 wrong place to be associated with therefore, they do not see the need for the church to exist.
414 Why should we have a local church here in our community, what value does it bring to us as
415 the community? I have been part of a team that established some local churches in some white
416 suburbs even before democracy. For me, I do not mind you can be as sophisticated as you want,
417 but if you do not know Christ, I know how to work with you and walk with you to a point where
418 you can realise that you need Jesus. Now, one of my colleague pastors makes a statement he
419 says we have established this local church here – does the community here recognise this church
420 that is located here? If this local can be closed, can the people around her notice, can they also
421 feel the absence of this local church? We all looked around and thought, my goodness – are we
422 making an impact here? That remained a very piercing question that the church in the
423 community in the society needs to have an impact so that the presence of the local church must
424 be felt by people who are not even born again. So, I am coming to this question that you are
425 asking - it is important that transformation happens and the church becomes the standard so
426 that people who are not members of the church should want to emulate that practice that has
427 been set by the church by the way the church does things – does things to its members – and
428 does things to the community around.

429 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
430 this church?

431 **Participant 2:** The fact that women are being taught to be involved in self-help kind of schemes
432 – those self-help schemes are very important because they are helping women to be
433 economically sustained. If a woman can learn how to bake and sell at the end of the day, it is
434 not a show-off kind of a thing, but it is an economic empowerment. Therefore, economically,
435 they do not rely. There are many things that church women are doing for themselves, and those
436 things are very helpful to them, but the most important thing here is economic empowerment
437 or economic development. When you train a young woman on how to pray or how to read

scriptures, how to win other people to God, obviously a woman who has a husband as an alcoholic and a woman, you get involved in the service that reaches out to that woman so that, that woman is brought to Christ – your assistance to this woman for her to get transformed is for her benefit, and her ways are changed but at the same time the family as a whole gets impacted because a woman who gets spiritually transformed – obviously in one way or the other by the way she does things and by the things she says to her family there are good results that will end up helping her family and gets spiritually transformed by being part of the women’s ministry.

Researcher: What were the implications of resistance in the past?

Participant 2: The implications of not empowering women in the past are that most families got destroyed. Some got divorced, either the husband divorced the wife, or the wife divorced the husband because if you are not spiritually empowered as a woman to the level of understanding the significance of prayer – because when you pray, you even touch things that you may not necessarily be able to touch. When you pray for your house, you are taught how to pray for your husband being in the tavern. God transforms a person from a distance through prayer because, as a woman, you are taught that you must pray for your family. Now, the other thing is that there are people who were supposed to have been born again, but they are not – not because they do not want to be born again but because somebody who was supposed to have been given the space in the church or somewhere else to minister to that one soul, was not. I said earlier when God calls us as individuals, he assigns specific people to us, that the people will be saved when so and so preaches. Others can make noise, but when this specific person preaches, these souls will be saved. In our church, you find that a woman was supposed to preach for someone to be saved, but because of this patriarchal mindset, we cannot even sense what the spirit of God that that woman must speak – somebody was allocated on that day to be saved through that woman.

Researcher: What are the current implications of resistance?

Participant 2: The current implications are that, daily, some people go straight to hell having not received the Gospel of Jesus. Who knows, that was the last day of that person – and the implication is that that person gets lost forever because of the way we understood the ministry of women.

Researcher: What are the expected aspects of change in future?

Participant 2: This thing is very theoretical, it is within the individual who needs that there needs to be transformation, there needs to be a change. But the transformation does not happen, or it will not happen effectively until there is a collective understanding, and this thing is pushed

472 to a level where it becomes implemented through the discussion via conferences and all that.
473 Those things are expected, but in most cases, the fear that is gripping people most of the time,
474 they do not want to be part of anything that will involve them in squabbles. People are just
475 minding their own business and should not be like that because we are part of a collective. My
476 business should be your business, and your business should be my business.

Appendix D3: Interview with Participant 3 (P3)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 3:** I can say Baba Bhengu used to understand the scriptures, and whatever he would
4 do would try and follow the scriptures. Using women in the church, he followed Paul's
5 understanding, who used to work with women like Pheobe and women like Aquilla. He also
6 worked closely with his wife, mama Mylet, so that other women could be at ease to come close
7 and work with him until he left for America to seek funds to carry out the work of the Back to
8 God Crusade. It was in America that he saw a vision that he must go back to South Africa to
9 see women with big headscarves, and that is where he would get the money he was looking for.
10 Women were the ones who maintained the work, even seeing to it that the dispatched pastors
11 were well taken care of. So, women were there as assistants to the pastors rather than leading
12 pastors in the local churches. The first problem was that black people took the time to listen
13 and welcome a woman in a leadership position. Some men also had an issue communicating
14 with a female, but to win all those males, a woman would have to have a male around her to do
15 the work successfully. But when the work had already been started, Reverend Bhengu would
16 sometimes leave the work with women; he trusted them, and he understood the gifts that were
17 vested upon them. As the book of Proverbs states, a person's gift opens doors for him and brings
18 him before the great. Baba Bhengu's great aim, therefore, was to get the church to a place where
19 women could freely and readily use their gifts to work - this would make a difference and win
20 more souls, and his ultimate goal was to win souls back to God. He tried by all means not to
21 exclude women. After establishing a lot of local churches, as we know, his aim was not to build
22 churches but a crusade that was aimed to propagate the Gospel from Cape to Cairo. However,
23 after starting some locals, he saw the necessity to have some women in the work. Women kept
24 Reverend Bhengu on his toes as they came to him with visions that God had shown them.
25 Women were not like men who would approach Reverend Bhengu, saying God is calling me.
26 He would tell any man who came to him to go into the field and return with people to make
27 sure he had a calling. Then, he would locate individuals to assist him, including women. Women
28 were at the forefront of the Back to God Crusade, fearlessly preaching to keep the work flowing.
29 Most rural men would be in the cities working, but the problem would be when they returned
30 home because they believed that women had taken their place thus, they would not put up with

31 it. The males made sure the woman knew where to draw the line, that her place was not in
32 preaching but in cooking and cleaning the house.

33 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
34 empower women?

35 **Participant 3:** We failed the vision of Baba Bhengu to be what it was supposed to be. Believe
36 me when I say that those who said that he should go, that he must so that they can fix this thing,
37 were foretelling the oppression of pastors because we are even oppressed by women. And with
38 the understanding that was there, of chapter one, verses 26 and 27 of Genesis where it says,
39 “then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over
40 the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,[a] and
41 over all the creatures that move along the ground. So, God created mankind in his image, in the
42 image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” They have that thing that no
43 one must bully another or rule over the other while they are at work. Reverend Bhengu started
44 the Mothers’ organisation, and all the other organisations, like fathers, youth, and girls, were
45 copied from the Mothers’ organisation. The original church Constitution was drafted before
46 these many amendments that have been done. But thank God most amendments were made to
47 the rules of procedure more than to the constitution itself. Reverend Bhengu wrote the
48 Constitution using pastor Nkomonde as a scribe, telling him all these things that should happen
49 according to the Bible. If Paul did trust the women to do this work, let them not be punished
50 and locked up. In some places, to be able to enter, you have to enter through a male person.
51 When this woman has entered, she must express herself in a way that no one can rip her off her
52 worth. Reverend Bhengu did this with understanding. In the middle of the constitution, he states
53 clearly that women must be allowed to work on Back to God, which will assist the work. That
54 is why you see handwork; it is part of Reverend Bhengu's vision. The understanding was that
55 there would come a time when black people would find themselves very oppressed therefore,
56 let them learn and equip themselves. Businesses should start opening there and have work done
57 by them in their brand name. Brand names would never be extinguished because they were
58 hands-on in their work. In that way, he was pushing for the freedom of women, where they
59 would not require permission from male leaders. He appointed the supervisors according to the
60 idea he came up with. He chose them according to the group that prayed together with his first
61 wife, mama Mylet, who was hands-on at work. Even when he shared the vision, women added
62 to that vision, and he saw people who understood his vision, and he made use of it. He allowed
63 it to be written down because the supervisors would have to supervise the work, and the first
64 organisers started at his time. He said that the organisers should be put to push the work because

now they had to wait for the male leadership, who were very busy and sometimes travelling. They were sometimes stuck because of that. Appointing organisers at the time was not a bad thing, but now it is where the work is affected mostly, and a lot of people do not know why this was started and for what reason because now people have got the opportunity to position themselves well, be famous and be forwards and in the ultimate end it crippled the vision and the understanding why the work was started.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 3: I will still say that if we understand what the vision is, the vision is something that never dies. It stands the test of time, and it is hard to say it is no longer relevant as I have said earlier, the work was damaged by us, but if you follow the vision itself, the vision is straightforward, and the wisdom that God gave Reverend Bhengu was great for all generations. I must state clearly that that is the reason the church is still standing to this day, it is because of that. It was not something he created for himself for a certain purpose. It is so unfortunate; I am saying it boldly, it was so unfortunate that Mama Mylet died before him because she was such a helpful hand - a person who was pushing the work even when Reverend Bhengu would be feeling exhausted, she would push him. Even if Bhengu were to initiate something, he would introduce the idea to Mama Mylet first to approve it. Unfortunately, she died first. And because he saw the need for a wife in his life, he remarried. And seeing the assistance he was getting from Mama Mylet, he was sure that he could not carry the task alone. Unfortunately, when he remarried, he married someone who had an interest in the organisation and an understanding of money making, Mama Mylet was never there for the money. Mama Mylet would never be at the forefront of calling money; she was only there to see that the work was balanced. If she suspected something, she would call her husband and say, "I want to see you, baba." And Bhengu, being Bhengu, would apologise and come and correct that himself and say when I went to sleep, I realised that this thing is not right. He would not say many things, but he would come with the understanding that this is what will help the work to move forward. Mama Mylet did not care about the high life; she was there for her husband. If it takes them to go and sleep on stage or in a caravan or an old car, she would do that; she was not after fame.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 3: I so wish people could have heard him and understood what he meant when he was doing things, but as people, we were worried about positions - **if our positions are not taken from us**, and we end up being ruled by women which is the main problem of

Pentecostals. We were worried about being led by women. They missed the point on that because they were busy protecting what they believed was theirs - positions. But if things were to be done accordingly, baba Bhengu was using a simple language of marriage in the Bible. Obedience should not be out of oppression. But compliance should be out of allowing the status quo of work to move forward for progress, we will always cry for it, and we will die crying for it. He would never close doors to anyone. He once visited the Orlando local, and we were hosting a quarterly meeting, and some sisters were the speakers, he said he was not there to change anything, so they must continue, he also would love to hear women leaders there. They preached before him, and he stood to back them up afterwards and appreciated their work, so they spent time with God and prayed. He stated that this does not come from any ordinary person or any school of thought but from a person who gave himself time with God and prayed. He then approved the sisters and permitted them to be part of the pastors, though later pastors did not allow them to be part of the meetings when they came to their places. Pastors felt that they would not be able to discuss men's matters if there were women, forgetting that this is supposed to be the meeting for the called ones therefore, what should be discussed should be matters related to calling and how we help each other in the field when things go wrong. They just felt that they were women and that they should not be part of the meeting because they believed that a woman's place was in the kitchen. After all, we bring our traditions from the rural areas - where they say (amadoda ebuhlanti -abafazi endlini) men by the kraal and women in the house, all that stuff. Baba Bhebgu wanted progress everywhere to such an extent that even if we can have an executive chairperson who is a woman, to him, it was fine. That is why he opened it in understanding when he said in the youth, they are not compelled to choose a male to be the chairperson, they can also choose a girl to be the chairperson, those are things that came up with him. He was very wise and open to anything that God instructed him to do with anyone, regardless of gender. And very carefully, if he heard something, he would make sure to support any idea that women brought and would stand to push the agenda item to happen because other people would still be watching who it was coming from and being the man of God, he would tell that this is from God. We used to call him Manotsha because of his wisdom.

Researcher: How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

Participant 3: I would say this quite clearly, and I will not blame the pastors on this one. I will return it to the women themselves because they have left the understanding they were given to carry out the work. When Mama Mylet left, the new wife had an interest in making money, that alone removed the map of the vision of working at ease and the freedom of doing it for people in need. The women began to oppress each other when one was promoted; she oppressed

the others - them alone, because they wielded their authority to demonstrate to everyone that they were in command. So, I will point that problem to women themselves. They could not cater for themselves. It has been battles of superiority resulting from positions. This is what mainly affected them. Some people believe that Baba Bhengu gave them too much power that they are unable to discern where to draw the line. But mainly, they began to humiliate themselves. They went to the church leadership to complain about each other, and overall, church leadership saw that they could not leave them alone but had to oversee their work and that whatever they needed to do, they must get approval from the church leadership. Some mothers have tried to get out of the control of the church leadership, but they never got support. Instead, those women were viewed as people who were trying to violate the work and the church. But, if God had favoured the Assemblies of God, Back to God and allowed Mama Mylet to live longer, I think many things would still be going the way they were supposed to go. But again, God is the only one who knows; maybe she would have that heart that does not allow the work to be left to the Holy Spirit because she has children, she gave birth. But on the work side, the mothers who work there would be too far by now. But the one who came in after her came in and had friends, others wanted to push their agendas through her; she was open, they used her, and things got messed up.

Researcher: Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for the Back to God Crusade.

Participant 3: They are still there in the Back to God Crusades, but unfortunately, what happened as we started saying when the work starts in an area, men will not listen to a woman. That is one of the things that affected that. But unfortunately, women are popular people, and they find themselves in that situation of yes and no or end up getting married. But overall, when they are in the revivals, people do not take them seriously as they would take a man. They would look at her with this mindset saying, you can make a good wife more than a good minister of the Word. But we lost some to marriage and when they get married, their husbands stop them from evangelizing. Because they are also happy when they get married more than - is my calling protected here or not? And they feel that we stayed here and ended up not being married. In some instances, people would take advantage of the tent because it is managed by a woman even though she has male assistants, and those men would also be viewed as useless on the basis that they are led by a woman. Sometimes tents are being vandalized because people undermine the woman, or they say that in our area we will not accept being managed by a woman. But generally, they are still there in our revival tents. Sometimes even though some are allowed by their husbands to continue working the husband says when I come back, I want

167 food, and now the revivals start at 6 pm and most people have one language that is, at 6pm it is
168 the time to be home. Furthermore, it is unpleasant to be informed that the woman who is not
169 home is your one, because she is out and about, busy stooping over men on the street.

170 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

171 **Participant 3:** However, there are still women who work in the Back to God revival tents even
172 in other regions I think there are still women working. As like I have mentioned earlier, some
173 get married and when they get married, it is no longer her decision alone to continue doing the
174 work and some of their husbands stop them from doing the work of evangelizing. In other cases,
175 it becomes a matter for the children that, if I am in this tent, who will take care of the children
176 because the father cannot take care of the children?

177 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
178 women's empowerment?

179 **Participant 3:** Let me start here. I am going to add to what we have already said. It is a
180 challenge when a person is called because, of the things that God speaks, there must be ears
181 that listen in full understanding of what God has said to the person. Let me take you back to
182 the scriptures to clarify what I am saying. When Nebuchadnezzar dreams a dream, he says I
183 need a person that will tell me what I have dreamt then I can understand that the interpretation
184 is true. But if you cannot tell me my dream it simply means you are going to do a guesswork.
185 So, unfortunately, Bhengu was called and was given the vision and mission of working with
186 everybody. And Bengu had no problem working with white people as long as they understood
187 the vision. What I am saying is, that calling is a hard thing. You find people who were saved
188 from you, taught by you, who received what you say as the only truth to be followed and as
189 they grow with understanding or grow with position or grow with the situation of the place then
190 they start challenging what they received from you, or what you have given them. For instance,
191 if a woman says that she is called to go and work there, can you leave her with the church that
192 has men, just to align with that which you have brought? If a person is called, you cannot stand
193 in the way of such a person but now he must understand that it is the husbands of these women
194 who are complaining. Now, with Baba Bhengu, he would understand that God has called you;
195 he would not fight that, and he would pray about it. He would then send you and weigh what
196 he found in prayer and what you will do to see if it corresponds with your calling. But he had
197 to adjust because some women have husbands. If I am called, no one can control me other than
198 me deciding to turn away from the calling. But a woman needs her husband's affirmation that
199 he will assist her and so forth.

200 That alone in itself is a challenge because now it does not give a person an easy way to work.
201 It makes him work in a reserved manner, understanding that my husband is the head, and if my
202 husband says that this thing cannot be done no matter what God tells me, it stops right there.
203 So, that did not give the leeway to women to run freely in the things that God has shown,
204 ordained, and sent to declare because now they always needed affirmation from their husbands.
205 Now it would sound like Bhengu was making their wives disrespect them, so, he had to align
206 some of the things; that is why I said, some of the changes that were introduced, when it would
207 assumed that they are correcting some of the things, they were affecting the vision and the
208 vision of baba Bhengu; that, this thing can move, it is alive and it is strong even if it was
209 received by these people. In other words, African culture had an influence and that is what
210 affected even his work, and the things he could have brought to us, which would have helped
211 the church, things that the church could have been standing on even today.

212 Let me say clearly, that most of the people did not come to him with the language of being
213 called. He chose them because he saw their gifts, and he did not send them like other people.
214 He allowed them to work as he saw them and would leave them with the work that was already
215 existing. It is not like a person who comes saying he has a calling whereby he would say go
216 evangelize first and let us see your work bringing people saved. For those, it would be
217 understandable because God would have confirmed their calling. It was like Jesus and the
218 apostles, whereby he had to pray the whole night. Baba Bhengu had that because he was an
219 apostle of course although he started on the evangelistic crusade which is why we still have a
220 problem of people who come here claiming to be pastors, and you ask yourself - where did he
221 get that because he cannot evangelize, he cannot do anything, and now he has to find a church
222 that is already established, no, that is not Bhengu's style. Bhengu's style was simple, we are all
223 evangelists, then the work gets established, then we teach.

224 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
225 the church?

226 **Participant 3:** In 1977, Reverend Bhengu came to the meeting and said that God said he must
227 have the vanguards of the church, and he would have to train them (which is the Teaching
228 Team). He came with 24 men, not a woman in them because he wanted people who would
229 protect the work and fight for it with understanding, like in war, so he wanted men. So, that
230 was the understanding that men could also feel that they would go out and protect the work so
231 that the work would not die in their hands. They came in excitedly saying that it must not die
232 in our hands, but when you follow in reality, they are falling fully to the prophetic voice of
233 Reverend Bhengu, that they said he must die so that they can enjoy the money. They are only

234 interested in that. I used to love a certain pastor here in our church. People always take me out
235 of context and think that I had something against this pastor, but I liked him; however, I did not
236 like the way he used to divide us, because he was interested in the position. Yes, he wanted the
237 work to be revived, but according to the times; with the terms and conditions of this time - but
238 then he is late now. I always say and I still maintain that - you cannot enter someone's work
239 and destroy it the way you want. you rather come up with your own thing, start it, and show it
240 to people.

241 But he would use every local where he was sent as a pastor, you can see it from the brothers in
242 these locals when they come to the meetings, they would violate some of the things, and you
243 can see that they ate what they ate. This pastor, when he first started, he did not do that but
244 when he started pastoring the big churches like Thema, Katlehong, Springs, and Alexandra that
245 is when he knew that he had one of the big guns of the church. And that is when he started
246 chaos, wanting to bring new ideas and that did not go well with people, and they did not allow
247 him. But he was able to introduce himself to people by visiting them until they gave him the
248 admiration he wanted. What I am trying to say is, that the very vision we have has not been
249 harmed by outsiders, it has been harmed by people who were told how good we are, our
250 standing our money, and whatever.

251 What holds women's ordination is that the ordination is only done by the Teaching Team, and
252 they did not approve of the issue of women being ordained as men. But they could not stop
253 some women in the past because they were ordained by Reverend Bhengu himself.
254 Unfortunately, most of the people that we have in the Teaching Team were real Zulu and Xhosa
255 guys and there were few Tswana who did not mind because already their countries had women
256 in their parliaments in the countries they were running. But we, this side it was a no, no. We
257 know where a woman's place is. You erect a tent there and then people burn it, what is a woman
258 going to do? If they attack her while she is preaching there, what will she do? So, these are the
259 things that brought the change - that let them be limited in being given bigger tasks.

260 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

261 **Participant 3:** Where we are right now, they have been given an opportunity, the problem is
262 that they have been opened to people who do not have the eye to see the ministry but have the
263 eye to see the organisation. But they have limited themselves to the organisation because they
264 believe that is where their strength is, to speak to women and their kitchen stuff more than
265 ministering. In our region, we have three women who have been given locals to lead but it is
266 difficult to move them to churches that can support them financially because the men in that
267 local church feel that they are being disrespected, by being given a female pastor, while others

are given male pastors - and a big church like ours cannot be managed by a woman, otherwise, we use the scriptures wrongly. Scriptures say, if a wife has something she wants to say, she should go and ask her husband - now what will he say if she is in charge, he should ask her (laughing). So those are the things that are hindering the freedom of women, but they are not inhibited. Many of our old Teaching Team members who were rigid with this matter are late, there are a few that are left. They no longer fight the women's issue because they also got challenged regarding this and they could not answer. They are supposed to have long been ordained, but, unfortunately, the ordination part is only done by the Teaching Team. That is where our squabble is because the people who are supposed to ordain them are questioning that. It is now pivoting in one place until we are all on the same wavelength.

Researcher: Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

Participant 3: Everybody has to be ordained. There is no reason why they should not. If they can understand, we who are ordained still have a problem, I am telling you the truth because we are ordained by the Teaching Team, but we all have the same question, these people who ordain us do not live a good Christian life – and they will pass this on to us. Second, when these people are called when there is a squabble between the church and the pastor, they come and oppose the pastor as if they are not called. So, what did you ordaining me for? Even women will understand this portion. Ordained or not will be meaningless for them because it saves them the hands that will convey the spirit that opposes them and does not accept a woman. But then I cannot say that to them because it will be like I am jealous for them to be ordained (laugh).

But then their issue is on the table that when they go out, there are these that have been working over four years which is a probation period. They do not need to go through probation period again, they must be put to work because they have been there. Some of them have been leading churches for more than 10 years. But if Baba Bhengu was still here – he would have ordained the women that we were talking about because he did want them to be ordained as pastors without going through probation because he would say that these have a calling and I approve them, and no one would say no to that. But unfortunately, he had also met Zulu men. It never materialized because if he left having not done it himself, otherwise it was going to be easy. But unfortunately, he left without doing it.

Researcher: What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it comes to church positions?

Participant 3: Let me inform you that, it is one of the things we are currently working on. When we were in the very last elections to dismantle that committee, some women were

supposed to come in – then the argument started. If you notice even these mothers who are supervisors, there is no need for them to want to be members of the Executive because it is run by them anyway, and the money is controlled by them. But unfortunately, they committed some mistakes which limited their freedom. So as the elder Teaching Team members surrender their positions, women are happy because they are the ones standing in the way of their freedom. But unfortunately for others, they knew that their wives were part of those women leaders who wanted bonuses, so they knew that that money was coming home. But then again, they turned out to be unable to use money properly, and they became greedy, so that exposed a lot of things.

Researcher: What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

Participant 3: To be honest, we are in trouble, but we do not agree to say that we are in trouble. To say who can make business better. Who can manage money better? I mean these are realities that we do not want to be talked about because it seems like they are undermining the potential of others, but these are realities. The thing that bothers us is, that we have got people who are entering positions over there who say that we can also learn from you not to bring justice to the matter but to close the doors - because if they go in there, we are not going to be able to control it. And they sometimes cajole our fathers, and our fathers then accept everything that seems to help them because they are not educated that much. So, they come as if they are helping them and even promise to give them something. These mothers will not give them anything, they want bonuses for themselves, and that alone creates a problem for women to push them backward rather than giving them a chance. But then again, as I have said, another thing that contributes is that these women have messed things up themselves. They have a lot of power vested in them, but the way they use it is where it goes wrong. If they argue with each other, they do not do that behind closed doors so that other people cannot hear it. They tend to publicize their issues. And then it would be decided that we cannot afford to be led by this quality of leaders. They fail to control the situation, a matter that they could have discussed over on their own before it could reach other people. Those things closed doors for them. Some women will tell you that, even at home things are not decided until the husband has agreed. As long as he has not agreed, nothing can be finalized. That has allowed some leaders to decide for them. Making decisions is where these women lack. Another problem is that women are fighting among themselves. The Supervisors and organisers for instance have an issue with women evangelists or those who are not in the organisation, for instance when they preach the word focusing on the organism or the church as a whole, they say they are not preaching the organisation. Therefore, the mothers' services, do not want evangelists because they say they

336 teach in the mothers' services - therefore, if you are an evangelist you should go to the revival
337 tents. If evangelists are told that they cannot preach, to me you are not talking because these
338 evangelical people are calling souls. According to me, these women must be given a chance
339 because, number one I am also gaining in the women's services. Secondly, we have pastor's
340 wives who are widows and widowed mothers who are never catered for in these services and
341 these people maintain homes, but they do not feature anywhere in the church. As for a widowed
342 pastor's wife, we respected her when the husband was still alive but after the death of the
343 husband, the respect she received is gone. Then, if her husband dies, she must return to her
344 local, and in that local, she is taken like any mother. If you do not have a home of your own
345 and lived in the mission house, after the funeral you are told that, we need the mission house,
346 and she is given one month to sort herself out after a month she must move out, where she goes
347 with children it is her baby. That is painful. The children of pastors hate our church and always
348 say, help us go to heaven like you, because of what is happening to their parents.

349 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
350 probationary period like their male counterparts.

351 **Participant 3:** The thing is, if you enter probation, it is for the sake of being ordained as a
352 pastor, so, the church does not have room for ordination for them as that is only done by the
353 Teaching Team who do not believe in female pastors. Do you know where it hurts? We found
354 out that we are in a meeting with all pastors or at a funeral or a wedding, then she has her
355 ministry, and she comes as a pastor and is not catered for as a pastor. If she married, she would
356 be taken care of under the office of her husband. She is not even called by her office as a teacher
357 or an evangelist, she is called a pastor's wife. One of the biggest pains is that they do not mind
358 being called that because they have an understanding of that these are our wives, let us train
359 them here so that they are not overcome or taken away by the mess that we see.

360 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

361 **Participant 3:** Do you happen to know the story of David and Saul. Saul went to the battle,
362 with all the people he trusted, strong men of Israel but they failed to fight Goliath. And it took
363 David being raised by God to win the battle that Saul did not fight. And there comes the voice
364 from women singing Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands and that alone
365 prompted Saul to give a command to invite David to the table to eat and for his sword to be put
366 nearer because he felt that he would not be disrespected by a boy in that way. You know, you
367 are talking about an unmarried boy, you are insulted by it as if you are not a man - that is caused
368 by women - that is caused by women. So, the challenge that is always there is that women are
369 easy to express what they feel and know. Unfortunately, some of the things, once you express,

370 you are said to be disrespectful even before we can hear you and understand where you are
371 coming from. You cannot talk to men like that, that is number one. Number two, if a woman
372 happens to be anointed and ministers a powerful sermon, that the people you happen to share
373 the convention with to fall below the standard of your sermon. And when the convention is
374 over then people say - they should have let that woman preach alone, there is nothing that these
375 men did. And men feel offended. And that does not end with them, they go home, and the wife
376 has heard what the crowd said – and then she says to the husband - these women are
377 disrespecting you - what this woman did is nothing compared to what you did, but they want
378 to pretend that this woman is better than you. This also comes from the same gender. Even in
379 positions, it is like that. As you can see, this house is clean but when a woman arrives, she will
380 want to clean and shift things that were on top - then you become a nuisance to us - because
381 these things that are sitting on top are what we eat and live with, and you are coming to expose
382 that. So, you can see that we have to live in filth because there are people who live on this dirt,
383 if you are going to remove this dirt, you will deprive them of food. I'm done.

384 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the
385 church adapting to the times?

386 **Participant 3:** In reality, women are supposed to be ordained, and if not ordained in the fashion
387 we have and in the fashion of understanding we stand for, it makes us conservative. Of course,
388 we do not have another word that suits us better than that. In the same breath, I would still say
389 if it is good for God that it does not happen at this time because there is something He
390 understands better, let it be, because even those He has hidden may end up getting hurt because,
391 they will be influenced by the spirit of pushing, and they will be given an evil spirit infection
392 by people who do not even have the gift they have. So, if God does not allow it now, he has a
393 better understanding. So, we are waiting for God to intervene on this one. We discussed it in
394 conferences, and we requested that copies be done and pasted into the rule of procedure and
395 constitution so that whenever they are gone, we can go back to it so that no one has an
396 unanswered question.

397 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

398 **Participant 3:** You know what, for this church to be restored to its strength, let our old people
399 be retired and allow us to bring the change, not the change against them but a change that will
400 bring life into the church so that we can breathe. Some of the local churches identify us as
401 (kwagogo) grandmothers' house as if there is nothing we could do. These churches used to
402 copy from us - we are in pain because now we copy from them. But if we can come to an
403 understanding that we have everything we need, the problem is the people we are reporting to.

404 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
405 change in the BTG church?

406 **Participant 3:** I would not say gender change because we need a drastic change in everything.
407 Yes, it affects gender because there is that thing that says we want to see progress by working
408 together and reaching that understanding that we do not need them to move out as such but we
409 need a way to work together - that women have an allowance like men so that it is understood
410 that, that which we intend to build is built so that we can be on the same page and happy. And
411 each one should be seen according to his gift and ministry because we understand that God is
412 capable of awarding everybody a gift. If I can take you to the Bible - if there will be an answered
413 prayer, it was a girl, Rhoda who heard that the person they were interceding for is knocking on
414 the door. If you take Nahaman's survival from his leprosy, it took a girl to intervene and be
415 heard by the person in charge. So, until we come to the position of mutual understanding, as
416 much as we need each other. We also need to honor and respect the very gifts and ministries
417 given to each other. The way we do it, it is easy to take women to be deaconesses more than to
418 be elders of the church. And everyone, if you follow them, they cite the writings of St. Paul,
419 but now they are failing to read all his writings, for instance in Romans 16, St Paul comes up
420 with a woman's name but being an elder in the church. Well, we are still in that complexity of
421 the fear of the unknown. The fear that they will end up being more than us and we have to bow
422 down to them, they will drive the law and rule over us. So as long as we still have those
423 uncertainties, some things will be delayed but once we can conquer that. And as I am saying
424 the people we have now are prepared to go for a change.

425 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
426 the Cape to Cairo vision.

427 **Participant 3:** What is hard in this, the voice of the called is more powerful than the voice of
428 the uncalled but unfortunately, the voice of the uncalled was given more power than the voice
429 of the called and that dropped the standard and brought the reluctance to stand for the truth
430 about the called rather than the ones we want. We had people we wanted too. Now you take
431 them to Cape to Cairo's work, they excel but the problem is, they are not ordained. Ordination
432 is required to trust you that you are that person from that church and that must come from the
433 Teaching Team because they are the ones who have been given the power to do that but
434 unfortunately, the people baba Bhengu entrusted with the work, did not understand and did not
435 follow his vision. That thing consumed his strength until the last day he died because he did
436 not die peacefully, he died crying. That is another unfortunate thing about us as the Assemblies
437 of God - Back to God. Baba Bhengu died crying. He said people found me busy calling people,

438 raising the work of Back to God and they said everything will be fruitless because when you
439 leave these people will go back to their old ways. No church carries such a message, therefore,
440 let us build churches. These churches are consuming the truth that I have been sent to deliver
441 because now I have to go down to attend to issues and disputes more than to fetch the souls that
442 I have been called to get. He died crying. Now we cannot be freely talking about these things
443 because they now feel that you are degrading them and playing politics, but this is the truth. If
444 we want to be free let us tell the truth and only the truth will set us free. That is the Bible, but
445 if we turn against the Bible then how will we live? And secondly, in his lament, he emphasised
446 that they are persistent that I must appoint people that will supervise the work, but they are the
447 ones who swallow people. And they will always quote Bhengu when it suits them because they
448 want to be defended, that Bhengu said this about us. We are saying to them, baba Bhengu gave
449 you copies and recordings, please share them with us because you are old, and we are going to
450 be left without information. No, they are dying with them. Whatever we have we get from their
451 children. We have to heal this church, and it is hard to heal this church not knowing where the
452 problem lies.

453 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
454 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
455 to the outside society?

456 **Participant 3:** If a person who got a call is in my local church and I am seeing what God is
457 doing through her, nothing should stop me from ordaining the person, but they want to be
458 ordained with the pastors in Thaba Nchu as if this is not powerful enough to free them.
459 Secondly, we do make preaching certificates rather than waiting for the probation issue, which
460 must be passed before you get the credential. But people see an old traditional church. While it
461 is full of people who are in freedom, they do not seem to be swallowed by these. And that alone
462 creates a scenario whereby we say talking does not help us at all.

463 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
464 this church?

465 **Participant 3:** They are now included as deaconesses, but I would say women should stop
466 being reluctant to seek knowledge or study because that alone will credit them even if they are
467 not credited by the church and will make them have the courage to stand anywhere and speak
468 because they are covered by knowledge. So, they can empower themselves and come closer to
469 people like the doctors and professors we have in the church.

470 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

471 **Participant 3:** People were hurt, whoever was directly affected by that, ended up leaving the
472 church and that affected even their families the church ended up being a bad place that people
473 could go to. There is something in the Bible that says, something that consumes the owners
474 when they talk about the people of Jericho. This is where we are because it does not develop
475 people and at the ultimate end it destroys whoever comes with the understanding and
476 knowledge of thinking through what we can do, they are being fought so that we do not have a
477 voice. If people come up with ideas that are going to help the church, they are rejected so what
478 can we do?

479 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

480 **Participant 3:** The way I see it, we do not care what the church does, we care that we are not
481 despised as men. I like it when you ask how it looks out there because people see an old
482 traditional church. While it is full of people who are in freedom, but they do not seem to be
483 swallowed by these. And that alone creates a scenario whereby we say talking does not help us
484 at all.

485 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

486 **Participant 3:** You can see that the change that people are rushing for is to see it only in
487 women. They do not know that the oppression is also done to men who could have long
488 transformed the church. For instance, another man here in the church would always say that
489 God continued to reveal himself to Peter, but he had to take women to run away first to the
490 grave, where was Peter because he wants us to understand that women are the ones who ran
491 away first, they were the first to see that Jesus has resurrected. They went to tell the disciples
492 that Jesus had risen. Let us take the trial time of Jesus, the women are the ones who stood
493 openly, followed Jesus, and even grabbed him until he said stop crying for me, cry for
494 yourselves. Peter denied him. Women were open that this person is ours, we go with him and
495 whether we are accepted or not accepted.

496 Unfortunately, when we are to defend men and the gospel, we want to pull women aside
497 because we do not want to hear that they were the first to go by the graveside and come
498 testifying to people. The disciple's stance to go and testify was because the women were coming
499 back from the grave saying they saw him. These are the people he used to travel with, who
500 would say we will die where you die. They would pull the sword and cut off people's ears but
501 when he died, they denied him. These women stood by him until he told them to move. He is
502 the one who told them not to cry for him but to cry for themselves and their children. Even
503 when Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to
504 her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' But unfortunately,

505 these things should not be said in that way because they lower our dignity. But the truth is that
506 we need transformation. But in the reality of all things, we need God to help us as this
507 generation, to be that which we promised - that we will bring change when the time comes. Let
508 us agree to change for the benefit of the Kingdom because this is not our work at the ultimate
509 end.

Appendix D4: Interview with Participant 4 (P4)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 4:** Reverend Bhengu never explicitly stated what the role of women should be in
4 the church, and I assume that Reverend Bhengu operated in areas where there were transitional
5 societies. His audience was Xhosa-speaking people because he went from Zulus to people who
6 are too traditional, and when it comes to Africans, black people do not believe in being led by
7 women. I assume that Reverend Bhengu had this idea that women had a pivotal role to play in
8 the church, although he never stated openly that women should do this and that. How do we
9 see that? we see it because Reverend Bhengu for instance, here in the former Transkei there are
10 churches that were led by unmarried women and pastor Bhengu never said she was making
11 them pastors, but he called them female workers and by interpretation, you will find out that
12 these were pastors. But because he was operating in societies that were too traditional, he had
13 to change the term and not refer to them as pastors but workers. So, that is what I can say pastor
14 Bhengu had the desire that women may work but he thought of balancing things, and not to be
15 seen as if he wanted to place women over men.

16 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
17 empower women?

18 **Participant 4:** There is very little that the constitution is saying, as I am talking to you now,
19 the issue of empowering women once came up and was discussed at the conference level. The
20 issue of ordaining women of which the issue of ordaining follows their utilization because you
21 do not ordain someone who has nothing to do, the person must work first and then be ordained.
22 So, it has been discussed at the conference level, and I think Back to God is buying into that
23 idea of saying, the time has now come, that women should be ordained. But like I said you
24 cannot ordain someone who has not been assigned, you assign her first and give her some work
25 to do and then ordain that person. Now what is happening, just a small thing that has happened
26 as far as women are concerned, is the issue of putting them in leadership positions as deacons
27 in local churches of which to be a deacon and to pastor a church are two different things. So,
28 even though it has been discussed at the conference level, it has not been discussed to a level
29 of women becoming pastors, which I think even though we are moving at a very slow pace, but
30 we will get there.

31 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 4: As I have said before, at the time Pastor Bhengu was preaching, introducing the Pentecostal idea, the people were not yet enlightened and were still in the dark and it would not be right for him to be aggressive in his approach. He had to take it step by step. And also, if you check his work, you will find out that, if he was still alive at this time, women would have been pastors by now. And when he left, he said, ‘Now brothers, I will soon get out of the stage, and you will take the church further’. And my interpretation is that taking the church further is to do things that he prophesied about. So, as for transformation, we will finally get there but it is moving at a slow pace, and I think there is no better time to implement his vision than now.

Researcher: Bhengu’s vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu’s progressive vision reflected in this church

Participant 4: You see, we still have the problem of saying, yes, verbally we accept women, but in essence, we still keep them away.

Researcher: How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

Participant 4: It has not changed I must say and regrettably so, it has not changed because, you see this concept of female workers, came with pastor Bhengu, and if you can check, there are very few female workers who are still alive today; and they are old, they are pensioners and are not strong anymore. So, after pastor Bhengu left, no new female workers were introduced again. Now, our generation has failed to introduce the female workers that will take over from the older ones. I do not remember the introduction of new ones after those who came with pastor Bhengu, they are not there. The others I had seen coming up, ended up being frustrated and they left the church.

Researcher: Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for the Back to God Crusade.

Participant 4: I think the focus now is on evangelizing and as men, we now in our day and age believe that it can only be done successfully by men. Presently, we do have female evangelists, and we do use them, even though they are a bit old, so we give them certain services especially regarding teaching because they are very good. But as leaders, we are also to blame. I understand that there have been requests made by the National Back to God Crusade committee, to the Executive Committee, requesting to meet the regional Back to God committees, whereby they can conduct a workshop with them whereby they will practically engage in intensive work on how to handle evangelistic process. I understand that some of the things the National Back to God Crusade wished to address are concerning women's involvement in the Back to God evangelistic task force. They think of promoting women to work in the Back to God tents. Their mentality suggested that they should also encourage the use of women. It would be

beneficial if this proposal was also presented to the RCCs so that they may comprehend that women should be used in the Back to God tents, but six years have gone by before this possibility was offered, or this request was authorized. Because the platform has not been opened yet, that is why I believe that we, the leadership, are partly at fault for it not happening.

Researcher: What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

Participant 4: I will say it is a gift because women are equally gifted because you will find out that there are for instance women who have a ministry of healing - for example, there is a young woman in Kokstad and I congratulate the pastor there because he offers to step aside when it comes to praying for the sick and call the young woman to pray for the people. So, I think that if we can first recognise these gifts of women then there is no reason not to promote them. I think it is the lack of diligence of women. Let me give you an example, at the Back to God tents we observed something. We used to use women as program directors, and we realized that this person is gifted even if you can give her a chance to preach, so we started with the 10 o'clock services. And also attract other women. So, I think if we can identify them and their gifts, that will enable us to use them and promote them. Women before were very committed, they sacrificed and left their homes, and they were doing this voluntarily there was no reason not to use them but now many ladies are professionals unlike before, and they have other commitments. Additionally, pastor Bhengu used to provide them with financial support, but now things have changed, and poverty issues persist, so the situation has not been the same.

Researcher: Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment?

Participant 4: I think as I have said before that what has killed the church is democracy. We are so preoccupied with democratizing the church and not focusing on the real issues. Because you will find that the Teaching Team does nothing without being approved by the conference before it can be implemented. Even the ordination of women's issues will be decided in the conference before implementing it. Even if there is a new idea that is suggested, it will be taken up and discussed by the joint leadership of the Executive Committee and Teaching Team and it ends there. This democracy is delaying us a lot. Pastor Bhengu used to say, this is what must happen, and nobody would stand against that. Some of the things were approved a long time ago, but they are still not implemented.

Researcher: What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church?

98 **Participant 4:** The ordination of women was something that was introduced and approved; As
99 to why it does not happen, I think the Teaching Team will be in a better place to answer that
100 one because they are the ones that ordain.

101 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

102 **Participant 4:** At the moment, there are not many women in leadership positions, but they
103 have been initiated into the positions of deacons because the Teaching Team announced that
104 women are now eligible to be elected as deacons but not yet as elders. So, I suppose the issue
105 of including them as elders will follow some engagements as well.

106 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

107
108 **Participant 4:** I think that women qualify to be ordained, I think that they qualify to be
109 evangelists, although they cannot be pastors for now, they qualify to lead churches.

110 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
111 comes to church positions?

112 **Participant 4:** You see the reason for that is that we still have many people who are too
113 traditional. I think it needs to be taught at the conference level but not forced, because as Back
114 to God we cannot run away from the fact that 70 to 80 percent of the members of our church
115 are people who still hold the culture of black people and their traditions which believe that for
116 something to be right, it must be done by men. So, I think much as many women are ready but
117 for the transformation to happen successfully, it must be taught first before it can be
118 implemented.

119 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
120 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

121 **Participant 4:** Eh, sis Nonnie, this question is difficult, unless I can repeat what I have already
122 said, that there is something here among us Back to God people that say that some other things
123 should not be known by women. You know the adage "women outside, men inside the house".
124 There is a popular belief that women are not able to keep a secret, if she has heard something
125 she will circulate it. So, these are the old traditional beliefs. So, that is why I say it is high time
126 that we have transformation in the church, but we cannot just force it, it needs to be cascaded
127 from the conference to the regions. So, there is no reason why women should be excluded

128 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
129 probationary period like their male counterparts.

130 **Participant 4:** Well, I think again the Teaching Team will be qualified to answer this kind of
131 question. The one lady who was known to be a pastor in Cape Town has left our church. She

132 got so frustrated with the way she was treated by the regional leadership. She was more than a
133 pastor and she proved that women could do wonders. I understand that there were male pastors
134 who would say to her that we do not have female pastors in the church. It needs to be taught
135 not only in the regions but started at the top of the conference and cascaded down to the regions.
136 Another thing about this question is that going through probation means that ordination will
137 follow. That is why now I say I think the Teaching Team will be in a better position to answer
138 this question because it is they who ordain.

139 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

140 **Participant 4:** They do not bring any challenge; they are just as good as men. What I can only
141 say is that all that needs to happen is to give them an opportunity and allow them to prove
142 themselves.

143 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the
144 church adapting to the times?

145 **Participant 4:** In my opinion, the conservative mindset that currently permeates our church
146 encourages the notion that men are superior to women. But I think what is happening in the
147 church community at large, will force the Back to God to reconsider its stance on conservatism.
148 For instance, if we go to funerals, you will find that we are working with the pastors of other
149 congregations, and we all sit around the same table as pastors. You find that the program is run
150 by a female pastor, the preacher in the church service is a female pastor, and the preacher at the
151 graveside is a female preacher. Therefore, I believe that the events taking place in our
152 community will compel us to reevaluate assigning women a crucial role in the church.

153 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

154 **Participant 4:** We need to be aggressive in our approach and not compromise. And as I have
155 already said, it is difficult for our church to do things at the regional level, because everything
156 has to start from the top first and be unlocked by our Teaching Team. It is all in the Teaching
157 Team's hands.

158 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
159 change in the BTG church?

160 **Participant 4:** We are shooting ourselves in the foot because by the time we realize everything
161 would have already gone wrong. Back to God has been accused that it is too conservative and
162 rightly so, I think if we continue like this then we will lose members to other churches and that
163 has already happened because many people like our church but the little and petty things that
164 we do are the ones that beat us. You also know that here in the former Transkei, if a woman
165 comes to church wearing trousers, everyone stares at them. I remember in my church I was

166 reprimanding someone just two weeks ago. The service was just about to be opened, and he
167 said put the chairs over there - let the others sit next to the red-lipped sister. You realize that
168 this person is trying to expose this sister with red lips. So, those are the kinds of things that will
169 make us lag in transformation.

170 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
171 the Cape to Cairo vision.

172 **Participant 4:** Yes, it has had a major impact; otherwise, we would be too far by now. You
173 are aware, without a doubt, that different people react differently to different people. For
174 instance, people react differently to different preachers. Since they are not accustomed to a
175 female evangelist, people will react better to her if she preaches here. This is because they will
176 regard her as a gifted sister. because people see this sister who is so gifted because they are not
177 used to an evangelist like this. So, I think it has hit us hard not to consider sisters and we lost a
178 group of people due to the absence of women in our revival tents. So, yes, it does have an
179 impact on Cape to Cairo vision.

180 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
181 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
182 the outside society?

183 **Participant 4:** Again, the Teaching Team is the one who can answer this question but
184 answering this question - makes people see us as people who believe that women are not
185 capable of doing anything. You see, women have accepted their status that they cannot do
186 anything better. Let me give you an example - you may have heard it many times here in our
187 church - we mothers do not preach, we mothers teach each other. Now when I stand there I will
188 be labelled as a black sheep in the family, and this is what I even said to one sister who is an
189 organiser. I said to her, here in our church women are kept away from the pulpit, and as you
190 are just an organiser, who knows if God is not opening a platform for you to use your gift of
191 evangelism? I told her that although you call yourself an organiser, you are an evangelist. Step
192 outside the organisation and deliver the Word when you are in the pulpit. Through this
193 organisation, God is opening for women to preach salvation. So, I am trying to say, that if the
194 Teaching Team can unlock this, amazing things could happen, but because said this to one lady
195 then what is happening to the rest of the regions.

196 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
197 this church?

198 **Participant 4:** I am very, very positive about women's empowerment. There are prospects but
199 someone needs to trigger those prospects. They are currently in the organisation as organisers
200 and supervisors. Recently they have been allowed to be elected as deacons.

201 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

202 **Participant 4:** The implications are that we have many people leaving the church. Many gifted
203 people are demoralized, who decide - not only women, but even men too. The issue of the
204 ministry has become so difficult. It is made difficult sometimes on purpose. There is that thing
205 that people used to do some time ago, if one has a calling, writes a letter, works and does
206 everything - but they take his application and put it in a briefcase, and forget about him. Many
207 have left the church to start their ministries. So, those are the implications of resistance in the
208 past.

209 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance

210 **Participant 4:** It is still the same as above because many unhappy people are still leaving the
211 church. We have a lot of people sitting out there, demoralized - with no confidence at all. They
212 lost their zeal because they did not see how to move forward. The same implications in the past
213 are still happening.

214 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

215 **Participant 4:** I am struggling to answer your question. Eh, I remain very much positive,
216 circumstances will force changes to happen. We will not transform if we do not follow the trend
217 that is followed by other churches. But if we are dragging our feet in transforming women, then
218 the circumstances will force us to do so. But I still maintain that we need someone to trigger
219 those changes by way of producing aggressive changes to our current legislation, to our current
220 beliefs that women cannot do anything better.

Appendix D5: Interview with Participant 5 (P5)

Researcher: Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual empowerment.

Participant 5: First of all, I would like to say that pastor Bhengu's vision was about preaching the gospel from Cape to Cairo. Number two, Pastor Bhengu did not have a gender issue. He believed in the calling regardless of whether it was a man or a woman, as a result, many churches that are run by pastors today were started by females. There was that thing in the church that was called a worker, besides the organisers - when he was about to leave, Reverend Bhengu said to all those that were female workers that he knew that he was gone they would be illtreated and he said they should move to the organisation although some could not survive because a calling is a calling. So, I am trying to say that he did not have a gender problem in his time. Those workers had working credentials. There was a girl then, she is a grandmother now, and those were the militants of pastor Bhengu. She is from the former Port Elizabeth now Gqeberha and she has been to KZN, Gauteng, Swaziland, Eastern Cape, and everywhere preaching. For instance, in former Transkei, there are workers as we speak that have credentials, although they did not have any locals, they would work with a pastor in whatever local that has been allocated to her. Then after some time, she would be transferred as pastors rotate. But over time that was phased out the issue of women workers and they focused on the organisation.

Researcher: How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Participant 5: I can say, the church has failed dismally because in the mainline churches, women are well recognised. As we speak the presiding Bishop of the Methodist church of Southern Africa is a female. In the Methodist, there are many female bishops and female reverends. If you go to Faith Mission, our Pentecostal brothers, that gender thing has been eliminated; you go to charismatic churches, that do not work anymore. It is the Assemblies of God, Back to God that still has a problem when it comes to females, and it is a serious challenge.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 5: Well! We are still fighting this issue, this crisis, that we should recognise females. We still have a big debate, for instance, we as the Teaching Team members, have started to put women in leadership, we have deacons ordained in many churches and there is a lot of progress because women are more zealous for work compared to men. And this issue of female workers is on the agenda as we go to the policy conference at the end of this month

(February 2024). But we will end up failing because it is high time. After all, the circular world has taken a woman and elevated her to the top. The mainline churches, the charismatic churches, and even the Pentecostal churches like Faith Mission. The stubborn people are the Assemblies of God – Back to God and African Gospel in the Pentecostal churches. Therefore, I can say that the vision is relevant, but we as the church are not relevant to the vision of Reverend Bhengu towards women. As I have already mentioned in my introduction Reverend Bhengu had no man and he had no woman, he was looking at the calling regardless of who had it.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 5: Well, there is no progress, this is what I mean by saying that we are trying to challenge this matter. It is a crisis that needs to be resolved because we need to recognise females. I am hoping that in this coming policy conference, we can come back with positive results regarding the issue of workers. We have seen many women working and many churches that are led by men today were started by women. So, if we do recognise them, we are not doing them a favour, but we appreciate the work they are doing because they have shown us the ability, so why are we complaining? The mainline churches, the charismatic churches, and even the Pentecostal churches like Faith Mission have already started and our women have worked hard to prove themselves therefore as the Back to God we need to give women a chance.

Researcher: How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

Participant 5: I can say that it is the Teaching Team that lacked, because he left his legacy in the hands of the Teaching Team, and the Teaching Teacher must carry on with his legacy and guard that what he left behind is not changed. Therefore, I will blame the Teaching Team office because the Executive Committee is administrators, but the apostolic office is the Teaching Team. It is them who are accountable. According to Pastor Bhengu's mandate, they are the ones who must uphold the principles of Pastor Bhengu.

Researcher: Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for the Back to God Crusade.

Participant 5: Here we are talking about the living organism and organisation. The challenge we have in my church - one of the pastors said to me while we were having a conversation that pastor Bhengu before he died, said he regrets forming the organisation, he thought it was something that would help this work, but it was something that would destroy this work. Our church has shifted from focusing on soul-winning, our church is more an organisation than an organism. That is the crisis we are facing. Now, as we are talking about these heroes of faith,

66 they have all been converted to the organisation. They turned off spirituality and they focused
67 on organisation.

68 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

69 **Participant 5:** This is what I am saying because Pastor Bhengu said that they would never
70 recognise these women because he is the one who understood them as he was giving them
71 churches to lead. He said when I depart these will remove them – because they are for the
72 organisation not for soul winning. Even now, we should not be talking about the female workers
73 issue anymore here in the church, because pastor Bhengu, started this work with the female
74 workers, however, it is still a big debate, even at the conference, as if it is something that never
75 existed. For instance, there is the late sister who was based in Limpopo, a girl from Mzimkhulu,
76 who was in charge of the churches in Limpopo. She started churches. She was discovered by a
77 pastor when she was still in the Alexander local assembly. This pastor saw the gift and he said
78 this girl was powerful, and he took her to Limpopo. This sister blew up Limpopo, establishing
79 churches. Limpopo fought for her to get the credential. She had a credential; she was a full-
80 time pastor.

81 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
82 women's empowerment?

83 **Participant 5:** As I said, it is on the agenda as we go to the conference that the issue of females
84 must be considered according to the vision of pastor Bhengu, although we are very late, and
85 time is against us. We have been resistant for a long time.

86 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
87 the church?

88

89 **Participant 5:** It is traditionalism, that has delayed pastor Bhengu's work because pastor
90 Bhengu was a spiritual man. Now when he left, the people of tradition entered, that in Xhosa a
91 woman is a woman, in KwaZulu a woman is a woman. Now, this hurt the work, as I say, I
92 blame the Teaching Team because they are the ones left with the legacy of Pastor Bhengu. It is
93 the one that was supposed to maintain the work of pastor Bhengu.

94 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

95 **Participant 5:** Their work is in the organisation because they are not recognised that they have
96 a calling and that they are called by God. You can see that this one has a calling, and she has
97 been converted to the organisation, and they get frustrated. One of them once came to my office
98 crying, clashing with other organisers and I said you are misplaced, you are not an organised
99 but a worker. They will never leave you; they will attack you right through because you are in

100 the wrong place. She wiped away her tears and said, "pastor, you answer me," and she walked
101 out the door. I said to her, you were called, those were not called, they were pointed by people,
102 you were pointed by the finger of God, now you are busy with the organisation, and you have
103 forgotten what God called you to. I said money or no money, when you are called by God, you
104 are called by God. Do not rely on people until you run to the organisation because you want a
105 stipend. A person called by God never suffered. What I am saying is that because the will that
106 God does call a woman has been killed by people who have also disregarded the organism.
107 Now there are also deacons in the local churches because we have approved that women can
108 be elected as deacons.

109 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

110 **Participant 5:** Women should be ordained; they are called by God. That is why pastor Bhengu
111 used them so much. This church is built on the work done by them because they are the people
112 that pastor Bhengu used as workers. The work they have done is great but now those churches
113 are run by men, and we do not want to recognise them.

114 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
115 comes to church positions?

116 **Participant 5:** There is a family from Ngcobo who had a home gathering, and a certain sister
117 passed by their house singing the chorus. As she was passing by - there was an epileptic child
118 who had a seizure. They called this lady telling her about the sick child, the lady turned around
119 and lay her hand on the child and the child recovered - then the revival began. This sister
120 preached to them, and they were all saved. A large congregation Ngcobo was started - it was
121 known as the congregation of the prophets. Can you hear me – I am saying that that sister gave
122 birth to the generals of this church. I am talking about, a girl. Now, I say that the leadership of
123 this church will account for neglecting pastor Bhengu's work. This church should be very far
124 by now. You see our senior pastors, he spoke to them, pastor Bhengu never wrote a letter and
125 there was never a middleman. Then at one time at another conference in Thaba Nchu, pastor
126 Bhengu wanted to release a blessing, but the senior pastors came flying, he turned them away
127 and called this one pastor and laid hands on him. They are growing old with those things, and
128 they will die without saying them and standing up for them. A woman in this church would be
129 far by now. We are too backward; God must help us. The challenge is that my church of late is
130 democratized. That is the problem. Democracy is meant to fight this stigma of gender
131 inequality, but here in our church, it is the other way around. I do not know where we take this
132 from. The founder of the church stood for this, to promote women and believe in the women's
133 calling. Some women started churches. These women went through this bad situation that I am

134 describing - they lived above the circumstances. They did not bother to make themselves grey
135 by being organisers. They were called by God. Even now they are well-known preachers. A
136 calling is not approved by people it is approved by God. There is another worker who was
137 based in Cape Town and the RCC there frustrated her. She worked and woke up a church for
138 these lazy men, now she has left our church and has gone back to her former church. In
139 Theology there is this thing called oral tradition where the leadership of a certain group shines,
140 having a certain belief. The problem is that people come in and dilute a thing. Pastor Bhengu
141 believed in a calling more than anything and there is a passage he used to scrutinize people that
142 they are indeed called, something that is not happening of late. When someone said he was
143 called, pastor Bhengu would ask - where he worked and had results, and when he said he had
144 not started, then he would tell him to go and work and come with people.

145 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
146 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

147 **Participant 5:** Hey, like I said, this is the responsibility of the Teaching Team, it is us as the
148 Teaching Team that needs to wake up. We are the ones who carry the legacy of Pastor Bhengu
149 - it is the one in the apostolic office.

150 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
151 probationary period like their male counterparts.

152 **Participant 5:** It is a problem for the Teaching Team. We need to stand up and do our work.
153 We have to understand that we are the apostolic office holding the legacy of Bhengu who had
154 no issues of Gender. There is nothing wrong with women, if a man has a problem with a woman,
155 and men have a problem, problems are resolved.

156 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

157 **Participant 5:** There is nothing wrong with women, if a man has a problem with a woman,
158 and men have a problem, problems are resolved.

159 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
160 adapting to the times?

161 **Participant 5:** If we say we are following the legacy of Reverend Bhengu, we must return to
162 the things of Reverend Bhengu and stop all our troubles because we will get nowhere. We will
163 preach until we have foam at the mouth, but there will be no fruit because we have neglected
164 the principles of pastor Bhengu. We just need God to help us not to be traditional, not to be
165 religious, and to go back to the Bible because in the bible there was no discrimination when it
166 comes to gender. As I just said we are going to the policy conference, and this matter is on the
167 agenda.

168 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

169 **Participant 5:** The apostolic office which is the Teaching Team must take its rightful position
 170 when it comes to spiritual matters and not the conference. Pastor Bengu gave the Teaching
 171 Team a mandate to maintain his legacy and uphold his principles.

172 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
 173 change in the BTG church?

174 **Participant 5:** We have lost many people in our church. As women arrive in the church, and
 175 they are groomed in the direction of the organisation and not in the spiritual. If you are not good
 176 at this organisation, you do not get recognised. To get recognition, you have to be strong on the
 177 side of the organisation. That is why I say, no matter what, if you have been called by God,
 178 even if you have not received recognition from the Teaching Team and Executive Committee,
 179 you will do what God has called you to do.

180 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
 181 the Cape to Cairo vision?

182 **Participant 5:** It is an effect in the sense that - what has killed our church is the issue of calling.
 183 Even the pastors, there are few who are called by God these days. Volunteers are coming,
 184 people who are eager to preach, not people who are called by God. Some are retrenched, they
 185 have various reasons, but the founder believed in the calling. Now to answer your question, it
 186 has delayed the process, by hindering women – we will not arrive in Cairo. For example, there
 187 is a missionary girl who travels all over the world, deployed by these organisations. But we -
 188 that is why we will never reach Cairo because we have killed the vision of our father Bhengu
 189 by neglecting the tools that were supposed to go and operate in these countries. We need to go
 190 back to the drawing board and look at what the founder of this church believed in - let's get out
 191 of tradition and be spiritual because the founder was spiritual. Let us go back to the Bible
 192 because the Bible is above our constitution and or rules of procedure.

193 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
 194 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
 195 to the outside society?

196 **Participant 5:** We look bad. Let us stop entertaining many things according to the circular
 197 world. Now we cannot even talk in the circular world because we are considered as people who
 198 victimize women as the Back to God church.

199 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
 200 this church?

201 **Participant 5:** Besides being deacons, they are in the organisation. Well, it was also pastoral
202 work that was erased.

203 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

204 **Participant 5:** Some died in the spirit, others converted to organisation, and they became
205 stagnant because he does not do the way of God. They got frustrated.

206 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

207 **Participant 5:** Same as the previous question because this thing is still happening. Like I said,
208 some died in the spirit, others converted to the organisation, and they became stagnant because
209 they did not do the way of God. Some got frustrated and left. These are the things that make us
210 keep on referring to the past, that the paint peeled. And they will say this person does not know
211 what he is talking about, and they will just close the Bibles and leave. We must prove a point
212 that the God who was there is still here. When we talk about Pentecost - the book of Acts must
213 be practical. You see when the water does not flow, there is that green slimy this – the algae –
214 it is called frogs' clothes. What would happen to some who can drink that water? He will get
215 sick, won't he? Our church is like that stagnant water with that green slimy thing that no one
216 can drink. Everything is just history - to say that we are Bhengu's church. According to the way
217 it is happening, see how our Conferences are conducted, how our RCCs are conducted, and in
218 the congregations, things are going the way they are going.

219 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

220 **Participant 5:** You heard me talking about things that are democratized, it is very, very
221 dangerous because once something goes to the conference it is ruined. That is where the damage
222 starts. We belong to the Bible and not democracy. For instance, Pastor Bengu gave the Teaching
223 Team a mandate to maintain his legacy. Now as we are going to the conference, in the
224 conference there are delegates, one was saved last year, another was saved last month - if you
225 have a certain profession that they respect, they just take that person to the conference and he
226 has just been saved - they are going there to debate but they do not even know where this is
227 coming from. That is a problem. It should be declared that the Teaching Team should go back
228 to Bhengu's work. The church must be led according to the Bible. The apostolic office must be
229 challenged very strongly.

Appendix D6: Interview with Participant 6 (P6)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 6:** Well, I think by the way of the historical background that we get from the
4 people that were with him then, I think it started when he wanted to get some funds to support
5 the ministry he was doing – the evangelistic ministry. To make a little bit of a background to
6 this question is that the Assemblies of God started in the United States on Azusa Street far from
7 Baba Bhengu could start the ministry which was presented to the AOG as an affiliate. He came
8 with his work – the Back to God Crusade which until the present time – the only institution
9 which is registered by the government is the Back to God Crusade type of ministry. The church
10 of Assemblies of God is not registered – the black is not registered. We do not have a name
11 under which we operate. However, when he started the evangelistic ministry, salvation, healing
12 the sick, and delivering the demonic oppressed as an interdenominational ministry that
13 addressed the issue of one sickness – sin. He would say come to Christ and be saved without
14 mentioning the denomination affiliation. That is where his ministry moved – that is the way we
15 get it from the history of the man who worked with him then. Then along the way, the ministry
16 needed more money to be supported of course when the churches were starting to mushroom
17 and now the issue of supporting this ministry came into play. The ministry is to move from
18 Cape to Cairo. That was a heavy vision that he had - then hence out of all these churches that
19 he started, he realized that the best way is to affiliate with the Assemblies of God, but he was
20 in the vision of the Back to God Crusade. But, looking for money he went to the United States
21 of America to raise funds that is when he was there according to reports, he saw a vision that
22 said you left the money in South Africa, the money is in the (doek) headscarf of women that is
23 where the issue of women came into play in the Bhengu vision. The Holy Spirit visited him
24 there and said you are in the wrong place – money is back in Africa in the women's doeks you
25 go back they will raise enough funds for you to go from Cape to Cairo. So, he came back of
26 course, and he started to form this women's movement. When he formed it, he did not only
27 want them to raise funds, but he also wanted them to do handwork. This thing the church is
28 doing even today – the zeal that was there then of weaving things by hand raising funds of the
29 organisation themselves and bringing it to the Back to God Crusade account to move the gospel
30 from place to place. And indeed, women started to teach other women how to keep their homes
31 wives to their husbands, spiritually, using their hands to make money, sewing and selling these

things to get the money for the ministry. That is how it started. That is where I think he empowered women highly because they were just housewives seated at home waiting for their husbands to come with something instead of doing something with their hands to increase income and alleviate some stress. So, it started there, and it grew up to where it is now. In the past they were just raising thousands unlike now they go to 20 million but according to the currency of that particular time, it was a lot. But women started to be alive in churches.

Researcher: How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Participant 6: I think the vision becomes effective when the dreamer is there, it becomes less effective when the dreamer is no longer there. So, in collective leadership, it is not easy to craft an effective vision that is authentic – authority where people could say this is the voice that we should follow. We should leave others and follow this voice. Now it cannot be as effective as it was during then because the church is led by the executive. During that time, the visionary would stand before the people and say we do not do this we do not do that, and his word was a resolution. No one could stand that position, that is what we call the apostolic position. He spoke as God told him, so, he did not extend. Now in this present time, we do not have such a person. We have an Executive who has got to discuss and reach a consensus. But they reach a consensus that is contrary to the vision. So that is the reason I say our setup now is not an easy exercise that we can execute what Bhengu said. It cannot be. You can try. If you have maybe 20 members of the executive 15 say no, and five say yes, obviously the 15 will have to progress with that vision. Let us say even at the conference we go and vote. You cannot go for a vote for a resolution that needs to be effective because normally the resolution, - will be rejected by some who are non-spiritual at the high level. So, you will not go anywhere. So, I cannot say the vision of Baba Bhengu for women is fulfilled in our time - because even women themselves are not happy – they are collecting all these millions but there is no crusade going to Angola or Malawi or anywhere else – they are not happy – only they cannot voice it, but they are not happy. There is no work-gaining grounds in the African continent before you could even reach Cairo. It is not happening. We are at a cul-de-sac. I am not here to criticize my leadership, but we got stuck because we are now no longer concentrating on what Baba Bhengu emphasised in his ministry – evangelism – reaching out to people – serving people – letting people be self-sufficient by doing what – using their hands, and women specifically. There was a time when women were worried that - we women are taught a lot but men are not taught anything. And when they apply it at home then they say - and what are you doing here - I am the man here. So, I think the issue is that it is going to be difficult – it is not possible - no one can say women

66 are empowered the way they are except for time to collect money. But the empowering part of
67 it is not there.

68 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

69 **Participant 6:** You know what, I think on that particular question, the message which our father
70 preached then emphasising is no longer lived or common from the pulpits of the Back to God
71 churches. It is his message of crying for souls and growing the church numerically and
72 spiritually that is countered by the message of prosperity and motivational speaking. It is
73 amazing to see how we are busy motivating people who do not even know Christ, to do the
74 work of the Lord. You cannot do the work of the Lord when you do not even know the Lord
75 you are speaking about. You were motivated to. Let me say this statement which was said by
76 our Lord Christ Jesus in Mark chapter 1 where he says go and preach the Gospel, those who
77 repent and believe baptise them. Now this statement that Christ Jesus said is vice versa. Instead
78 of preaching repentance, we are preaching – believe – you will receive all from the Lord. They
79 all come to fetch the blessings by faith, and they enjoy these blessings, but they never repent.
80 Repentance comes first then believe – not believe in the process you can repent if you wish to.
81 Now, this thing alone caused the church to be full of believing people who have never repented.
82 Now, this blocks the church's growth, and the message of Bhengu because he was stressing the
83 issue, repent and come to Christ. In fact, his message remained his ministry – a powerful name
84 – he said Back to God. It is a prophetic word. How do you do that, repent, come back to God,
85 and believe? Right now, we have all kinds of people. We have got gays and lesbians; we have
86 people who sin who say grace has done the work – I am living my life – I will live my own life.
87 But I want you to understand that right now the church is in a mess – spiritually. You can see
88 the type of believers we have in every public meeting where we come together without naming
89 anything. You realize the type of believers in our time. XXXXX So, I want you to understand
90 that the message of Bhengu today is more serious – that come back where I left you. I never
91 taught you this, I taught you this. This is not the church I intended. The church I was intending
92 is this vibrant, Holy Spirit accommodating where all gifts operate. And that question, the
93 message of Baba Bhengu is still relevant, but it has got no preacher. We should preach it to
94 these people; because why - we need people to follow us to support us – to buy us Mercedes
95 Benz, to give us cash, to take our bank accounts and deposit some money. Who does right who
96 do wrong it does not matter, as long as you are feeding the man of God – the heaven is theirs.
97 Otherwise, that is where the stumbling block is, unless something is done where the ministers
98 are all taken to Thaba Nchu to be re-disciplined and seriously so because if something does not
99 change from the pulpit nothing will change under the pulpit. Therefore, a tent must be pitched

100 for us pastors, and no sinner must be allowed to come in and we must be preached to again.
101 The message of Baba Bhengu was left in the hands of the mothers, supervisors, and pastors of
102 course; to support it but now it is stumbled by the new winds that are blowing now. And people
103 cannot see it easily without spiritual eyes. It is stumbled in such a way that if nothing is being
104 done, we are not far from being like the established churches. The message of our father is
105 stumbled because there are no communicators of it now. Right now, it is needed first before the
106 outside world should receive it. We should be the first people to go back to God then we call
107 the world to go back to God, the God of Bhengu. The top Executive should have time to go to
108 a (bosberaad) forest summit and say beloved where are we leading this church to? Otherwise,
109 for me, I would say the message is more relevant today than during the time of Bhengu. It fails
110 to have propagators.

111 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
112 vision reflected in this church?

113 **Participant 6:** I think most of us individually admire what Baba Bhengu has achieved. And as
114 I said most of the people, all these organisers, and all those old men that worked with Baba
115 Bhengu would speak the real truth they know about him and how this should be, but they have
116 no power to coin resolutions to go according to what he was doing. That is the reason I said
117 there is a difference between one man's vision and 20 men's vision. I do not want to elevate one
118 man's vision higher than 20 men's visions but the problem here is when the collective of the
119 20 are all not in the same mind or the same vision that becomes a problem. What are you going
120 to achieve there – when you are 20 with 20 pieces of understanding? Will you one day become
121 one to do this work? No. The problem is that all of us can talk about the bigness of Baba Bhengu
122 that they are talking about cannot be consolidated and become a resolution to the conference.
123 If that could do, I tell you the truth we would be far. What I am going to is that there is a vacancy
124 in an Apostolic ministry, where when he stands and speaks – no resolution can go against it.
125 Now we go against what he wanted us to do in the vision, according to the issue of missions.
126 The church without a mission, I tell you is dead. You do nothing, no activity, nothing, it is dead.
127 So, the issue here is that we have got individualist truth which cannot be consolidated and
128 become a resolution to the conference. The constitution says the conference is the highest
129 decision-making body – no space for prophecy - no space for the divine revelation which can
130 coin and change that direction of the resolution of the conference. So, we got stuck with the
131 conference and we are there now. That is why I say they will all tell the truth, but where are we
132 stuck? We are stuck at the conference. There should be a leadership which should say – this,
133 we stand for. Conference – this we stand for. It is prescribed in the blueprint of his vision. But

134 now, that one is a stumbling block that we do not know how to resolve. It is like a big elephant
135 in the house. They say he would stand there in front and say – what I said in that time that we
136 should work this way and we worked but the Lord has rebuked me. It should change. It does
137 not need a conference debate; it is the voice from the Lord – and it would be changed. Pastors
138 were transferred at the conference. So, I want you to understand that the vision is still very clear
139 but who are the implementers? Now, what we have now is that the Executive spoke the truth
140 which everybody understood. How long will it take from God's side, that the bulk of the money
141 we are receiving is maintaining administration? Now, automatically it is getting a bigger share
142 of the mothers' fundraising, and they said it clear. That is why there is no concern that crusades
143 must continue. Tents are not going out because there is no money. They have to pay for Thaba
144 Nchu, Henley on Klip administration, workers, and all that and that takes a lot of money. This
145 can never be resolved unless the direction where the money is going changes. But the ball is in
146 our court as attendees of the conference to contribute what we have and put on the table for
147 discussion and not rely on the leadership. The question that I was saying they answered very
148 well, was when we were at Henley on Klip – it was a conference where we were discussing the
149 organisation of structures. And of course, questions were coming through as that why the
150 revival tents were not functioning properly, the national tent is even worse. We barely hear that
151 it has been pitched somewhere. What makes the tent meetings to be fewer? Then that is when
152 they answered openly – that we are aware, we have got this mountain of a responsibility
153 financially and they elaborated everything. I could understand that definitely, it is an issue of
154 choosing – to kill one and live the other. And that as well is not a simple process. It will now
155 be driven to the normal conference. That is where then we have a chance to speak about issues
156 openly because we are given policies to do there to recommend. We go there with points that
157 sometimes they were not ready to hear – which ought to be given space for discussion.

158 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

159 **Participant 6:** Evangelists have become organisers – and men evangelists have become pastors
160 of the local churches.

161 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
162 for the Back to God Crusade.

163 **Participant 6:** The issue is that you do not become an organiser without being birthed.
164 Someone must have said - you have done a lot for the church I cannot allow you to remain in
165 the street forever – let me take you in, and that to her is a bonus, because now she is going to
166 get something from the church. When she comes back home after organising, she comes back
167 with money and at least she has got something to give to the children. Remember they have

168 needs, that is another thing. The reason why the Disciplinary Committee (DC) was paying these
169 people is because the local assemblies used to collect money for evangelism and that money
170 had its account – then it was collated together, and they were given a stipend from that. But
171 then that tradition died, and it was not much. And these mothers have grandchildren, and they
172 need food. So, such circumstances take the gifts from the street to the house. That is why
173 women have left the evangelistic task force. It is because there is no allowance there. And
174 women were strong. I once said that I think God loves women because when women do
175 something they will do it with all of their heart. She would preach 100 percent. Men, would say
176 after this how much are you going to collect for collection? I once said God is using women
177 more than men – internationally not in our church. So, women can do damage to the kingdom
178 of the devil. They do not beg the devil – they attack the devil. So, they changed them, but it
179 will not work because they are anointed for that.

180 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

181 **Participant 6:** The issue here as I said - the church is becoming highly commercialized. People
182 want to be positioned where there are funds and a monthly payment. When you are just a
183 preacher from place to place, you do not have the so-called stipend allowance. It did not kill
184 only those women's movements. The way God was using them, also killed the ministry in the
185 church where evangelists ran away from the street to the churches because there were no
186 allowances there. So, we have pastors who have failed to be evangelists hence it blocks the
187 church's growth because some men are wrongly positioned because of the stipend. Evangelism
188 was not blocked – it is because there are no funds from the national coffers. They would preach
189 in trains and taxi ranks, villages, and schools but there is no monthly allowance there. Hence
190 you see now all evangelists ran for safety (laugh). So, it has killed the sting of the Gospel and
191 misplaced the person who should be on the street and is now preaching in the house – who is
192 not meant to be a pastorate – and is now struggling to be a pastor as it is not working for him.
193 Hence, we have what is called effective pastors and ineffective pastors. It is because of
194 misplacement. You can take him wherever you want they will be the same when they see
195 people, they see street people in the house, so they have to box you every Sunday. When you
196 do not like you can go (laugh). That is why women have left the evangelistic task force. It is
197 because there is no allowance there. And women were strong. I once said that I think God loves
198 women because when women do something they will do it with all of their heart. She would
199 preach 100 percent. Men, would say after this how much are you going to collect for collection?
200 I once said God is using women more than men – internationally not in our church. So, women
201 can do damage to the kingdom of the devil. They do not beg the devil.

202 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
203 women's empowerment?

204 **Participant 6:** Jesus says Go ye and make disciples out of all nations – not go ye and make
205 converts and you passed over, no. We move converts to disciples. We left converts alone to see
206 to finish. The vision evolves when those who are preaching the Gospel in the context of the
207 vision of Baba Bhengu should have the capacity to disciple others who have been converted by
208 their ministries. When they disciple them, they disciple them the same way they were discipled
209 by pastor Bhengu, the founder. Then there would be an exchange of chains of groups of people
210 who have the same passion, the founder had, the same commitment, the same zeal, to approach
211 the kingdom of darkness, because they are discipled and taught of which there are two different
212 messages. There is a message and teaching. The inspired message inspires the listener to action.
213 The teachings inform a convert about moving from one level of Christianity to the second level
214 because the evolution of the vision has something to do with the changing of the mind. Hence
215 Paul says be renewed in your mind, the mind that does not grow cannot evolve with the vision.
216 You need to change from time to time like the statement that Peter said in the house of Cornelius
217 when he was preaching in that house, all of a sudden the Holy Spirit came down as he did on
218 the day of the Pentecost and Peter uttered a statement – because he never thought that the Holy
219 Spirit could come down like it did in the day of the Pentecost and he said - now I realize that
220 this Holy Spirit is not only for us Jews but also for the gentiles, now I know – this what a person
221 who is growing should say. When you are growing spiritually - there should be times when you
222 say, now I know, and that which you know should change your mind, change your actions, and
223 change your language. That is how it works. That is how to make disciples. Disciples are made
224 by being taught and taking action, you must not want to sit, learn, and act – you must reflect
225 because reflection is educative. Whoever reads them is propelled to action. I think you are doing
226 a very good study – Practical Theology is powerful.

227 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
228 the church?

229 **Participant 6:** I think the Back to God church, though they have never proclaimed it is
230 endearing to suppose. They have taken the biblical passage of Paul that I do not allow women
231 to speak in the church, if she has got some questions let her ask her husband. That thing in the
232 Assemblies of God even after Pentecostalism was founded in Azusa Street, escalated
233 throughout the United States, to London to South Africa through the missionaries but when
234 they came here, they came being dismantled – but they all do not ordain women for ministry.

235 The way I look at it, they are basing it on that particular passage. The churches that have
236 ordained female pastors of late are the Presbyterian church and Lutheran church. Lutheran
237 church started in the 1980s to ordain their first woman pastor (Sophie Korombi) in Venda. They
238 started in Venda, there was an outstanding woman who was also used by the RCC when the
239 pastors were dispersed for the change of pulpit, she was also part of it. Today she is still part,
240 and she will never disappoint. She would preach as if she was not a woman and when the
241 elections were conducted about the leadership, the elders, and deacons, the assembly elected
242 her as the Assemblies secretary to date. They appreciated the gift. That woman does not play.
243 She is prayerful and well-educated, she worked for the government, and right now she is out, I
244 think they have given her a congregation to lead. What is happening in other regions is not
245 happening in our region – we have women pastoring churches. Back to God – at least now we
246 have deacons but Back to God – I do not believe will be ordained any time soon – it will take
247 years.

248 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

249 **Participant 6:** At the moment they do the deaconess work, I think in the book of Titus there is
250 a certain woman who is a deacon in the church, that is besides being organisers, and supervisors.

251 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

252 **Participant 6:** When I look at our church, I believe that certain women have a special ability
253 to teach because what is important is to teach because once you are ordained you are going to
254 a church to teach – if you just evangelize you will not last, but teaching does not end. So, I
255 think talking about what other churches are doing. Assemblies of God – Back to God at least
256 was expected to think about those women who have teaching abilities not just teachers by
257 profession but women who are consumed by the Word.

258 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
259 comes to church positions?

260 **Participant 6:** The truth – she will have to tell the man what to do and what not to do in the
261 church. And that is exactly what men do not want. They are avoiding a woman dictating to
262 them as men. So, the problem is not just with other pastors but also with the men in the local
263 churches. To sit down with a man and ask him about what he is doing to his wife. To them,
264 that is not palatable.

265 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
266 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

267 **Participant 6:** Women by nature are not like men. Men are tougher and stronger against issues
268 of life. Women are not like that. Number two, the women species is different from men species,

269 and in speaking, women speak faster than a man. They do not put much thought into what they
270 talk about and what the implications can be after that. Men think before they can say something.
271 Due to her fast speaking, a woman wrong and would come back and apologize after and men
272 do not go that way all of the time because men speak thoughtfully. Even in the way we behave
273 in timekeeping women are different from men. If a man says half past, I will be out of here,
274 they will but a woman will drag until they are late. So now such things – timekeeping is very
275 important to God. That is how you can find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time.
276 There is a woman just to support my statement, during a Bantustan – there was a prayer meeting
277 around Giyani of a team of young people – young evangelists who were preaching in the area.
278 And the Lord spoke prophetically that you should go now and see Professor Ntsanwisi, he was
279 the Prime Minister of the Tsonga speaking. And the Lord said stand up now and go straight.
280 That was a woman that was used by God. Then she thought I am going to meet a Prime Minister
281 – by the way, there is no appointment made. The Lord said, ‘go there now’. She wanted a good
282 dress to look presentable, and she wasted time. When they arrived at the Prime Minister’s place,
283 at the gate they met a convoy. Here she comes saying I am sent by God to talk to the Prime
284 Minister and the message is urgent. They stopped the convoy, and they went to him and the
285 Prime Minister said – I would have given her time – I waited for her – (she cried tears). And
286 he was ready to meet her even though there was no appointment because God had already
287 prepared the heart of the prime minister – the prime minister said, yes, I would like to hear what
288 the Lord is saying but unfortunately, I cannot. He was answering from the car in the convoy.
289 They cannot go back and bring the prime minister to his chamber. And when this woman came
290 back – when they went for prayers – God said you did not obey me – I said stand up and leave,
291 I prepared the heart of the man, but you wanted to follow the protocols of this world. So, women
292 are different in keeping time and that is where they throw it away but there are women. You
293 know women who are in the cabinet, conduct themselves as professionals, in time and
294 everything. They act professionally, if they act as servants of God not just housewives. God is
295 a God of time. If he says this, it must go that way – stop impressing people. The garment of
296 anointing upon you is a dress big enough to allow the man to talk to you. I am just mentioning
297 the points that women should improve on to compete in ministry like their male counterparts.
298 These are the things we hear them speaking about that these people talk too much. And that
299 they form groups in the church. She has a group of women who feed her with things. Now she
300 become a minister of that group, and the rest of the church is just watching. Now, they say
301 women have got these weaknesses, will the church be united if this woman can be ordained?
302 Will she stand as the bond to bring the church together?

303 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
304 probationary period like their male counterparts.

305 **Participant 6:** No, they are not considered as pastors, I think **they** are considered as workers.
306 So, probation does not mean anything to them because once you go on probation then you need
307 to be ordained. Once they can go for probation, it means it should be passed by the General
308 Counsel, and the General Counsel is not authorized to do that.

309 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

310 **Participant 6:** These are the things we hear them speaking about that these people talk too
311 much. And that they form groups in the church. She has a group of women who feed her with
312 things. Now she become a minister of that group, and the rest of the church is just watching.
313 Now, they say women have got these weaknesses, will the church be united if this woman can
314 be ordained? Will she stand as the bond to bring the church together? These are things they are
315 not mentioned. If you tell a woman a problem about your house, she will tell the whole group
316 of intercessors, and they will spread it like wildfire, and you find yourself in a triangle. In order
317 to acquire the trust of the entire church, there are some things a pastor needs to keep to
318 themselves. A pastor does not have a group. A pastor does not belong to a camp, the people are
319 all his. So, it is not an easy exercise to do all these things. Many say I am anointed, and I know
320 what I am here for, and I am here for the whole church. These are some of the issues that we
321 cannot publicize but at least you should know that there are these issues.

322 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the
323 church adapting to the times?

324 **Participant 6:** I am not sure they are only being conservative, they are struggling with the
325 issue of biblical interpretation, the passages that I cited written by Paul. That is holding them
326 back in interpreting them the other way around. Once we go for relevancy, then it means, you
327 will be saying to ignore this biblical text. The Teaching Team is always on loggerheads with
328 the Executive on that but even though there are those in the Executive who 100% support the
329 Teaching Team on this matter. The struggle is how can you get any other persuasive teaching
330 from the scriptures that can authorize the women for ordination. It is the problem that is
331 escalated to the world now, especially in the circle of Pentecostal churches. The Evangelicals
332 and other Orthodox churches have a straightforward theme. No, to pastor ordination of women.
333 But in the Pentecostal churches, there is still some negotiation they are still trying to find some
334 persuasive verses that can support this. It is a difficult issue that will take time even if it will be
335 finally successful.

336 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

337 **Participant 6:** I think in Back to God the direction they are taking now is taking them as
338 workers. And in that position as workers, they need to prove themselves which can make a
339 person like yourself build the case on the success of that woman in the church she ministered.

340 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
341 change in the BTG church?

342 **Participant 6:** I think a line of demarcation should be drawn between pastorate and women
343 leadership in the church. As I said they moved a bit now to allow women in the leadership of
344 deacons and a deaconship position is a permanent position that you leave by death or by sinning.
345 They also have women structures where they allow women to lead. The leadership that is
346 leading the highest number of people in this church is women's supervisors and organisers.
347 And the majority of members in the Back to God are women. Hence by avoiding women, you
348 are avoiding the progress of the church. The church can remain with nobody. Women are in the
349 majority. If you temper with them the church funds will go down, and men will do nothing.

350 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
351 the Cape to Cairo vision?

352 **Participant 6:** You know, what is happening here, you are studying her. You are elevated to a
353 certain level of understanding, of the church and the Word of God. Just have in your mental
354 picture of one of our locals in the township. You pick up a woman there, maybe who has grade
355 12 and you make her a pastor and you pick up a person like you – all of them are going to be
356 ordained. Here is a person put from women – ordinary woman – and here is you with the
357 knowledge about leadership and the Word of God and everything and all these things. Who
358 will perform better? Because there is no training in the Back to God. A woman is being picked
359 up – tomorrow she is in the GRC, and they recommend you from there you spend four years
360 on probation and then you are ordained empty-headed. If one feels God has called her, they
361 must not wait for the RCC – they must go to the Bible college and be trained. Go where pastors
362 are equipped and empowered. I tell you; you will pastor a church like any other man. Back to
363 God is letting these women down because they do not have training. Whether you are a man or
364 woman is the same because you will get to the ministry raw as you are. Women need to
365 empower themselves.

366 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
367 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
368 the outside society

369 **Participant 6:** You know what, I think the question is mixing two things that cannot be
370 mixed. The issue of social service is different from the issue of the church, serving the
371 community. Our approaches are different. The church goes with the message of repentance.
372 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
373 this church?
374 **Participant 6:** They have an organisation where they teach each other, they are organisers, they
375 are supervisors they have been allowed to be deacons no recently, They are also workers.
376 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?
377 **Participant 6:** None, no one resisted women's empowerment, that is why they have been
378 working in the church all this time. Talk about ordination, even there is was never resisted but
379 it is something that was never done even by the founder.
380 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?
381 **Participant 6:** We once elected a woman in the national executive in the past, but it was
382 contested because the office is for ordained pastors.
383 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?
384 **Participant 6:** I do not see women being ordained in the near future. The future of women in
385 Back to God is dim if it is not dark

Appendix D7: Interview with Participant 7 (P7)

Researcher: Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual empowerment.

Participant 7: God revealed to (Baba) Father Bhengu that he must accommodate women (both married and unmarried or mothers and girls). He formed an organisation for mothers, girls, fathers, and the youth (youth being both girls and boys). The first organisation that Baba Bhengu formed was the Mothers' Organisation and all the other groups were copied from the pattern of the Mothers' Organisation. He then introduced the mothers' services which were held on Thursdays, and he taught them the word of God. The girls' services were held on Wednesdays. These weekly services led to monthly to quarterly services to the Mini Convention which is held once by each region and ultimately to the National Convention which combines all the regions in one venue which is Thaba Nchu. The Girls, the Youth, and the fathers meet every December, and the mothers meet during the Easter holidays. This is one of the ways that when I look then I can say that mothers are accommodated, and they work in the church. But here at AOG Back to God, they have their services. For example, in their monthlies, mothers conduct their services, they teach, they preach, and men sit down and listen to them. Even in their quarterlies, mini-conventions, and national conventions, they are the ones who take care of all their work as they do in the monthly services, the fathers are behind. Therefore, I can say that this was Baba Bhengu's historical vision for women's spiritual empowerment. Also, the female preachers are called workers. Well, even male pastors used to be called workers before, it is a recent thing to be called pastors. And there are still sisters who are workers and have been given local churches to lead. Some have planted churches, for example, they have started some churches. There is a church in Maritzburg in Sobantu. Those who know the history of the Sobantu local church say that there was a war there and the women started singing in the streets of Sobantu. It is said that people threw away their weapons. That is how the church in Sobantu started. I understand that these sisters were the first to manage that congregation. Although I am not sure if the sisters started there the Sobantu local is one of the places that is mentioned in the history of the work of the sisters in the Back to God.

Researcher: How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Participant 7: The way the Back to God church is run was revealed to the founder. Reverend Bhengu would ask God before he could do anything he did, even the rules of procedure of the church. Baba Bhengu's determination to empower women is reflected in the rules of procedure

of the church. As I have mentioned before - I will repeat and say that women have their services according to the vision of the founder where they preach and teach and raise funds according to the vision Baba Bhengu saw while he was overseas. In those services starting from weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, mini-conventions, and national conventions the women take care of their business, everything is administered by them. Men only go to those services to support women. They sit down and listen to do what mothers say should be done because it is their service. This way of doing things in the church is in the rules of procedure of Back to God. Because Baba Bhengu when he went abroad in the United States of America to raise funds for the church, he had a vision from God where he saw a mother with a big headscarf. He was then told that the money was in the mother's headscarves and was told to come back to South Africa. When he came back, he started the mothers' services as you can see in the groups we have in the church. He started by building the mothers' organisation then the girls', fathers', and youth organisations followed after. The purpose of these groups was to raise church funds because Back to God is independent. That is when he started teaching women to weave things and doing handwork to sell as a way of raising funds for the church as well as a skill that could help them to make money for themselves so that they can raise children without depending on their husbands. Mothers are at the forefront of this vision of Reverend Bhengu, and they are not disturbed by anyone.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 7: It is very important because, for example, the money that is raised by mothers was meant to fund the Back to God Crusades – (hamba vangeli) “go evangelize” and bring souls back to God, that is why this crusade was called Back to God, but this money also supports pastors' widows. It is surprising to me that Reverend Bhengu came and was relevant at the time that God revealed it to him due to a lot of things that were happening at the time, like the killings in the KZN, in East London, but it seems to me that this vision is even most relevant in our time. A lot is going on, and I think this is when his vision is most relevant.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 7: I can say that the church is still following Baba Bhengu's vision, for example, the money that is raised by mothers is to bring souls back to God, and there are revival tents that are bought from the regional level and national level to evangelize and win souls. Mothers hold services to raise funds for these crusades. But the services of the mothers, as I have already said, are not only concerned with fundraising but also with the teachings, the mothers empower

66 each other according to the word of God - they preach and teach each other - from weeklies,
67 monthlies, and quarterlies.

68 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

69 **Participant 7:** First of all, we do not have many tents running currently. Although they are
70 there, they lack the power, it is no longer the same as in the time of Baba Bhengu. We are
71 waning we need strength. Hey, ey, (uncertain) I can say that maybe the church at large needs
72 to search itself to see where we went wrong because – we no longer have heroes (old sisters)
73 like the sisters who worked with Baba Bhengu, who preached and gave birth to many pastors.
74 Even now we still have a few that still pitch tents and preach but they are very few. In our time
75 it is no longer the same, maybe we do not give them enough support.

76 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
77 for the Back to God Crusade.

78 **Participant 7:** Revival tents are rare, especially after COVID-19. They have been suspended,
79 and even releasing funds to the regions has ceased since COVID-19. But when we look at why
80 the sisters are no longer there, and why the crusades no longer have the power they did during
81 the time of the apostle Bhengu, it may be because of our decline spiritually. We have declined
82 from the standard that was set by Baba Bhengu; we are no longer the same.

83 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

84 **Participant 7:** It may be that after the person who had the vision passed away, the people who
85 were left either had no vision or did not catch the vision the way the visionary got the vision.
86 And maybe we did not do things the way he used to. I can say that it is probably one of the
87 things that led to a spiritual decline. In his capacity as an Apostle, he was able to appoint
88 someone – and say you will go there with the approval of God of course. Maybe because he
89 was the bearer of the vision. Now, we follow his vision and maybe make many mistakes. And
90 maybe now we no longer ask God for direction anymore, instead we ask each other. Baba
91 Bhengu did not follow the procedure much, he was spiritual.

92 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
93 women's empowerment?

94 **Participant 7:** Even though the information I have may not be comprehensive, I can say that
95 there are aspects, for example, in the issue of women's ordination as pastors, that have not
96 happened yet. So, I cannot tell where it got stuck. I do not have a comprehensive answer that I
97 can give. But they are being empowered, because they are working, even in the lack of historical
98 evidence supporting their ordination. But some of the answers I have given above might be the
99 reason; that as the bearer of the vision, he could make decisions with the backing of the Holy

100 Spirit, unlike someone else – and say you will go there with the approval of God of course.
101 Maybe because he was the bearer of the vision. Now, following his vision is a bit difficult and
102 we may be committing a lot of mistakes. As I mentioned Baba Bhengu was a spiritual person,
103 he did not follow the procedure unlike us who rely mainly on the rules of procedure.

104 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
105 the church?

106 **Participant 7:** I can say it was the Apostle Bhengu's vision. All of us who are here in this
107 vehicle have grabbed things according to his way of doing things. Now he passed away without
108 giving the reason for not ordaining women or let me say he passed away before he could start
109 administering women's ordination as pastors. Now it is difficult to change because in his last
110 message, he said we must never remove the landmarks of the church. Now the whole process
111 is slow because it is controlled by the majority. Such issues have to be decided by the
112 conference.

113 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

114 **Participant 7:** They are Organisers and supervisors of women's work and recently they
115 started allowing them to be voted in as deaconesses in the local churches.

116 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

117 **Participant 7:** I think that women are not ready to be ordained. But I would encourage women
118 to register and attend the Bible College and be empowered.

119 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
120 comes to church positions?

121 **Participant 7:** I can say that everything has its time. The way I see it, it seems it is getting there
122 - because some of us were studying with some women, doing some Bible courses. The time
123 may not have come yet, but it is getting closer, even though it is slow.

124 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
125 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

126 **Participant 7:** Maybe this question is difficult for me even though it is clear. There was the
127 Apostle's vision, and everyone who jumped into the car followed his lead. He died without
128 explaining why he had never ordained women or without establishing the ordination of women,
129 therefore the problem is currently advancing slowly. Because the majority has power over the
130 issue, it is democratized. Even though we say that everything depends on the Holy Spirit,
131 decisions are made at conferences. Thus, similar questions have been raised, but they are
132 unanswered as the majority controls the subject. Hence, the only explanation I can offer is that
133 it is not being administered yet because the majority, following in apostle Bhengu's footsteps,

134 has to ratify it. All ideas that are proposed are debated and carefully examined first to determine
135 where they are leading the church. As a result, it takes years to resolve matters.

136 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
137 probationary period like their male counterparts.

138 **Participant 7:** Well, there are some things that I think are difficult to answer because even if
139 they did not go on probation at least they can be allowed to work among certain people, or
140 under certain pastors for a certain period - even if it is not called a probation period. I am
141 struggling to answer this question, but I can say it has not yet happened.

142 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

143 **Participant 7:** The first challenge is that, in congregations, people are not the same, that is why
144 there are RCCs, which are guidelines, so that there is a place where the congregations can
145 account. Some people disregard even the male pastors, how much more when it comes to
146 women? There are still people like that, so now it is one of the challenges, that women are
147 looked down upon because some men believe that they will not be controlled by a woman.
148 Another challenge is that, for married women, the problem may be with the husband, if the
149 husband is not mature – either the man will have to work with his wife or be close to his wife
150 so that he does not suspect his wife. I come from the perspective that, in the local committees
151 we put them in as deacons, and sometimes we release them before our meetings are over so
152 that they can get home on time. It does not feel good when a wife or sister comes home late
153 because of a church meeting. So, on their side, it becomes a problem. Secondly, perhaps, there
154 are challenges in terms of the way people are chosen, mainly using that book in Acts 6 - there
155 is this place that says they should be filled with the Holy Spirit. When a person is filled with
156 the Holy Spirit, it is easy to work together because the challenges do exist even if it is only
157 males because one is filled, and the other is not. It is the Holy Spirit that unites the minds of
158 people.

159 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the
160 church adapting to the times?

161 **Participant 7:** In conferences like the one we are going to where policies are going to be
162 discussed, it is where new questions come up. Such questions challenge the church to examine
163 itself as to where it is now. It is conferences like this that make the church realize that it is still
164 behind and that it is still lagging.

165 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

166 **Participant 7:** What I am thinking is that the key issues that need to be addressed must
167 accelerated. They must be prioritized to be addressed.

168 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
169 change in the BTG church?

170 **Participant 7:** The church is the body of Christ. The body of Christ has parts. The members
171 of the body of Christ are diverse. Now, if there are parts that are pushed aside, the body will
172 not function properly - that is, there will be weakness. For example, when we can think of going
173 to take women out, and we say we are putting them aside. We cannot afford it – that is out
174 because we need each other. We must complement each other, and we must support each other.

175 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
176 the Cape to Cairo vision?

177 **Participant 7:** It could be one of the reasons that even in our crusades we no longer witness
178 the power of the Holy Spirit - like the power that was working during the time of apostle
179 Bhengu. Maybe it is because we do not appreciate the gifts given to women - to embrace them
180 and work with them. It might be one of the things that makes us decline spiritually.

181 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
182 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
183 to the outside society

184 **Participant 7:** It can appear as a church that does not appreciate women, that looks to one side,
185 if we do not ordain women. It may not look like a biased church, but I did mention earlier that
186 women in this church are utilized so much that there are weeklies - that is a revival - you find
187 that a woman is used, she is the one who preaches and even preaches on Sunday. At least they
188 were not sidelined. I can simply say we are getting there; they have been put in a lot. We are
189 growing in utilizing them.

190 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
191 this church?

192 **Participant 7:** They are organisers for women, they are also appointed by supervisors to
193 assume the supervisor positions. Recently they have been added to deaconship in local
194 committees.

195 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

196 **Participant 7:** I cannot say there were any implications, that they went on strike or complained
197 or left because they say they were not given a chance – instead, men are the ones that leave and
198 start their churches. They are empowered in the women's services. They are given good
199 teachings on how mothers must conduct themselves and how a girl must conduct herself.
200 Sometimes they would be saved but the man was not saved – and the man would also be saved
201 because of his wife. There is a place in the bible where it says that if you have an unbelieving

202 man - by your good behaviour as a woman you can win him. Now if a woman misses these
203 teachings, she fails her husband. She may lack the good character to respect her husband if she
204 has not been empowered. Their empowerment yielded positive results from the time of the
205 apostle Bhengu. One of the implications is that some women have spiritually given birth to
206 pastors. Some started churches. So, I see that the empowerment of women has been beneficial
207 because there are also young people who have been saved because of women's evangelism.

208 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance? – **SAME AS ABOVE**

209 **Participant 7:** I cannot say there were any implications, that they went on strike or complained
210 or left because they say they were not given a chance – instead, men are the ones that leave and
211 start their churches. They are empowered in the women's services. They are given good
212 teachings on how mothers must conduct themselves and how a girl must conduct herself.
213 Sometimes they would be saved but the man was not saved – and the man would also be saved
214 because of his wife. There is a place in the bible where it says that if you have an unbelieving
215 man - by your good behaviour as a woman you can win him. Now if a woman misses these
216 teachings, she fails her husband. She may lack the good character to respect her husband if she
217 has not been empowered. Their empowerment yielded positive results from the time of the
218 apostle Bhengu. One of the implications is that some women have spiritually given birth to
219 pastors. Some started churches. So, I see that the empowerment of women has been beneficial
220 because there are also young people who have been saved because of women's evangelism.

221 What I can say is that their empowerment had a positive impact from the time of the apostle
222 Bhengu. One of the implications is that some women have spiritually given birth to pastors.
223 Some started churches. Sometimes they would be saved but the man was not saved – and the
224 man would also be saved because of his wife. So, I see that the empowerment of women has
225 been beneficial because there are also young people who have been saved because of women's
226 evangelism.

227 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

228 **Participant 7:** I would like to say, that what we expect is for women to be empowered, we
229 know that they also have God. Therefore, they must be equipped in the same way as men.
230 Therefore, they must be included in the way we work, supported by the way Baba Bhengu
231 supported them, supported by men, in God's right way. I think those things will happen, albeit
232 slowly.

Appendix D8: Interview with Participant 8 (P8)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 8:** Bhengu understood the women's gifts according to the Bible because you notice
4 in the Back to God, he also had women servants, and I would quote a case in question where
5 in eMmsinga revival the king of amaBomvu invited him to come and preach because there was
6 a lot of violence. Miracles happened blind people were healed, and virgins were speaking in
7 tongues. The king was the first to be baptised and the others followed. There was a faction
8 fighting in uMmsinga. People were killing one another. And Bhengu knew that one of the
9 workers there was called to ministry (There was a sister from Ermelo). Bhengu had appointed
10 her to be a pastor after he left the work. She was stunned and she said Baba Bhengu I cannot
11 because you can see that these are men, and they are fighting. And he said I know that Zulu
12 men cannot not kill a woman. So, he appointed her to be a full-time pastor of that church. There
13 was a special man who used to come and tell her, that (nkosazana) princess, there would be a
14 fight tomorrow. I am telling you because you must tell your people, and you must hide. So, he
15 would hide behind the revival tent's altar and the Zulu people would not come to the tent. She
16 managed the tent and she was the one who was taking the virgins who were prophets and
17 speaking in tongues via certain routes to Pietermaritzburg to join churches because the Zulus
18 at that time used to carry them away and marry them by force; because one of the things they
19 were fighting for was young men proposing young women from another village where he did
20 not belong, then they would fight and say you cannot take this one she is our girl. Another one
21 went to Pietermaritzburg, and when she got to the station the person, she was supposed to meet
22 was not there, but God guided her to the house she was going to. That was a true Pentecostal
23 in a young woman and a true Pentecostal was this sister.

24 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
25 empower women?

26 **Participant 8:** The church constitution, if you look at it, does not emphasise the Bhengu
27 approach much. I think that is one way where Bhengu said, he loves the Assemblies of God
28 because they will allow him to run the Back to God work as he has been taught by God. Bhengu
29 is that person who would say others do this, others do that, and God allows them but to me,
30 Bhengu would do what God has told him. So, as I am writing a book as well when I interviewed
31 some of the mothers, I am sorry because one of them is now late, she was an organiser – she
32 confided to me that she told Baba Bhengu that she has not been called for this thing of

organisation, God has called them to the ministry and Baba Bhengu accepted that. But you will notice in my books some questions – about women’s empowerment that Bhengu was sensitive to not offending the church because he noticed the black culture of men that they thought that a woman especially from the Zulu background was not there to teach them or to take authority above them, so, he said to them, take what I give you now for this time for the time will come when our church will be matured enough to understand women’s ministry.

Hence Bhengu allowed some of them who were called into the ministry to be organisers and said I am giving you this chance that you can teach and minister as the spirit uses you in women’s work but in good time you would be appointed to ministers.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu’s vision for the church today?

Participant 8: Bhengu’s vision is very relevant because when I studied missions, I attended missions at a Pretoria school and got exposure and training. We were exposed to many women, who were running assemblies. Some were from Swaziland, and one of our sisters was a pastor in Limpopo and she is still a pastor. So, I did some research and I found that some regions find Bhengu’s vision of empowering women very relevant because where there were few pastors the RCC and Executive in the Assemblies of God would appoint women to run churches and the elders accepted that but in some other conservative areas you will find that the elders would say we do not support that but some who are wise would always say when they give a woman to preach on a Sunday that we as the elders have agreed and the pastor and fathers also agreed that she must minister on a Sunday. Please do not trouble us in the future and say why do you not do this uniformly to others – because the whole reason is to allow the church to grow uniformly to understand that women are also Pentecostals. But what the Back to God is doing they would ask a senior elder or the pastor himself to introduce the woman so that the congregation should understand that the authority she received is from the eldership and the pastor himself that she should minister. In my experience along the RCC we had some scuffles with some pastors where strong ladies had come to preach and we as ministers and RCC would decide to give her on Sunday. And you could see that some have not yet reached that level of Pentecostalism in women but then we would say look brethren we are looking at the gift and the message she is having that if we can spread to Sunday and the whole church receives it, we will score somewhere and that is how we got it through.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu’s progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 8: I am afraid in that one that, during his lifetime as you notice in his last speech, there were many things God had given him but the church was still immature to receive them,

67 especially the prophetic words which were for the church and even prophetic ministry for us
68 for the nation of South Africa because the nation was still immature and the church was still
69 immature. So, the progressive kind of this vision is still not so clear. I think ministers and people
70 who would research and study and pray for the progressive work of women in the church –
71 could still log on to the Holy Spirit to help us. I am sorry, not very progressive – because most
72 circles are still conservative because of cultural background.

73 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

74 **Participant 8:** I just want to say there is some progression, although not to a wide extent
75 because, on the other hand, the leadership and the pastors do not want to hurriedly destroy the
76 church which grew from a conservative background. But the Pentecostalism of women
77 prophesying or some speaking in tongues although I have not seen many in the strong prophetic
78 office where they would come to the church board and the pastor would say God has sent me
79 with this so, there are very few instances where some are matured to that level. So, then the
80 vision is not so progressive but in cases of some few local churches, that I have seen where
81 women would be allowed to work very strongly. And at some stage, he had to defend this issue
82 of (ukuthwala), headscarves because he said some in Lesotho were working in the banks and
83 some could steal, and the bank gave a ruling that you do not put a headgear on. So, you have
84 to be flexible with that rule and he could allow something like a symbol which is usually a
85 beautiful flower. And this became more popular. At my current local here in Sandton I see a
86 real overflow of Baba Bhengu's vision where you saw a woman closing the church, making
87 benediction. Usually, that is not tolerated by elders because we know that senior usually blesses
88 the juniors. So in the local church, you see the Pentecostalism of women being respected and I
89 think I would applaud the senior pastor of this church for that because you have to look at the
90 session where the church has been so highly spiritual and they have truly logged to the power
91 of the Holy Spirit then a woman can bless but in a small church where they have not come to
92 that level you will be in a big problem as a pastor. And they also pray for kings and all those
93 that are in authority. Now praying for those that are in authority, I will bring it to the teaching
94 of ordaining people because it needs senior and well-seasoned prayer person of the church –
95 that you are bringing people now that are ruling the nation, who are in authority, so you have
96 to be at the right standard of spirituality- almost you know the best men in the Bible or servant
97 of God who could ordain two or three kings. Samuel ordained David, Saul – so he is a shining
98 example of authority for kings and here in our local can also use a woman to pray for the kings
99 and all those who are in authority. I have also heard of one female pastor who preached here in
100 our church. I respect her doctrine, and I used to comment and how she responded. She is a

101 seasoned pastor. She is inspiring even our church board. But we have not reached the level of
102 what you would see in the USA.

103 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
104 for the Back to God Crusade.

105 **Participant 8:** We have women who are serving, but in my last two crusades, we have
106 been trying to raise women – especially to be the task force but I have noticed that when you
107 say come and testify what God has done for you – that is where we see the indications of a
108 strong woman evangelist. But I am sorry we only had the singing they have not testified. So,
109 so far, I would say God has not raised for us strong taskforces I do not know in other regions –
110 as previously we had some who were singing in the Back to God. If you push a lady to the
111 front, you will win a lot of ladies – we still need to train them a lot, especially in the girls
112 meeting for soul-winning.

113 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

114 **Participant 8:** What prompted - is that we have got little gifts from the local churches. As you
115 know Bhengu's approach, we get servants from the church, and we do not rely on the Bible
116 School because anybody can go to a Bible School and study theology and when they are
117 studying it is not so easy to find the strong gifts there, we always see them in the field and in
118 the church – then we can identify them. So, I think the changes have been caused by ..., if the
119 local churches... - because I have been exposed to some regions, and you do not see a lot of
120 sisters coming up who are mostly when you hear them testifying or singing evangelistic. They
121 only teach them to be holy that is it. But to say receive Christ, change from your sin, and come
122 to the cross. You know that tone of testimony is no longer strong with the sisters because they
123 start in the church – so, we are sensing when we attend girls' services that this one is a strong
124 evangelist. If we push her, we can get her to Back to God in the tent.

125 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
126 women's empowerment?

127 **Participant 8:** The evolution of the vision depended more on the members of the Teaching
128 Team who have taught the work but have come closer to the women. I think the church needs
129 a seminar on Bhengu's vision for women and from there we can tap here and there, that actually
130 he had a bigger vision for them like the issue of Emsinga and the appointment of the sister as a
131 pastor but initially tried to refuse to ask pastor Bhengu why he would do that knowing that she
132 is a woman. So, there is also the issue of the inferiority of women enculturated in them that has
133 made the vision not evolve. And the lack of pastoral leadership to teach it. You see, Bhengu's
134 church is a specializing church, but the specializing part of it, of women, girls, men - we have

135 not taken it too much to the front. But now we are too late. We had a visionary like Bhengu,
136 and we did not take some of his specialising branches and we lost.

137 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
138 the church?

139 **Participant 8:** I would think that, that one is a big crunch because you have got to get the whole
140 church when you notice that they say ja! ja! - the woman because Bhengu studied ethnography
141 and you know the cultures of the different ethnic groups in South Africa where they say (umfati
142 or inkosikati – inkosikati) a woman, a woman has been highly respected in the Swazi kingdom
143 and some of the kingdoms because she is the first adviser to the king. But usually, the king is
144 portrayed as the leader of the nation – so, the queen mother is usually an assistant around. So,
145 this approach has come into the church, hence I quote culture. So, to see a woman standing and
146 commanding it will be rare. If you go to some of the Basotho historical exploits, we had a
147 chieftainess in Gauteng who was called Mantantise during the Mfecane. She was leading a lot
148 of men and in our Xhosas, we have a prophetess called Nongqawuse, she was very instrumental
149 in influencing the Xhosa, but you still had the chiefs. So, we have to move a bit in elevating
150 the women. You had Mkabayi in the Zulus – she was the sister to Senzangakhona, a very strong
151 woman. She was a sort of a man at the prophetic level. So, we are looking at women's
152 empowerment, but she was behind the scenes. That is where you see the lagging of your vision.
153 So, the evolution of such empowerment, you will find is mostly linked to our culture which we
154 did not push the women in the front to command the forces. But with Israel, it is different where
155 sometimes you will find Esther up and find Deborah especially Deborah who commanded a
156 war against the enemy of Israel.

157 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

158 **Participant 8:** Except in the groups, like women's work, as our senior pastors' wives. Women
159 are now leading their monthly and the chairperson's wife is also part of that team. In the local
160 church, the pastor's wife is an overseer. That is a very strong role because they oversee the
161 whole work. When you have a case with a woman, you need a pastor's wife. The supervisors
162 are a shining example of Bhengu's vision to the women where they command the whole Good
163 Friday ministry of fundraising, but you do not find them doing doctrinal issues that is the
164 Teaching Team the pastors, and the Executive. So, I think it is just restricted to that. At some
165 time, the pastor's wife is called to a judicial table. There is a story of a young man who was
166 very spiritual, a good preacher, and he got married and this young woman always complained
167 to the pastor that her husband was abusing her. When the elders sat down with the senior pastor
168 to look at the case. The young man was denying saying look at her, she is beautiful. There is

169 nothing wrong I did not do anything. And by a stroke of luck, the Holy Spirit showed the senior
170 pastor – the wife of the senior pastor was busy serving them tea, as she passed through the door
171 the senior pastor said – ok wait and called his wife and said mama take this woman with you
172 into the bedroom and just check her the whole body for me and she did. She opened her back
173 and she had scratches and wounds. The young man was not beating her with punches, but he
174 was abusing her. He was pinching her skin, bringing out wounds even up to the buttocks. Her
175 back was heavily sore. Then the senior pastor excommunicated the young men based on his
176 wife's report.

177 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

178 **Participant 8:** Eh (hesitant) I support it because if you look at Acts 2:17 – the Holy Spirit will
179 call young people to be prophets, especially the young men, young women will prophesy, and
180 men will see visions. Servants of the Lord. All flesh and handmaidens. So, if the Holy Spirit
181 calls a woman. Who are you not to ordain her? But to add to your other question I think the
182 Teaching Team has developed. Although deacons are not being ordained, they have already
183 included women in deaconship in the church leadership. I have not heard of any having them
184 as elders though. In other churches, women are being ordained as pastors and are being ordained
185 elders, so you can see that we are still lagging.

186 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
187 comes to church positions?

188 **Participant 8:** The circumstances that prevent gender transformation is culture as I said Baba
189 Bhengu understood that when he offended the church, he would be offending the body of Christ
190 as you know in the Bible – Jesus approached Saul and said why do you persecute me? So,
191 Bhengu respects the whole resolution of the church, as very serious. Number 2 is maturity, the
192 maturity of the church. We have not yet come to mature the church. Now if you have noticed
193 in our churches, powerful preachers are evangelists. People do not like teaching **because**
194 teaching - you have to mature it is like giving some technical team some time to talk. So, it is
195 not like ecstasy and emotions. So, if the standard of teaching is allowed – not yet diminishing
196 the flame of the Holy Spirit, we would mature quickly. When I researched about Bhengu's last
197 campaign in Lesotho, there was a complaint that, our conventions now are no longer teaching
198 as Bhengu did when he was in Bloemfontein. He would take three hours teaching and that
199 would mature the church but now people like to be hyped and so on. Other circumstances would
200 be – again I would say seminars because in seminars Christians ask questions – and the panel
201 should be mature – that would differentiate between cultural things and the doctrine of the
202 Bible. And also, spiritual because one of the functions of the Teaching Team is to teach the

203 church about the Holy Spirit. That the Holy Spirit would take you to levels that no man has
204 taught you. And when you log to that level – we speak of revelation. The church has not yet
205 reached that kind of revelation. And finally, I remember something – issues like dress are
206 hindering the empowerment of women because our black people are very modest – and the
207 Pentecostalism from abroad where you would see an almost naked woman because of pants –
208 ministering to the church – insinuates our seniors. So, it is a very strong hindrance. So, if women
209 would be on fire being decently dressed, I do not see any problem.

210 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
211 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

212 **Participant 8:** I would not emphasise equal treatment there because of some teachings like
213 Paul's -the woman should not take authority. The first factor I would tell you are the immature
214 husbands. A husband should know how far a gift in his wife goes that she submits to her. For
215 instance, my wife's elder sister is a lecturer in nursing, but I have confirmed that she is a pastor
216 – because her gift and the Holy Spirit once led her to one time I was in Donald Gordon. She
217 ministered to me the Holy Communion which is a sacrament for pastors and God used that
218 Holy Communion in such a way that I started to vomit, and I was delivered from some things
219 because the sicknesses of pastors are not usually medical. There are very bad things and some
220 evil people even including some circles in Pentecostal churches – bewitch pastors. Also, when
221 my children got Holy Communion from her – especially my wife she also had some things
222 troubling her. She so prayed and administered Holy Communion that my wife was also
223 delivered – she vomited. So, we could see the hand of God upon her life. So, the husband first,
224 is the one that should understand and step aside. The other thing is the immaturity of the called
225 women. Some women, when they have authority in the church through gifts but when they
226 come home, they think they have authority in the home as well and they want to command the
227 husband – and those levels are not the same. The spheres of exercise are not the same. So, we
228 have a problem in there. The third factor is the issue of the local church again. The local church
229 has not been taught Acts 2:17 downwards that the handmaidens are pastors – fivefold ministries
230 in the women and you find Paul speaking to some apostles in Rome and the differentiation that
231 the teachers, prophets, and even pastors – they can also be in the local church like in the church
232 in Acts 13.

233 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
234 probationary period like their male counterparts.

235 **Participant 8:** I think it has to do with the Teaching Team and the type of DCC that is there
236 because up to so far, I do not remember one that we have put on probation. We need the
237 Teaching Team and the Executive to give guidance on that.

238 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

239 **Participant 8:** I think it is a very interesting one, you will see yourself with the statistics, that
240 we have got a lot of women more than men. African men are shy to be outshined by a woman.
241 You take a woman, and you put her on the pulpit – she moves – and the whole church moves
242 in the spirit – then the following week you take one of the elders or deacons you put them in
243 the pulpit and the work is dull. So, the approach of Saul, directly or indirectly comes because
244 David outshined Saul because he was the man of praise and the spirit – and generally if you
245 move in the spirit, you will be very high. And if you are a good scholar and faithful disciple of
246 how the spirit moves like women. So that is the first challenge. The second one is – women are
247 meticulous. Women take time to read, prepare, and market themselves with their beauty and
248 the influence of Eve of course – their charm comes on the fore - and they will outshine the men,
249 so, usually because men are dominant. God understand this thing of – I am the boss here. So,
250 sometimes God does not like schisms so, he gives the men their way. But you could say that
251 we are also losing a lot because of the strong women's ministry, we should be advanced like
252 other countries. And, in some ministries abroad, you can see that some African women are
253 documented. Another challenge is that we have not documented our women's ministry so much,
254 for instead if you can start documenting Mylet Bhengu (Bhengu's first wife), how she and Mrs
255 Buthelezi powerfully started the women's movement. That woman moved with God. She was
256 even a mentor for Bhengu because she prayed for Bhengu and she would tell him do not do
257 this, do not do that, please.

258 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
259 adapting to the times

260 **Participant 8:** We are truly conservative, but in the church, I want to tell you there are levels.
261 We have got to get it right with the Back to God first as I said the church must mature to that
262 level because it is not the inculturation of the Africans that demands it, it is the Bible which
263 says handmaids chosen by the Holy Spirit Acts 2:17, and I think the strongest power that can
264 do it, is the General Executive because ordination even probation, we get our credentials from
265 the general executive, so it must move from Back to God level – and I think with the General
266 Executive it might be approved very easily because with General Executive we have the groups
267 – the white church, the colored's and Indians they know that it will be approved. But, with Back
268 to God, – Baba Bhengu left it in that way – you have got to take them forward with teaching.

269 Unfortunately, when brethren choose leadership, they look at a very powerful preacher like an
270 evangelist – which is good – it is not wrong it is God’s gift – but they do not know what
271 leadership is – people who can teach. People must be taught, and they must ask questions.

272 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

273 **Participant 8:** The church needs to be taught and must ask questions. Seminars are crucial in
274 this case. You should mature the church. Discussions. And I think in that case also you can add
275 that people who usually bring good change like in the 1976 revolution, and we are free with
276 them are the youth. If the youth can bring up these questions and they take senior pastors as a
277 panel maybe enlightened people that we know, who would say in my experience in my local I
278 have seen this. That would help the church. That would bring radical change.

279 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
280 change in the BTG church?

281 **Participant 8:** The consequences that we have is that the church will remain on the same
282 themes of teaching like submitting to your husband in an extremist way that a prophetic word
283 can never be said by a woman to a husband because it will offend him – and those kinds of
284 things that we find a redundant church. The flame will be extinguished – because this is what
285 caused the mainline churches to be. They stayed only in one mode; they did not have radical
286 change as our pastor is pushing. Radical change and change drivers are the leaders at the front.
287 If God would give him a chance, I would advise him also to take this kind of teaching to the
288 Executive, to the RCCs, and to the Teaching Team. Once they grab the hype – the spirit of
289 radical change which of course if you know change management, you cannot avoid change. In
290 change there are also challenges and augurs, so, the consequences will be at the same level and
291 keep on going down and the light of God will leave us.

292 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women’s ordination has affected
293 the Cape to Cairo vision?

294 **Participant 8:** First and foremost, reluctance has destroyed us because women are hasty and
295 emotional. In that case, they could have acted like Jael’s wise wife, and he killed the enemy.
296 And women are also very subtle like Rahab, who understood the change that was coming
297 through the Israelite army and the fame of leaving Egypt. And she gave the spies covering. So,
298 you find women in the forefront allowing the vision to go forward, like Rahab. And Mirriam
299 who would burst into song and revive the whole nation. So, it has stopped Cape to Cairo in a
300 way that we sing Cape to Cairo, we no longer preach and teach Cape to Cairo. Number two,
301 strategizing for Cape to Cairo and studying how to do missions today – contextually with
302 today’s studies. We have left it and yet Bhengu was very flexible. Where it was the land for

kings, he would preach traditionally and win his Zulu conservatives. And where it was an urban area – they would call him Manotsha because he would put a cap. He was flexible in facing all situations.

Researcher: Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and to the outside society?

Participant 8: The denomination as you correctly have implied in the previous question would look too conservative and backward. But another thing the denomination will also look in the manner of disvaluing the women and lacking confidence in them - in their training. And whilst speaking of that I am sorry to say, you could be few of the women who wish to have that should be trained in theology. Some women do not go deep in theology, and this includes the issue of losing value in them, but should they go deeper on sowing their training – Bible studies, they should impress even the local church, and even outside the church. So, it will just speak of the two things you have mentioned, lack of value looking down upon women, and being conservative. The other churches even now scorn at us. But not to say that we should be so liberal like other churches that should allow things to be loose. They would allow feminism, gays, and lesbians – very extreme stuff. I will be very against that. The church of God must remain Holy while everyone runs on their own track.

Researcher: What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this church?

Participant 8: In the youth women are added to the panels to answer questions. And recently with the addition of women in the local church – like deacons – it is empowering women. I am not looking at the specializing groups for girls and mothers, those are very, very exquisite and doing well. I would like just to warn of the extremism of women there, in making the year planner they demand too much for the groups that the local church is suffering. But empowering the church, really women are trying. In our Bible school at Henley on Klip, I have seen a few female students from different regions, but I do not know about the current year. But in our church, there are few strides in empowering women which I have seen. We should always start with the girls and Sunday school. I saw in Sandton City today, on a Sunday, the MC was a woman, and the way she was dressed gave the church the decorum. Because the issue of decorum is also important.

Researcher: What were the implications of resistance in the past?

Participant 8: There was a lot of resistance especially, some senior pastors were not so good in theology. The type of pastors, Baba Bhengu had – I will say something that Bhengu said –

and something had made him angry, and he said – But God, how do you give me people like this who are foolish? So, they could not catch his vision very well, especially the Cape to Cairo. And also their cultural background of chieftainship and all those things have been engraved in them from youth and childhood that to see a woman doing something was not good, so, they used to go and complain to Baba Bhengu when women were getting the upper hand, that (kanti le cawe seyiphethwe ngabomama, amadoda enzani) this church is now run by women – and what are men doing? That is, I would say conservatism. And some other resistance, you will be surprised, came from ladies themselves. Some ladies did not like women's empowerment because usually some young ladies, educated ladies, were getting the upper hand. When they ministered, when they did things, it was good. The older women, some wives of the church leaders also criticize the younger women that they do not do handwork, and they do not attend their services because they think they are educated. That is an insult. They were very strict.

Researcher: What are the current implications of resistance?

Participant 8: The current implication of resistance is that we are missing a lot of talent from good women. And I would like to say let us go back to the drawing board, like youth seminars. Another setback is that when Bhengu taught the girls, he did not give them a seminar and the old organisers say ‘We do not have a seminar’ and the mothers also say ‘We do not have a seminar’ but they forget that Bhengu was flexible. If there are these kinds of needs for a seminar – like the trick – they invited people to Thaba Nchu after COVID-19 and they said Women’s Seminar and when we came there, they said we do not have a seminar – they started fundraising. I was so disappointed. Seminars for youth, girls, and mothers. We should approach the Teaching Team – they have the license to open these things – to grow the work. Bhengu told them before he died that you keep the work intact for three years – only after three years – you can re-elect and do the work as it fits the occasion. So, the Teaching Team and the Executive do have the license to make the work flexible – not to keep it in the little crucible way.

Researcher: What are the expected aspects of change in future?

Participant 8: Well, we will start with women's ordination. The change should be towards empowering them for full ministry with the necessary training of where their authority starts and ends because women are subject to men – that is still a biblical doctrine. And change in how the local church should view women and their gifts – spiritual in praise and worship, not just in the local church but up to the national convention – because women have not been trained to know the limits of their authority. In policy formation, women should be very careful – the year planner is out of proportion, and they are squeezing the local church to death. And the women are stubbornly holding so, and they say we will not give you money and you find that

371 the pastors would not like to offend the church, and they would allow them grudgingly. So, if
372 you empower women, tell them the boundaries of their authority.

Appendix D9: Interview with Participant 9 (P9)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 9:** Though I was not there during his time, we are hearing from our senior
4 ministers, Bhengu believed that God the Holy Spirit indwelt all believers including women and
5 he believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not limited by gender. He would then use every
6 person including women when he sees that they are gifted. He would use them in tent crusades.
7 He used a lady here in Alice. She was in Bhengu's Crusade team. We hear that in KwaZulu
8 Natal there was a place where he pitched a tent, and he could not get any breakthrough until
9 she gave it to this lady God did wonders there and a church was started there. And Bhengu
10 would also give someone a platform even if she is a woman. He was empowering them because
11 even when he was doing his teachings, women would also be there, and he believed that
12 everyone should seek the face of the Lord. He believed in the priesthood of all believers. That
13 is, I could say that he believed that they should be empowered hence he had a department of
14 women to teach them a Godly character and encourage them to pray understanding that, out of
15 that the gift of the Holy Spirit in them will be activated.

16 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
17 empower women?

18 **Participant 9:** I would say the church is still on track because the church has not moved away
19 from what pastor Bhengu was doing in terms of using women. The women's department is still
20 operational as it was before, on weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, Mini conventions, and
21 Conventions. We are seeing women being used in big platforms of our church. If women are
22 anointed for tent crusades no one will stand in her way. There was a lady in East London – she
23 is late now; she was young, and she was working in crusades and people were getting saved
24 and the whole leadership was fully supporting her until she was taken to preach at the Back to
25 God crusade of the region, so, I would say even now, if anyone is anointed by God and is
26 passionate to do the work of the Lord, I think my church is still open for that. To mention our
27 Eastern Cape region just last year at our youth convention, our speakers were a woman from
28 the former Transkei and a pastor from this region. On Sunday the main service was given to
29 the woman.

30 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 9: I would say the man was from above, really, because the vision he had, is relevant for all generations. If you look at his documents, he has written the constitution and the way he understood and interpreted the scriptures is amazing. As I continue with my theological studies since I started from a junior degree, I am amazed at how special he was. That man had time with God. Very relevant even in our time, but the problem we have is the leadership we have in our time, they limit themselves and they complain that the church is limiting people. If you talk about a denomination that is not limiting anybody, it is the Assemblies of God. But people do not take advantage of the open ground that is there. People can be developmental, and they can enlarge their territory. The field is there but people have enclosed themselves in a small scope. If you elect a youth Committee, what they do they just maintain what has been there, and they do not open your grounds – they are in blinkers and they will come and complain that our church blah blah blah. When you are a leader, you must be able to break new ground. Think out of the box and that is when you will find followers. People need to be inspired by something new. They must have a reason to follow you. So, the structure of the Assemblies of God will be relevant for 20 years to come. For example, in the Eastern Cape, we still have the challenge of strictly confining people when it comes to the issue of attire, yes, we do support the descent way of dressing up for everyone, but the challenge then is when we strictly say that if women are wearing trousers, they are not born again. Then we are being limited and that makes us irrelevant for this time. That is only there where I would say it is not right because our children are going to varsity and are in SCO's and they see women wearing trousers and being used by God so powerfully. And when they come and are resisted, then they can leave and look for a ministry that will embrace them.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 9: Unfortunately, everything in Back to God if I would speak the truth deteriorating and dwindling, for example, I will use the example of the handwork. Pastor Bhengu had the vision of Supermarkets and factories that would create jobs and employment, that would put food on the table; that would develop and impact communities because he prophesied that the apartheid regime would come to an end. The black person would have freedom. But if you at it now, it is just a matter of going to Thaba Nchu, just showing things there and people buy there, and you ask what benefit you got from this handwork – nothing. That was not Pastor Bhengu's vision. He also said young people must educate each other with youth fund because he had a vision that young women and men would occupy the highest positions in the government and become presidents, CEO's and have an influence in policy making and impact

65 – because he was not just looking at the Assemblies of God – and impact the world with the
66 Gospel. He understood that if we pitch tent crusades, reaching out, we are winning people and
67 when they come, they must be developed and be sent back to the world – and that way we can
68 impact. That was his vision. So, I would not say it is fully progressive because we are seeing
69 the corruption outside there – I always ask people, in this big corruption that we have – where
70 are we as Christians because in all these departments we have Christians. And how come there
71 is so much corruption – where are the Daniels of today, those who would say I will never defile
72 myself?

73 I would say by having the women’s departments whereby he said that they must be taught how
74 to love their children, how to love their husbands and be taught spiritually in their organisation
75 so that they can have an impact I would say that if you look today there is big pressure even
76 with women who want to be recognised as powerful preachers as a result of that most of them
77 are neglecting the basic teachings that pastor Bhengu instructed them to specifically that – you
78 older women teach young ones to love their husbands, to raise children and to clean and work
79 hard at home. No one is teaching those teachings. They are fading away, and everyone wants
80 to talk about anointing, fire, and all those things and now you see the rate of divorce is becoming
81 high because women have neglected the basic teachings of building homes. And it happens
82 both on the side of men as well. So, the rate of immorality is rising because the biblical basic
83 teachings of Christlike character are neglected. After all, everyone when they preach wants to
84 be invited again.

85 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

86 **Participant 9:** I think it is quite a hard thing at our church at the moment, because it is a
87 question of biblical doctrine. There is pressure that women should be ordained as pastors. And
88 they should come to the office of elders and deacons and there is still a disagreement on that. I
89 remember when I was still pastoring in Alice, then I was going to go to the radio station “Fort
90 Hare FM”. Just before me was an old man who was a pastor also from another church. He was
91 saying that the church is discriminating against women because some churches do not want to
92 ordain them. They do not want to give them the positions of being Bishops and all that stuff.
93 So, when I came in the presenter said what is my comment on that and I said it is a question of
94 a biblical doctrine. I would not love a person talking to Christians and not quoting scripture.
95 One should say according to Paul or so and so, according to this book and this chapter - having
96 done a correct biblical interpretation and convincing us that the scripture is saying that –
97 because there is a tendency to say that there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor
98 female according to God of which that is not true, that is specifically speaking about ‘in

99 salvation', 'in coming to Christ'. We come to Christ in the same way but when it comes to
100 gender, there are specific roles that the Bible gives, that a woman can do, and that man can do.
101 It is the same as in the family situation. I would like my wife – there are my responsibilities,
102 the way I am created is different to the way she is created and the things she is supposed to be
103 doing. Now the challenge is that now, the Back to God is saying if the Teaching Team is going
104 to elect Elders and Deacons – now we are saying strictly for the position of elder because an
105 elder is a pastor and an elder is an overseer, so we strictly keep that to male because in the
106 scripture there is nowhere where you find a pastor and an elder who is a woman. But there is
107 room when it comes to the church board and deacons, those who will be serving - because an
108 elder is responsible for teaching, responsible for home visiting, is responsible for discussing
109 cases, and judging them but when it comes to the deacons it is a matter of serving. Where there
110 are no men, or there are mature women, then on to the church board they can be part of
111 leadership. And some can be deacons because some are good. In Romans chapter 16, Pheobe,
112 though there is a debate on that one because the Bible says she was a deacon, and that deacon
113 there if you taking to Greek, it does not talk about the office, it talks about a servant, of which
114 every Christian is a servant – all of us we should be serving each other. And there is an office
115 of a deacon, whereby then you are responsible, you are expected to be serving people generally.
116 But I think there is a development because you see a lot of women on church boards which that
117 is an improvement in terms of utilizing women. Also, women are very sympathetic, so, pastors
118 like women in their leadership because they are sympathetic – they can feel for a pastor.

119 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
120 for the Back to God Crusade.

121 **Participant 9:** I would say they are because some are full-time in terms of singing. The
122 committee that is leading there, yes of course we have not come to that level, it is only pastors,
123 and I would not see any reason because that is not an office that is operating at the local church.
124 We should by now have women on the national Back to God Committee, we should have.
125 However, we do have female workers. And also, when there is a crusade woman do preach on
126 the national Back to God crusade.

127 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

128 **Participant 9:** We still have some preaching in our region, there is not much change, and you
129 still see them in many platforms like youth week, women's week, and girls' week preaching.

130 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
131 women's empowerment?

132 **Participant 9:** It is a question of a biblical doctrine, does the Bible evolve? no, it is the same
133 yesterday, today, and forever. His Word stands the same – it is not subject to evolving according
134 to different generations. If the scripture is precisely saying that in the office of an elder and
135 pastor. I do not think by the changing of times we as the church should not be pressured by the
136 pressure outside, otherwise, we would not be interpreting the scriptures correctly. So, that is
137 why I am saying it is the question of a biblical doctrine. For example, if you talk about
138 Executives, they are national deacons, I will not see any reason women cannot serve there. But
139 now the church is saying that, a person that has to be there must be an ordained minister with
140 at least ten years in ministry to be elected. If then for instance – generally our understanding of
141 shepherds is male. The shepherding part of the flock is for males, you would not expect women
142 to be shepherds. You would expect them to work inside. But if you look at the daughters of
143 Jethro – Jethro had no son, only girls – what did they do – they were shepherds because there
144 were only girls. If Jethro had sons, those girls would not be shepherds. If we have men, ordained
145 ministers who can do the job, why should we bother women because they have a huge
146 responsibility? My point is by not taking women to be pastorate, to be elders, we are not limiting
147 them because their plate is full. If then they go there and interact with cases and all that and
148 travel all around, who is going to raise children? Who is going to teach younger women? Who
149 is going to sustain homes – because they have a huge responsibility that God has created them
150 for? That is a biblical argument. If they would neglect their assignment and pursue other
151 people's assignment there would be a void somewhere and then that would be a challenge.

152 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
153 the church?

154 **Participant 9:** I would say again it is a question of biblical interpretation; how we view
155 scriptures when it comes to the hot debate of women in ministry. I do not like the way they put
156 it to say women in ministry - they should say women in position on pastorate because they are
157 already in ministry because if they are teaching women and teaching children – that is ministry.
158 Some of them are doing home visits, and hospital visiting that is ministry. Now the question of
159 ordaining them for the office of pastorate, for the office of elder I think the Bible does not
160 reflect or although the Bible is not explicitly saying that women should not be ordained but we
161 take a pattern from the scripture. The scripture says that men of but one wife. To all the leaders
162 there, New Testament leadership positions even if you look at the Old Testament, kings were
163 men, prophets were men, priests were men and then judges you would have a mixture and
164 Christ Jesus came and elected 12 males and when it comes to the positions of the leadership it
165 will always say elect men and then it gives the characteristics of a man that should be there. So,

166 if then we would have to ordain women for pastorate and elder, I would struggle to find a
167 scripture that would support that unless I would have to bend those pones and say that the man
168 that is there is not in masculine gender of which is not true. I think that is the problem that
169 would hinder. And those churches that are liberal, that are free to do what they think is good
170 even though the Bible does not celebrate it that is what they are doing. But those who are
171 reformed would listen to what the scripture is saying and will follow the scriptures, and it would
172 never be easy for them to do that, unfortunately.

173 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

174 **Participant 9:** As I have already alluded to they are being utilized, greatly so than my early
175 days of my joining the Back to God. It used to be very strict. Now, some women are having big
176 platforms than me as an ordained pastor. For example, if in the Eastern Reef they want to have
177 a youth week, a girls' week a women's week, or a Sunday School seminar, on those four
178 departments women are not limited at all. They preach from Friday till Sunday. So, for me, if
179 a person would say they are limited, I would want to know, what do you mean by that? It is
180 only the department of men, whereby a men's quarter would not invite a woman to come and
181 speak on men's quarter. Why - there are men – if there were no men to come and talk, they you
182 would look at compromising them.

183 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

184 **Participant 9:** I am maybe influenced by my theological studies. I have done reformed
185 theology. I am very cautious of implementing what I do not see in the scriptures. I would not
186 have any feeling other than giving a biblical understanding because it is not a matter of how I
187 feel, that is not how we interpret scriptures. We do not interpret scriptures on how we feel. We
188 discover and we seek to know the original intent of the original author – was speaking to who
189 – what was happening – what was he saying – what was their understanding then we come up
190 with a clear hermeneutics in that passage. That is what we believe is the Word of God to relate
191 to people – not what I feel. I discover what is there. The context, the meaning of words and the
192 reason why did he say that – how did they understand the original audience – how does it apply
193 to us currently. So, you will be surprised when I say to you. **I would not be happy.** You know
194 I have been married for 18 years now. Some men are saying that women should be ordained –
195 women should be given opportunities and should be ordained. I interviewed every person who
196 says that, if he is married – I always ask – can your wife be a pastor? He starts to say no then I
197 say whose wife do you want to go there? He would point to someone's wife, and I would say
198 to him, if you go to her husband, he will tell you that my wife will not stand the position of
199 being a pastor. Emotionally, she cannot take it, she would rather shout or be angry or quit

200 because there is too much pressure there. She is not designed for that. She can preach but
201 pastorate is not just preaching. You are dealing with... You must say No, you must face people
202 and say that this is wrong, you cannot do this – why have you done this? You must step down.
203 Paul says to 1 Timothy 1:3, if I delay since I am going to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus that
204 you may stop those who teach false doctrine. The church of Ephesus was an old church with
205 elders, Timothy was a young man, ordained and inducted and given a clear assignment. So, can
206 a woman confront an old man who is doing wrong things in the church and say what you are
207 doing is wrong and would sit in a meeting and engage? They cannot stand that.

208 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
209 comes to church positions?

210 **Participant 9:** I think Paul in the first letter to Timothy was instructing Timothy on church
211 operations. The theme of the letter is chapter 3 verse 15 – if I delay, I write to you that you may
212 know how we ought to conduct ourselves in the church which is the pillar and the foundation
213 of the truth. He is instructing him. Firstly, in the first letter, he gives his testimony, and he gives
214 the clear assignment that he must do to those who teach a false doctrine. Chapter Two, the order
215 of the church – what is the first important thing to be done he touches on women that women
216 must be silent in the church, he does not allow them to teach, he does not allow them to have
217 authority over men because they were deceived and sinned, not man. And he continues to deal
218 with other issues, instructing on how Timothy should aim to conduct and direct the church. Not
219 just saying push them away but giving them their place.

220 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
221 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

222 **Participant 9:** I think we have mentioned the issue of being emotional, number two is the
223 scriptural interpretation that hinders because people when they look at the issue of church
224 positions, follow the scriptures. I would not say by not ordaining them we are not treating them
225 equally, but I would say that women are being utilized 100 per cent in our church for what they
226 are supposed to do, and men are utilized 100 per cent for what men ought to do. Equality does
227 not mean doing the same job – some jobs can be done by men only. Even though people keep
228 on saying we should be equal, we should be equal, I think people misinterpreted what Mandela
229 had in mind. The Mandela equality was that; if you are an SCEO and I am CEO our salaries
230 should be the same. That is what he was saying but he was not saying we must do the same job
231 regardless of gender because the way your body is created is not the same as the way my body
232 is created. You cannot carry heavy stuff, I can provide manpower, so, the same applies to the
233 functions in the church. Even culturally speaking some issues must be handled by men that

234 women cannot handle, even if you say take this responsibility. They will not be able to. So, if
235 the church now turns a blind eye to gender issues, then that is a big problem. That is unrealistic.

236 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
237 probationary period like their male counterparts.

238 **Participant 9:** I think the church is limited on that, I do not see why they cannot be ordained
239 for what they are doing because the Back to God ordains people for deaconship, elder, and
240 pastor only. The question is why? Why would you not ordain an evangelist and say that she is
241 being ordained as an evangelist? (The elder office is a spiritual office, and the deacon office is
242 a practical office – 00:51:27) In the fivefold ministry you have the gift of prophecy, apostle,
243 evangelist, teacher, and a gift of the pastorate. They are in the same office. But the question is
244 now if a person is gifted as an evangelist – it is not a matter of being ordained and what, but it
245 is a question of function. If a person would be ordained just to establish a church and then goes,
246 he is not sitting there, pastoring and teaching and dealing with issues then I would not have a
247 problem of ordaining that person. So, what I think is that the Back to God ought to because
248 what I do not like is that there is a woman (like the female pastor in Cape Town) who is doing
249 the same thing as other men – then you would ask a question – is she on the regional payroll of
250 people that are pastors. You will find that she is not treated equally as the other pastors, and
251 she is doing a big job.

252 So, then I would say – for me that person can be helped and be given a stipend like all the
253 other people that are working there and but specifically saying that we are ordaining you for
254 this. The problem that is always in the church is funds otherwise we would be saying those
255 who are evangelists must remain evangelists and then have pastors to lead the churches so
256 that they can use their gifts where they are needed. We say go and preach in the preaching
257 point – run a crusade the whole year, we will give you monthly support. When we see that he
258 is finished we say, go there but now the problem is that who is going to pastor that preaching
259 point, I must take an applicant and put him there, and where am I going to get funds?

260 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

261 **Participant 9:** I would say that some of them are being threatened, because sometimes we have
262 very gifted preaching women, so men get threatened by them and sometimes they begin to
263 discriminate against them as if they are making themselves better than others. That is generally
264 then. But for me, I believe that if God has called someone and has anointed that person, no one
265 can be before that person. One female preacher used to say no (akunamuntu ongavimba umuntu
266 wesifazane ofuna ukubeletha noma ungathi alikho igumbi lokubeletha, uzobeletha la ekhona)
267 - no one can stop a woman who wants to give birth, even if you say there is no delivery room,

268 she will give birth where she is. She says if you are ready to deliver, nobody can stop you. If
269 you are being stopped, you are not due.

270 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the
271 church adapting to the times?

272 **Participant 9:** I think in the church context we should not be afraid, and we should expect that
273 we will be challenged with the stand that we take if we take a biblical stand, we should not be
274 worried because the church has been called with names because the world wants the church to
275 conform to the world standard. So, as the church, we should not be threatened by that. We look
276 at the scriptures and we stand for what the Bible says and let everybody say whatever they say
277 because those churches that are not ordaining women are interpreted as being conservative and
278 discriminative to women. They are not gender sensitive of which we are saying that - it is a
279 question of biblical doctrine, it is not a question of time, it is a question of biblical interpretation.

280 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

281 **Participant 9:** It must not change; one must operate within the parameters of God's ordained
282 platform. I am saying again if you are called by God – just do what the Lord said you must do.
283 Do not fight for the position. Do not even ask for the ordination – just do what the Lord is
284 saying because nobody can stand against the function – just do it. If you feel you are anointed
285 to preach, go and preach and people will only see when you are there – people cannot deny the
286 reality of what they see. If anyone is called by God and the Lord is leading them in that direction
287 – they should do it. But the part that I do not agree with is when a woman would go to a place
288 where there is no church and preach and people get saved and a church is established, and
289 people begin to give and tithe and would take that tithe and centralize it and, on month-end,
290 you do not pay that person. That is satanic, that is demonic, that is cruel. We need to look at
291 the welfare of that person. She is the one that must enjoy the fruits of her labor.

292 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
293 change in the BTG church?

294 **Participant 9:** Again, I would say that, why would we change it? For me, I say there is nothing
295 that should be changed on the gender issue because the Back to God is utilizing everybody
296 including women. People should just be encouraged to do what the Lord has called them to do
297 because the consequences that it might have been where a woman is called by God to preach –
298 and you say you are a woman; you should not be preaching – then that is where the problem is.
299 Then the consequences are that we are limiting God's work. We are frustrating people. The
300 consequences would be that people would begin to start independent churches because a person
301 who is called cannot sit down - if she is being stopped to preach then she will just move out.

302 Once a person lives the Back to God, people start to hate that person, there are no relations
303 nothing, and as if that person is now an enemy which it is just an extension of God's kingdom.
304 And you find that if you try to utilize them within the Back to God they would refuse and they
305 prefer a pastor of another ministry who does not even know Back to God – to give that person
306 a platform than their former fellow pastor. So, there are consequences because the kingdom of
307 God is not moving as it is supposed to be. So, we are frustrating people, and we are creating
308 problems, and we are opening unnecessary gaps.

309 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
310 the Cape to Cairo vision.

311 **Participant 9:** If the ordination would be connected to giving support financially then I would
312 say yes it does. But if we say we are not going to ordain you as a pastor because you are a
313 woman; you cannot be in the office of a pastor, but we will pay you stipend for what you are
314 doing then there is nothing that will be hindering the Cape to Cairo vision. What is blocking
315 the Cape to Cairo is that the church at large has dropped spiritually. There is corruption in the
316 church, financial corruption, moral living and cruel people hating each other. It is about what I
317 get -money – wealth – material things. We do not have people who are still hungry for God's
318 anointing – who are saying that I will preach the gospel, and I am leaving everything.

319 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
320 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
321 the outside society?

322 **Participant 9:** They would say that we are discriminating, and we are not recognising that
323 God's gift can be in women of which I think the church maybe might think of ordaining
324 evangelist because the issue of ordination is a matter of being given a certificate – recognition
325 by your church. The anointing comes from God.

326 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
327 this church?

328 **Participant 9:** Bigger platforms are given to them. There are no problems when women come
329 and say I am going to pitch a tent, or I am having an event.

330 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

331 **Participant 9:** The church was not growing because in the Eastern Cape you would hear that,
332 more especially in the rural areas, women have planted churches. Because they would come
333 and work here during holidays, they go home and start to preach and establish churches. Once
334 you limit them not to do that then you are hindering the growth of the church, numerically and
335 spiritually.

336 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

337 **Participant 9:** The implication would be the same if they are not allowed to do what the Lord
338 has laid in them – either male or female we are hindering the growth of the church, numerically
339 and spiritually.

340 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in future?

341 **Participant 9:** The church must pray; the church must live a Christlike character and impact
342 the society. Firstly, by the way they live. Paul speaking in the first letter to the church of
343 Thessalonica chapter 1 – he says the gospel we preach to you today did not come with words
344 only, but also with power of the Holy Spirit – for you have seen the way we have conducted
345 ourselves before you. And you have also imitated us. Which means that the Gospel that we
346 preach to you was so powerful that it raised the dead, it delivered people from sin but the
347 evidence that we have seen – it is our lifestyle. We were different in the way we live to the
348 society of Thessalonica, and you accepted the gospel, and you also imitated us. The power of
349 the same Gospel that transformed us also transformed you and you have seen its power. You
350 have accepted the Gospel with great joy in the midst of tribulations.

Appendix D10: Interview with Participant 10 (P10)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 10:** Since there is nothing in writing that outlines his vision, I will offer my
4 opinion. Based on how our church is organised concerning other Pentecostal, Evangelical, or
5 charismatic churches, I believe he valued women and provided them with a space to participate
6 in church activities. For example, even though we do not yet have female pastors, our church
7 is among the Christian institutions that permit women to serve in leadership roles. When our
8 church got started, we had people called female workers who were fully operational in the
9 ministry. These female workers would arrive where there were no churches and they would
10 exercise their gift, evangelizing and they planted churches. Some of them were allowed to look
11 after those churches, of course under the supervision of a recognised pastor, that is point number
12 one. Number two, we have people here in the church who are called organisers (both mothers'
13 and girls' organisers), who are females. These are also known as opportunities, to exercise their
14 gifts which I would put in the women's ministry. So, in other words, pastor Bhengu had a place
15 in his heart for females, to be empowered and to participate in the building of the body of Christ.

16 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
17 empower women?

18 **Participant 10:** Although it varies from person to person, in general, the church partially
19 carries out pastor Bhengu's vision, if not entirely. This is because the women workers and the
20 organisers, whom he introduced during his lifetime, are still in place and continue to function
21 even after his passing. In other words, the church picked up where pastor Bhengu left off with
22 his vision.

23 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

24 **Participant 10:** It could be relevant to some people and irrelevant to others, particularly in the
25 case of the organisers for various reasons. Still, they continue to function, and new organisers
26 continue to emerge. Maybe what helps us is how cautious our church is about these things; you
27 have probably heard the phrase "never remove the pillars of this church" and so on. What I am
28 trying to say is that, despite our differing perspectives, this is how the church founder saw
29 things. Therefore, we do not have a choice because we must be careful not to work against his

vision because he is the one who established the church, each of us joined a wagon that was already in motion, it is not our vision but pastor Bhengu's vision.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 10: As I said, the vision is important in any organisation because the organisation is built on the vision of the person who founded it, and the vision is what makes the organisation different from other organisations. So, from time to time, it should be updated for instance as we are Back to God, our vision is designed so that - because we do not enter salvation at the same time, to work as pastors, organisers, and all those that are in positions of leadership, we enter at different times. Therefore, the vision of Pastor Bhengu, from time to time should be taught. Let me quote to you one example; If we are talking about our organisation - the church groups as in the mothers' group, the father's group, the sister's group, the young people's group, and the Sunday school. As we know, every year, congregations are visited by organisers of different groups to revive the vision, teach, and elect new committees. That is how the vision of the founder is maintained so that in the long run the vision of the founder is not lost. So now the church is two-fold, the church has this aspect of organism which according to me is the most important part because there will be no organisation without organism. It is the main reason for us to be here, we were called by the word of God. Now, with the development of people, this aspect of the organisation appeared. So, the organism also needs to be supported or encouraged, but I want to be honest with you that many times the organism suffocates, and it is suffocated by the organisation. I have realized that a lot of weight is placed on the side of the organisation. For example, there is a church year planner where all the things that need to be done in the year are slotted in. You will find that there are a few things concerning the church, our year planner, is full of organisational things. In my own opinion, this is the only thing that I am not happy about, that the organisation is supported a lot at the expense of the organism and is not balanced. –Now you ask yourself to say, is it about the organisation or is it about the organism? I don't know how pastor Bhengu was going to handle that if he was still alive. That is the only aspect that I am not sure about whether pastor Bhengu would be happy if he could wake up from the grave and see this because in the end, the church has a clear mandate in Matthew 28:19-20 which says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations. That is the main reason for the existence of the church.

Researcher: How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

62 **Participant 10:** This will be related to what I just said that the focus now is on the organisation
63 more than the organism. Let me give you an example, the only places I can think of where there
64 are still workers are in the former Transkei in the Eastern Cape, and there are not many female
65 workers in the Western Cape. Women are only present at revivals, and even then, they are
66 merely singing; they are not free to carry out their ministry or concentrate on it. It indicates that
67 the vision is no longer being properly tracked because that thing of workers is no longer visible.
68 Now, in the former Transkei, where I mentioned that there were workers, I do not think there
69 are any under the age of 50 years old. All of them are over 60 years old, and they received the
70 opportunity to be workers from Pastor Bhengu while he was still alive. Apart from that, you
71 cannot find anyone who is called a female worker having been recognised in our generation.

72 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
73 for the Back to God Crusade.

74 **Participant 10:** There are a lot of factors that contribute to this. The organisational structure
75 has become the most powerful entity of the denomination and has overcome the church. Once
76 a woman shows some signs, qualities, or indication of a calling, is thrown into the organisation
77 and given the title of organiser. This indicates that we are no longer appreciating female
78 workers who will operate freely and without constraints. Secondly, for us who are now here,
79 it is also a question of culture or tradition. This has an element of tradition. We have not
80 inherited or shown reverence to our late father, Bhengu. We tend to believe that God
81 exclusively employs men and that God only uses women to a limited extent.

82 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

83 **Participant 10:** Like I said, I think it is a question of culture or tradition. I will repeat that we
84 have not inherited or shown reverence to our late father, Bhengu. As men, we tend to believe
85 that God exclusively employs men, and that God only uses women to a limited extent. It is
86 something that is in us, we have convinced ourselves.

87 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
88 women's empowerment?

89 **Participant 10:** Our church is gradually moving away from that way of thinking. I will explain
90 why. Our church used to only have male elders and deacons, but as of late, we have added
91 female deacons, indicating a slow but noticeable shift. Maybe soon we will have female elders
92 until we have female pastors.

93 This is a very good question in such a way that I can start by saying that even pastor Bhengu
94 himself, we believe that everything he did and implemented was not out of his mind but he was

95 doing it being led by the Holy Spirit in such a way that he would make mistakes, and after
96 implementing, then he would come back and say brethren, I am very sorry, what I have done
97 is not acceptable to God, so I will correct it and do it this way. Now what does that mean, it
98 proves that he was not doing anything of his own, but was being led by the Holy Spirit, and
99 when he left, he left the church with the Holy Spirit. What that means now, is that we need to
100 be sure, that we are connected with the Holy Spirit. Whether we do have ears to hear the Holy
101 Spirit. And whether or not we can hear and comprehend the Holy Spirit when he speaks or if
102 we would accept as true anyone who expresses what the Holy Spirit says, is another issue. Once
103 more, there is a component of church politics getting penetrated within our church. What I
104 mean is that we first look at who is raising a point. Stated differently, we reject information
105 from others, thus we will not trust anyone who approaches us claiming to have heard from the
106 Holy Spirit.

107 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
108 the church?

109 **Participant 10:** It is the African tradition and the problem with this element of tradition is that
110 we mix God's things with our things. We are unable to recognise that God sees all of us as his
111 children and that he does not view people based on their gender. Additionally, God is not
112 constrained by a person's gender because God can utilize anyone for any purpose. Therefore,
113 in my opinion, tradition and culture are the main causes of our problems. We tend to jumble
114 these things together and you will find that we mix our traditional and cultural issues with
115 spiritual and biblical concerns and in that process, we are unable to tell the difference between
116 the two.

117 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

118 **Participant 10:** Besides their organisation, of late, we have added female deacons.

119 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church? -

120 **Participant 10:** It is according to the gift or according to the ministry, according to the grace
121 of God upon those who are ready to be ordained to be pastors because what qualifies a person
122 is the anointing or the calling. There is no one, who is equal to the task of being a pastor. Paul
123 makes it clear in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 5 that "Not that we are competent in ourselves
124 to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God". In other words, it is not
125 because we are competent to be the ministers of the new covenant, but it is God who makes us
126 competent to be the ministers of the new covenant. So, I am trying to say that in this task of

127 being called and operating in the kingdom of God, no one is equal to it even males, so in that
128 aspect, women are ready because God through his grace will use them as he uses us males. That
129 is one aspect, now, another aspect, look at the congregation in terms of how they treat pastors,
130 you can see and for me looking at that aspect, I do not think they are ready yet - because from
131 the local church up to the national level, how things happen in our conferences. At all levels of
132 leadership, it is not easy. Our generation is radical, robust in everything, and disrespectful. It is
133 very blunt as opposed to the older generation. You can see, for example, the pastors or the
134 workforce that pastor Bhengu started working with - a large percentage were uneducated people
135 who were not enlightened but they were able to work in the church and no one undermined
136 them, they were working with the anointing God gave them and the grace that was upon them
137 at that time. But looking at our generation, today, if you do not know your story, being a pastor,
138 you will be undermined. As you open the Word, starting to make an introduction (laugh), then
139 they say, 'hey, it seems as if we are going to go to bed starving here, then they will start looking
140 at their phones, googling their things and by doing that sending you a message to say, we cannot
141 hear what you are saying'. When we look at that aspect, then I do not think things will be easy.

142 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
143 comes to church positions?

144 **Participant 10:** The things that contribute to the prevention of gender transformation when it
145 comes to church positions are culture and tradition, and maybe the way that we interpret the
146 scriptures. also contributes to that because it depends on how we interpret the scriptures.

147 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
148 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

149 **Participant 10:** I will repeat that the factors that contribute to that again are culture and
150 tradition as well as the way that we interpret the scriptures. In the scriptures that say that women
151 should be silent in the church, Paul says that he does not allow women to speak in the churches,
152 but a person who will interpret that at face value, in a literal sense can say that they are not
153 allowed to participate in the ministerial positions, but that is not the case. It does not mean that
154 they must not preach, it does not mean that they cannot participate in worship, but when you
155 observe, you will find out that it was about participating in discussions that were held in the
156 church. They were not allowed to participate in the open discussions that were held in the
157 church, they were expected to ask their husbands at home, but it was not something to do with
158 their involvement in the ministry. It was concerning participation in the issues of discussion.

159 And it was also to separate that the time for worship is not the time for discussion. Maybe it is
160 in this part of Corinth since the membership there was predominantly Greeks, and culturally
161 the Greeks were people who had their own way of doing things, who would question things.
162 They are the kind of people who do not expect to be told that things go this way and that way.
163 So, the females there would not just accept anything, they would challenge things. So, Paul
164 was correcting that. So, it is in line with the history of the place, the people that were being
165 addressed, and the situation of that place at that particular time. It does not apply to everybody.
166 It specifically addresses the problem of Corinth, which is why you do not hear the message said
167 to the Ephesus, you do not hear the message said to the Romans, you do not hear the message
168 said to the Colossians and all the other places. This is why I say that the way we interpret the
169 scriptures also contributes to the prevention of gender transformation.

170 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
171 probationary period like their male counterparts.

172 **Participant 10:** This question takes us back to what I was saying, that maybe if Pastor Bhengu
173 was still alive, we would be doing things differently now. But I must say that it is not easy to
174 do things that have never been seen pastor Bhengu doing before. Some people may feel that
175 the question you are asking is relevant, but one may say that during Pastor Bhengu's time, no
176 females were leading the congregations, the workers who worked in the congregations, were
177 under the supervision of the recognised male pastor. So, we cannot now in our time do things
178 that pastor Bhengu never did. But I insist on saying I do not know if things would be the same,
179 or if he would have done things differently and allowed women to be ordained and be
180 recognised as pastors - because it is evident that he recognised their ministry from the onset –
181 so that we can work to ensure that they are given the freedom to be ordained and to lead the
182 congregations as men. So, it is one of the most difficult things to change because while some
183 see the need for change, others do not see it and insist that we cannot do things that the founder
184 of this church never did.

185 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

186 **Participant 10:** What I can relate to; and I am not confining it or limiting it to the church only,
187 but it is general. Females have been at a disadvantage, they have been marginalised, and it has
188 caused them to have an element of anger and disrespect against males. I will make you an
189 example - and please hear me out, not everyone does that. You listen to a woman who has been
190 given a platform to preach, and you realize that this woman can preach but at the same time she

191 wants to prove a point to men that it is not only you that can do this, but we can do it too. But
192 I have understood that it is because of the oppression they have endured for many years. So, I
193 think that is one of the things that are a problem. You would see that she is coming so well with
194 her sermon and in peace but then gets overwhelmed by the element of wanting to prove a point.
195 That is the only element that I think men are concerned about when it is pronounced that women
196 will be given this freedom, this right. So, women want to prove a point and are also being
197 disrespectful and offensive. But also, men feel threatened by anointed women. And they are
198 also threatened by vocal women when they see that she can challenge their decisions in the
199 leadership meetings.

200 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
201 adapting to the times?

202 **Participant 10:** I think the church needs education, men should be taught that in this day and
203 age, things are happening differently and if we are not moving with time, the world will view
204 us as being conservative and we cannot defend ourselves in that view. But we must also check,
205 I will always go back to the issue of the interpretation of scriptures because education applies
206 to two aspects in this case, the first; we need to have a correct interpretation of the scriptures
207 because according to me, the way we do things by and large is influenced by our interpretation
208 of scriptures, or our understanding of the scriptures. You cannot expect a person to do the right
209 thing when that person holds an incorrect view of the interpretation of the scriptures. The
210 Teaching Team holds the responsibility of maintaining the scripture doctrine. They are in a
211 position to be the guardians of the Bible's good teaching, but, sadly, you cannot currently expect
212 them to act morally because there is nowhere, where they have been taught correctly so that
213 they can pass that on to others. For example, the Teaching Team is the most significant
214 structure in the church, and they ought to have as much authority as possible, but that is not the
215 case. A candidate for the Teaching Team should be expected to have completed some sort of
216 training to ensure that he is familiar with the scriptures as written. But the people that join the
217 Teaching Team, are just told that they will be joining the Teaching Team without any training
218 given. They get told that they will go with a fully-fledged member of the Teaching Team and
219 that they must do what they do, as a result, you find that what they say is not the same. One
220 will come and say this today and another will come and say the opposite tomorrow because
221 there is no place where they get training to be empowered and be given the correct information.
222 Number two, so that they can say the same thing as members of the Teaching Team

223 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

224 **Participant 10:** The Teaching Team should get theological and doctrinal solid training, to
225 ensure that they are teaching the congregations the right things. Nobody should join the
226 Teaching Team only because they have been a pastor of this church for a century or because
227 they are friends with a member of the team, even when their theological and philosophical
228 knowledge is incorrect, and they are unaware of Pastor Bhengu's vision.

229 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
230 change in the BTG church?

231 **Participant 10:** First of all, we shall miss the blessing that God plans to give this generation
232 if we judge people exclusively by their gender instead of by the gifts that God has bestowed
233 upon them. As you may already be aware, events in the outside world have an impact on us as
234 a church, thus there are some things we do not need to examine exclusively within. The outer
235 world's developments affect us as a church. The country has taken a stand on equality, and we
236 will soon have a female president leading our legislation and politics. There is balance in both
237 the political and religious spheres when a female voice in leadership speaks up and approaches
238 issues from a female perspective. The first disadvantage is that if we do not accept it, we are
239 denying the church the blessing that it is due in our generation. Second, we are already losing
240 women to ministries if we are not prepared to acknowledge them to the extent of ordaining
241 them as ministers because they do not have a platform to exercise their God-given gifts. We
242 are losing the quality of people raised in our church and raised by God in our time.

243 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
244 the Cape to Cairo vision?

245 **Participant 10:** I cannot think of anything specific that has impacted the Cape to Cairo idea,
246 but I can speculate that if women were given more credit, they might be the ones to devise plans
247 to go to Cairo or find ways to get where males are unable. Female ministry is at a disadvantage
248 in operating freely, and Cape to Cairo in one way or another is affected.

249 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
250 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
251 the outside society?

252 **Participant 10:** The country will see us as conservative and will see us as people who do not
253 believe that God can use anyone other than men. It will show that we believe that God can only
254 use males whereas the Holy Spirit who uses men is the same Holy Spirit that can also use

255 females. It will expose that we are discriminating against women. That shows that we do not
256 have faith in women. Getting assistance would be challenging for unbelievers, particularly for
257 those in need of repentance. Let us take an example where someone has come to the church to
258 beg God's pardon. Perhaps this person killed his wife or lover and came to the church to repent,
259 realizing that even here at the church, women are ignored. Hence, rather than turning to God in
260 repentance, this man leaves the church without seeking assistance upon realizing that women
261 are being treated with disdain even in this so-called house of God. So, they will not see any
262 difference instead it will be a confirmation of the way they think, that I was right to get rid of
263 her. Therefore, as the church, we must be open-minded and consider all of these issues that
264 contribute to the undermining and undervaluing of women. As the church, we need to reclaim
265 our rightful position and positively impact our sick society to remedy the circumstances in our
266 local communities by setting an example. If the church could transform that would have a
267 positive influence in our communities by providing gender-based violence perpetrators with a
268 rehabilitated perspective on women and lead to a psychological shift in their thinking about
269 them. And that would have a positive impact on society in terms of femicide and gender-based
270 violence.

271 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
272 this church?

273 **Participant 10:** They have entered local leadership as deacons, but that is not enough because
274 at the moment there are no other ways for them to enter other structures without being ordained.
275 That is a limitation to them.

276 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

277 **Participant 10:** I will go back to what I said that the church has lost its blessing from God that
278 comes through females.

279 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

280 **Participant 10:** It is the negative reaction of the female folk, when they get an opportunity to
281 preach, they misuse it and spend most of the time trying to prove a point that we as females can
282 also do this and maybe do it better than males. That creates a gap between males and females.

283 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in future?

284 **Participant 10:** I was going to say change is not something that happens overnight. That
285 we have female deacons today shows that gradual change is happening. So, education is
286 necessary to change our mentality. I think it is necessary to make an effort to comprehend the

287 times we live in and also to understand what the scriptures say about the involvement of women
288 in God's plan. We must also try to do away with issues of culture and tradition. We need to give
289 the scripture total authority as Jesus was telling the Pharisees that they value their traditions
290 more than the Word of God, that they burden people with difficult tasks that they cannot even
291 touch with a finger.

Appendix D11: Interview with Participant 11 (P11)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 11:** I think his vision for women's spiritual empowerment is deeply embedded in
4 his broader vision that God gave him that vision being the salvation of souls in particular that
5 Africa will come back to God. So, his vision on Women's empowerment is intricately linked
6 with a broader vision and that vision did not see women as lesser of God's vessels and lesser
7 of God's people. In other words, even way back in his own time, far before the dawn of
8 democracy with its constitutional provisional and so forth that is with regards to women's
9 development, Bhengu understood even at that time that women are very critical and important
10 stakeholders of a group within the church and were not of the lesser value than their male
11 counterparts in the work of the Lord, that are in the church broadly. So, to answer the question
12 specifically then he understood that the Lord's work and the vision God gave him would not be
13 complete without women. So, women were very central in his vision and therefore he also
14 focussed on their development. For him, the centrality of women was not only in the church. If
15 women were central in the church in terms of fulfilling God's will, and that centrality must start
16 in their own homes, in their own families and it comes into the church as well. So, his focus in
17 the development of women was that they should be central at home in the communities and of
18 course in the church as well.

19 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
20 empower women?

21 **Participant 11:** The constitution does reflect that, but I would not say it adequately. In other
22 words, the Constitution we have in my view might not adequately capture Bhengu's vision for
23 the role of women, particularly because Bhengu preceded our 1994 democracy in South Africa
24 and therefore the constitution in its evolution can still go far in accommodating women. Bhengu
25 did what he could even in his own time, given the context of his own time. But the Constitution
26 of the church at the moment, I do not think has taken full advantage of the current legislative
27 landscape for the development of our women in the church.

28 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

29 **Participant 11:** I am going to lack relevant words to express how relevant that vision is. In
30 fact, Bhengu's vision is relevant if it is to illustrate the development after his own time both at

the church's developmental level and at the nation's developmental, even at the political development level. What happened after his departure was a very strong confirmation of his vision. In other words, if we as the church for example had fully embraced his vision. If as a church we were able to fully run with his vision, I am telling you, our contribution to our communities, our contribution to the nation would be far. The point I am making is that in his prophetic vision, he understood these times. The times that we are in, and I dare to say even far better than some of us who are living in these times. For instance, in Bhengu's time even in the community, even in work environments even before labor legislation kicked in to open doors for women in their working environments and so forth, Bhengu in his church, knew that women could do what God called them to do. He established a women's organisation, fully run by women, their committees from the local assembly, teaching women how to do hand work, how to develop themselves, how to build their families and so forth and so forth. So, he had confidence in women's leadership, that women have to be developed to take care, not just married women but women in terms of girls. You can take that further even around him; he had women who were part of his ministry. In the crusade, he had women involved, not just singing but playing an active role in the crusades as well.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 11: Well, I would say to a large extent that the church has been able to continue and sustain what Bhengu had initiated with regards to women's empowerment. But I also want to say that the church has not gone that far, like I was saying the church has not taken full advantage of the current constitutional and political landscape in terms of empowering women. So, I am then saying while we have been able to preserve and sustain what Bhengu initiated, I think we should have done far better in touching many strides ahead. I will make one example, if you look at the youth work- youth work you should talk of youth organisers in the youth ministry. Those who were exclusively men would be appointed as youth organisers at that time, but there is no reason today not to have women as youth organisers because when you talk youth, youth is not only male. Youth includes both young men and women. So, who is going to be addressing these young women in the context of youth organisation if it only going to be the voices of the men? So, in the youth organisation, we have organisers that are exclusively male and that is an issue that I am raising that there is no reason not to have women as youth organisers. So that these youth organisers can raise their voices in building these young girls within the youth organisation.

64 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

65 **Participant 11:** Well! I think their role and position has developed. They have moved further.
66 I do not think their position has kind of regressed or deteriorated and so on, but I think their
67 role has progressed. Women have continued to be able to raise their voices. They have
68 continued to preserve their role within the church. But I must also give credit to them because
69 they have been very vocal. They are very defensive of their space, and they have been very
70 vocal about that and that is what has made them retain what Bhengu had brought for them. So,
71 they have progressed, they have moved, and they have conquered more territory now than
72 before. But I am still saying there is more territory to be conquered.

73 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
74 for the Back to God Crusade.

75 **Participant 11:** I think this is the point I have made earlier on, that Bhengu had women in his
76 crusade, not just to sweep and clean or to sing, they were evangelists. He worked with many of
77 those women. One of them who was here in our region is now late, the question is now why we
78 do not have that. And I think that is probably an indictment on our church leadership – why we
79 have lost that. There was one thing sure, and we cannot argue and say no today we have no
80 women evangelists. I think we have failed as a church to retain and preserve at least that
81 component of his vision, and we have reduced women now in their work in the crusades. And
82 maybe one will also go on to say – even those crusades – where are they today? Because we
83 are talking about something that is probably non-existent. So, those crusades are no longer
84 there but I am not running away from the fact that even when they were still there, we would
85 not allow much of women participation and involvement.

86 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

87 **Participant 11:** It is difficult to say here exactly what could have prompted those. Maybe partly
88 because we may have not fully captured Bhengu's vision. We do not operate at the same level,
89 he had a broader view, and we do not have the benefit of that. So, that could be an issue. I do
90 not think it could be an issue of men being intimidated, feeling small, or being intimidated for
91 having women. I do not think that could have been the case. Maybe, let me not rule it out,
92 maybe it may have been an issue I do not know but frankly speaking, it is difficult to say or
93 explain that challenge.

94 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
95 women's empowerment?

96 **Participant 11:** The pastoral ministry within the church, the landscape of pastoral ministry
97 within the church I sense that it is not yet ready. That landscape has not yet been prepared. I
98 am not saying women are not ready to be pastors, but I am saying the environment still needs
99 to be prepared, and that talks to education that talks to theological exposition of the biblical
100 teachings on ministry. So, that is why I am saying, we as the pastors, now, maybe we need to
101 do more in preparing the landscape. I will give one example; how many assemblies in our church
102 will allow women to preach on Sundays? I am not boasting but my local church where I am
103 pastor is one church I know will use women a lot on Sundays. Because what we normally find
104 when we have for example our quarterly meetings – let us say a mother’s quarterly and a mother
105 will arise and preach on Friday, Saturday and because we have been so blessed by her ministry,
106 we will make an exception and say on Sunday, please finish what you came for and continue
107 on Sunday. That is an exception that we would do, and we would do it for visiting women. Yet
108 some other women who are locally based, their ministries and potential have not been unearthed
109 has not been used. The point I am making is that it is a mindset. What I mean by preparing the
110 ground is that the first acre of that ground is men themselves. If we can deal with that acre first
111 the other acres will be much easier.

112 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
113 the church?

114 **Participant 11:** I think it relates to the fact that we as the church, as I have said before having
115 not taken full advantage of the new political landscape. Bhengu did what he could within the
116 confines of his own time, politically and legally. But then 1994 came and brought us democracy
117 and many avenues opened and I think we have not taken advantage of that in the church to
118 advance women and unlock the doors for women, so the issue of women's ordination begins
119 with women’s recognition and the appreciation of their ministry in the broader church, where
120 we will then say, women’s ministry is not only good enough for the women’s services but their
121 ministry is good enough for the entire church. Hence, I was making an example of using them
122 to preach even on Sundays to the entire church. So, I think what has hindered that development
123 is one, we may have not fully understood, we are not operating at the same level as the vision
124 of Baba Bhengu, and we have not taken advantage of times of our own to take that vision
125 forward. And of course, like I have said there is too much male domination in our church
126 leadership. For example, if I may explain, it is only recently that we begin to see women in
127 leadership, even as deacons. And I am sorry to say that even there, it happens sometimes

128 because we do not have enough men. So, now we can also have women coming in as deacons
129 in the church. We can only hope that this will progress even to other avenues as well.

130 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

131 **Participant 11:** Well, as I said, their current status is still limited only to their services, be it
132 girls' services or mothers' services. But in the broader running of the church, their role is still
133 very limited. Like I was saying it is now recently in some few local assemblies where we see
134 now women being elected in positions of being deacons. So, the current position is that women
135 have not been fully embraced and integrated into the leadership, of the church.

136 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

137 **Participant 11:** Well, if we can prepare the landscape, that is the mindset of current male
138 pastors and ordinary men in the church and the attitude of the general membership of the church
139 because sometimes if you were to rush to do that now, talking women pastors now, ordination,
140 you may have resistance within their male counterparts – as equal colleagues as equal partners,
141 that is number one, and number two, remember that our men are still elders in the church. Our
142 leadership is still dominated by men. So, if you are going to have this woman pastor over these
143 men who have their doubts and reservations about this woman pastor, you will have problems.
144 So, I guess what needs to be done is education at all these levels to prepare ourselves, otherwise
145 I sense that women's ordination is not a matter of if but it is a matter of when.

146 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
147 comes to church positions?

148 **Participant 11:** Gender transformation – I think I will go back to say as the leadership of the
149 church and, including myself, we have not fully embraced the benefits of the current political
150 and Constitutional landscape to develop our church, to open up opportunities for women. In
151 other words, we have not been able to transplant Bhengu's vision into the current dispensation
152 and get maximum benefits of the current dispensation in enriching and enhancing the value of
153 Baba Bhengu's vision, so that rests with us leadership, which we have not done. But also, would
154 you rush it for more of a quick mark knit, or would you expect it to rush to look forward and
155 accelerate? So what I am trying to say is that we as men may not move fast enough in moving
156 towards that direction because it may mean some of us losing our positions, maybe not positions
157 but our egos, and our attitudes – may be denting those and therefore may not fully embrace, or
158 not be in a hurry to bring in our women into the leadership, so we will need that transformation
159 definitely.

160 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
161 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

162 **Participant 11:** Well! Someone would say, no, no, no Bhengu never got women on board, and
163 we are keeping Bhengu's vision. In his vision, Bhengu had men in his leadership and DCC
164 level which are called RCCs now or at the Executive level or the Teaching Team level, Bhengu
165 had men, never had women and that argument for me will not fly, I will go back to what I have
166 said, Bhengu did the best he could in the context of his own times and therefore there is no
167 reason why us today cannot therefore, move while maintaining the vision without diluting it
168 but at least doing what you could do to bring that equality. So, the factors then would be that
169 the drivers of that process are men themselves. Therefore, this goes back to what I was saying
170 if the turkeys are drivers themselves, do you think they move at a fast speed driving towards
171 Christmas? They will not - they will not, that is the challenge we have. But obviously, then
172 others will go for theological perspectives – they may go for some scriptures to say no, no, no,
173 no, this is what Paul says. But all I am saying – what factors contribute to this – it is the
174 broadening, it is the enlightening, the freeing of our own mindsets as men.

175 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
176 probationary period like their male counterparts.

177 **Participant 11:** (He immediately changed) Do we have women pastors I am not aware of that.
178 I do not know, unfortunately. In the former Transkei, we had several women, but we never
179 called them pastors. We called them workers. They are still there, though their role has changed
180 now. And also, because they have now grown old, but in the Back to God we do not have
181 female pastors. That should come from the conference and that should be in the Constitution
182 of the church and the local churches should open the applications to say now we also need
183 women, so mothers and girls can also apply, the ministry is open. Then we can have women
184 pastors, but I have never heard of that.

185 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

186 **Participant 11:** (he looked very uncomfortable) I must express my discomfort with your choice
187 of words “employment” That is not the kind of language we use as a church. As a researcher,
188 you can use it but to us, as a church, it becomes a foreign language to talk of employment. In
189 the church, we do not take ministry as employment. We take ministry as a call, a call by God
190 and we have responded to the call. The fact that now they are in the church and provide
191 opportunities for that ministry to be fulfilled and practiced in the church and provide a stipend

192 to us does not mean employment. But on the other side, I understand what you mean by
193 employment because this person is offering services and at month-end, they must get
194 something, whether we call it a stipend, but we get something month-end which comes in
195 different forms, it can be mission support, traveling allowance, stipend so I understand in that
196 context. But then come back to the question now. No doubt, - no doubt, it may be very subtle
197 in understanding that, (hay maan, ndizakuphathwa ngumfazi) – no never, I am going to be led
198 by a woman. So, we may not be outspoken about it. Do we have full confidence in our women
199 that this woman can be our pastor. And that also leads to the general attitude in the community
200 as well. A pastor is understood as a counsellor, and when it is a woman, she asks questions as
201 to whether he is going to be able to tell his problems to a female pastor as a man. You have got
202 those things. But the question is if women do that to a male pastor why men cannot do the same
203 to a female pastor? So, it goes back to the mindset of men. That is why I say the ground still
204 needs to be prepared and education is key, otherwise yes, the fear must be there amongst men.
205 Can I relate to this woman as a colleague of mine? It is the mindset. Maybe also amongst the
206 men in the church including pastors, we still understand the spiritual ministry, the way the Holy
207 Spirit works – the ways He provides gifts to people – He does not provide according to gender.
208 He gives the gifts and ministries in his own best way, the way He likes. So, this challenge for
209 men to embrace women is because of their shallow understanding of the depth of the ministry
210 of the Holy Spirit that the Holy Spirit can put this woman and use her for that ministry. The
211 Holy Spirit is not looking at gender and I think that is the king of teaching and preaching that
212 men must be given.

213 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
214 adapting to the times?

215 **Participant 11:** (furious) Well! The criticism of the church as being conservative will be
216 justifiable, and I do not think that calling the conservative is something that the church will
217 worry about, because if you say to me I am conservative I am not worried about that, what will
218 worry me is to say I am unscriptural – what I am doing is not biblical – that will worry me –
219 but if you call my values conservative that is fine because these values for me are good enough,
220 - are ok. The fact that they are conservative and so what – and so what (getting annoyed). So,
221 what I am saying then that will carry more weight will be to say these are unscriptural – the
222 church is not being biblical. (calming down) So, the charge of the conservative then will be a
223 fair one and may be correct in that sense. But then that charge, I will be worried to call it
224 conservative, because then again to call it progressive and dynamic what would that mean, that

225 would mean now that the church has become wealthy which is following certain trends and so
226 forth. So that is why I am saying that calling it conservative could not worry the charge but to
227 call the non-ordination of women unscriptural – unbiblical then we can talk.

228 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

229 **Participant 11:** No, I think the church needs to confront this issue head-on. I do not think the
230 issue has been confronted. I think we have been tiptoeing around this issue, and I think it needs
231 to be brought now right to the table, and we deal with it head-on, as the conference of the church
232 - confronts this question. Where do we stand? What is the Bible saying to us about women's
233 ordination? We need to talk about that and then we talk about it in our local assemblies, in our
234 regions, and so forth. So, the question has not been brought to the centre, it has been talked
235 about in the corridors, but it needs to be put firmly on the agenda, then we can talk about it.

236 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
237 change in the BTG church?

238 **Participant 11:** Well! The consequences are that if we do not embrace our women in the
239 ministry the church is going to suffer. We are going to lose benefits. I do not think the current
240 situation is going to last, so if we do not want to transform ourselves and manage our
241 transformation properly, circumstances within the church will force us to transform ourselves.
242 Our women will raise their voices, and their voices will be louder than louder. And women are
243 in the majority in the church. Women will raise these issues to say but why? I understand that
244 women are in the majority but also, they are the most financial contributors to the church. So,
245 if you look at the purse of the church men do not give, it is the mothers that give. So, these
246 women will see that these men do not want to put us in the ministry, they put themselves alone,
247 what if women say, that is ok then we will not put our money in tithes, we will put it in other
248 things and not in tithes, what will happen? So, I am trying to say that if we do not want to
249 embrace change and transformation on our own, the change is going to force itself through. So,
250 the sooner we bring this issue to the table deal with it and move forward the better. Otherwise,
251 at the moment, we are losing in terms of the spiritual value that we will be benefiting from our
252 women. And the generation is changing so this is not sustainable.

253 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
254 the Cape to Cairo vision.

255 **Participant 11:** Well! My answer may not be exact, but it may be a possible answer. The
256 funding of Cape to Cairo is coming from women's funds and that is what I am talking about

257 that if we do not embrace women in leadership, in ministry, this may down the line dampen
258 weaken and discourage women from giving and that is why I am saying being the majority in
259 the church, they are most contributors financially to the church. Now the point I am coming to
260 now, that the Cape to Cairo mission is meant to be funded by women's funds and now the Cape
261 to Cairo mission is almost stagnant. Crusades are no longer there and not because there is no
262 money, money is there every year and it is increasing every year, but the question is then, where
263 does that money go? Maybe that already answers your question because women now may say
264 well, these men instead of Cape to Cairo they are using this money for their own things because
265 we are not there in the planning. These men may be using this money for their own comfort,
266 their own convenience not for the core business as a result money may not be pouring in now.
267 So, what has happened, women in national leadership and other levels as well have discovered
268 other priorities that are closer to their hearts than the men's priorities. So, Cape to Cairo is a
269 men's thing and we give these men money and what do they do with it?

270 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
271 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
272 to the outside society?

273 **Participant 11:** Yes, you might be right in that sense, lack of confidence and recognition of
274 women but one would argue that it is not the lack of confidence. We still have confidence in
275 our women, but then that confidence has not grown enough to say this woman that we have
276 confidence in as our chairlady, she can actually make a great leader in the church so that one
277 for me has to be broadened. Not that the church has no confidence in the women folk. We have
278 got them as organisers, we have them as supervisors, but that confidence must grow to the level
279 whereby we can say this woman is a pastor. So, from the outside it may make sense but from
280 me inside I do not think it is about that.

281 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
282 this church?

283 **Participant 11:** Well, I have seen women as deacons in the local churches, there is now a
284 discussion on the table of having young women as part of youth organisers. Currently, youth
285 organisers have been exclusively male but now we are dealing with that issue, and we hope that
286 at the next conference, there will be a resolution on that one. In the finance committee of the
287 church, we have women playing an active role. In the local churches, we are picking up women
288 with spiritual and ministry gifts and we are using them in crusades and revivals. So, I would
289 say the walls of Jerico are gradually collapsing but their collapsing may not be instantaneous.

290 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

291 **Participant 11:** I understand why this question does not easily sink in my mind, (getting
292 irritated) it is the word resistance as if there has been some kind of deliberate, intentional resolve
293 to block women. I do not think in my understanding it is that, but I think we also need to
294 understand the church in the context of society. Society is gradually opening up to embracing
295 women, that is what the church is doing and of course, society has moved faster than the church.
296 The church is moving slowly. So, I would not say there has been resistance in the sense of
297 rebelling against or judging women's empowerment, no. It is a question of education, level of
298 understanding, level of enlightenment – that is what we are battling with here. When I say
299 education, I am talking about the understanding of the times. So if you ask me the
300 consequences, of course, the church it is obvious the church did not benefit from women's
301 ministry, we are still not benefitting as much as we should so we have been crippled and
302 handicapped as the church and that must have retarded the progress of the church. Who knows,
303 if we had women pastors, probably the growth of the church and the spread of the gospel would
304 have moved at a much faster pace. And there is this view that when you have got a woman
305 preaching, men tend to listen. I mean how many men got converted in the church because they
306 went to a crusade and they saw beautiful women singing and preaching and they got converted,
307 so the point I am trying to make is that – definitely without having women at that level in the
308 church it has impoverished us? We are a poorer church in other words. Spiritually we are poorer
309 than we would be if had women ordained in the church.

310 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

311 **Participant 11: SAME AS 3.4.1**

312 It is obvious the church did not benefit from women's ministry; we are still not benefitting as
313 much as we should so we have been crippled and handicapped as the church and that must have
314 retarded the progress of the church. Who knows, if we had women pastors, probably the growth
315 of the church and the spread of the gospel would have moved at a much faster pace. And there
316 is this view that when you have got a woman preaching, men tend to listen. I mean how many
317 men got converted in the church because they went to a crusade and they saw beautiful women
318 singing and preaching and they got converted, so the point I am trying to make is that –
319 definitely without having women at that level in the church it has impoverished us? We are a
320 poorer church in other words. Spiritually we are poorer than we would be if had women
321 ordained in the church.

322 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

323 **Participant 11:** Well the question maybe would be what my hopes for the future. Well! for me
324 you do not give women empowerment by simply ordaining them as ministers, there are many
325 other ways of empowering women, and those many ways the church is doing but now this
326 particular one of ordaining women, I would not call it empowerment. But let me now answer
327 the question - I hope that this discussion must take place sooner in our conferences as such so
328 that a position is taken in the light of the scriptures, in the light of the word of God and then the
329 church will therefore move as the word of God says. Not to move to be fashionable as other
330 people do things but let us be fashionable with the Word of God.

Appendix D12: Interview with Participant 12 (P12)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 12:** History tells us that pastor Bhengu had no qualms with the gender. He worked
4 with women, he used them in revivals, and some started preaching while they were still
5 schoolgirls. Yet many female workers came out of his hands, they were not called pastors, but
6 the word worker was used. So, this means that, positionally, these girls were workers, they went
7 to work full time, they did revivals and some planted churches with the revivals that they ran.
8 So, that shows that Baba Bhengu used everybody, as long as they were gifted.

9 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
10 empower women?

11 **Participant 12:** You must remember that during pastor Bhengu's time, there were political
12 barriers, and there were things that he had to align with. Yet, God gave him a vision and it was
13 difficult in those days, and no woman could be a leader in the sense of leading a church because
14 even the political systems were putting women under men. Even if a woman tried to establish
15 a church, a woman would not be able to preach at a funeral because of the culture everywhere.
16 For example, in the rural areas of the entire Eastern Cape, a woman could not be qualified to
17 be placed as a pastor. But now, there is a need for a transition, there are things that need to be
18 revisited and added to the Constitution. Right now, the issue of the ordination of women is
19 currently being explored at conferences, to align things because things have changed, and our
20 times are different. In other words, there is a process that is underway concerning women's
21 ordination because at least Pastor Bhengu did not have a problem with empowering women.
22 He did everything to empower women, yet he was limited in what he could do. It is now the
23 responsibility of the church's national leadership to demonstrate that pastor Bhengu had no
24 trouble empowering women and to adapt his vision to the needs of the modern era.

25 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

26 **Participant 12:** Pastor Bhengu's vision is not generational. It is not a vision confined and
27 limited only for that time and only for him. Long time after pastor Bhengu had passed away,
28 you can still feel that the Back to God is still united. It is one of the churches that has never
29 experienced division, even in the face of difficulties. No matter how influential a person may
30 be within the church, once they leave, they do so on their own and no one follows. That
31 demonstrates how forward-thinking the vision God gave Pastor Bhengu was. For this reason,

the adage "the visionary can die, but the vision continues" is true. Pastor Bhengu was therefore far ahead of his time. Let me tell you that both Pastor Bhengu's vision and the man himself are incredible. Not only was he an apostle and gifted individual, but he was also intelligent. There are things that God helped him with just by using his mind, for instance, do you know that in his inception of Back to God, he was the first man to start the youth department? Even in the area of carrying on with this ministry, Pastor Bhengu studied in America. That demonstrates how pastor Bhengu promoted education, which is essential given that people must learn for the future. Since our church still uses it and maintains this organisation afloat, we can now see that it is an effective strategy. Even in his final words, he predicted that this church would have difficulties, but that God would occasionally continue to produce individuals who would bring this church to the original vision. This is what is happening to demonstrate that it is still relevant, and we do not see anything that might undermine Back to God's relevancy because, even at the time of its founding, it was a global movement. Originally, though, the message was Back to God from Cape to Cairo; hence, it transcends customs, borders, and the differing belief systems of individuals. This elucidates the continued importance of this vision. The potent force of this message is still being received by many people.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church

Participant 12: As I have indicated earlier on, women were empowered by pastor Bhengu in the ideas he committed to in their time, not only spiritually. He empowered women to do handwork for them to improve their social status because women could not be employed, only men were employed, and even those who were employed had to stop working when they became pregnant. There were so many ills regarding women. But pastor Bhengu encouraged them that they should be able to stand for their cause. He empowered them materially, physically, and even spiritually as I said that he allowed the women who were endowed with the ability to preach to do so.

Now, as I have indicated, from where we are now, we are reviving that vision because there are contemporary issues that do not only face the Back to God church but the church globally. Women are taking the stage. Even the government is empowering women more than men because the government says - although we were all oppressed, the levels of oppression were not the same, as women were at their worst. Thus, it was not only financial or economic tyranny, but also the social standing of women, in their eyes. They experienced spiritual effects even in places of worship. However, as women are now becoming liberated, there are constant talks about women's freedom to leave our religion if they so want.

66 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

67 **Participant 12:** They are empowered now in terms of the Bible saying there is no woman, nor
68 man, no, Greek or what ... in the church. But what is left is exposing our women, to some
69 platforms that were closed for them. Speaking about the church in general, some women are
70 taking positions of leadership, and they are flourishing, they are successful and then it becomes
71 ironic that when we are in those platforms, we acknowledge them but when we are in our
72 platform we do not. This is because some of our women are of a caliber that allows them to
73 compete on a global scale; all they need is access to opportunities. For instance, last year during
74 the national convention, we had a woman from the Free State who was preaching. We are
75 gradually introducing them to the platforms that they were not before. However, gradually, not
76 all of them are prepared and a paradigm shift is necessary for even them. For example, if the
77 chicken was tied, it may remain bound even after the objects that tied it have disappeared
78 because its mind continues to tell it that it has not been released. Thus, by doing this, we are
79 progressively conveying the idea that women need to be prepared to share the gospel with the
80 world. They will therefore have additional opportunities. Even now, as leadership, we are
81 discussing that in the special conference that is going to take place in February 2024, there must
82 be a woman preaching. It will be history. It will be the first time.

83 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
84 for the Back to God Crusade

85 **Participant 12:** They are still there but performing more of the worship and MC services. It is
86 more dominated by men because men are the pastors and evangelists in our church. The young
87 women who used to work with pastor Bhengu are not young now anymore and the succession
88 plan had hiccups because you do not have young ones availing themselves full-time for the
89 Lord. Maybe it could be the historical reference that when they look back, they do not see
90 somebody who did that because those are old even the workers, I was referring to are old. There
91 is a generation gap in terms of succession, but this is what we are about to restore now.

92 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

93 **Participant 12:** There were many things actually that prompted the changes during the time of
94 change. You would find that women were not interested in such callings, they were interested
95 more in building their careers. So, a lot of women are careerwomen, it is very rare to find even
96 people like you who are interested in theology. I hope that as you are busy with your research
97 there are other doors that your research will open, it will enhance the conversation to grow
98 stronger.

99 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
100 women's empowerment?

101 **Participant 12:** No, it does evolve but maybe you would say at a slower pace because pastor
102 Bhengu died in 1985, now we are in 2024, and we have strong women. For instance, we had a
103 quarterly meeting in my local and the preacher was a pastor's wife preaching in the main service
104 on Sunday and she is also preaching in different conventions. Before this one, there was another
105 who was getting more respected, and that was before they left our church, I am making an
106 example. You know there is still a program in our church that women do not preach on Sunday
107 even if they were speakers for women but now, they have begun to preach - they are given that
108 opportunity by the RCCs and by the Executive. Now we can say it is progressively evolving
109 but not at a steadfast pace because we are still healing from the past, but his vision is very much
110 adaptative. So, I believe that maybe two years to come you will not be asking the same question.

111 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
112 the church?

113 **Participant 12:** That is why I said the conversation has begun; I think even in this conference
114 it will be one of the agenda points, otherwise, some women are already ordained but sometimes
115 when there is an urgency because some women are preaching in hospitals, they are preaching
116 in prisons now they come, and they need an ordination certificate that declare the church they
117 represent. and that they are pastors as well, so this church has to ordain such women.

118 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

119 **Participant 12:** I think the current status of women I think the bulk of them are still in a passive
120 mode. The one thing that complicates the life of a woman is when a woman is powerful as a
121 girl and once she gets married, she finds it difficult to continue the way she used to do because
122 she is under a certain leadership now. So, that also plays a part in diminishing the role of women
123 because those people keep on getting married. So, there are very few women who can come
124 out of marriage and maintain what she has been doing before. So, that is another element.

125 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

126 **Participant 12:** I think women should be ordained because they also have gifts bestowed on
127 them by God to edify the church. When these gifts are not used in the church, the church suffers.
128 And we in the church have our things placed on each of these people that are gifted by God, so
129 we are missing out on that as a church.

130 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
131 comes to church positions?

132 **Participant 12:** That element might play a role, even a role to say when you liberate women
133 you must only liberate them in terms of their role in marriage because marriage is another
134 reason for change. So, if you want to make a complete change in everything concerning women,
135 there are other aspects that you need to attend to that do not make it easy for women. For
136 instance, if you say a woman is going to be ordained to be a pastor of a local church, can you
137 transfer somebody's wife from one region to another? Some responsibilities need a woman at
138 home. So even though you are making this shift, you still have some challenges. Therefore, you
139 can treat everyone equally or to a certain extent, but there are some circumstances in which
140 treating women fairly is not appropriate for women.

141 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
142 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

143 **Participant 12:** As I mentioned earlier, the topic of women being ordained is currently being
144 discussed at the conference level. Although I do not believe that women getting ordained as
145 pastors will be the issue, I do have to wonder who will move someone else's spouse to a
146 different area. Sometimes this young married woman has young children who must still go to
147 school. And some responsibilities at home need a woman. So even though you are making this
148 shift, you still have some challenges. Despite this change, there will be challenges along the
149 way. This is the reason I believe that, although we can try our best to treat everyone equally,
150 there are some situations in which equal treatment will have disastrous effects on their marriage
151 because you cannot just throw women the way you throw men, and another thing let me be
152 specific that married and single women are not the same. So, it is not going to be easy to do
153 that. Because a wife is under her husband's leadership. So, we, as men, are thrown anywhere,
154 but if it was going to be my wife and I am left at home and my wife was sent for instance to
155 Swaziland, that was going to be a challenge for me. And I would finally say to my wife she
156 must choose because at that time she is far away from me and I need her services at home, and
157 the kids as well. And despite our desire for the church to develop, you are aware that we
158 discourage divorce in our church. The children become progressive under the leadership of
159 their mother more than their father because naturally, a father is more outdoors working but a
160 woman would remain at home to raise children. So, how do you separate that from the spiritual
161 leadership in the church? So, we still have other challenges that we are facing, even if we can
162 include women in ministerial positions - but it will not be the same responsibility that some
163 other people will continue to say there is still discrimination somehow.

164 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
165 period like their male counterparts.

166 **Participant 12:** I say the challenge is the one we are talking about, that some are getting
167 married and that thing that they are getting married is also a challenge in the sense that - much
168 as women can be powerful, we are sharing their ministry with their husbands. Some of them
169 do get ordination, due to their prison ministry so that they can perform certain duties otherwise
170 they are not ordained to pastor the church, and it is done in privacy.

171 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

172 **Participant 12:** No challenges at all it is just that we have delayed putting correcting measures
173 in the issue of women. As I have said before there is a generation gap in terms of succession
174 plans and having women ordained to be pastors and we are progressively evolving but at a very
175 slow pace.

176 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
177 adapting to the times – (from notes)

178 **Participant 12:** Yes, we will be viewed as conservative, but we are adapting to the times, I will
179 repeat what I have just said that we are correcting some of those things because the issue of
180 women is being discussed at the conference level, and it will also be one of the agenda items
181 for the special conference in February 2024. So, the church is doing something about that, and
182 you will agree that by that we are adapting to the times.

183 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

184 **Participant 12:** The conference is the highest decision-making body of our church and since
185 this matter is there at the conference level already, the conference will come up with a
186 resolution. But I think this matter is long overdue.

187 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
188 change in the BTG church?

189 **Participant 12:** Well! sometimes you cannot avoid consequences because consequences can
190 be either positive or negative. Sometimes putting people before their time may have a negative
191 consequence, and there are still so many things that must be learned from those changes - and
192 demographic changes as far as the church is concerned. So, maybe the delaying of the church
193 was just to prune them, to finetune them and make them ready for the challenge and to answer
194 certain questions as I say in other communities, if a woman is a pastor, they are not allowed to
195 bury. That thing is easy to be accepted by the elite group of educated people who are bombarded
196 with arguments about these things. But there are people in the rural areas who are stereotyped,
197 who do not believe in women standing in front because they believe that a man is the head of
198 the woman and such issues. So, they needed to be ready so that they would not be offended
199 when they meet such conditions out there. And I still say that there are still a lot of questions

200 that need to be settled here. It is not a question of calling here but a question of how you do
201 work with other stakeholders, in general - that they must also understand because even
202 according to the ratio, the women that are already pastoring now, are still like a drop in the
203 ocean. You still have the ministries on TV, those are men. There are also those cases in point
204 who seem to be more gender-based even themselves, for instance, if you speak of the apostles,
205 the apostles were men, and yet in Jesus' ministry, there were women. But those women were
206 not supposed to be - He chose men because of the culture of the Jews. It was not easy even
207 Jesus himself though he empowered women, but he was looking at certain factors that were in
208 operation from where the ministry has been operating. So, I am saying then, to alleviate more
209 negativity about a thing we must have a case, a right case for changes because a change that
210 takes place earlier might spoil the whole thing, but we must also check that we are moving with
211 times - we do not delay so much and become so late. And we must be careful about the changes,
212 the people who are talking about the changes, a resistant change, every time you are making a
213 change you are going to meet resistance. So, not everything has to be changed and not
214 everything must stand. So, in other words, you must look at those things that must change and
215 those things that must not, and keep equilibrium, keep a balance to avoid the consequences
216 that can be harsh to you.

217 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
218 Cape to Cairo vision?

219 **Participant 12:** As I said maybe circumstances for now are too harsh for letting women in the
220 Cape to Cairo. You cannot take women to go to Algeria. There are also prison sectors there.
221 Men find it challenging to travel to Cairo; women will find it even more so. It is not acceptable
222 to put women under the same pressure as men. Women can enhance the Cape to Cairo vision
223 by propagating the gospel through technology. It is said charity begins at home, there are many
224 platforms at church where we can put women to preach the gospel, and then we will see where
225 they can help but let them start here at home

226 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
227 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
228 the outside society?

229 **Participant 12:** In the outside world this is not the only change that people need to see
230 happening because even to them there are lots of changes that are happening around them. In
231 ministry, whether you are a man, age is considered, people would say we cannot be led by
232 children but now things have changed. The few women who have already been ordained must
233 effectively represent the church well so that the few questions that are letting the minds of

234 others must be answered by those who have already been ordained. Once they live right and do
235 the unexpected, they will draw attention that this group of people needs urgent attention because
236 so and so is doing well and is successful. As I said we will start slowly but the pace will increase
237 as we go as people inside see how good it is for a woman to be ordained which I believe they
238 can do.

239 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
240 this church?

241 **Participant 12:** Women have seized opportunities when they have been presented with them,
242 just like the select few women who are already having a significant influence in a variety of
243 fields. So, something is changing for the better. Women are included to preach even at
244 conventions; that is transformation. Another change is that they have the chance to preach
245 during the main service at the church on Sundays. The fact that there are now female deacons
246 in the local churches is a transformation. Women are assuming these leadership roles, and they
247 are taking them with both hands.

248 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

249 **Participant 12:** It was culture.

250 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

251 **Participant 12:** Culture is getting eroded. People are now more global citizens than belong to
252 a certain group. Education is making people to understand that humanity is beyond gender
253 roles. People are ready to embrace change.

254 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

255 **Participant 12:** The expected aspect of change is that, let the doors be opened for all so they
256 can feel that they can do anything as long as God has ordained them. So, we are expecting
257 adjustments, people must be flexible enough to allow change to take place. So, they must be
258 ready to adjust for those things that were a taboo that are no longer a taboo now. If there is one
259 thing that one cannot stop is a change, you change even if you do not want to change. So, we
260 are in that space now that we must allow the change to change us but you must be in control of
261 the change. The change must not just happen randomly because for the sake of happening. Let
262 us cooperate with it so that we keep other things that need to be kept and change all those things
263 that need to be changed. It must be for a good cause.

Appendix D13: Interview with Participant 13 (P13)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 13:** Reverend Bhengu had the vision to grow the church as a whole, but he lacked
4 the resources to do what he needed to achieve, he travelled abroad in search of donations, and
5 while he was there, God spoke to him in a vision. He observed large-veiled women in the vision.
6 He then returned with a prayer that women be raised not just to be independent and self-
7 sufficient spiritually but also to be raised spiritually since, after they have matured spiritually,
8 they will be able to mature socially. He talked with, instructed, and provided tools for both
9 physical and spiritual labour to four women whom he had identified. Since he was unable to
10 perform this duty on his own, the women persisted in empowering all the women. These ladies
11 grasped this vision with both hands, grew it, and saw it through. Even today, women are strong
12 spiritual beings who can maintain spiritual order in any Back to God church because they are
13 the ones who enter into the Spirit. They obey God when they receive instruction, gifts, and
14 baptism via the work of the Holy Spirit. Not everything appeals to women. They can filter
15 things through the power of the Holy Spirit, which helps people avoid feeling guilty because
16 when someone disobeys the Bible, it brings disgrace to those who hear and see them. Therefore,
17 the main objective of Reverend Bhengu was for them to mature and avoid doing anything that
18 might land them in trouble. Compared to the services of men and young people, the mothers'
19 and sisters' services at BTG are more spiritual because women pray a lot, study the Bible a lot,
20 and are hungry for the Holy Spirit. That gave them the ability to act. They are skilled teachers
21 and take good care of their homes as well. They brought up their kids in God's manner. Their
22 kids learn about God as they grow up. Women learned from Reverend Bhengu that their
23 husbands are not abandoned, that divorce is not acceptable in this religion, and that it is because
24 of them that they can save their husbands from their ways. However, there were still no divorces
25 during that time. When we witnessed them in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we were
26 astounded.

27 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
28 empower women?

29 **Participant 13:** The freedom of women to work is guaranteed by the constitution, but it also
30 depends on the individual and their level of knowledge, as well as the knowledge of the pastor.

31 According to the church, efforts are being made to empower women. Platforms are opened for
32 preaching; we have wives and girls who preach. Some of those established churches and did
33 not receive assistance from men since they were free to demonstrate that they had some divine
34 influence. Some women work as organisers and others as workers. Workers are also referred to
35 as missionaries or evangelists. They were always called workers and were never called pastors.
36 They were referred to as workers because, in my opinion, there was nothing that said a woman
37 could be a pastor, but they would carry out duties in that capacity. They also work in the Back
38 to God in revival tents, and you will never come across a revival tent without at least two sisters,
39 or a married woman because men would preach the Word and when people get converted, they
40 would require a woman to sit them down and provide them with spiritual and lifestyle
41 equipping.

42 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

43 **Participant 13:** The vision of Pastor Bhengu remains relevant, but you will observe that the
44 church has been invaded by many individuals who are unfamiliar with the church and do not
45 want to sit and pay attention when they are educated about the vision of this church, and they
46 muck things up. Yet, those like us continue to cling to the cornerstones and symbols of this
47 church. In my local church, there is a topic that God has placed since the time of the COVID-
48 19 pandemic, in Haggai chapter 2 the scripture says, "Who is left that knows this church when
49 it was still in its glory?" and it goes, "Zerubbabel, be strong." That is what is bothering me—
50 this thing is shifting; it is being removed and removed by individuals who have invaded and
51 are hijacking it. The church is unstable because some of them came here in search of work and
52 are now pursuing their own interests. They do not understand that God, through his servant,
53 wanted people to return to Him so that they would see Him in the heavens on the last day.

54 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
55 vision reflected in this church

56 **Participant 13:** All that Reverend Bhengu taught women is currently being practised in this
57 church as we speak. They continue to hold their prayer service on Thursdays, as well as
58 monthlies, quarterlies, and mini conventions in each region. Additionally, they have a large
59 national conference in Thaba Nchu. Nothing has changed, and they are provided with plenty of
60 opportunities to continue doing this. There, they take their time to instruct and equip one
61 another as well as show off their handiwork following what God revealed to Reverend Bhengu.

62 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

63 **Participant 13:** The position of women has not changed since Reverend Bhengu died.

64 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
65 for the Back to God Crusade

66 **Participant 13:** They are still there, there are many of them, it is just a pity because I do not
67 know their names. If you go to any Back to God tent you will find them there. Even when the
68 Back to God report is made, it mentions the sisters and mothers who are still preaching in the
69 Back to God tents.

70 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

71 **Participant 13:** As I previously stated, to the best of my knowledge, Reverend Bhengu's
72 methods of working with women have not changed, particularly in our area. Women continue
73 to work as previously in terms of women's empowerment.

74 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
75 women's empowerment?

76 **Participant 13:** I may not fully grasp your question, but if I have this right, we are unable to
77 change Reverend Bhengu's vision because God gave it to him alone. He also made it clear
78 before he departed this life in 1975 that the Holy Spirit would be in charge of the church, not
79 anyone. You see, he appointed some men as members of the Teaching Team, which is
80 responsible for protecting church doctrine, and I believe that group is the one that can assist.
81 However, Reverend Bhengu made it clear before he left that this church's landmarks should not
82 be removed. Therefore, I do not think anyone dares to change this thing.

83 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
84 the church?

85 **Participant 13:** Since he left this church to the Holy Spirit rather than to a man, Reverend
86 Bhengu's vision cannot be changed. He predicted that man would come and go but this one is
87 not set aside for a person; rather the Holy Spirit will guide the church and accomplishes
88 everything. Women can still be ordained, even today if the Holy Spirit whispers that, therefore
89 that is possible.

90 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

91 **Participant 13:** As I have already said the role of women in the church was not
92 something that even Reverend Bhengu thought of, but it came from a vision that was revealed

93 to him by God, where he identified four women and spoke with them. It was these women that
94 he used to drive and grow the vision by empowering and teaching other women. Married and
95 unmarried women have their weekly, monthly, and quarterly services. They also engage
96 actively in the Mini Convention, which is held once a year in a regional setting, and the National
97 Convention. At every level I have already outlined, they have leaders, yet their work is led by
98 women organisers. In their structure, they have female supervisors. And their organisation is
99 the only department with supervisors. Recently, the Teaching Team has approved that woman
100 be included as deacons in the leadership of local churches.

101 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

102 **Participant 13:** I see nothing wrong with ordaining women since, once someone is anointed
103 by God, they are appointed for that purpose and will carry on in that manner.

104 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
105 comes to church positions?

106 **Participant 13:** Since, as I have previously stated, it depends on the current leaders of the
107 church and, as Reverend Bhengu stated in his final sermon, he leaves this church to the Holy
108 Spirit rather than to anyone else. Thus, it will occur when the Holy Spirit makes that revelation.
109 During the tenure of Reverend Bhengu, some worked full-time, and there are still others now.
110 Some of the people who were there when Reverend Bhengu was leading the congregations
111 have already passed away, but those who arrived after his passing are still in charge of the
112 congregations and are revered as pastors. They are recognised as pastors in those congregations
113 even though the title "pastor" is not used. When the pastor of this church is called, she responds.

114 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
115 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

116 **Participant 13:** The Teaching team who is the watchdog of the church doctrine can probably
117 help us with this question because they are the spiritual leaders of the church. After all, the
118 Executive is more administrative even though it is elected from seasoned pastors.
119 Unfortunately, as I have already mentioned pastor Bhengu left this church in the hands of the
120 Holy Spirit and no one can take these decisions until the Holy Spirit reveals something maybe
121 to some of the members of the Teaching Team. In this case, Reverend Bhengu's vision cannot
122 be changed because he left an instruction not to remove the pillars of this church. Women can
123 still be ordained, even today if the Holy Spirit whispers that, therefore that is possible because

124 in my opinion, if women are allowed to formally fill such roles, they would work in the same
125 manner as we see them working now. Since we do not complain about their lack of skills, I do
126 not see how there could be a shortage anywhere.

127 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
128 probationary period like their male counterparts.

129 **Participant 13:** Because of their reliability, they were not subjected to the probationary period.
130 They are more faithful than anyone claiming to be called. They do not speak with their mouths
131 as they are called. When the Holy Spirit reveals it to them, they act, and by the time she informs
132 her leadership, she has already begun to carry out what she has been called to do. One would
133 be in the Back to God tent, and she would go on. Occasionally, they would even leave her in
134 charge of the tent, telling her to take care of it. She would then depart from the location because
135 she had already been transferred to the other side or was required to go back to the local church
136 where he had originally been pastoring.

137 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

138 **Participant 13:** There are no challenges. Because of the way they are utilized, I do not see
139 anything that is a hindrance.

140 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
141 adapting to the times?

142 **Participant 13:** Regarding your question, if you can look at the Methodist church we can make
143 an example with it. How many years it has been preached in Methodist without female pastors,
144 they are starting now. When did John Wesley open the Methodist Church? It also took a process;
145 it was not something that happened today and woke up tomorrow and they were already there.
146 Even here it is still the process, and I believe God and the Holy Spirit that this thing, as long as
147 we are alive, will happen at the time it will happen, without having to complain about anything
148 because the Holy Spirit speaks. At the time when Reverend Bhengu was establishing this
149 church, he looked into it and conducted research, but nothing more came up. Additionally,
150 nothing in his vision told him that he should measure a particular church. That being the case,
151 his creations are distinct from those of others. He delivered things in the manner the Holy Spirit
152 had shown them to him.

153 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

154 **Participant 13:** At the moment I can say that nothing. As I have already stated, this is not our
155 thing, and its founder did not leave it to us, so we have to wait for the Holy Spirit to lead us
156 through our leaders. But much as I declared that Reverend Bhengu never left the church to
157 anyone declare that there is not one right now. As I have mentioned before, Reverend Bhengu
158 never left the church to anyone, however, because of their positions, the current leaders are
159 accountable. We should pray for guidance and determine whether it is appropriate to ordain
160 women because, as workers, they carry out all of the tasks just like their male counterparts.
161 They also attend Bible Schools and learn about various topics because they are fully committed
162 to their work.

163 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
164 change in the BTG church?

165 **Participant 13:** In my opinion, there are no consequences since, as pastors, we collaborate
166 closely with our wives, therefore gender is not a factor. Even though we also have counsellors
167 now, it is still the pastor's wife's responsibility to take care of matters of women. It makes sense
168 that people would flee to the mission house, where they would claim that they wanted to visit
169 the pastor's wife to be free, receive assistance, and return home content. A pastor's wife is
170 trained to assist people, just like the pastor.

171 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
172 the Cape to Cairo vision?

173 **Participant 13:** In my opinion women's ordination has nothing to do with the Cape to Cairo
174 vision because women are still accepted. They continue to carry out Reverend Bhengu's vision;
175 nothing has changed. The women are working, conducting open airs, and going door to door
176 even though it appears that the Cape to Cairo vision is advancing slowly. They are not stopped
177 anywhere as they serve the church by giving sermons in the Back to God tents.

178 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
179 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
180 the outside society?

181 **Participant 13:** In the church, we have great faith in women. As I have already stated, they
182 face no obstacles, and Reverend Bhengu's vision remains unhindered.

183 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in
184 this church?

185 **Participant 13:** In the church, women perform all of the roles undertaken by men: they pray,
186 teach during services, and preach to the entire congregation. For instance, last Sunday, my wife
187 preached at the church because she has something that God has placed in her that she needs to
188 pass on to people, something which I do not have. So, they are given enough opportunities.

189 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

190 **Participant 13:** I have never heard of problems caused by resistance or any resistance in the
191 past, and even now things are going well for us.

192 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

193 **Participant 13:** Once more, let me state that everything is going great for us, particularly
194 regarding the founder's vision of married women's roles. I had never heard of resistance issues
195 before.

196 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

197 **Participant 13:** We will have to wait for the Holy Spirit to show the current leadership—
198 especially the Teaching Team, which places a greater emphasis on spiritual matters—what
199 needs to be done since this church is unique in that it is a church of vision. It is challenging to
200 simply make adjustments since, as its founder noted, the church's pillars must never be
201 eliminated.

Appendix D14: Interview with Participant 14 (P14)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 14:** Baba Bhengu's vision for married women was to be able to build homes and
4 to be independent. When we talk about women, we are talking about unmarried women who
5 live in their homes, but we are also talking about married women who are in their own homes.
6 For those who are single, they will be able to be independent, even in the gospel, they will be
7 able to stand without fear. Also, married women would assist their husbands in raising children
8 in a Godly way. He taught women to use their hands, by doing handwork and also teaching
9 others. He also, encouraged girls to go to school, saying, soon, this country will be run by
10 educated people. Therefore, if they are educated, they will be able to enter government positions
11 so that they can influence, so that ungodly things do not happen as we see now. The laws that
12 are made should not be against God such as abortion and same-sex marriages. Now, when it
13 comes to empowering women spiritually, baba Bhengu tried, even though the time was not
14 allowing for women to be in leadership, because the moment a woman becomes a pastor, she
15 would have to lay hands on men, and this could lead to women wanting to lead their husbands
16 at their home as well. Baba Bhengu had founded organisations for women, those that were
17 married and single, and could learn from one another. In addition to teaching one another,
18 mothers would provide a service where they could counsel one another on issues they face as
19 married women and support one another. One benefit of these services was that the scriptures
20 would be used as a guide. Women would use verses that reveal bad and good women in the
21 Bible, and they would teach about those things. Baba Bhengu taught about a lot of things, but
22 the problem is that the many different people who came in from various religions including
23 ministries, brought many foreign ideas to the church and they applied them. Also, baba Bhengu
24 did not have any problem in terms of clothing, he just said, come as you are, just as we say trust
25 the Holy Spirit. If someone does something wrong scripturally, even if it is the garment you are
26 wearing, we will not say take it off, but we will pray for God to talk to you. That is why now,
27 you find people who testify that I came here dressed like this, wearing trousers, wearing
28 earrings, but there was something that said I should not be dressed like this. Hence one mother
29 would teach saying, open the Bible and teach about the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is the one
30 who will do the work, then a person will change if she changes, and she will not change if she
31 does not change.

32 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
33 empower women?

34 **Participant 14:** The constitution keeps changing but the initial one did not talk much about
35 women, it talked a lot about brotherhood - Bhengu had nothing specific regarding women.
36 Nothing said women were inhibited from being empowered because he had given them the
37 opportunity. Baba Bhengu made women organisers and not pastors, and some sisters were given
38 local churches to lead in the former Transkei; they were preaching in them. Even in my church,
39 there was a sister who kept coming. But she would preach and when hands were to be laid on,
40 she would ask one of the men to do the laying on of hands. Baba Bhengu said, yes, I could
41 make you pastors but should I die, they will fight you, so, the plan is that I make organisers and
42 you will preach at women's services. Sometimes you would see that this verse is for all people,
43 but they would explain it focussing on women because they are being careful of what Baba
44 Bhengu said because he was a man with a vision.

45 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

46 **Participant 14:** Baba Bhengu's vision is relevant to our times because Baba Bhengu did not
47 live for his generation, he lived for the next generations to come because all things were
48 revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. His vision for the women was that they should continue
49 with the things he had set, should not change, and not discriminate against each other, it must
50 always be the Holy Spirit who rules, and no other rules should be made. So, even though this
51 vision seems ridiculous to others, baba Bhengu said that the vision for women should continue
52 like this and hold it like this.

53 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
54 vision reflected in this church

55 **Participant 14:** Pastor Bhengu had been shown a vision by God that women are the ones who
56 will be able to make the money needed for revivals to win souls. Now in the days of our lives
57 that does not happen, if it does happen, it happens occasionally, but the women still hold the
58 vision of Baba Bhengu. Even now these women take millions to Thaba Nchu, and how that
59 money is used now, is not their problem anymore. Regarding the revival tents, Baba Bhengu
60 had a great vision of tents because that is where souls are won. When a tent is pitched on the
61 plain, people will come and be caught. So, pastor Bhengu used women because he had a great
62 vision regarding women. Now that vision is not as strong as before, but it is still very fruitful

63 because even now in the church you can see that women are more than men, that is why the
64 church cannot end when there are women.

65 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure? -

66 **Participant 14:** They are still working but not as before because revival tents are now rare, and
67 their scarcity is due to the lack of money because sometimes money does not reach the regions.
68 Sometimes the regions are not given enough money. Since the money was taken to Thaba Nchu,
69 now there are few revival tents. The regions are now starting to do it themselves, according to
70 their ability, but now the financial situation does not allow it, and it is difficult for the pastors
71 to be paid. The status of women is now worsening because this is where they get the most
72 opportunities. But now things are not the same, their position on crusades has declined a lot
73 and now another thing is that the power of conviction is no longer the same as it was during
74 my baba Bhengu's time - the spiritual level has declined.

75 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
76 the Back to God Crusade.

77 **Participant 14:** According to my knowledge, they are still part of the Back to God crusade, but
78 it may differ according to region. But in our region, women are still part of the revival tents,
79 they are still preaching, and they contribute a lot in helping the evangelists, especially in things
80 that relate to women. Pastor Bhengu had opened a platform for women, that they should do
81 their work but after a while now that Bhengu is gone, many women that are complaining that
82 they want to become pastors and do as men do. Yet for the women, the way pastor Bhengu had
83 set was for them to be in an organisation to teach each other, but now they are not satisfied. Yet
84 pastor Bhengu had a reason for that, when women teach, they will enter all avenues, that we
85 pastors, when we teach women, cannot enter.

86 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

87 **Participant 14:** No changes have been made except that the Back to God Crusades are rare
88 due to the lack of money. Sometimes the regions do not receive the money for revivals.
89 Sometimes the regions hold their revivals but even that depends on the resources that is why
90 the status of women seems to be fading because this is where they get the most opportunities.
91 Another thing is that the power of conviction is no longer the same as it was during my Baba
92 Bhengu's time - the spiritual level has declined.

Researcher: Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment?

Participant 14: As I have already mentioned, I think pastor Bhengu had his reasons regarding the way women work, which is one of the reasons why he built the organisation for women, married and unmarried. Now it is not easy to change this because it was a vision that came from God. And again, as I have already mentioned in our region, we still have women, but they are not like those who worked with pastor Bhengu, who were doing miracles. Also, revivals are rare because of the financial crisis in the church. Let me repeat that things are not the same as during the time of Pastor Bhengu, the spiritual level has decreased because the power of conviction is not the same as during the time of my pastor Bhengu, the spiritual level has gone down. Here is another thing that I must mention about the evolution of the vision. The change of times has made the regions work differently and they included their traditions according to a particular region. For example, if you go to Gauteng, if you have already done this study there, you will find that what we are telling you here is different in terms of women. Currently, there is a confusion. The vision of pastor Bhengu has deteriorated, and it is not doing very well.

Researcher: What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church?

Participant 14: The main thing that has delayed it is that there are still old men who worked with Bhengu who would not dare change this thing. It is because we differ in thinking, but there is also this thing that pastor Bhengu never ordained women. There were known female preachers during Bhengu's time, but he never ordained them as ministers, instead, he made them organisers. The thing that is holding us back is that we are trying to follow the vision of pastor Bhengu, lest we start something that will confuse us because what we are in, was a vision that came from God and now pastor Bhengu also ordered that it be done in this way. We are now afraid to alter something that is not our own; if one has an idea, it would be better if they start their own.

Researcher: What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

Participant 14: We have women who are deacons although in some places it is still rejected and from single women, they prefer to use the older ones. The women also have their organisations where they lead and preach freely. I understand that there is something that makes them uneasy when it comes to the elder role. When you look, you can see that some of them do

124 qualify because even if men are absent, you find out that the church continues, but now they
125 are afraid due to the issue of the laying on of hands because the elders have to lay hands.

126 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church? –

127 **Participant 14:** I am dual because in some places they are still holding to African tradition and
128 culture. Also, it depends on where you are, because in some places there is no problem some
129 trained women know where to put and where not to put, while others are not trained. Another
130 thing is that when they are ordained, the tradition is still held. No woman will have to lay hands
131 on men. Yet, unless the Holy Spirit just does a miracle, and uses the woman to heal people
132 when they are laid hands on by her that would make a difference and would be allowed to lay
133 hands. But in KZN it happens - here in our church, but they do not put a hand on the head. Now
134 when a woman is ordained, she will have authority, she will not wait to be asked by the
135 leadership. There is a verse in the Bible that is used a lot that a woman cannot teach. Paul was
136 putting that because the culture there did not accept women to stand and teach. We, being Xhosa
137 also, have things that our culture does not accept - so we take this culture and incorporate it
138 because it corresponds with our culture.

139 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
140 comes to church positions?

141 **Participant 14:** We have a problem, it seems as if here at home we are not yet at that level
142 where we can put women in those positions, but the next generation will probably be at that
143 level. For instance, here at home there is a woman who was once asked to be included in the
144 Executive, and indeed she was, but it is said that she would just come to meetings and make no
145 contribution, and she decided to stop. After her, no woman was added again. So, I think the
146 main problem is the understanding of these things that are discussed and how they are
147 discussed. And here at home, there is that thing that women must submit, that submission thing
148 is a problem because no matter how smart a person is, that thing overwhelms women - that is
149 depressing them because they can see that this should been answered in this way, but she is
150 stuck because she knows that she cannot say such words to men, but the next generation will
151 know it.

152 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
153 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church? –

154 **Participant 14:** Biblically, Paul puts the subject of women in a good light, he says that these
155 are delicate vessels, and there are things that they will not be able to handle. For example, they
156 have been ordained in other churches, but now those churches want to stop because there are
157 things women cannot handle. But pastor Bhengu was a prophet, he saw these things prior, and
158 he knew that women would not be able to cope with certain things. We allow them to preach -
159 but we should not make them pastors because it is difficult to cope with certain situations, they
160 can continue to preach and work but they are weak vessels. Another problem with women is
161 that they like to gossip. We do not know this thing of Bhengu; it is unique yet difficult. The
162 things he said are happening just as he prophesied. Pastor Bhengu was not living for the time
163 he lived in but he was living for the future time as revealed by the Holy Spirit. But again, I
164 would also say that women are equivalent to men because they contribute a lot even though
165 they are not ordained. If you were to tell them to stay at home and not give, do nothing, and do
166 not come to church, you would see – this place will be the wilderness. What we are still
167 struggling with now is how they can be ordained, who should be ordained, and why - what is
168 her situation? And when we are in conferences, that thing always comes up, that women do
169 apply but now we do not ordain them.

170 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a
171 probationary period like their male counterparts.

172 **Participant 14:** Another thing that we must understand is the leaders that are in charge at a
173 particular time; that is the main problem because they can see that these people are gifted, and
174 these people can build a church, but now we do not have the rules and procedures that allow us
175 to ordain these people or put them as probationers. We will only put them on probation and
176 ordain them when it is agreed by the conference. But in our area, we can see that these people
177 are mature, they deserve all these things, but now we are prevented by that - but we, seeing
178 their maturity, understand that we should let them preach. Now if you look at the woman who
179 is said to be a pastor in that region – and ask where it is stated in the rules of procedure – they
180 would excommunicate us because we have done something that is not in the rules of procedure
181 of the church. Even here many applied but some left and went to other churches.

182 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

183 **Participant 14:** The problem is either they ignore the woman because they feel that she is
184 overtaking them, but other pastors would use her in the local church and be an evangelist in
185 that local. From there she could be put in a revival tent, if there is no tent, she can be given a

186 preaching point. And this preaching point will grow, maybe another father who is an elder or a
187 deacon will be sent out with her so that as he preaches the elder or deacon will lay hands because
188 the problem is with the hand, I do not know then, if the woman has the gift of healing (laugh).

189 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
190 adapting to the times

191 **Participant 14:** Yes, we will be viewed that way, but we will be seen by people who do not
192 know what we are in. We are also worried because this thing is not ours and it is not easy to
193 change what is not yours. Baba Bhengu, the person who came up with the vision, did not ordain
194 the women, he just prepared them to run their organisation freely without anyone disturbing
195 them. But I can say that we are getting there - but we are afraid of this equality (laugh).

196 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

197 **Participant 14:** I think that at times when you are a pastor, the elders are aggressive. So it
198 depends on whether the leadership agrees. Therefore, these matters are supposed to be
199 discussed and resolved at the conference.

200 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
201 change in the BTG church?

202 **Participant 14:** The consequences are very bad not just for that woman but for the church as
203 a whole if people are not used according to their gifts due to gender. At the same time, that
204 weakens the church because we are not utilizing their gifts that can help the church grow - the
205 church cannot grow and what should be happening in the church does not happen because the
206 church has a gender problem. That is why you see many gifted women end up leaving the
207 church to go and join other churches or start their own thing because they are repressed, on the
208 other hand, the church loses.

209 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected
210 the Cape to Cairo vision?

211 **Participant 14:** It is a dual scenario, in the sense that, it affects it – and again it does not affect
212 it, because our vision here in the church when it comes to going out with the Back to God
213 crusade, maybe in Namibia, there are gifted women that can be incorporated, then it does not
214 affect it like that. But it affects it in the sense that they cannot go and do it alone, they should
215 go there with male evangelists for protection purposes.

216 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
217 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
218 the outside society

219 **Participant 14:** First of all, we try to protect them in a way that we do not envy them, but we
220 do not want to throw them on fire. Even now, if you are someone's wife - when we see your
221 gift and want to utilize you - we will go to her husband and ask for permission and even request
222 him to accompany her, and as leaders, we also will be there. But the problem we face is
223 tradition, culture, and patriarchy. And yes, people will read it the way they see it, as if we
224 oppress and that we look down upon women.

225 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
226 church?

227 **Participant 14:** Women are allowed to preach in the open air. Women are allowed to look after
228 each other and even visit each other when one is sick - to come and pray. Here at home, nothing
229 is barred, but there are just certain restrictions. It has been said that when they find people they
230 must take them to the male leadership. I think that the leadership has been cautious that should
231 they encounter problems or be attacked then they know that there would be people to protect
232 them.

233 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

234 **Participant 14:** Well, here at home, since women were given to other women leaders to teach
235 and preach to them, that worked a lot in other places, but in others it did not work because they
236 are weak vessels. Many things attack women, especially in our time, women are very
237 vulnerable. The thing that attacks them is that they do want to preach, and we also want them
238 to preach but, in our days, it is very dangerous to violence against women, the situation is not
239 good. Before women used to walk long distances on foot but now it is not easy, they can no
240 longer walk freely because of the increase of evilness. In other words, we are trying to protect
241 them, however, we do give them a platform.

242 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

243 **Participant 14:** It is the same thing as I have just said that here at home, since women were
244 given to other women leaders to teach and preach to them, that worked a lot in other places, but
245 in others it did not work because they are weak vessels. Many things attack women, especially
246 in our time, women are very vulnerable. The thing that attacks them is that they do want to

247 preach, and we also want them to preach but, in our days, it is very dangerous to to violence
248 against women, the situation is not good. Before women used to walk long distances on foot
249 but now it is not easy, they can no longer walk freely because of the increase of evilness. In
250 other words, we are trying to protect them, however, we do give them a platform.

251 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

252 **Participant 14:** As we continue to see the faults that have happened on occasions where women
253 were prevented - that is why I think that in the future we will improve and see what we can do
254 to improve. We will see if we can allow them to be ordained by observing their strength. And
255 the culture is important in this matter because some of the things that are mentioned in the Bible
256 are very related to some of our cultures. Let us take this verse when analysing that verse which
257 says that some are evangelists, some are teachers, some are prophets... those are the gifts not
258 profession - it is teaching not a teacher, to teach what was put in you to be a teacher, our problem
259 is that you are made a teacher, you are made an evangelist yet those are the ministries. We
260 should see that the ministry of evangelism has been put in you and then we can use you - the
261 ministry of prophesying has been put in you, now let us listen to you when you prophesy. But
262 when we summarise, the Bible has placed all people according to their place and you do not
263 fight over something. Even women who are in a hurry to become pastors, in other words now
264 they want the position not to do the ministry because in the ministry you are just asking to be
265 given a place to preach and convert people, once the people are converted, they are taken to the
266 churches.

Appendix D15: Interview with Participant 15 (P15)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 15:** The origins of pastor Bhengu's vision for women's empowerment might be
4 traced to his alleged financial struggles, which prevented him from fulfilling his evangelistic
5 job. He left the country to look for money overseas. According to history, he was abroad when
6 God told him that he would not get any money where he was, and that the money was with the
7 people he had left behind back in South Africa. In my opinion, he was told to go to married
8 women who wore big head scarves and was informed that the money was there. Thus, he was
9 led to impoverished people who had nothing. He returned to the women and presented the
10 vision to them. The vision was that he should gather these women together and teach them
11 handicrafts. They were sewing, knitting, making mats, hats etcetera. This handwork was done
12 so that, even though they were poor, they could sell it to earn a living and give offerings to the
13 ministry. Numerous regions in South Africa as well as other nations with which we are still in
14 ministry, like Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, and so forth, have managed to carry out this
15 vision and make a living off of it.

16 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
17 empower women?

18 **Participant 15:** Not necessarily the church constitution, but the rules of procedure do reflect
19 Bhengu's determination to empower women because they define the role of mothers in the
20 church. The church is still standing today because of the work done by these women, they never
21 stopped what pastor Bhengu taught them. You see, the organisation of mothers was the first
22 organisation that pastor Bhengu built. The organisations for girls, young people, and men came
23 later but they took their cues from these mothers. You see these days people benefit by doing
24 hand work, according to the skills given to them by God; and they develop because they
25 collaborate. For example, I was a pastor in one of our villages here in the Eastern Cape right at
26 the time of COVID-19. I was teaching parishioners to plant flowers. Since it is in the rural
27 areas, there are no beautiful places for photoshoots, I said to them let us find a place to plant
28 flowers and plants so that when people have weddings, they can come to us and hire a place to
29 take wedding photos. We have now developed a committee with mothers and fathers to start
30 the cultivation. I am trying to say now, that this vision of pastor Bhengu was not limited to
31 mothers only. Pastor Bhengu taught mothers how to learn to live. And he made sure that married

women do not depend on the salary of their husbands but work for themselves so that even these problems of gender-based violence (GBV) can end. Sometimes gender-based violence is caused by being needy, it is caused by deprivation.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 15: Pastor Bhengu's vision is very relevant even now because, in the olden days, black people depended on being employed by white people, something that no longer happens; jobs are scarce; people who worked in the mines lost their jobs and returned home to live with their wives. When a woman cannot use her hands, it means starvation in that home. Many homes have been built through this vision of Pastor Bhengu. Women who have established their own homes can make a living through doing hand work. We also have people who sew clothes for us, who were developed by this vision of pastor Bhengu. Almost everything Reverend Bhengu did was looking at the future of life, and the future of the country long before this country became what it is now. In other countries like the Kingdom of Eswatini have factory shops for this craft.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 15: Pastor Bhengu saw the state of this country before it was in its current state. It is one of the first churches that utilized women as preachers. You see that some churches are raising their heads and saying that women should be used - Back to God started long ago. There is a mother here who used to be on the Executive Committee of the church but stopped after the committee was re-elected after its time lapsed. On the other hand, we have mothers who are national supervisors, who are in charge of the work of these mothers. These women worked with the Executive Committee as Pastor Bhengu worked with them. However, as I have already said, pastor Bhengu first appointed the organisers and worked with them hand in hand. The work here is very good but to be honest, the work here at Back to God has been successful because of the mothers. Fathers do not produce much money; they do have their handwork, but they are very lazy. Sisters are taught by the mothers because it is said that mothers should teach their daughters to wail - that is to pray. That wailing also means that the unmarried sisters are taught how to do handwork by the married women so that when the time comes for them to get married, they are prepared, ready to build a house, so that she would not be a burden to the man she is getting married to.

Researcher: How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

Participant 15: As far as we are concerned, nothing has changed because as I am talking to you, there is a revival here and girls are preaching. The girls start preaching at the local

66 churches, that is where we identify them. Then they get developed until they enter the Regional
67 Back to God tents. If something is placed in a person by God, then that thing is placed by God
68 therefore that person is given a chance, and there are no gender issues.

69 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
70 the Back to God Crusade.

71 **Participant 15:** No in our region they are still part of the Back to God Crusade

72 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

73 **Participant 15:** Maybe there are at the national level but at the regional level there are no
74 changes, we still have women preachers in our revival tents.

75 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
76 women's empowerment?

77 **Participant 15:** We do not all see things the same way, which makes it difficult. You see, issues
78 will never be resolved as long as there is ongoing dispute surrounding them. I believe that there
79 is still disagreement within the church on women's empowerment. Some do not have a problem
80 with it, but some feel that this must not happen.

81 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
82 the church?

83 **Participant 15:** These women do not need to be ordained; God has already ordained them. It
84 is not important to be ordained by people's hands if God has done that Himself. It is the
85 ordination of the Holy Spirit that makes the pastor say, I cannot stand and preach here today,
86 the women speaker must continue and preach even if it is a Sunday. The year before last there
87 was a young woman who was scheduled to preach in a Youth Convention in our region. This
88 young woman was scheduled with another pastor. But on Saturday evening, and it was clear
89 that the bride had not finished the message, the Holy Spirit descended. According to the
90 program, it was expected that it was going to be the pastor who was going to preach in the main
91 service on Sunday according to the schedule. When the pastor ascended the pulpit, he said -the
92 Holy Spirit says the message is not in me, it is in this young woman. God says she must come
93 to finish what she was saying. The whole house resounded - Hallelujah. And he said it is not
94 me who is saying it, it is God. If we are going to wait for the ordination from the people, we
95 will be late, the ordination comes from the Holy Spirit, hence pastor Bhengu said that there is
96 no one whom he can leave this church to be its Bishop, and he left it to the Holy Spirit. So this
97 church is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who anoints his children for the different
98 ministries and work that God has given them to do. Women are not permitted to lay hands in
99 certain places, but that is something that requires heavenly wisdom and revelation rather than

100 intelligence. Therefore, if a person's spiritual graph is poor, they will handle spiritual matters
101 with their intellect and use their mind for things that do not require it.

102 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

103 **Participant 15:** The current status of women is that they are given the opportunity by the youth
104 organisation to preach from the local to the Convention level in Thaba Nchu. They also do the
105 work of women's organisations.

106 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

107 **Participant 15:** I still maintain that if we are going to wait for the ordination from the people,
108 we will be late, the ordination comes from the Holy Spirit. Pastor Bhengu made it clear that he
109 is leaving the church with the Holy Spirit to guide it.

110 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
111 comes to church positions?

112 **Participant 15:** The attitude that men have toward women is the main issue that I observe.
113 Men need to get over their jealousies. We must acknowledge that this is God's property and
114 cease appropriating it through our maleness.

115 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
116 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

117 **Participant 15:** There are conspiracies made by certain people. If you are a pastor and you
118 support the use of women, a conspiracy will be made to remove you from the area. It will be
119 said that you are causing chaos. Meetings would be held to devise the strategies for inciting
120 riots, there would be reasons for your removal. The senior leadership would not know what is
121 happening and would be convinced that there is a problem with you, so they should remove
122 you. So, I am trying to say that we are trying to help other areas as much as we can but you see
123 that there is a big challenge.

124 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
125 period like their male counterparts.

126 **Participant 15:** They do not acknowledge them as pastors, they have a different name. They
127 call them workers.

128 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

129 **Participant 15:** There are no challenges brought by women. Men are the ones who feel the
130 challenge when they see a powerful woman like this young Makoti I was telling you about. We
131 as men must change our attitude towards women. If we keep on pushing them back when will
132 they start exercising their gifts?

133 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
134 adapting to the times?

135 **Participant 15:** As a region we are adapting but if you ask me about nationally, we not
136 adapting, and it still looks like it will take time. Like I said the problem is our mentality which
137 must change.

138 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

139 **Participant 15:** We want to help change this situation, but the problem is that they are resisting
140 because there is an opposing spirit. I was in another region according to the way the regions are
141 demarcated here in the church, but it was also here in the Eastern Cape, and I realized that there
142 is a lot of resistance concerning women's empowerment matters.

143 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
144 change in the BTG church?

145 **Participant 15:** These are the things that slow down the church's progress. Let me give you an
146 example, the young men from here will go and preach in Joburg, and others will say that these
147 young men are carrying the gospel of the farms.

148 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
149 Cape to Cairo vision?

150 **Participant 15:** They are delaying Cape to Cairo because many times, the leadership is misled,
151 and they listen to the gossip of people who oppose the progress of the church. You will realize
152 that, especially in such situations, the people who are at the root of the problem have a way of
153 doing things so that they are believed in everything they say.

154 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
155 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
156 the outside society?

157 **Participant 15:** It is like that; people already know that we are like that. My wish is that since
158 the conference has started discussing this matter, they continue to ordain and also come with a
159 way forward on how they will implement it and not just throw them in the deep end.

160 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
161 church?

162 **Participant 15:** They are Supervisors for women, they are organisers in their women's
163 organisers. They are now allowed to be voted for by the locals as deacons. But women desire
164 to be ordained as pastors. It has been mentioned in the conference that women are applying to
165 be pastors.

166 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

167 **Participant 15:** The spiritual level has decreased, and we are not winning souls as it used to be
168 during Pastor Bhengu's time. Now it is getting worse, even though we are just talking about
169 women's empowerment, there is no hope that they will ever be considered. This church is no
170 longer the same as before. The fire it was known for is gone. What is even worse is that powerful
171 pastors who we hoped would help this church have left.

172 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

173 **Participant 15:** The church is not moving forward. Men suffer from masculinity; they do not
174 want to share the church leadership positions. Women are retarded and traumatized. Although
175 God wants to use them, men oppose God. We shall never reach Cairo; we will end up where
176 we are because even here evangelizing is not happening. In other words, we are contradicting
177 the command of Jesus which says go and make disciples of all nations.

178 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

179 **Participant 15:** Issues of this nature need to be discussed and not shy away from them. But let
180 us hope that the Conference will resolve this matter and consider women and, in that way, we
181 will have a positive change in the future.

Appendix D16: Interview with Participant 16 (P16)

Researcher: Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual empowerment?

Participant 16: It was a matter of empowering them to build their homes and taking the gospel to all nations. The first thing was to build their homes and avoid divorce. In the services, they taught women how to do housework and that they must never leave their homes untidy, that they must clean before they go to preach the gospel, especially those who were newly married, and some taught them to sew. Spiritually, they were teaching them about the mothers in the Bible who did good deeds, but also those who did bad deeds so that they would not do like them. Women were also taught to pray, and they were empowering them so that they could go and teach others.

Researcher: How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Participant 16: The constitution is only generalising; it is not specific regarding Pastor Bhengu's determination to empower women. But what I can say to you; is the women are the ones who built the Back to God church through the work of their organisation. The organisation pattern for girls, men, and young people was copied from the mothers' however the money raised by these organisations is for other purposes. The money for women is for the Crusades to spread the gospel from Cape to Cairo.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 16: It is very relevant, I have mentioned how women taught each other to clean, cook, and sew as well as preach the gospel although preaching is spiritual. Teaching each other to sew was not meant for fundraising for the church alone, but it was meant for them to sell and earn a living. The aim was for them to open factories and create job opportunities in the long run. This crafting skill has been relevant in the sense that some women have managed to run their businesses in all the South African Provinces and KwaZulu Natal and in the Kingdom of Eswatini they have opened factory shops to sell handicrafts. This shows the relevance of Pastor Bhengu's work, as he taught the women and that the organisers and supervisors continue to visit the churches and teach the women.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church

Participant 16: It is progressive. Bhengu taught them handwork. This was to raise funds for the church, and it was also meant for them to sell and earn a living. Women are making millions every year and reports are made at the Women's National Convention in Thaba Nchu every Easter. This money is from that vision Bhengu got when he was abroad seeking funds for the Back to God Crusade. Women are continuing with the vision, and this shows the progressiveness of Bhengu's vision in the church. This crafting skill has been relevant in the sense that the money they make puts food on the table, they have managed to take their children through this money. The aim was for women to do business open factories and create job opportunities. Some women have managed to run their businesses in all the South African Provinces and KwaZulu Natal and in the Kingdom of Eswatini they have opened factory shops to sell handicrafts. This shows how progressive Bhengu's work is even in their personal lives. Organisers and supervisors continue to visit the churches and teach the women as Bhengu taught them.

Researcher: How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure –

Participant 16: I would say that nothing has changed because there are still women called by God. Some women are called to preach the gospel today, they are still there and some of them in our region do come to me and ask how they can go about if they want to preach since there are no women pastors at Back to God. As I am talking to you, I have two who are in the field. I believe that each person must walk in the way God has called her without fear, even if it is not at Back to God but in the Gospel of Jesus

Researcher: Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for the Back to God Crusade.

Participant 16: They are there, we still have them here in our region, some are newly married, and some are grown up.

Researcher: What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

Participant 16: As far as I know, nothing has changed yet, they are still there and working, but as I said, some have got married and some are old. Some would say that God has called them and then they leave the church. So, we do guide them as senior pastors. But if God says go there no one can stop you. When God calls you but does not call you to the Back to God, it is also good, we support them.

Researcher: Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of women's empowerment?

Participant 16: The problem that exists is that the national revivals have not yet commenced since the time of covid 19, we are still not sure who is available.

65 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
66 the church?

67 **Participant 16:** Given the approval of female deacons by the Teaching Team, maybe what
68 would follow is allowing them to occupy positions of leadership among the elders. I believe
69 that eventually women will be ordained as pastors but just that things are moving at a slow pace
70 and everything has its time.

71 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

72 **Participant 16:** They are leaders mainly in the women's organisation. Some are organisers and
73 they lead the women's work and supervisors who are like the overall leaders of the women's
74 work for both mothers (married women) and girls (unmarried women). They can be elected as
75 deacons in local churches, some are workers preaching in revival tents and some are looking
76 after preaching points.

77 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

78 **Participant 16:** According to my view, yes. We want to align everything with the women in
79 the Bible, and how they worked in the New Testament, there are women deacons, but we have
80 not found women elders in the Bible.

81 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
82 comes to church positions?

83 **Participant 16:** Well, it is the lack of female pastors. Currently, women are unable to hold
84 leadership positions because the qualification of the current leaders is that they are ordained
85 pastors. The pastors of Back to God are all men. Until they are ordained, then they will be
86 qualified to occupy those roles. At this point, women are organisers and supervisors, and they
87 are ordained.

88 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
89 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

90 **Participant 16:** What I can say is that the time has not yet come. When the time has come
91 everything will fall into place. Our church has grown a lot, but in some areas, it is dominated
92 by tradition. But everything has its own time.

93 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
94 period like their male counterparts.

95 **Participant 16:** When God has given you the spirit to educate yourselves, you will be our
96 seniors shortly. As you are doing these PhDs, God will place you in great places, just keep
97 going, God is preparing you, but you do not know. There is something God is preparing for
98 you; you do not know why God made you complete this course. You are getting somewhere.

99 You will come back and tell me, and I will tell you then. In other words, men are afraid that if
100 they ordain women, they will take their positions until they are above them, now they are afraid
101 to start that.

102 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

103 **Participant 16:** Men are typically appointed to the roles of deacon and elder, and the elders are
104 regarded as assistants to the pastors because they are the ones who are close to the pastors. Men
105 perceive women in these roles as a threat, however not all men have similar issues, and some
106 men acknowledge that women are capable. They are quite aware of that, you see, in my church,
107 I have a powerful woman, and we do open for her to use her gift. Some of the men lack
108 confidence in themselves and suffer from inferiority complexes.

109 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
110 adapting to the times

111 **Participant 16:** What I can tell you is that things are not easy in our church. I know many who
112 believe that they were called Ministers of the Word. Some approached me seeking guidance,
113 but they were never considered. Many have since left the church for other churches.

114 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

115 **Participant 16:** When you are a woman, go ahead and do your thing, do not worry about many
116 things. Some people even in your local church will blame you, but do not worry as long as you
117 know that you are doing God's thing. Sometimes you are also blamed by your pastor because
118 of lack of knowledge. He will blame you, just keep on doing your thing. Some things require
119 courage.

120 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
121 change in the BTG church?

122 **Participant 16:** That has a negative impact, women are not happy. Some, as I have already
123 said, have left our church and are in other churches, but we cannot stop them if they want to
124 leave.

125 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
126 Cape to Cairo vision.

127 **Participant 16:** These are the factors that prevent women from doing things that men do—
128 mothers are, after all, people of the house. This is the part that I believe has been challenging
129 for the Back to God administration—a woman must raise children and take care of the home.
130 Now what is going to happen when she is everywhere? The woman is thought to be the one
131 who takes care of the household. Cape to Cairo is not affected by women, it is affected by
132 administration in general.

133 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
134 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
135 the outside society?

136 **Participant 16:** People view the church as a whole, so they will not notice that we are holding
137 women captive. It is up to us to realize that this issue involving women needs to be resolved
138 for the church to move forward. However, those outside the building will never be aware of
139 what goes on within the building; they will only notice that the church appears to be is
140 deteriorating but the only people who will know are us.

141 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
142 church?

143 **Participant 16:** They are preaching because, as I mentioned before, I have just released two
144 workers and others, like the one who would lead the revival in my church the next week, were
145 already on the field. Three local assemblies have been led by women.

146 One was stationed in Tzaneen; she is now late. That one was a real pastor and was holding a
147 pastor's credential. One is currently sick, and she is old, and we need more. Women are now
148 deacons in the local churches. The Teaching Team said women must be put there as deacons.

149 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

150 **Participant 16:** We would have taken over South Africa long ago if we had not suppressed
151 women. By now, they would be far if we did not hinder them. If it were up to me, we should
152 not treat women in such a harsh manner because we live in the world, not in an island.

153 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

154 Participant 16: We have delayed the progress of the church; we have delayed the progress of
155 women. We have failed our societies because these women would motivate other women
156 through the Word of God. Look at our societies. Look how our girls behave. No one is saying
157 no. Maybe we would have not been in the mess we are in in South Africa. We would have taken
158 over South Africa long ago if we had not suppressed women. By now, they would be far if we
159 did not hinder them.

160 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

161 **Participant 16:** I see women becoming ordained ministers. As I previously stated, only time
162 will tell. Everything that we have talked about will happen even if I am no longer alive. All
163 these seemingly difficult things will happen. like I said before, even guitars, even keyboards,
164 they did not want them, but now we are fighting over them. Women will soon be ordained,
165 which will also bring about change.

Appendix D17: Interview with Participant 17 (P17)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment?

3 **Participant 17:** Whoa! That is a difficult one because pastor Bhengu was not focusing on a
4 certain gender, he was focusing on everybody bringing them back to God. I cannot for the life
5 of me have an understanding of women's empowerment. His agenda was to call everyone to
6 Christ. Another thing, keep in mind that there was no such concept back then as there is now
7 regarding gender parity, women's emancipation, etc. That's my opinion.

8 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
9 empower women?

10 **Participant 17:** Currently, I would say it was started by him even though he was not focusing
11 on gender, my understanding is that women were his powerhouse, if I may put it that way. In
12 starting his revivals, he was financially supported, predominantly by women. I assume that it
13 happened like that up to now where you find that the evangelistic missions of the church are
14 predominantly supported by women. I cannot run away from the fact that our society is a
15 patriarchal society that still upholds the authority of men. So, the acknowledgment of women
16 currently or let me put it this way, in the Back to God church, each person runs in his lane. So,
17 there are women who are fully empowered but empowered to run women's issues. There is still
18 no approach to the empowerment of women by the church itself, but the church has different
19 sectors, it has the women's sector, the youth, and the men's, and women mostly operate in the
20 areas that are aligned with them.

21 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

22 **Participant 17:** It is still relevant; it is just that the times have changed. The methodology used
23 back then is also still applicable today, but the setting in which pastor Bhengu was operating at
24 the time was somewhat traditional. Our culture is multicultural, yet despite its high level of
25 modernization, there is still a tendency or attraction to the conventional way of doing things.
26 So, the tents that he used are still being used but not at the scale that he used them, as I say
27 society is shifting from being that traditional society to a more cosmopolitan one, but the tents
28 are still functional and they do work when they have been pitched up, just not to the same extent
29 as before.

30 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
31 vision reflected in this church

32 **Participant 17:** Yes! as I have previously stated, the church is set up so that everyone stays in
33 their own lane. That affirmation that pastor Bhengu had still exists even now, as I say if the
34 organisation of mothers (married women) says turns left, the entire church turns left. Therefore,
35 I presume that their influence stems from the fact that they are a powerhouse with money. Some
36 people go to the extent of suspecting that because of that, the mothers are manipulating the
37 church. It never happens that mothers say something, and it is not done. So, as I say, some
38 people have a view that it is because of that powerhouse they have that is causing that. I arrived
39 at this conclusion because it was once remarked that mothers are the real church leaders, while
40 men are only ceremonial leaders. Women make the decisions about what gets done and what
41 has to get done, so much so that everyone is aware of this and advises against interfering with
42 a mother's organisation. They make their own decisions. So, what I am trying to say is that the
43 vision seriously affirms the role of mothers to the extent that, some people even think that it
44 has gone way beyond what it was intended to be.

45 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

46 **Participant 17:** I do not think their position has changed per se as I have mentioned earlier on,
47 women have been more hands-on, in raising the funds for the church as per pastor Bhengu's
48 vision. And their focus has been more on their organisations than anything.

49 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
50 the Back to God Crusade.

51 **Participant 17:** I think there are two things, one I have referred to, life has changed. Actually,
52 evangelism does not start when there are tents, it starts on the ground, in locals, so, in the local
53 churches, there is nothing that they are doing. So, I am suspicious that times have changed, and
54 people have different interests. And finally, if you remember, life at the time of Pastor Bhengu,
55 there was a high level of illiteracy and less ambition to do things. People saw spirituality as the
56 beginning and the end of life. You see now Jacobs is doing Ph.D.'s and the question would be -
57 why should I go to preach? It is because they are ambitious now. They are following their
58 careers. That view that we will preach to be so heavenly-minded and earthly useless. That time
59 has passed. So, people are ambitious in life - evangelism is not the beginning and the end.

60 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

61 **Participant 17:** That is why I say times have changed. Things that were of interest then are no
62 longer of interest now. It is not that they are held or whatever, it is just that on the ground, things
63 that were of interest then are no longer of interest now. It is not that they are imprisoned or
64 whatever, it is just that there are no evangelistic missions on the ground. Not only is it affecting
65 women, but things have also become quiet for men. You will see that Back to God is run by
66 those who were already in the Back to God vibe. I predict that in ten years, even Back to God
67 will be having difficulties for both men and women. As I said, circumstances have changed.
68 People are interested in other things. These days, people have lost interest in evangelism.

69 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
70 women's empowerment?

71 **Participant 17:** As I have mentioned, the times have changed and so is crime, including
72 gender-based violence. So, the vision could have evolved with the times if we had made use of
73 radio television, and social media platforms, however, the people that would be strong,
74 especially on the internet, as I have said, would be cosmopolitan people, fairly young people,
75 enlightened people, I could even say literate people of which the bulk of our pastors are not in
76 that space. For example, if you do a statistical analysis of our pastors, you will find that few are
77 educated, and that is the influencing factor number one. But having said that, the congregants,
78 because some are enlightened, on Facebook most churches are strong, so you find that, the
79 majority of them have a Facebook page, and when the Sunday service is conducted some people
80 take videos so that they can be posted on the Facebook page. But now you look at who visits
81 that Facebook page, you will find that the majority are members of the church. So, there is an
82 element of representativeness on the internet, but the consumers of that material are not as
83 strong. My number three is finances, finances have an influencing factor that we are not
84 expressed, for example on TV. If you care to know, those people that are on TV, you find that
85 per service they spend about R15 000 - R20 000 per service. I am saying that because, if you
86 remember during COVID 19, in 2020, we had no Conventions, and then KZN started doing
87 these services live on TV. That is the range they had to pay. Now our churches cannot sustain
88 that kind of amount of money. So, I am trying to say that the fourth point is the expenses. I do
89 not know how other churches are managing, but in ours, we cannot. There is another reason I
90 did not reveal to you that made mothers not be given a platform on Sunday, it was the same
91 mothers. It is reported to have happened at a meeting held in Emadadeni following the death of
92 Pastor Bhengu; I am not sure if it was in 1989. Women were allowed to give sermons on
93 Sundays, before. The women who shut the door are the mothers' Supervisors. As I mentioned

94 before, the Supervisors declared during a conference in Emadadeni that women should no
95 longer be allowed to preach on Sundays. They explained that mothers preach to men. Mothers
96 do not get along with other mothers, so the cancer continued. As I mentioned before, they, not
97 anyone else, prohibited them but themselves. And those who still hold into a patriarchal mindset
98 took advantage of that and just accepted that and said it is from them.

99 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
100 the church?

101 **Participant 17:** When something gets entrenched, it is difficult to change. But in other regions,
102 for example, if for instance there is a women's quarterly meeting, and their speaker does well
103 in other regions she is allowed to preach on Sunday as well. But this requires that there be an
104 agreement between the leadership of the church and the pastors so that it is a program that is
105 driven by the church and not something that is done by some regions. Lastly, there is another
106 reason for it: even if you visit the women's quarters and discover that the message is exclusive
107 to them. They will search for the scriptures about Mary and Esther, very selective and not
108 intended for the entire church. Now it will not be easy because there will be a wide range of
109 individuals looking forward to the message of the day.

110 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

111 **Participant 17:** The issue of women's ordination came up at the conference, but I told you that
112 our church is patriarchal. So, women at the moment are only concentrating on organisation.

113 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

114 **Participant 17:** Well, I can say, it is not really about me, because even if I say I do support it,
115 it will not help. Several men support women's ordination, but some men do not want that. So,
116 the matter lies in the conference. If the conference agrees that women should be ordained, the
117 Teaching Team will approve that.

118 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
119 comes to church positions?

120 **Participant 17:** There is nobody preventing gender transformation, it is just that nobody is
121 pioneering it. Secondly, you know the thing about our church, there is that thing of saying
122 Bhengu's things is in charge here, if Bhengu never said something we do not either. So, now,
123 unfortunately, Bhengu lived in a different era than us; we now live in a different one. So, that

124 is a significant determining aspect as well. We would still like to discuss the topics Bhengu was
125 discussing. They would tell us that we must not remove the landmarks that Bhengu left. The
126 Back to God is a very complicated church.

127 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
128 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church? -

129 **Participant 17:** I do not know, like I said our church is very complicated. You would think that
130 it is simple. They would say the landmarks that Bhengu left cannot be removed. That is
131 confusing because then why is the Teaching Team there, if they cannot take some decisions as
132 the Spiritual leaders and the watchdog of the church constitution because it seems now that
133 their duty has been entirely taken over by the Conference, all they do is to approve what the
134 Conference has decided.

135 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
136 period like their male counterparts.

137 **Participant 17:** I do not know, like I said our church is very complicated. But I am just thinking
138 that if there had been no resolution from the conference on that matter it would be impossible
139 to let them go through probation. You must remember that people that go through probation do
140 that because after they have completed the probation time they would be ordained as fulltime
141 pastors. But if you can let women go through the probation time, then you will be raising their
142 hopes that they are going to be ordained and there is still no resolution on that.

143 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

144 **Participant 17:** None, because women are running their own organisation, they are in their
145 own lane they do not tap into other areas.

146 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative is the church
147 adapting to the times

148 **Participant 17:** It is not adapting at all. Our church is facing the same problems the ANC is
149 facing. You see, the ANC is going for elections now, instead of telling us about the existing
150 problems and solutions, they are telling us about Mandela, telling us that we freed you in 1995.
151 It is the same problem in Back to God, the Back to God is stuck in the past. They turn a blind
152 eye to modern and relevant things. If you come up with an initiative today, they will say, wait,
153 we know the gospel of 1950. This is the problem of the movements that had pioneers who were

154 more outstanding than the congregation. We do not see our relevance; we always look back.
155 We are in trouble.

156 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

157 **Participant 17:** Why should pastors, not parishioners, be in charge of everything? That being
158 said, the main issue with Back to God is that they have their sights fixed on the past and ignore
159 the present. The monopoly of pastors over the church is the second issue with Back to God. I
160 may remark that since pastors are at the heart of everything, members are merely observers of
161 the decisions and actions of the pastors. That is not how things are meant to be. The issue is
162 that if the referee is also a player, there will not be any progress made because he would only
163 ever take actions that will benefit him. Thus, the pastors are by far the church's greatest
164 beneficiaries; they receive tithes, and they receive mission support. During Easter, some money
165 is delivered to Thaba Nchu, and among the beneficiaries is the Teaching Team which is the
166 pastor. Do you think if I am benefitting in something I would pioneer to change that thing? It
167 will never happen. So, one of the downfalls is the inability to be forward-looking. The second
168 one is the overwhelming focus on the pastors. They are the ones who determine the left, they
169 are the ones who determine if women can preach. And now if I want to show up, will I agree
170 that Miss Jacobs should preach on Sunday? When I see that I have the opportunity to preach,
171 myself? That is not going to happen. So, things need to change, the centre of the church should
172 not be pastors, and I know, this is a radical approach. I have said in many forums that our
173 problem is that the centre of the church is the pastors whereas the centre of the church is
174 supposed to be the congregation.

175 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
176 change in the BTG church?

177 **Participant 17:** Clearly, because everything revolves around us as pastors, we are neither
178 forward-thinking nor moving forward. As I have already stated, we are the ones who benefit,
179 but we also make the decisions, including whether or not to free women.

180 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
181 Cape to Cairo vision.

182 **Participant 17:** The absence of mothers has an impact. Women are very strategic by nature. It
183 harms sustainability. Mothers are naturally sensitive individuals. When we eliminated them, we
184 always used drastic measures. In essence, women's participation on the front lines is a loss for

185 the church because it is lacking something essential. Thus, everything is seen from the
186 perspective of men. Everything happens as they see fit. That is incorrect, because as I
187 mentioned, we are losing the truthful side, the kind side, and the merciful side. If we eliminate
188 women, we will have to be radical all the time. By keeping women on the sidelines, we are
189 losing that compassionate, forgiving, and honest aspect. As you are aware, males are naturally
190 dishonest. Their items will therefore always be dubious. They act in certain ways to fulfill their
191 desires. Mothers are honest; they share everything. So, the Cape to Cairo vision is going to be
192 compromised.

193 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
194 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
195 to the outside society

196 **Participant 17:** The non-ordination is a sign that their gift is not respected or valued, which is
197 a serious problem because it prevents observers from learning anything useful and from having
198 confidence in women. It also prevents those who commit acts of gender-based violence from
199 feeling guilty because they know that the Church too devalues women. It is the role of the
200 church to set an example.

201 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
202 church?

203 **Participant 17:** You see, there are two things that I see that have a contribution, first of all, we
204 appreciate people like Baba Nkomonde who have been the driving force, in the issues of women
205 entering the diaconry. They are the people who were able to influence until it happened,
206 because of the level of leadership they are in. I think it is a good transformative initiative. The
207 other one looks small, but I think it is one of the things that I think has a contribution, in this
208 category of young people it is no longer necessary for the chairman to be a brother. I appreciate
209 that, especially because it is at the youth level because they are the future of the church, they
210 are the ones who have the potential of driving the change. If they are now able to lead
211 organisations like the organisations of young people, it gives me hope that the future will be
212 better.

213 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

214 **Participant 17:** Because, as I have already mentioned, mothers are the ones with the ability to
215 sympathize with others. For example, when the elders bring you into the room, you are scared

216 because the men show no mercy. Since the mind is involved in everything they do, you would
217 discover that the elimination of women, or rather, the marginalisation of women, renders this
218 compassionate quality lacking. Secondly, men are not creative people by nature. Men exist to
219 maintain the status quo, not to create new things. The fact that males run the show and women
220 are not part of that is one of the reasons that keeps us in this position. Men are not
221 developmental. You look at their quarterly meetings and how graceful they are and you look at
222 the men's quarterlies they are empty and lousy.

223 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

224 **Participant 17:** Because, as I have already mentioned, mothers are the ones with the ability to
225 sympathize with others. For example, when the elders bring you into the room, you are scared
226 because the men show no mercy. Since the mind is involved in everything they do, you would
227 discover that the elimination of women, or rather, the marginalisation of women, renders this
228 compassionate quality lacking. Secondly, men are not creative people by nature. Men exist to
229 maintain the status quo, not to create new things. The fact that males run the show and women
230 are not part of that is one of the reasons that keeps us in this position. Men are not
231 developmental. You look at their quarterly meetings and how graceful they are and you look at
232 the men's quarterlies they are empty and lousy.

233 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in future?

234 **Participant 17:** There are possibilities and big possibilities and as I mentioned what the young
235 people are doing now which we are encouraging everywhere we go. They are a sign of a better
236 future. They are a sign that things will change, we cannot stay in this position forever. So, even
237 if the car is moving very slowly but it is moving towards the right direction.

Appendix D18: Interview with Participant 18 (P18)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 18:** Pastor Bhengu returned from America after he had a vision, of women with
4 big veils. You see (it is Xhosa women who wear big headscarves) and it was said to him that
5 the money that he needs is in those big headscarves. They are the people who will drive the
6 Back to God, Cape to Cairo vision. Then the women's organisation started that way, and it still
7 exists today. The women do not listen when it comes to pastor Bhengu's vision, it runs deep
8 down in their veins and sometimes you would feel that the organism suffers because these
9 women are working hard making this money for the revival tents of Back to God to carry out
10 this vision of Cape to Cairo to fetch souls.

11 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
12 empower women?

13 **Participant 18:** The original Back to God Constitution included it before the Rules of
14 Procedure were added. It no longer appears as a result of our ongoing revisions to the Rules of
15 Procedure. We continue to make changes without completing them, and before they are
16 finalized then the Executive Committee's term comes to an end, and a new committee will have
17 to take over. So, there are always delays.

18 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

19 **Participant 18:** It is relevant except for what he said in his last days. Bhengu said some of the
20 leaders that time were in a hurry for him to die saying, let him die so that we could change this.
21 Now we are in that space, now we are like the daughters of Zelophehad, we are fighting
22 something that is already inside, it is painful. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the church is
23 rare, and that is what pastor Bhengu had said. He said that the sermon would be delivered
24 psychologically and procedurally without the presence of the Holy Spirit, and you realize that
25 these things happen top down. I was at the convention now recently, and a member of the
26 Teaching Team announced that the song (Ndiyakholwa), which means "I believe," would not
27 be sung because of time constraints. Church members questioned one another, "How come?"
28 because these are the cornerstones of this church which Bhengu said must not be removed.

29 With "Ndiyakholwa," we are conveying a message and declaring our belief in God the Father,
30 the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, what I am saying is that it is difficult, but we are trying.

31 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
32 vision reflected in this church

33 **Participant 18:** It is progressing, but very slowly and the reason for that is that we have arrived
34 where pastor Bhengu said they will want to live a lavish life, it will be about them, it is no
35 longer about the vision. These days, a speaker would tell you that I cannot stay in this hotel, I
36 cannot stay in this B&B, I need a certain hotel and when I am finished preaching, I want you
37 to give me money and I want to see it on the bank app in my phone. It is all about them. And
38 the clothes, where have you seen a pastor wearing an R2000 shoe, they are driving a Mercedes
39 Benz, which we do not have while we offer in the church. So, it is difficult because these people
40 who are leading, it is about them. We live in such times.

41 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

42 **Participant 18:** It has not really changed. We still have women leaders expect that they only
43 take care of women organisation. There are women committees and there are also organisers and
44 supervisors. Yes, we do have them, there is a new generation coming in, and they are still part
45 of it.

46 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
47 the Back to God Crusade.

48 **Participant 18:** They are, they are still there in the Back to God crusades. It is just that the
49 revival tents are still rare, especially after the Covid 19, but we still have them.

50 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

51 **Participant 18:** As far as we are concerned, nothing has changed, as I said, we still have them.

52 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
53 women's empowerment?

54 **Participant 18:** That is challenging, but the largest obstacle we seem to be confronting is
55 cultural in nature—customs and traditions. The issue of culture and custom frequently comes
56 up; women are perceived differently and are not viewed as men since males prefer to regard
57 themselves as leaders. It is a mentality issue. Also, the eminence of Christ is lacking in men
58 because if Christ was preeminent in their lives, they would see women as children of God, who

59 have the Spirit of God, who receive revelations from God. And therefore, they would be freed
60 to share what God has revealed to them because the message God gives to each one of us is
61 meant to build the whole church. Now, how will we be edified if there are messages that we do
62 not receive? That deprives the whole congregation, not them.

63 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
64 the church?

65 **Participant 18:** As far as I can see, we have women who have the gift of teaching but now
66 there is jealousy. You find that the pastor does not get along with a gifted brother who is a good
67 preacher, to the extent that their issue becomes the story of Saul and David. And that brother
68 would have a challenging life and would not be scheduled to preach again. So, you could see
69 that it is a matter of jealousy. But when you read Pastor Bhengu's document, it was even revised
70 in the resolutions of the February 2023 conference that the pastor should teach men to the point
71 that they are equal to or even greater than him, but the pastors do not want that, how much more
72 so on women.

73 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

74 **Participant 18:** Since they are the ones who were made visible in the vision that pastor Bhengu
75 witnessed, they raise money to conduct the Back to God revivals. They are the only department
76 with supervisors. For the work of married women and single women, respectively, they also
77 have organisers. Recently, the Teaching Team gave their approval for women to be elected as
78 deacons at local level.

79 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church? –

80 **Participant 18:** If you had asked me this question when I was still at home, I would have
81 brought you some scriptures because I believe in the Word. Another is from the letter St Paul
82 wrote to the Corinthians 14: ??? Another one he wrote to Timothy says that women should be
83 silent, there are also others. Based on those scriptures, I can say that I do not agree.

84 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
85 comes to church positions?

86 **Participant 18:** Even with that it is based on those same scriptures, because Paul says that a
87 woman cannot speak in the church but in the women's organisation we do listen to them on
88 Sunday. But it happens that even if it is a girls' service sometimes, you hear that they have not

concluded the message, but they know that they have to finish it on Sunday morning because they are aware that they do not preach in the main service on Sunday. So, I think we need to change that mindset first.

Researcher: What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church? -

Participant 18: I would say that maybe we still adhere to Judaism because they treated women as second-class citizens, as you know that even in the temple, they had a place but were not allowed in the main church. As with other nations such as the Arabs, they do not want women to study. We are still stuck there, we do not make means to escape this trap, but we do need a way to get out of this, we need to pray about this. You must bring all the scriptures on how we can get off the hook because you do the research - because the scriptures agree that we are all priests, so I am not sure if we interpret the scriptures correctly. What God says to a man, he can say it to a woman, married or single. So, the problem is when it comes to women being given the right to operate. So, the problem is with the origin of this religion because it embraced that culture. But there is a way, if we can be rooted in the scriptures, we can get out of this problem. We must serve God in the Spirit and remove the tradition. So, that is why I say there is a chance that we can get rid of this problem if we can accurately interpret the scriptures.

Researcher: Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary period like their male counterparts.

Participant 18: Because they are holding them by saying they are workers and not pastors; they are not allowing them to be ordained. We are held by tradition, that is what is holding us – it is our tradition and also it is the Jewish tradition, that is what is holding us. So, they are not pastors, they hold, they are workers according to the initial way of pastor Bhengu - they were called workers. Now people do not want to be workers, they want to be ordained by force, they want to be called pastors, and they are not pastors, they are evangelists. There is a woman here in my local church who can teach. When she is given the opportunity she teaches - she dissects the scripture, you could hear that she understands what she is talking about but now we are held by tradition.

Researcher: What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

Participant 18: They do not open up to them, and unless someone is an organiser, they do not get the opportunity they deserve. They do not have anywhere else to go unless another church

120 invites them outdoors. Occasionally, they receive invitations to another local location, where
121 they are given a platform. Consequently, a few of them have departed to establish their own
122 ministry. Some lack confidence, yet you see that there is something here.

123 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the church
124 adapting to the times

125 **Participant 18:** I can say, we are adaptive to times because this matter has become an agenda
126 item for the conference, So, there is hope that we are getting somewhere with this issue. We
127 will pray that it happens.

128 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

129 **Participant 18:** I think a lot of teaching is needed for the church at large. Women should also
130 study the scriptures and be encouraged to take short courses even leadership courses and be
131 empowered to gain confidence.

132 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
133 change in the BTG church?

134 **Participant 18:** The first thing is that they will be challenged by the local churches because
135 they are perceived as second-class citizens. And there are things that they will have to discuss.
136 Even if they have done conflict management, it will not be good enough for the issues they deal
137 with. Look, we have tried this, the first time the Executive went out, they went to Switzerland
138 and came back with swollen heads saying that in Switzerland they were told that trailing behind
139 - they were asked why there are no women in their Executive Committee. So, there is a woman
140 who was put in, but she never finished the term, she became sick because people change when
141 they get to meetings, they are not the same people you know, and you have to keep admonishing
142 each time. Firstly, you have to start with a strong scripture to remind us when it gets tense. So,
143 what will a woman do in such a situation?

144 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
145 Cape to Cairo vision.

146 **Participant 18:** It has not really because they were not going to be alone there. There are still
147 pastors who do the work of Back to God. Pastor Bengu's vision was that women should play
148 their part in supporting the work financially. I understand that pastor Bhengu worked with some

149 women in the revival tents but now times have changed because churches are even being robbed
150 lately. Also, the tents are still very rare, the work is not moving currently.

151 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
152 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
153 the outside society?

154 **Participant 18:** All these things revolve around cultural problems. People are still held by their
155 traditions. Truly there is nothing that prevents us from giving women a chance. This is why I
156 am saying, let us hope that the conference will resolve these issues.

157 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
158 church?

159 **Participant 18:** Some preach in revival tents. Others are workers in preaching points. During
160 quarterly meetings, they are allowed to preach in the main service on Sunday. And as I have
161 already said, they have now been allowed to be voted in as deacons in local churches because
162 the Teaching Team has approved that.

163 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

164 **Participant 18:** I do not have a specific history. Women used to preach on Sunday, I do not
165 know where it turned. Anyway, the same women came and said, "Hey, hey, hey, fathers, we
166 women do not preach on Sundays. We were still telling them to preach. Sometimes you give
167 her a chance and she will be afraid and say a lot of nonsense and you become disappointed.

168 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

169 **Participant 18:** We are deprived of the message that God has for us through women. Men
170 forget that we go to church because we need to hear from God, not to pass the time or have fun.
171 Moreover, we have possessed God's thing and claim it as our own because the church belongs
172 to God, not to men. How are you going to explain to me that God condones the mistreatment
173 of His children? This reveals that men do not fear God. The church suffers because women are
174 in the majority in our church and make the largest donations; without women, the church would
175 not be surviving today. They do not attend midweek services, and they only come on Sundays
176 and these women play leaders in their absence. If these women were not there this church would
177 have been closed long ago.

178 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

179 **Participant 18:** As far as I can see, we will be through this problem and what I like is that
180 women are no longer quiet in the conference. At first, the women would come and be quiet and
181 say nothing.

Appendix D19: Interview with Participant 19 (P19)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 19:** Pastor Bhengu's vision according to me was that women should be
4 empowered, so that the church can be able to operate well especially on the mission part of the
5 church, outreach ministries, that is why according to anecdotes when he was somewhere
6 overseas for fundraising, God showed him a vision to say you left the sources of funds in your
7 church and that is from women. So, his vision to empower women was that they were going to
8 play a very critical role in extending the church.

9 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
10 empower women?

11 **Participant 19:** Ja! Well, looking at the Constitution, you will find that it may be more implied
12 than explicit in terms of his determination to empower women. So, that is why you find that
13 the church continues as is because of the lack of explicit people to say, this is what women
14 should do, this is what the church should do to empower women; it is implied that is why it is
15 subject to many interpretations. The interpretations that I think of are the interpretations that
16 are coming from people's backgrounds, when they look at the Constitution, they interpret it
17 based on their background. From the cultural perspective, in particular, women have a particular
18 role to play. Women cannot be leaders in the sense of standing in front of people and others are
19 misquoting the scripture by Paul that women must learn in silence. So, all these are coming in
20 because of how people interpret, the role that women should play and that has an issue on what
21 women do in the church – you find that they do not actively participate – active meaning taking
22 an active role in terms of leading the church.

23 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

24 **Participant 19:** Bhengu's vision is very relevant to the church today. Relevant in the sense that
25 most of the things that he talked about, we see some of them taking place today. For example,
26 when people have these receptions during weddings, you would prefer that people finish earlier
27 than to stay there till it is very late. Before these current killings and robberies were taking place
28 in churches. So, to me, he was a visionary because if we follow what he said already we are
29 solving the problem of a church being robbed and the church being attacked during the night,

so it is very relevant he was a visionary. Concerning women, the vision he had was that the source of funding for the mission would come from women because women can raise more funds than men. So, that aspect was the aspect to empower women which we still see today, if you see women's work today in the church you will find that it is more effective, some kind of a pillar to the missionary work in the Back to God.

Researcher: Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 19: In the current church because of what I said, because of the different interpretations of what Bhengu stood for, some of the practices are not progressive, they do not reflect what Bhengu meant, they reflect what people interpret what Bhengu might have said. It is more of the interpretation of what Bhengu said than the actual because the actual reflects Bhengu as a very progressive and forward-looking leader than what some people would portray him today with regards to women.

Researcher: How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

Participant 19: One can say we have regressed rather than progressed, why am I saying this; we were supposed to see more women pastors today, but you rarely find ordained women pastors in the Back to God which is what regression to what Bhengu stood for. And to show that we are regressing if you look at the policies of the Back to God, and the plan going forward, not much is there to plan for the empowerment of women in the church. So that is why I say we are regressing rather than progressing, but at the same time interpreting what Bhengu said – and say this is what Bhengu said. I can say misinterpretation of what Bhengu said.

Researcher: Follow-up Question - Do these interpretations from the different people not contradict each other?

Participant 19: They do because if you go to churches with progressive thinking minds, the role of women is slightly different from what you find in the context of the church women are regarded culturally as people who are supposed to be subjective to men. So, it depends on how people interpret them based on the context and culture in particular that comes in to say a man is a man is a leader, he must lead not the women, and others use Paul's scripture to say women must learn in silence and not in the church they will talk at home. That is not what Bhengu stood for. But that is what is happening because of how people interpret the position of women in the church.

61 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
62 the Back to God Crusade.

63 **Participant 19:** That is difficult to respond to, I might not say I do not have the history as to
64 what happened, I did not read about that but the key part of their contribution to the evangelist
65 mission is on the finances. The money that they are contributing is meant to extend evangelistic
66 work. Bhengu never looked at a person as a woman, but he looked at the gift of a person in
67 extending the kingdom of God

68 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

69 **Participant 19:** Like I said, I can only speculate I do not have empirical evidence to support
70 what I am saying – but as things progress, we retrogress on the issue of women. So, one element
71 of retrogression is exactly what you are talking about why are we no longer seeing women
72 being part of this task force? It is in line with the issues of interpretation and many other issues
73 that may be there.

74 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
75 women's empowerment?

76 **Participant 19:** This question is linked to what we have just said. Several issues might have
77 led to this – how people view women today. How people interpret Bhengu's vision and mission
78 and many other factors, of course, lead to the issue of leadership because if we have many
79 women availing themselves for leadership, the space for leadership is going to smaller. Others
80 might feel threatened to say if we are available in numbers to lead, we may not have a space to
81 lead. These are some of the speculations that we may bring in, but the major one is how we
82 interpret the issue of women in the church. So, one of the reasons is that man might be scared
83 of being omitted from leadership.

84 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
85 the church?

86 **Participant 19:** As we said, culture is one of them, secondly, the belief that women are not
87 supposed to lead they must be led – these are some of them, and of course - lack of visionary
88 understanding of the role of women in the church. As I have mentioned earlier, the influence of
89 St Paul's writings may also come in. St Paul says women must be silent in the church and they
90 will talk at home instead of people going beyond that statement to look at the background we

91 can talk about exegesis – they look at the scripture at the surface and use that as a kind of a
92 stick to hold women back.

93 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

94 **Participant 19:** The current status is not something that we can boast about regarding the
95 empowerment of women. There is still a lack of progress in terms of empowering women to
96 take leadership roles. We do have women, but women generally are known as prayer warriors
97 as people who support the church – -mission support but not in leadership positions which is
98 an indictment in the church.

99 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

100 **Participant 19:** As a person I feel that women are like any other person, they should be
101 ordained

102 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
103 comes to church positions?

104 **Participant 19:** Like I said the interpretation of what the Bible says about women, is the major
105 one, because unless you can interpret what the Bible is saying and look at the context and go
106 beyond what you see on the surface of a sentence in the Bible – you will stick to that and that
107 will be a major hindrance in terms of empowerment. Also looking at the future planning for the
108 church, I do not know how visionary leaders are in line trying to bring more women into the
109 fold as pastors where they are ordained. I think one thing that we can maybe request from the
110 leadership of the church is the plan that they have in terms of trying to speed up the process of
111 women's leadership in the church – is there a particular plan?

112 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
113 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

114 **Participant 19:** As I said – misinterpretation of the Bible, culture – how people interpret things
115 based on how they understand culture, culturally from home you know that a man is a leader
116 and is supposed to protect a woman and not the other way round. So, all these things combined
117 become a stumbling block. Now to summarise, it means that leadership should read more, and
118 study more – the more they read, the more they study, and the more open-minded they will
119 become be able to deal with these issues. This would facilitate progression in terms of women's
120 empowerment in the church.

121 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
122 period like their male counterparts.

123 **Participant 19:** The line of thinking is the same, the unequal treatment of men and women, if
124 there was equal treatment, this question would not be there. So, it goes back to the unequal
125 treatment of men and women, but the question would be then, they are all children of God, that
126 is the bottom line – why are they treated differently? It goes back to what I talked about - issues
127 of looking at a person from a different perspective but at the same time saying we are all
128 children of God. We are all children of God but at the same time, we are different (laugh). But
129 there is a scripture saying – there is no more Greek, there is no more Jew – it is being used
130 selectively, that is the problem we are having, it is more about how people interpret the Bible
131 in other cases they interpret it to suit them. To say I used this scripture to suit me and protect
132 my privileges. You see a person who is in power is not easy to give power away. They will do
133 everything to protect that power. That is what I can say.

134 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

135 **Participant 19:** Remember I just said, when you have power, you do not want to give power
136 away. Maybe one of the challenges would be that women will become a threat to the person
137 who is in the position – to say they are coming to take our positions. That might be one of the
138 threats especially if you look at women from that perspective that I talked about. The issues of
139 looking at a person from a different perspective but at the same time saying we are all children
140 of God. We are all children of God but at the same time, we are different (laugh). To say I used
141 this scripture to suit me and protect my privileges (SEE 2.5). Women become a threat.

142 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
143 adapting to the times?

144 **Participant 19:** Regarding this one to me, it is something that in some cases, people may put
145 women in some positions more of a token that is really in power, just to be viewed as not being
146 conservative. But looking at it in the essence in our church in particular – there is still a
147 conservative approach when it comes to women because that is why as we said, few are
148 ordained, few are pastors and usually when we attend these meetings, the RGC meetings, many
149 are male, and women are few. And usually what I have observed is that when women are there,
150 they hardly talk – they are very reserved and quiet. So, it needs an overhaul. Training women
151 – the church has a plan, training males as well. You must train all parties. Train women to assert
152 themselves. Train men to accept that women are people. They are children of God like any

153 other person. It needs a lot of training, and a lot of minds shift which is what the church is
154 suffering from now. They adapt in different ways; some leave the church. The departure from
155 the church is a way of adapting. So, the church remains with few members, that is how it adapts
156 in some cases. And they will say the more Holy we are the fewer we will remain (laugh), and
157 that leads to the mushrooming of ministries.

158 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

159 **Participant 19:** So, it needs an overhaul. Training women – the church must have a plan,
160 training males as well. You must train all parties. Train women to assert themselves. Train men
161 to accept that women are people. They are children of God like any other person. It needs a lot
162 of training, and a lot of minds shift which is what the church is suffering from now. We must
163 train women on issues of leadership and assertiveness, to take their rightful position because it
164 does not help to create a space for women to come in when they are not trained – there we are
165 going to have a disaster. To train men as well that these women are children of God, they can
166 do anything that the man does, so it takes a lot of training – training, training, training education,
167 education, education. And no one should be a pastor without having qualifications because that
168 also contributes. So, people must be encouraged to study and obtain qualifications and based
169 on those qualifications then you become a pastor – because it is in reading and studying that
170 one's mind gets empowered and starts thinking broadly, unless we do that it is going to be a
171 struggle. Do we not have pastors who have never gone to school? How many are there? That
172 is part of our problem.

173 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
174 change in the BTG church?

175 **Participant 19:** Lack of church growth, and people leaving the church. It also affects the
176 missionary aspect of the church because people tend to say – oh is that church that oppresses
177 women? So, that view of the people of the church affects their acceptance of the church. The
178 church is viewed negatively. So, there are dire consequences. And of course, if people do not
179 accept the church they die in their practices. You see now in South Africa we have got many
180 things that are going on - and it is the church that was supposed to help but when people see
181 the church as something that is not helpful, something that is oppressive even if they have
182 problems they would say I would rather die in my problems than to go to this institution which
183 is going to oppress me more. So, the consequences are dire, and this also affects the economy.
184 If people are trapped in their sins – citing sins of beer drinking, substance abuse, and gender-

185 based violence in the end, they become sick and a sick person cannot be productive,
186 economically. That will also affect the economy. We do not have to blame the economists only,
187 even the church. If the church was operating to its maximum – potential. The economy would
188 improve.

189 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
190 Cape to Cairo vision?

191 **Participant 19:** One, we do not have human power because women are at the back – so that
192 affects the vision because in the end if it is men only that are doing that – how many do we
193 have – not much, so, that affects the Cape to Cairo vision. It also affects the issues of
194 contributions in the church. Other women would say, why do I contribute to this when I am not
195 part of it in terms of being involved in missionary work? Others question why, we do not get
196 value for the money that we are paying, why because women are at the back there. They are
197 not participating the way they should. So, that will always affect the Cape to Cairo vision. Not
198 few people – we need to ensure that all of us get into it.

199 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
200 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
201 the outside society?

202 **Participant 19:** They view the church as an oppressive instrument, perpetuating oppression.
203 So, women have several oppressions – oppression at home, oppression from the workplace,
204 and oppression in the church, which was supposed to be the other way around. The church was
205 supposed to serve as a model for the workplace and home, but it is the other way around, that
206 the church becomes an oppressive instrument. So, it makes society look at the church as an
207 oppressive instrument rather than an instrument that liberates people from their sins, their evil
208 practices and also sets the example of how people should live. So, this is what is happening
209 with the church. That is how the people view the church.

210 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
211 church?

212 **Participant 19:** Others are being accommodated to being pastors which is very right, two, in
213 some churches where there are no males, women serve in the leadership committees as elders
214 because they accept that the church cannot stop running because we do not have men. So, these
215 are the aspects that I see as something that is helping to move towards women's empowerment.

216 So, you talked about practical theology – so practice dictates – so, because we do not have
217 enough men, so, let us take these women to be there meaning if men come (laugh) then we take
218 them out. As long it is not written in the policy that is what is likely to happen. So, practice
219 dictates, that practice is leading what is in the policy, meaning that there is a need to revise the
220 policy. So, practice is talking to say, it is possible, for women can be on the committee The
221 Teaching Team has approved that women can be elected as deacons and women are also
222 included in church boards.

223 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

224 **Participant 19:** Stagnation of the church in terms of growth both numerical and spiritual. That
225 is from my observation, and we still suffer from that because the Back to God is not where it is
226 supposed to be both numerical and spiritual. The other implication is the mushrooming of the
227 self-independent churches/ministries. If you can check how many ministries came out of the
228 Back to God – there are many, you cannot even count them in terms of the number and it is
229 because of the resistance to change – because others propose this and they say, no, not here,
230 you go and do it somewhere and they leave. Even as we speak there is another church that has
231 been born. So, it is an ongoing thing because of the resistance to change. Implications to women
232 are that they are disempowered to lead, they lack self-confidence, and they are not developed
233 to the extent that we can say we have women who can be able to lead.

234 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

235 **Participant 19:** SAME AS ABOVE

236 Stagnation of the church in terms of growth both numerical and spiritual. That is from my
237 observation, and we still suffer from that because the Back to God is not where it is supposed
238 to be both numerical and spiritual. The other implication is the mushrooming of the self-
239 independent churches / ministries. If you can check how many ministries came out of the Back
240 to God – there are many, you cannot even count them in terms of the number and it is because
241 of the resistance to change – because others propose this and they say, no, not here, you go and
242 do it somewhere and they leave. Even as we speak another church has been born. So, it is an
243 ongoing thing because of the resistance to change. Implications to women are that they are
244 disempowered to lead, they lack self-confidence, and they are not developed to the extent that
245 we can say we have women who can be able to lead.

246 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in future?

247 **Participant 19:** We may not have youth in the church if this does not change. We may not have
248 educated people in the church. We may not have people of influence in the society in the church
249 because they will interpret the church as something that is not progressive. Now, to be
250 progressive does not mean to throw away the principles of God - but to be progressive means
251 to be empowered to be able to interpret what is in the Bible based on the context. So, if we do
252 not do that, we are going to lose many people including women who are educated and women
253 who are rich. We may not have people of influence in society like politicians, ministers, and
254 the President of the country, in the church and if we do not have those people in the church, the
255 church in the end may not have influence and it may lose its saltiness. It may lose its light. So,
256 instead of people learning from the church, it will be the other way around - the church will
257 start learning things from outside. And it will be deemed useless. That is why – you see the
258 church is very important. If the church is weak, usually the economy becomes weak. The things
259 in society become weak and horrible – it reflects what is happening in the church – but if there
260 is a revival in the church, the economy works well, and everything operates well. Even songs
261 that are sung are not gloomy but are celebratory songs because it is the church that is leading
262 but if the church does not lead, people outside start with these gloomy songs, and the church
263 copies so you know that the church is being led instead of leading. So, the church is the center.
264 That is why if you look at history as well, the church has been the centre. Where there was a
265 revival even employers, would go for church people because they would say these are good
266 people- they do not steal, they are honest, they always do things right. If the employees are
267 good, do not steal, are honest, always do things right, and are diligent, there is no way the
268 company cannot grow and if the company grows then the economy grows. But now if those
269 who steal are in the church (laugh), we are not influencing society in the right direction.

Appendix D20: Interview with Participant 20 (P20)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 20:** According to institutional memory and oral history, we do not have a document
4 that would say this is what Papa created for women's empowerment. No, no, no we do not have
5 that reference document but the oral history that the elderly people tell us says Papa had a vision
6 of women while coming from the United States of America, he had a vision of a woman having
7 some cash hidden in a (doek) headscarf. That is all we know. It appears that when he went to
8 the United States of America to do some fundraising things did not go well. When he arrived,
9 there was a place called Docks I Port Elizabeth – (that is where the ships are docking), wearing
10 a bellbottom, you remember those times. In those times bellbottom was the attire of the day
11 and people were intrigued to see Papa wearing a bellbottom. He told the leadership that was
12 there that this is what he saw in a vision for women, that women can do fundraising, and they
13 have the capacity to give birth to this vision by way of fundraising. We are now talking about
14 the administration part of the church. Remember the church is in three spheres. The church is
15 administrative, the church is financial (revenue, the capital, and the church is spiritual. That is
16 as far as I know according to the leadership of Reverend Bhengu then. And then I think it would
17 be proper if I could also talk about the issue of women's participation in so far as the five-fold
18 ministry is concerned because we are a Pentecostal church. Reverend Bhengu never constrained
19 women from prophecy. There were prophetic women. He never constrained women from
20 preaching which is why there were women preachers in history. What Reverend Bhengu would
21 have done if he was alive, he would have ordained women. But because then he was contending
22 with tradition and social stereotypes there was also a high pressure of oppression. Oppression
23 was rife, so, he was also contending with white supremacy. Remember honorary J. Bond is
24 British, and the Malan brothers who supported Reverend Bhengu were Boers (I am sorry to
25 bring that into the church space), but it is the reality of the society. Remember, the church is
26 not an Island from the society and then he had to balance. So, the honorary J Bond, what I am
27 told is that he saw an opportunity to expand the Anglicisation of the Gospel. So, he embraced
28 Rev. Bhengu under the Assemblies of God, and that is why we became Assemblies of God Back
29 to God. It is because of honorary J. Bond saw an opportunity to expand the Anglicisation of the
30 Gospel to us as Africans through Rev. Bhengu. Rev. Bhengu was also contending with the
31 issues of ... ok I will remember...So there were these Americans who wanted to encroach on

the space of the African people much as the British, much as the Boers. So, the Malan brothers were contending with honorary J. Bond because then there was an expansion of Anglicisation of the Gospel, so he was not able to explicitly say women must also be embraced at a pastoral level. However, white people had always had women pastors. So, the issue of female pastors was the issue in the African context. And I think it was perpetuated by tradition, by social stereotype. Also, what we have to consider is that Judaism in its approach is very patriarchal, I wish I could repeat that. So, we inherited a belief system that also has some traits that are similar to our tradition in terms of viewing the participation of women. So, I can safely say without any fear of any contradiction even though he did not explicitly present that plan, he would have ordained women undoubtedly.

What makes me say that is that he created the organisers' forum for women at a national level in the quest of accommodating women. That there must be a group dedicated to that as in the mothers' group at a national level. It was headed by mothers. So, for him to have created that structure at that level for women simply tells that if it was this time, he would have ordained women. Women would preach, the women would prophesy, and the women would participate in choir services. All the five-fold ministry. I think where we were conservative is the apostolic part of it where women are occupying the apostolic office so to speak. Where you have a woman pastor who would look after the congregation. Rev. Bhengu was never able to reach that. They were just allowed to preach and do the organisational work. They were not doing any sort of work like anybody else.

Researcher: How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Participant 20: I just want to be frank with you like I said in my opening remarks no reference document explicitly states how women should participate to go to the level of the constitution would be a cherry on top. The church constitution is silent. I remember no clause that speaks about women's participation. I would say the constitution is contradicting Bhengu's determination because there is no perfect constitution, and the constitution would have its shortfall so in this context the constitution did a disservice not to accommodate women.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 20: Bhengu's vision is as relevant as it was. Remember, the church is the body of Christ. Remember that the church is the light of the society. It is an agent of change. No church,

no liberation. Do you remember Malcolm X, even in the South African context, liberation was brought by the church. People fail to understand that, OR Tambo, Nelson Mandela, those people were groomed at church. So, the vision of Rev. Bhengu is as relevant as it was. Where we need to tweak, I must accept we have to tweak the vision to encourage women's participation because the church schism is tradition especially African tradition where women are perceived as second-class citizens; this notion or paradigm is against the Word of God because in Him was her. So, women are not non-parallel human beings, they are human beings like us. God can speak to them. God spoke to Deborah the judge. I can count many women of wisdom in the Bible that have influenced etymologically speaking that kind of society. So, I think it has been a travesty of justice in history that today we have not fully integrated women as the church into the positions of the levers of the church. I must be honest with you that has been perpetuated by tradition which we have to be liberated from. I remember one time; I was with pastor Smith (pseudonym) and we were talking about issues of the progress of Back to God. This Smith said honorary J Bond said to Rev. Bhengu, "You see Nicholas, you are flying far above your people". S Rev Bhengu was advanced. It is like Nelson Mandela who said I have a vision of a democratic society but at that time that sounded like a taboo as if something that would never happen. So, Rev. Bhengu was far more advanced than the people of his time. That is why I am confident that if he was alive, he would have changed the whole setup and made the women participate in the levers of the powers of the church.

Researcher: Bhengus vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive vision reflected in this church?

Participant 20: It is a very painful question; I wish you would not ask that question. I just wish because I will have to be brutally honest. Look, there are followers in everything. And followers do not mean, your kind. So, the vision of Rev. Bhengu in the current space, I see it to be trampled upon. It is not carried in a manner that he would have carried it if he was still alive. What is happening now, there are lots of factions, church factions, and also a dereliction of duty of the leadership of the church and there is lots of denominationalism. Those problems are problems that are repugnant to the vision of Rev. Bhengu. There are no people who carry the baton to his kind as in this hand and in this hand. The current church does not. They have not managed, if we speak Cape to Cairo. Did we manage to reach where? Did we manage to reach Egypt? Did we? No, we have not. And the vision has not been progressive. The vision is naturally alive, once you say vision you are talking about a living thing, therefore, it has to be progressive. It cannot be static. It has to produce; it has to be developmental. It has to be

96 adaptable. It has to be relatable. It has to be responsive. It can never be static; the vision can
97 never be static. So, we would in the near future observe lots of dwindling and dying of the
98 organisation if we cannot be relevant to the current community. For example, if there are no
99 women pastors, do you know that there are people who would relate better – there are issues of
100 gender, as a man of God people would come, and you will find that some of the issues would
101 be handled better if there was a female pastor because they need a female face. So, by being
102 patriarchal in our approach to the implementation of the vision of the late Rev. Bhengu, we
103 have done injustice to his vision. We have not even managed to scratch the surface in terms of
104 servicing the people of God. The problem is patriarchy.

105 **Researcher: Follow-up question:** If you say some other things would need the face of a
106 woman- can you please make an example for me so that I can understand you better?

107 **Participant 20:** Look how do you deal with a rape victim? When a female comes to you as a
108 man of God and says I have been raped. Do you understand that engagement is limited from a
109 patriarchal point? Do you understand that you will not be able to assist maximumly because of
110 the gender issues, so when you have female pastors, they can relate to the issues of females?
111 They can better serve the congregants. Females are more versatile than us males, I must accept,
112 that they are the latest version of the creation of God, naturally intelligent by intuition. They
113 have got that thing we are limited to have. So, when the church is one-sided, is patriarchal, then
114 the church loses its ability to serve the people of God.

115 **Researcher: Follow-up** - what could be the cause of the unprogressive vision? Where does the
116 problem lie?

117 **Participant 20:** I think it is the impartation issue. Remember Rev. Bhengu called 24 people as
118 in Jesus Christ who went into the mountain and when he came down from the mountain, he
119 attributed his disciples as apostles. So, the problem is the impartation. Where I am sitting, I
120 remember Rev. Bhengu was sick and brethren were posturing that maybe the reverend would
121 leave the baton to whoever of them at that level, but Rev. Bhengu said to them, I am leaving
122 the church to the Holy Spirit, not to any person. So, there was a void in that office because by
123 nature people follow a leader. Yes, the Holy Spirit is there. That is why there was Moses, and
124 that is why after Moses passed away there was Joshua because, in the paradigm of the setup of
125 people, people are made to follow, so that was the first mistake that happened because that
126 office was left vacant a there has been a lot of contestation between the Teaching Team and the
127 Executive of Back to God about the Apostolic power of Back to God. That is number one.

128 Number two is the congregational approach, for example in politics you have what you call
129 democracy but in church, the ideology of running the church is either congregational or
130 Presbyterian or... I will remember this terminology, so, the problem of Back to God is because
131 it is a congregational church. It does not have a papal approach, where there is a leader that is
132 anchored, so everybody feels to lead and it does not work that way, that is why there are
133 squabbles at the top. There are squabbles of power, there are squabbles of factions; there could
134 be some serious financial abuse of the church. I do not want to go there.

135 **Researcher: Follow-up,** Please go anywhere because that will give me a wider scope, the
136 reason I am doing this research is that I am curious to know what exactly is happening in the
137 church.

138 **Participant 20:** No, I think let me indulge you, in 2003, we appointed Price Waterhouse Cooper
139 (PWC) (an audit firm), because then, there were issues around the church funds that were not
140 fully disclosed and declared. We appointed Price Waterhouse Cooper. We engaged some of the
141 National Intelligence people that we know, and a lot of issues were exposed. We tabled the
142 report to the conference I think it was 2003 and 2004. It was a big issue all over. So, we could
143 safely say also, the handling of the church finances could also impede the vision. Tradition,
144 patriarchy, handling of church finances, factions, power mongers, gatekeeping (men who would
145 go to verses that say – a woman must be silent in the church, they ride on that verse to constrain
146 women that are a threat to them. Regrettably, the space has also been occupied by demagogues.
147 So, people who have no interest in the vision whatsoever, are there for themselves (self-
148 aggrandizing), self-glory, selfish interest, narrow interest, and Nefarian interest that are
149 impeding the progression of the vision of Reverend Bhengu.

150 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure?

151 **Participant 20:** It is worse, you can tell me one woman pastor you know. Women are limited
152 to being supervisors only there is no female pastor. You can imagine Rev. Bhengu passed away
153 in 1985, to date there is no female pastor. So, it simply tells that the vision is stagnant. Women
154 are oppressed. Even when we run the elective conferences of Back to God, it is a man's club.
155 Tell me one woman who has ever contested any of the positions. So, it simply tells you that the
156 church is still constrained and restricted by the issues of patriarchy which is the regrettable part
157 of it, and that stifles the vision from being progressive. That also stifles the church to
158 maximumly service the communities, because once you are patriarchal in your approach, you
159 are doing a disservice to yourself, it is a disservice to us (the church) and to the society. We are

160 the same human race as women, so, for the church to have not given that latitude of opportunity
161 to women is defeating the cause we purport to stand for.

162 **Researcher: Follow-up question:** I just want to understand the change in women's position

163 **Participant 20:** Where is evangelism? Where is it? Ever since women were worked out of the
164 process of reaching out to the souls. Where are the tents, where are they? Where are the
165 revivals? Where are they? You see!!! You know – let me tell you in 2008, on the 18th of May
166 there was xenophobia. I just want to show a classical example, so we created what we call JOC
167 (Joint Operation Committee), which was constituted of Christians, Islam, Jews, traditional
168 leaders, and political leaders to salvage the commotion that was happening there. I saw Islam
169 donating thousands to alleviate the plight of xenophobia. I saw the Jews, and I only saw the
170 Methodist church. I took the phone and phoned the late Baba Hletha to say, look this turmoil
171 has happened so most of the religions are clubbing up to alleviate the plight that we are facing,
172 so can our church do something? It was me I was talking to him, and the answer was, no, no,
173 no we do not make donations to any kind of eruption, we are focussing on monthlies, quarters,
174 and Thaba Nchu. We do not do it. You see, so, then, I was managing the Germiston crisis center.
175 As our foreign brothers were chased out of the informal settlements, they would run to
176 Germiston City Hall. So, my church which I love so much was not able to reach out to the
177 community. So, it simply tells you that the vision is stifled, so what happens is that there is
178 what we call conservatism (verkrampste) so to speak. The conservatism of the maintenance of
179 the status core so that the church is confined to its tradition. It does not care about what is
180 happening in society, which is also very repugnant to Christ, because Christ was compassionate
181 about people. If Jesus Christ was alive, He would have provided bread, and He would have
182 provided fish for those people, but my very own church could not.

183 **Researcher: Follow-up:** So, what are you saying about women's position after Bhengu's
184 departure

185 **Participant 20:** The position of women changed. Women are relegated only to be organisers.
186 They are tokenized to do the organisational work. You see for me; women have been used as a
187 fundraising mechanism. They are limited there, except for those women who are distinct in the
188 gifts of preaching. Tell me at least, maybe my memory fails, of one conference where there was
189 a female main speaker at Thaba Nchu. It has never happened, but I am told that Reverend
190 Bhengu would have some lineage toward women. It is a regrettable state of affairs.

191 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force

192 for the Back to God Crusade.

193 **Participant 20:** Well, I could attribute that to, number one, the lack of understanding of the
194 vision of Reverend Bhengu. The people who purport to know Rev. Bhengu, are limited to
195 understanding the vision of Reverend Bhengu, very limited. That is what I would say.

196 **Researcher: Follow-up:** What would be the reason for that?

197 **Participant 20:** It is the ulterior motives, it is like, why are you part of the organisation (the
198 reasons one is part of the organisation). Are you there for yourself glory? are you there to
199 advance the organisation? That is the distinction. And then you will find that for the reason of
200 egocentrism, for the reason of limited knowledge, for the reason of lack of vision advanced by,
201 also issues of tradition, women were gradually worked out from the evangelistic wing of Back
202 to God, which is the Back to God crusade.

203 **Researcher: Follow-up:** What could be the reasons they were worked out of the evangelical
204 team?

205 **Participant 20:** Look, knowledge is a revelation, and also if it is not revealed you will never
206 know it. So, I would attribute that to Nefarian interest, that women would take over, or women
207 would mess up, you see that is my assumption. You see the lack of confidence of leadership
208 towards women is a problem. It is as if women are not parallel human beings, they are human
209 beings. They are not shadowing us. Women are us; we are women. So, some other traditionalists
210 would think that women are second-class citizens, but that is wrong. Whichever society does
211 not advance the participation of women at any level, that society will dwindle, will dissipate,
212 and will die.

213 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

214 **Participant 20:** Number one is tradition, two is a social stereotype, and three, is ego, men's
215 ego. Fourth, ignorance because these people do not understand the vision. Five, the issues of
216 insecurity. Do you know that generally, men fear strong women, they fear strong women? Even
217 in the corporate, if you are that strong, an iron lady, they fear you. They would do everything
218 to pull you down. So, it is those Nefarian interests, so to speak for the lack of a better word.
219 Otherwise, they do not have anything to do with vision itself. The vision of Rev. Bhengu is
220 immune from patriarchy. There is nowhere where the vision ever said women must not
221 participate, there is nowhere, instead, he tried his best for women to participate to the extent

222 that he created the supervisor's portfolio, (the national supervisor's department). So, he tried,
223 he tried.

224 **Researcher: Follow-up:** But what could have made him not to ordain women then?

225 **Participant 20:** It would have been the issue then. The society was not yet ready. If you think
226 we were oppressed, women were also oppressed. Men and women were oppressed by the
227 regime. Women were also oppressed by tradition and religion. Religion is going to be judged
228 by God, tradition is going to be judged by God because tradition seeks to suggest that women
229 are supposed to be only limited to the kitchen. It is a paradigm and a narrative that we must
230 despise. Remember the greatest woman, Margaret Thatcher, remember mama Miriam Makeba,
231 so in that space of music, they advanced political awareness. They sang about what was
232 happening and they made the world aware (*not yet uhuru*), so if we are able, of which we are
233 able, it is just that we need to change our thinking, we must be transformed, to understand that
234 as in the right hand so is the left hand, so is the woman participation and that would be the
235 formula for us to see the light of the day.

236 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
237 women's empowerment?

238 **Participant 20:** It will never evolve, look the simplest pattern is the pattern of Jesus and His
239 disciples, so that pattern worked because Jesus Christ imparted divinity into them. In the book
240 of Matthew (10:1), he called them and gave them power. So, with that kind of impartation,
241 knowledge, vision casting, getting your kind. You know Adam was lonely, it does not mean
242 there were baboons, there were no elephants. He was lonely, lonely in the sense of getting his
243 kind. There was no kind of Adam, in what sense, in that sense of aptitude in the sense of vision,
244 in the sense of goalsetting, in the sense of understanding where we are going. So, the disciples
245 regrettably of the late Rev. Bhengu lacked that. So, that is why the vision is constrained to
246 issues of factionalism, into issues of patriarchy, into issues of church tradition, into issues of
247 denominationalism. Those are church schisms. It is a problem in the body of Jesus Christ of
248 Nazareth.

249 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
250 the church?

251 **Participant 20:** I could say the ordination of women is purely made by the lack of knowledge.
252 You see ignorance is a syndrome, and ignorance tends to camouflage itself in tradition,

253 ignorance hides itself in conservatism, and ignorance hides in the procedure. You must know
254 once a person sticks to legalism, you must know that there is a problem because you have got
255 to think outside the box. For the vision to see the light of the day, you have got to think outside
256 the box. So, the ordination of women, I can only attribute that to ignorance otherwise there is
257 no real reason.

258 **Researcher: Follow-up:** What are about scriptures

259 **Participant 20:** Sometimes they would quote the scriptures - women must be silent. Jesus was
260 a male, but you know in theology there is what you call hermeneutics – is to interpret the text
261 in context, is to understand the etymology if you do not understand the etymology, you will
262 quote the Word of God out of context. That is why there is theology so that we make sure that
263 the interpretation is succinct with what was said. So, then in Corinth, why St. Paul spoke like
264 that because he was addressing a specific scenario in that part of the church. So, it is connected
265 to a historical injunction

266 **Researcher: Follow-up:** Please expand on that

267 **Participant 20:** Why did he not say that in Ephesus? Why did he not say that in Iconium?
268 remember in the book of Acts. Why did he not say that in Athens? Because it is only in Corinth
269 that you get that verse. It is because there was a particular predicament/ scenario he was
270 addressing then. I also want to say that the vision of Jesus Christ of Nazareth would not see the
271 light of day if there were no women. Jesus Christ was supported by women, trust me. There is
272 a woman who bought perfume for Christ. Wherever Jesus was, so was Mary Magdalene. Mary
273 Magdalene was delivered from seven demons, and she never forgot what Christ has done for
274 her, so Christ, where I am sitting, was not patriarchal. There were women. There is nowhere
275 where Jesus Christ says I do not want any women; you can peruse the Bible from Genesis to
276 Revelation. You will never get a verse that says Jesus Christ says women must not talk in the
277 church, women must not participate. That is why in the Old Testament there were women like
278 Deborah, Phoebe, and others, there were very distinct women who made a change in the house
279 of Israel. You will have many women who have contributed to the advancement of the kingdom
280 of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

281 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

282 **Participant 20:** The current status of women is that they have been tokenized, they are used as
283 a token of fundraising, and it is a shame. They fundraise this money for Thaba Nchu, they have

284 nothing to show. I was running the administration of the church from 2003 to 2005, so, it was
285 a shame to see how much money the Organisers were paid. The people who are doing the day-
286 to-day work of the church.

287 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

288 **Participant 20:** Personally, it is not a matter of feeling, it is a matter of must. It is not a matter
289 of privilege it is a matter of right in the context that women must be ordained. It is a must. My
290 feelings aside, it has to happen. It is a regrettable state of affairs do you know that mainline
291 churches have evolved better than the Pentecostal churches? Charismatics have overtaken
292 Pentecostals because women have their churches. They perform miracles, they do wonders that
293 we cannot do, and they reach the frontiers that we cannot reach in the charismatic community.
294 Pentecostals are conservative. They are patriarchal and religious, they are very legalistic, and
295 they are too much into procedure.

296 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
297 comes to church positions?

298 **Participant 20:** I would attribute that to social stereotypes, and tradition, I would also attribute
299 that to conservatism. To be conservative, you know when you have got that "*verkramp*"
300 (conservative or narrow-minded) mind, it is a problem. Ordination could be used as a tool to
301 constrain women and also non-ordination could be used to constrain women so that women do
302 not escalate the levers of power, they remain relegated. They remain tokenized in the church.
303 It is a deceit; the word of God says do not be deceived. You are deceived when you look at
304 another human being less than you, whether you perpetuate that through tradition,
305 conservatism, religion, or procedures. You are deceived because the Holy Spirit according to
306 the book of 1 Cor. 12:7), is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives as he wishes. You
307 will find that there are women that are anointed more than you and then by depriving the
308 participation of women, you are depriving the edification of the church. We meet for the
309 edification of the church. So, when you do not ordain women, you are depriving the very church
310 of the edification the church yearns. The Holy Spirit does not say this is a male, this is a female.
311 Even Judas who betrayed Jesus Christ was given the gift to take out demons in Mathew 10:1,
312 then who are we? Then who are we? I am taking this worst-case scenario so that we can come
313 into the consciousness of understanding how wrong we have misrepresented the Kingdom of
314 God. The leadership will account to God. There is a very scary verse in the book of Matthew
315 (25:35). "I have never known you", that is what Christ says. Didn't in your Name cast out

316 demons? Didn't in your Name heal the sick? Didn't in your Name perform miracles? And
317 Jesus Christ answered, "I have never known you". You know why, it is because we have
318 misrepresented the Kingdom of God. We have succumbed to the malpractices of the society.
319 We gave in to the societal paradigm of looking down upon women. As a church we are supposed
320 to rise above patriarchy, we are supposed to rise above matriarchy as a church. We have to rise
321 above all forms of classism, all forms of restrictions, and social stereotypes as a church. The
322 church is supposed to be the light of the world. The church has deviated from its purpose. The
323 church as the body of Christ is supposed to be Christlike. You remember the first church we
324 were called the people of the way because Jesus Christ would say I am the way, I am the way I
325 am the truth, I am the life. So, the Jews that were conservative on Judaism, the Sadducees and
326 the Pharisees, and the Priest of the Jewish Religion would sarcastically call us the people of the
327 way. It was in Antioch; St Paul appears in the 9th chapter of Acts. Where was St Paul in the first
328 chapter, second chapter, 3rd chapter, nowhere? He was busy persecuting the Christians because
329 he was an antichrist until such time, he met Christ in the plains of Damascus. The church of
330 Antioch was the church that could accommodate Gentiles and the Jews. It preceded a vision of
331 Peter while Peter was in the upper room, fell asleep, and saw a big shift with all sorts of reptiles
332 and God said slaughter and eat. So, that vision was a precursor of emancipation of all forms.
333 Then the prevailing paradigm was gentiles. To look at people as gentiles is similar to looking
334 at people according to their sexual orientation or gender. So that classical example was an
335 example of the emancipation of the human race from stereotypes of gender, stereotypes of race;
336 stereotypes of ethnicity, stereotypes of matriarchy, stereotypes of patriarchy in the church, so
337 the church must be immune from such because the church is the body of Jesus Christ of
338 Nazareth. So, the current church has been commodified. It is used as a commodity now. That
339 is the problem it is no longer serving its purpose as Jesus Christ meant it to be.

340 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
341 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

342 **Participant 20:** Factor number one is the procedure, the procedure they would tell you, a
343 woman is not allowed to do whatever for example a woman is not allowed to lay hands unto
344 men, they would say so. Factor number two is religion, you know there is a distinction between
345 the church and religion. The church is the body of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Religion is the set
346 of rules adopted by people for their convenience, that is religion. Another factor is tradition,
347 you see traditionalism, as being conservative. So, primarily all these factors that I have counted

348 are a family of ignorance, because once you adhere to them at the expense of the organisation,
349 you are doomed to fail. You are scoring an own goal.

350 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
351 period like their male counterparts.

352 **Participant 20:** Look if I am talking Back to God, I know no female pastor. For me, if you
353 have not been conferred you are not a pastor. They would be doing a window dressing of some
354 kind, but where I am sitting, I would like to see a female pastor ordained, a female pastor that
355 has been recognised, that has been accepted, a female pastor that is participating in the levers
356 of the powers of the church. That has not happened in the BTG. So, the problem is that there
357 is a lot of traditionalism. There is a lot of conservatism. There is a lot of proceduralism for lack
358 of a better word. But like I said, all of such set is advanced by ignorance because women can
359 preach, and women can perform miracles. Women can do whatever they can do. They can be
360 presidents, they run corporations by the way. They are very powerful. They are ministers, they
361 are in parliament, but can you show me where they are in the church? They are nowhere. They
362 have not been conferred to probation, ordination, recognition, escalate, and emancipation to the
363 levers of power of the church. So, they remain tokenized. That is advanced by ignorance.

364 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

365 **Participant 20:** You see in terms of employment; I love this question because some other
366 people have seen the church as an employment agent, some other people have seen the church
367 as an opportunity to advance their ambitions; some other people have seen the church as a
368 societal club. It is like, I have learned in the recent past that not everybody who is in the church,
369 is in the church., not everybody. They are there for different reasons. So, people with Nefarian
370 interests, see women as a threat, and if we can allow them to escalate the levers of power, we
371 will be history. So, it is an issue of egocentrism, it is an issue of low self-esteem, it is an issue
372 of a social paradigm that is the upbringing that women are second-class citizens, or they belong
373 to the kitchen which the church must abhor such narratives.

374 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative; How is the church
375 adapting to the times.

376 **Participant 20:** As a preamble, Back to God is not amenable, to adaptation on the issues of
377 women's participation, let us be frank about that Back to God is very conservative, very
378 patriarchal very religious, and is very procedural to the extent that sometimes though we are a

379 Pentecostal church some other people may view us as liturgical so to speak because everything
380 has to be done according to the book. So Back to God as a section in Assemblies of God it is
381 regrettable that it is not amenable to the participation of women and also to the ordination of
382 women. Yes, out of the women we have our great-grandfather, Nicholas, there is a vision he
383 saw when he was in the United States of America to do some fundraising. So, there are
384 interventions that are pointers to this adaptation because of the world's demands. One of those
385 is that we see many splinter churches that are coming out of Back to God, so the brethren would
386 rather walk out of Back to God and establish their little churches there so that they become
387 progressive to accommodate the demand that is needed by the community in so far as the
388 participation of women is concerned. We see new developing churches and such churches,
389 some of them become Charismatic in their approach, that is why I said in my submission that
390 Charismatics seem to be more responding to the issues of adaptation, to the issues of women's
391 participation. Secondly, of course with the group approach where you have got the mothers
392 during the Easters and then you have the mothers as the quarterlies, and there are mothers for
393 the monthlies and also in the weekly participation; that to some degree would indicate to the
394 platform that is created for the women to participate in their corner. Then you will find out that
395 there are very few women that are out there as pastors, but I do not remember from where I am
396 sitting any Convention or conference where at Back to God, we have ever ordained women. I
397 do not remember since Memorial times. So, that is why in my opening remarks I said Back to
398 God is not amenable to adaptation at all because there would have been some women that have
399 been ordained countrywide, so there is none. I mean where the Teaching Team would equally
400 call the name of a woman as they would do in Thaba Nchu to say Miss so and so or Mrs so and
401 so today you are declared as a pastor, and the Teaching Team would lay hands, the way we do
402 ordination. No woman pastor was ordained by Back to God. So, if I were to focus on Back to
403 God as our thesis, then I would say, that Back to God is not amenable at all to the ordination of
404 women. I must say to you, talking is cheap because we talk about these things in the corridors.
405 There are women that I know that are gifted but you will find out that they are only maintained
406 or restrained to be speakers (per invite) only. I have never seen ordained. I am not talking about
407 probation; they would do a window-dressing by saying this one is still under probation for the
408 longest time, but it has never happened. That is the situation at Back to God.

409 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

410 **Participant 20:** What we need to do – number 1 there must be a Moses. You see currently there
411 is no Moses, there is no voice of reason. Yes, I understand that Rev. Bhengu said I am leaving

412 the church to the Holy Spirit, but the issue is that there was no anchoring of the church into a
413 particular Moses as in Joshua as in Elisha and Elijah. Can you see that sequence? That sequence
414 assists because people are naturally flocks, they are made like that, so they have to have a
415 shepherd.

416 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
417 change in the BTG church?

418 **Participant 20:** Consequence number one is that the vision is constrained, it does not grow as
419 a result people are leaving the church. When any organisation does not accept the change, you
420 adapt or you die, that is the rule of nature, you see because as society evolves, the church must
421 advance. The church must lead the evolution of society. The church must be enlightened
422 because the church is the light of the world. Society is supposed to follow the church not the
423 other way round.

424 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
425 Cape to Cairo vision.

426 **Participant 20:** Affected is an understatement, I would rather say it has killed the Cape to
427 Cairo. Cape to Cairo remains a lip service. It has never seen the light of the day. It remains a
428 mirage because there is no women participation. There is no women ordination. There are no
429 women who are recognised as evangelists. So, we have made the Back to God a boy's club.

430 **Researcher: Follow-up:** What difference do you think women would make?

431 **Participant 20:** Women would make a lot of difference. For example, the society yearns for a
432 motherly touch. If you look at the society, the society is angry. There was no grieving of the
433 society after oppression. There were no therapy processes to relieve society from the ills of
434 oppression. We experienced the Gqozo massacre, we experienced the Boipatong massacre, and
435 we experienced a lot of brutalities that are bad as a society. Do you think men will be able to
436 rise to that occasion to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah (9:6), "Unto us, a child is born, unto us a
437 son is given, He is a wonderful counsellor. Do you think we would fulfil that prophecy? No,
438 we will never fulfil that prophecy outside women. The nation as things stand now needs a
439 motherly touch because the nation is fragmented, the nation is bleeding, the nation is
440 traumatized, and that is why you see violence. So, where I have an issue with the church is for
441 the current church to be aloof and pretend as if it is business as usual. So, had we had women?
442 – I remember, I would not have been a participant in the struggle if it was not for the sake of

443 Winnie Mandela. I am making an example because she was a full soldier. I would not have
444 been part of the liberation movement if it was not for the sake of Bishop Tutu because Bishop
445 Tutu represented the church optimally. After all, that is what the church must do. The church
446 must speak against corruption, the church must speak against crime. There must be a voice of
447 reason to say no to crime, no to corruption, no to the ills that are bedevilling society but without
448 women, we would never be able to do that. If you want to get what I am saying just look at the
449 change they do when it comes to preschools. They have a motherly touch. When it comes to
450 hospitals. You know Florence Nightingale is one of the distinct women that I respect. I will
451 forever respect that woman; I have never seen her but the motherly touch she extended to the
452 soldiers who were wounded. Her legacy lives. So, until such time we have come to a point of
453 accepting that, we are not enough without women's participation. In the book of Genesis 3, it
454 is titled The Fall of man. Do you know that God created us in His image, and he was her? What
455 fascinates me there is that our mother Eve apparently had some talks with the serpent, and they
456 spoke, and Adam was there. There is a verse that I love there – she saw that the apple was good
457 to be eaten – she saw. Adam was there but he could not see. So, women brought unto us the
458 knowledge of knowing the good and the bad. Angels want to be like us. We are very fascinating
459 kind of living beings because we are advanced in terms of knowledge and God Himself
460 conceded to say now man is like us therefore, we must constrain them so that they do not eat
461 the Tree of life lest they live longer, so people preach it negatively but for me it is giving me a
462 window of the ability of the intuition of the revelation that women are powerful

463 **Researcher:** Non-ordination could reflect nonconfidence and lack of value in women – by
464 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the
465 members and to the outside society

466 **Participant 20:** It makes the denomination appear as if the denomination condones abuse of
467 women. You see abuse can manifest itself in the form of religion. It is an abuse for you as a
468 female not you as a person to be deprived of your gift of the Holy Spirit for the edification of
469 the church. It is an abuse in its highest order. So, society would view the church as being
470 abusive. The church must be relatable. So, the transformation that the church purports to be
471 advancing, that transformation is the transformation that we must live, we must abide by. Do
472 you know that there are people who will never want to be part of the church because they see
473 patriarchy, because they see sexism because they see these gothic practices? We are deceived
474 as a church. Jesus Christ said come I will make you the fishers of men. When you fish as a

475 fisherman you got to look better, you got to be exemplary, you've got to be above board. So,
476 people view the church as this traditional animal that is conservative, that is patriarchal, that is
477 abusive towards women because it is an abuse not to allow women to participate and we must
478 abhor it. It is not Christlike.

479 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
480 church?

481 **Participant 20:** Women preach; they are workers looking after the preaching points. They are
482 leaders in the women's organisation as organisers and supervisors.

483 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

484 **Participant 20:** The implications in the past were that women were constrained not to perform
485 some other ordinances of the church. They were not allowed. Tell me one priest that was a
486 woman. Why I am bringing this point is because I am trying to illustrate to you that the
487 patriarchal approach of Judaism was an inheritance to some degree to Christianity. So, we really
488 have to transform to rebirth, to rebuild, to reconstruct, to refurbish. We really got to interpret
489 religion in the current format. Unless we do that, we are dead in the water. Women must
490 participate in the church at all levels.

491 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

492 **Participant 20:** The current implications are that we must accept that not everybody is a cup
493 of tea of everyone. It does not follow that because a preacher is a male, everybody will be
494 converted by males. You know preaching is not only preaching in the pulpit preaching is in the
495 lifestyle as well and how we live as Christians, how we reach out to the community. We will
496 never be able to do that maximum without the full participation of women. So, the implication
497 is that this is constraining the advancement of the kingdom of God. It does. I am worried, really
498 you know to be a woman painful because you know you can but there are people who are telling
499 you, you can't. It is a pain. Let me quote Steve Biko, In the relationship between the oppressor
500 and the oppressed, the most powerful tool is the mind. So, women must rise, they must speak
501 against these things, and they must not succumb. If you sense any sensitivity of gender, whether
502 it is perpetuated by religion, tradition, by social stereotype, never be apologetic, immediately
503 jump to the mountaintop. That is an invitation I would say to women.

504 **Researcher: Follow-up** – How do you think this has affected women?

505 **Participant 20:** It has robbed them of self-esteem. Generally, women are lame when it comes
506 to church issues. Low self-esteem, lame, fear, lack of self-confidence, women are passive- they
507 do not want to play an active role in the church because of what we have done to them. We
508 need to restore their confidence. They must understand that they are full participants in the
509 kingdom of God.

510 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

511 **Participant 20:** In the future – there must be awareness that speaks against women's non-
512 participation, because sometimes there is ignorance and therefore, they are not aware, secondly,
513 the theological institutions must encourage women across, there must be a quarter that says
514 your theological school should have 50 plus students that are doing theology. It must be a
515 criterion. They must make it a point that they educate women. They must fuse women into
516 theological institutions. And also, the church procedures that are conservative against women
517 must be done away with. Women must not be armchair critics; they must stand up for their
518 rights. It is not a privilege it is a right, a God-given right. Why you are a woman is because God
519 gave you that. It is not like they requested someone for them to be women, but God saw it fit
520 that they must be women, therefore, it is a preordained right that goes with a full package of
521 women representing the kingdom, maximumly.

Appendix D21: Interview with Participant 21 (P21)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 21:** Pastor Bhengu's historical vision was based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
4 the revelation because pastor Bhengu in the first place did not decide to establish women's
5 empowerment. He went on preaching all over. When he went to America looking for funds...
6 you know that story, that is the place where God told him to go back to South Africa but then
7 when you go back do not go back to the church, go back to the women. So, the history is based
8 on the vision coming from God to pastor Bhengu, hence now he came and called all the women
9 to Standerton where he established this women's structure that we have and appointed the
10 women's supervisors there. For me, that was historical, maybe from the women's perspective
11 it is but to me it was spiritual.

12 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
13 empower women?

14 **Participant 21:** The church has a document called Rules of Procedure that stipulates women's
15 empowerment – the determination of the church for women's empowerment. That document
16 explains well the role of women here in our church, so, the church is doing very well there but
17 I would not say the Constitution but the Rules of Procedures of BTG.

18 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

19 **Participant 21:** Very relevant in capital letters. Firstly, the whole world is talking about
20 women's empowerment, be it religious or political. Number two - you will notice that even
21 political parties here in South Africa have adopted what pastor Bhengu started in the Back to
22 God. They have the women's league; they have the youth league etcetera. Number two; you
23 will notice that to balance everything, pastor Bhengu established the single ladies' organisation.
24 So, today it is relevant because the whole world is trying to get women into the fore. And the
25 last one is that you will notice that quite several churches did not have a wing for women but
26 now they have copied it from what we are doing, it was only the Back to God doing that where
27 the mothers would have their services but now almost all the churches are doing that. So it is
28 very relevant and even tomorrow it is going to be relevant.

29 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
30 vision reflected in this church?

31 **Participant 21:** Yes, he affirmed women in every way. Let me put it this way. We do have a
32 full participation of women running their affairs. In other words, for instance, when we go to
33 Thaba Nchu during the Easter Weekend, we will find that everything is run by mothers (married
34 women), except just for a few things whereby the leadership would take over. And even the
35 business, even in the sermons women are participating. So, it is highly respected as far as
36 women are concerned. Now even in our locals in our mother's quarterly meetings, even in the
37 main service on Sundays, you find that the mother's speaker is allowed to continue ministering.

38 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure –

39 **Participant 21:** Oh, not much, but yes, a little bit, somehow a sense of direction has been
40 compromised somewhere at some stage, and lack of guidance since pastor Bhengu was giving
41 them direction before. It seems we are not well capacitated to do exactly what pastor Bhengu
42 was doing to the women's work hence I say somehow there is a bit of compromise in terms of
43 their work after his departure but as I said, not much but God being God is trying to protect this
44 work that pastor Bhengu started. So, the damage is not that big, they are just causing some
45 confusion here and there and some misunderstandings here and there, which might affect the
46 work here and there but not that much.

47 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
48 the Back to God Crusade.

49 **Participant 21:** Thank you, if you go down to what I have just said now, the departure of pastor
50 Bhengu is making us lose some very important issues here in our church. Pastor Bhengu had
51 passion, and the passion cannot be compared to anybody. He was passionate about getting
52 women involved and how it should be done, and he did that in front of many people especially
53 those he appointed to work with him so that they learn, the Teaching Team and the Executive
54 members including the Back to God Crusade Committee which was then called the Back to
55 God Executive. Those people who were close to pastor Bhengu then, almost all of them are
56 gone. They have got new people who did not work with pastor Bhengu directly. Now, some of
57 them did not know these things and what was happening, and that is very important here. So,
58 this is compromising the participation of women in terms of the evangelistic task force that you
59 are talking about. There are challenges, of course, one of them is the marriage commitment.

60 You know when a woman gets married, there are some restrictions in terms of movement, going
61 that way and that way and that way.

62 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

63 **Participant 21:** There are challenges, of course, one of them is the marriage commitment. You
64 know when a woman gets married, there are some restrictions in terms of movement, going
65 that way and that way and that way. Moreso, those people at that time were not married, so
66 those who were married, their husbands were pastors and were part of the Back to God work.
67 So, they understood that it was possible. So, the marriage is also playing a role there. And
68 another thing is that the young ladies in our days have entered the job market so few young
69 ladies are single and available to participate in the evangelistic work, because you travel all
70 over for like three months not coming back home - you cannot get a career woman doing that.
71 So, these things are the reason why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force
72 for the Back to God Crusade.

73 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
74 women's empowerment?

75 **Participant 21:** Rigidity is playing a role, it is people who do not move with the times, it is
76 worse now because pastor Bhengu would evaluate the current state of affairs and predict what
77 will occur the following day. So, most of our current leadership members are rigid and I
78 apologize for that. They refuse to adapt to the changing times and instead cling to the things
79 that pastor Bhengu did in the 1960s and 1970s when there were fewer obstacles than there are
80 now, such as crime and other issues. Now, there is also a political influence that is also playing
81 a role here. There is also a cultural influence. In addition, many distinct ethnic groups comprise
82 our church, each with its unique perspective on women, including roles and positions within
83 society. I won't name them all because some of these ethnic groups are fiercely opposed to the
84 idea of women's empowerment and they use their knowledge and convictions, disregarding the
85 fact that the church is an independent organisation. In political terms, it seems that we have not
86 accomplished enough, but this is usually because of the challenges I just outlined. Evolution is
87 therefore taking place, even though it is very slow. So, it means that we will have to get in touch
88 with several areas to accommodate everyone. The Executive and the Teaching Team are
89 supposed to be working together. They do try to work together but they have some differences
90 here and there which is slowing down progress. Yes, pastor, Bhengu was led by the Holy Spirit
91 but now we seem to be depending more on the international structure of the AOG than our own.

92 And this church Back to God was not relying on the wishes of man but they would go to God
93 to say this is the situation and now there is no one in that position to handle that – a very
94 important spiritual element of the vision. We have a problem when it comes to that, that is my
95 opinion. Pastor Bhengu had a problem, or should I say a challenge when it came to the
96 succession plan. Number he had a problem getting somebody appointed, a single person who
97 would succeed him. The problem was that that person was not showing the qualities, the
98 attributes that he had. Even though he was the father of the church, he never had a sense of
99 ownership of the church. So, there was a problem as far as that is concerned, that is my opinion.
100 Looking at the people he worked with you find that there is nobody who did precisely as he
101 was doing if he appointed a single person. Number three, Bhengu did not want this church to
102 become somebody's inheritance, including his family, now the question if for instance I was
103 appointed by pastor Bhengu then. I am just giving an example; when I die what method am I
104 going to use to get someone there to continue as the leader? if I am the one who is at the helm
105 of the church now, I might say, let me get my son or my relatives or somebody that I favour.
106 That is why pastor Bhengu decided that he must leave everything to the leadership of the Holy
107 Spirit and not appoint an individual. But much as he said the Holy Spirit is the one that is going
108 to lead the church, he did put the leadership roles on the Executive Committee and the Teaching
109 Team with the hope that they were going to continue with the work, but that is the challenge
110 today because they are now divided. There was a power struggle when pastor Bhengu left in
111 1985 going forward between the three structures with whom pastor Bhengu left to run the
112 church while he was there, it was the Executive, the Teaching Team, and the Back to God
113 Crusade executive so, all were claiming to be the people and they were divided until 1989 to
114 establish what we call now the tripartite structure. So, we do not have a direct person to whom
115 the Holy Spirit is talking. It should be that the discipleship - you know when Jesus Christ left,
116 he never appointed one person, maybe he copied from that, which was a pearl of great wisdom.

117 **Researcher: Follow-up question:**

118 Was Baba Bhengu happy when he left, did Baba Bhengu bless the church before he left?

119 **Participant 21:** It is a very tricky question, but I hope I can be led by the Holy Spirit to respond
120 to this question. I was one of the youths who last saw him, I was still very young. I heard him
121 preaching and I heard him teaching at some point also with the cassettes that I have
122 accumulated, there are some utterances he made before he died that would help me respond to
123 your question. Number one, pastor Bhengu left very much worried in terms of what will happen

124 to this church when he is gone. He mentioned that I can quote: "There are those who say
125 (makahambe, makafe, sizokuyitshintsha le nto) meaning let him go, let him die so that we can
126 change this thing. So, he left very much aggrieved, and he left here frustrated but he had no
127 choice he had to go.

128 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
129 the church?

130 **Participant 21:** There are quite a number of them, but I will mention a few. Number one, it is
131 the cultural beliefs that some people still hold on in this church even though they are saved
132 especially those who are holding positions or have positions of influence within the church.
133 Giving an example, there are ethnic groups in South Africa who have this belief that a woman
134 cannot lead men, and when it comes to women's ordination you will notice that women are
135 given the right to go and study, to go to a theological school like the Henley on Klip, but when
136 they come back they are not regarded as pastors, they just become church assistants - to say
137 you can preach. Number two; marriage also plays a role here, because if a lady is ordained -
138 and you will notice that most of the time the people that will go to a theological school, 80
139 percent are single ladies. So, some might, later on, get married when they have already worked,
140 and they will be restricted by their husbands. Marriage comes with restrictions for women. So,
141 you find that what she was doing when she was still single, she is no longer free to do it. So,
142 these are some of the things that the church needs to deal with when it comes to the ordination
143 of women. I understand that the Teaching Team is now saying, let us ordain them but they will
144 not be local pastors. So, we are waiting for the Teaching Team which is busy regulating this.
145 Another thing is the transferring system of pastors of Back to God will have a large negative
146 impact on the women's lives who are pastors. Let us say a married woman is a pastor in one of
147 the Back to God local churches around here and when the transfer period comes, they say you
148 are going to a different region, the husband is not a pastor, he is working somewhere, so, what
149 is going to happen? Does the husband follow the wife, or does he remain at home and the
150 woman pastor goes alone? So, the transfer system would not work for the woman pastor well
151 based on what I am saying now. And you will also notice that women play a major role at home
152 than men, so when the woman is away, and the husband is alone; many things go wrong within
153 the families in terms of looking after the children and all that, but a woman can do without a
154 man.

155 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

156 **Participant 21:** We have a well-established structure within the church for women. We have
157 developed to a stage where women are now. The conference agreed that in terms of local
158 leadership, women can be voted in as deacons.

159 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

160 **Participant 21:** In my opinion women can be ordained because when you ordain a person you
161 are not giving that person a qualification to be a local pastor. Ordination has to do with God's
162 work. It has to do with anointing. It has to do with God's calling. So, we have to do that, but
163 we have to interact with the Teaching Team, they are the ones who are doing ordination.

164 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
165 comes to church positions?

166 **Participant 21:** One of them to respond to your question, is the biblical interpretation. You
167 know the Bible from time to time you will get verses that say women cannot do this, especially
168 Paul, so it is the interpretation and adherence. But you find that these were circumstantial, so
169 you have to check the relevance of it as to what was said at that time and the time now and the
170 situation in which we are now and not a mistake of standing against scriptures. We have a
171 problem of educating people to have a common understanding of the situation now in terms of
172 the application of what we are trying to get in terms of the Bible. I also mentioned the marital
173 challenges. The transformation of women can be tricky somehow – a married woman has got
174 husband who is not that supportive to the work. As I have already mentioned it is rigidity, it is
175 the culture of some ethnic groups who come to church and want to implement their beliefs
176 according to their cultures. The last one is that the church at the moment is transforming and
177 changing the church Constitution to try and accommodate women's transformation. It is there
178 it is just improving.

179 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
180 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

181 **Participant 21:** Quite a number, some of them are the ones I have mentioned but I will repeat
182 them because they are of relevance here. One, some of the women are educated, they followed
183 careers and now you find that they are not in the position to go full scale into ministry because
184 they are career women. They are self-supporting and their standard of living is higher than
185 when they just become mere ministers. So, I reckon, some will choose to stay in the careers
186 rather than responding to the call. Number two is the cultural impediment which will still have

187 to teach our church about. The rigidity or the conservativeness of some people who would say
188 no you cannot have women in the forefront, we still have to teach people that women have to
189 be in the forefront, and we need to make examples of women in the Bible that led during their
190 times. The exclusion is based on that as far as I am concerned. And also, the Teaching Team
191 still has to finalize the document.

192 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
193 period like their male counterparts.

194 **Participant 21:** A number of them were working as evangelists in the Back to God crusades,
195 so when they now wanted to be fully fledged pastors, here in Gauteng there was resistance to
196 allow them to do that. One moved to Limpopo because in Limpopo we are lenient in terms of
197 that, they do allow women to be pastors even though it is not a big number. There was a pastor
198 there, he is now late, a very good man who was reasonable. He is the one who allowed her. She
199 was not the only one that was used by pastor Nkwinika. So, this lady might have not been
200 allowed in other regions. Some regions are still very conservative, so we impede and retard the
201 progress. But I also did mention earlier that they are assistants, and they serve under the main
202 pastor when they are in those preaching points.

203 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

204 **Participant 21:** Well! You know as human beings when it comes to male and female human
205 beings there will always be challenges. Some of the challenges are based on competition.
206 Competition, not in the negative sense but in a positive sense. One of them is the one that I
207 mentioned before – that women are getting more educated. I am talking about challenges that
208 are caused by women to men because now we are becoming equal in the social space – I am
209 educated – you are educated so what? Do you understand that? Number two, as I said women
210 now, have the challenge of becoming career women and they have to explore that avenue. If
211 you go to university and study and then come back and concentrate on church work, you also
212 need to explore your academic qualifications. Another challenge that women are posing now is
213 that when they are employed, those who are employed are escalated to high positions at work.
214 They become managers, they become CEOs and that would change their mental
215 perspective/mindset in terms of managing situations. Then when you are in the church with a
216 person like that who has qualifications, who has got managerial, that she has acquired in the
217 university even through experience at work, you cannot shy away from using those skills in the
218 church. Now here is this lady who is full of these managerial and gives a talking in the church

219 and now there is me who does not know that much at that level now I use my position as a man
220 and say you cannot be told by women here. Some can even manipulate the verse if a woman
221 has got something to say and says keep quiet in the church and go and ask your husband. And
222 what about the others who do not have husbands? I am just giving you a few but there are more
223 I just wish we had time and also the anointing even though you are not going to compete they
224 are not there to complement each other. You know a gift is not for competition but for
225 compliment. Now some people take it as a threat if a woman seems to be more dynamic than a
226 man. Men will say we cannot be told by a woman like this, and they will say a whole lot of
227 things. Then you must know that you have become a threat. That I call a lack of spiritual
228 maturity. So, those are the challenges in response to your question.

229 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
230 adapting to the times?

231 **Participant 21:** Well! my sister the process of the Teaching Team to improve the Rules of
232 Procedure, the clause that allows women to be ordained - they are busy with that now. Number
233 two, my observation is that they are gradually given platforms in the public space within the
234 church as I mentioned before if it is a mothers' quarterly or girls quarterly - on Sundays, it was
235 cut and dried that a person that must preach in the main service at 10 o'clock on Sunday must
236 be a pastor and we would use a male but now women are given that platform, that is another
237 adaptation but be that as it may, the outside world- when I talk about the outside world I am
238 talking about outside our church, it can be other churches or social groups or political parties,
239 government etcetera they will see us as very much conservative and they will continue to say
240 the Back to God is not transforming. But within the church, if you check it things are very very
241 slow because the Teaching Team is the custodian of the doctrine - 90 percent of the members
242 of the Teaching Team are not the type of people who are highly knowledgeable when it comes
243 to developing policies, then they appoint certain brethren in our church to do that for them and
244 the things do not go as they wish so there is some impediment of some sort.

245 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

246 **Participant 21:** Education of the masses is very important. Also regulating the process. In other
247 words, here we need the Teaching Team to show us the way because at the moment we are just
248 using discretions. But it is getting there now that should there be somebody keen, who can
249 handle the main service on Sunday, they should be given even if it is a woman especially if it
250 is a mother because we cannot be ministered by a girl. And we must demystify a lot of mindsets.

251 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
252 change in the BTG church?

253 **Participant 21:** In my own opinion, we have limited consequences, because it is a matter of
254 finding a common ground based on the times, we are living in now. But when it comes to the
255 consequences, I think it is the dissatisfaction that we have created. Two, the division that might
256 happen in the church, so if we do not accept people who we see should be given a platform -
257 some will say why not, and others will say if you say why not do you have a reason why we
258 must. Why must we do it? Another thing is heresy, people using their knowledge to oppose the
259 church. Another one is apostasy. Another consequence can be a breakaway, you know there are
260 those people who break away because a certain process was delayed, and now they go and start
261 their churches and promote their visions. Some of these things are unnecessary but they happen.
262 There are many more and so we need to alleviate these kinds of restrictions.

263 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
264 Cape to Cairo vision.

265 **Participant 21:** Well! In my own opinion, it affected it, but we cannot blame the lack of
266 participation of women. Because of, one, the crusade wing is not based on the second gender,
267 it is a holistic mission. For us not to have made progress is not because of the lack of
268 participation of women but because the church as a whole has not done enough to further what
269 we have done so far. I do not think the ordination has anything to do with this. But also
270 remember that if some of these women have been ordained, they would be assisting in a
271 particular church and that would bring some restrictions, and it means she cannot go as she
272 wishes.

273 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
274 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
275 the outside society?

276 **Participant 21:** To me this is not a question of non-confidence, it is a question of policies that
277 must be changed. It is a question of mindset that must change. It is a question of educating
278 people to say we need to adapt and change here, and when I talk about education, I am talking
279 about the entire church membership. So, we also have to look at their societal challenges. At
280 least these are biblical challenges, that we have to deal with here so that we can take everybody
281 on board. As I mentioned before this church consists of different ethnic groups and in these
282 ethnic groups much as we sometimes have common cultural beliefs at the same time, we are

283 diverse. Now a certain ethnic group comes with this belief and that might be common with a
284 belief from another group, so as we promote the participation of women you find that some are
285 resisting because of their cultural beliefs. Remember I did mention that much as we are
286 Christians, but some still respect and are postponing their cultural beliefs. But where I am now,
287 I am promoting a system which is called collaboration when it comes to communication. The
288 Back to God still lacks a lot in terms of collaboration. They are still not communicating and
289 collaborating.

290 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
291 church?

292 **Participant 21:** We had very strong women before here and pastor Bhengu being the wise person
293 got them. He saw that because of the vision he had from God when he was in America. The
294 issue of women's empowerment was a very important issue to him to such an extent that he
295 wanted to start it from the grassroots level so that it may be easy when they become married
296 women. That is why he established the girls and the mothers and intertwined them. **We have**
297 the mother supervisors, the organisers for both mothers (married women) and girls (single
298 ladies) and he also made sure that they run their businesses, they are at the forefront when it
299 comes to their business. They have their speakers for their services be it a monthly, a quarterly,
300 a mini-convention, or a convention. So, the transformation is there but still not yet eminent. We
301 now have female deacons voted in our local church committees.

302 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

303 **Participant 21:** Retardation of progress is one of the implications. Two, divisions and
304 misunderstandings do come in here because you will not have the whole church resisting, it
305 may be one section of the church and if there is a section of the church resisting, it means then
306 that there will be divisions. And once there is division, friction starts especially when there is
307 stubbornness. And there will be blame-shifting. And all these lead to spiritual bankruptcy. In
308 other words, the church will come together to worship but not in spirit but in flesh. Also,
309 ethnicity and some will support a pastor because they speak the same language or come from
310 the same place they are coming from. And that also is because of spiritual maturity, not just
311 spiritual maturity but also mental maturity even social maturity and lack of understanding of
312 the Bible.

313 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance? – SAME AS ABOVE

314 **Participant 21:** Retardation of progress is one of the implications. Two, divisions and
315 misunderstandings do come in here because you will not have the whole church resisting, it
316 may be one section of the church and if there is a section of the church resisting, it means then
317 that there will be divisions. And once there is division, friction starts especially when there is
318 stubbornness. And there will be blame-shifting. And all these lead to spiritual bankruptcy. In
319 other words, the church will come together to worship but not in spirit but in flesh. Also,
320 ethnicity and some will support a pastor because they speak the same language or come from
321 the same place they are coming from. And that also is because of spiritual maturity, not just
322 spiritual maturity but also mental maturity even social maturity and lack of understanding of
323 the Bible.

324 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in future?

325 **Participant 21:** The Bible school that we have at Henley on Klip must come with a specialized
326 curriculum that deals with this aspect of inclusivity. So that those who go there and become
327 local pastors may be well-equipped to teach the church about this aspect of inclusivity. We can
328 use our pastors because they are in the position in front. Number two, there must be a time
329 when the elders or the local church board, in a year or twice a year be taken to Henley on Klip
330 for a workshop concerning this so that if the pastor is not doing enough the church board is also
331 empowered. This can be done at the regional level or national level. The usage of expertise
332 from inside and outside the church to facilitate the process of change is of cardinal importance
333 for future development because if we do not have anybody from within the church on how a
334 certain aspect must be handled and somebody from outside the church can be a professor as
335 long, he or she works within the confines of what we expect. I do not see anything wrong in
336 outsourcing that particular person. The other one we must establish what we call a change agent
337 within the church, to help the Teachings Team who would help to teach the doctrine because
338 they are there, but they are very few for the whole SADEC Region. The church needs efficient
339 facilitators of the Word.

Appendix D22: Interview with Participant 22 (P22)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 22:** Other things that were at the core of his Christian needs were that he was a
4 person to whom things were revealed by Christ. He was a very humble person, he did not want
5 to be known nor introduce himself, nothing was written about him. Those are the things that
6 make his lineage not very clear. At the beginning of pastor Bhengu's ministry, he realized that
7 some married couples could not live well together at home as they were not yet saved, and he
8 encouraged those who were saved to live salvation so that it could be seen even by non-
9 believers. Even at home, there was a belief that the husband is not preached to by his wife, but
10 he must see the behaviour of his wife until he is converted. The story of the salvation of women
11 is something that they emphasised a lot with his first wife Mylet, that women must live salvation
12 at their homes among non-believers. And now these Thursday mothers' services began. It
13 became clear while he was leading the revivals that he was having financial difficulties. In
14 addition to studying overseas, he attempted to raise money for conducting revivals during his
15 time there. He had a vision in which he was informed that the money he needed was not where
16 he was but rather back at home in South Africa. The women who wear large headscarves are
17 the ones who will provide financial support for the work. After his return, he started providing
18 services for married women in South Africa. He took the leading pastors' wives of that time,
19 trained them in the work, and put them in charge as Organisers. Pastor Bhengu's teachings were
20 embraced by the women, and the mothers found great insight in them. To sell their handicrafts
21 and generate money for revivals, they began training one another on how to make them during
22 their church services. However, Pastor Bhengu ensured that they also did handwork for
23 themselves at home to generate cash for their households, which would enable these women to
24 support themselves and be independent of their husbands. Later on, he formed other groups
25 like girls (single women), the youth, and the men's organisation. Bhengu emphasised that the
26 money raised by married women is specifically for soul winning and it was used for the Back
27 to God Crusade as per the vision he had. However, that concept of women's spiritual
28 empowerment remains, and mothers continue to be quite powerful in their Christian Walk.
29 Married women's fundraising efforts have allowed these revival tents to remain in place, but
30 this money is now used for other purposes.

31 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
32 empower women?

33 **Participant 22:** The work of the mothers is fully organised, according to the teachings of Pastor
34 Bhengu which he imparted to the organisers. Because even now if you notice women organisers
35 are very strong in their work of women even more than other groups. This means that the vision
36 is completely absorbed, and not easy to be distracted. Additionally, the work that mothers do
37 benefits the church as a whole.

38 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

39 **Participant 22:** I think its relevance is that there the determination of pastor Bhengu to continue
40 with revivals is still there. The church supports this work so that all people can be saved and
41 come to know the truth, as the Bible says. That means that this is something that cannot be
42 erased while the church is still alive. The church is still holding on to the vision because the
43 goal is for all people to come to God. This means that revivals must continue to Cairo - meaning
44 that this is a work in progress. If there are places, we still have not yet reached, it implies we
45 are still in debt because the work has not reached the place it should reach according to pastor
46 Bhengu's vision. The church goes on even though the Back to Gog Crusade has not made it to
47 Cairo yet. Perhaps the things that Pastor Bhengu hoped would come to pass eventually. But
48 Pastor Bengu's vision has not gone away.

49 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
50 vision reflected in this church?

51 **Participant 22:** I believe that one reason pastor Bhengu was able to bring women closer is that
52 they are incredibly resilient individuals. It is also common for things to continue when you
53 enter from the mother's side. Mothers are powerful, but in our church, we have not come to
54 terms with the fact that women can become pastors. You will see that women do work in the
55 church. Even though they are supposed to be teaching, mothers are also preaching;
56 nevertheless, this has not yet progressed to the point where they are being ordained to become
57 pastors who head congregations. Similarly, to the preaching sisters of the Back to God Crusade,
58 they served under senior pastors in the revival area during Pastor Bhengu's tenure, but they
59 were able to spread the good news because people knew how powerful she was. But now single
60 women preach to other single sisters and married women teach other married women. Even
61 though the vision showed the founder married women as the carriers of the vision but it is
62 inclusive. And it was one method in which we have attempted to make this work inclusive.

63 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

64 **Participant 22:** The work of Pastor Bhengu is ongoing. Naturally, those who were there earlier
65 are now elderly, but some young women are carrying forward this vision although their
66 commitment is not the same as that of the earlier ones. As you can see, even the current
67 organisers of the mothers are working. There is no difference between them and those who
68 were present during pastor Bhengu's early years when you listen to them. They express it in the
69 same spirit that the recipient of this vision brought it. Since the church and work are expanding,
70 I have not offered any criticism of it. Although there is a sense that we will not make it to Cairo
71 as the vision predicted, the work continues.

72 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
73 the Back to God Crusade.

74 **Participant 22:** In our region they are. But I do not know how the national Back to God
75 Crusade team works. It looks like there, the work seems to have stopped for now, due to
76 financial problems. So, I do not know.

77 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

78 **Participant 22:** As I have already stated, not much has changed in our area other than the fact
79 that Back to God tents is rare, particularly following COVID-19. I am unable to provide you
80 with a detailed explanation at the national level because the Back to God Crusade is overseen
81 by a committee.

82 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
83 women's empowerment?

84 **Participant 22:** It is evolving, as you can see, even though certain things have changed a bit
85 but we are constantly reminded not to remove the pillars of this church. Even though we do not
86 do things the same way he used to but we are cautioned not to go astray even though
87 circumstances change. The most effective strategy is to concentrate on taking actions that will
88 let everyone realize when they move away from the path and must be pulled back because the
89 vision of the founder does not change. Sometimes you could feel that there is some tension
90 because some people seem to have a problem with the pillars of this church because they do
91 not understand this thing. It is like here in our communities, among the unbelievers, you find
92 that it is always said that - this is not how it was always done but is because we are growing as
93 a church. Due to the change of times, as we grow, even in families, when the house expands

with more people than before, it becomes different from when there were few members of the family. Certain things do change even though you would not exactly pinpoint what has gone wrong, but you could see that things are different from what they were.

Researcher: What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in the church?

Participant 22: I think there are people do see and think about that, but it is what I am saying that it would have been good for us but when we look back and it turns out that such a thing has never happened before, they have not seen it being done though women did work even though they were never ordained to be pastors of the churches; because there were also old sisters, some were even brought to the church, and the local church would be hers according to the level of the pastors but it would not be said she is a pastor just because she is doing the work and is maintaining the church. We have done it in our region as well, especially among the older sisters, you would find that she is looking after the local church because there was a shortage of pastors. However, I believe that in due course, it will be realized that they ought to be brought closer, provided a consensus can be reached.

Researcher: What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

Participant 22: They are there, they are still carrying on the vision of pastor Bhengu that for the work of preaching the gospel to continue, they are the ones who have to do that by raising the funds. The mothers' organisation, led by supervisors and organisers, is still doing that work. Until now, the women have not disappointed the church, yet the church ensures that each organisation has its monthly, its quarters, and its conventions. But in all these groups, it is the women's group specifically married women that carries the responsibility of spreading the gospel and the existence of the church, so much that if they were not there the church would be struggling. Now coming to your question; women are working, they are preaching in their services at all levels from the local to the convention in Thaba Nchu. Now, they are also allowed to preach in the main service on Sundays during quarterly and the Mini Conventions. The female speaker is given a chance to continue during the main service on Sunday if the pastor is convinced that she has a message for the entire congregation or if she has not finished the previous day's sermon. However, the pastors must first gather to make this decision.

Researcher: Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

124 **Participant 22:** When a woman is going to be a pastor, she must know that she will take full
125 responsibility for the church because she will be working under no one. So, she needs this firm
126 character. You can see now women have not reached that place. Perhaps these are some of the
127 things that make it impossible for them because they lack that manly authority.

128 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
129 comes to church positions?

130 **Participant 22:** Although it will take time, it will happen eventually because already there are
131 many knocking but the time has not yet come. Women need to be resilient, firm, and assertive
132 so that they can deal with issues in their local churches. Nevertheless, it is clear just by looking
133 at some individuals that she has a gift, and some of them will even go so far as to start their
134 churches in response to being ignored. And now that she is independent, you can see that hey
135 this woman is powerful, as you can see many ministries are mushrooming.

136 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
137 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

138 **Participant 22:** There can be many contributing factors to the exclusion of women from
139 ministerial positions but one thing I will say is that it is not because they are less equal than
140 men. In my opinion, the church has focused primarily on pastor Bhengu's vision that women
141 must bear the financial burden of evangelization. However, the church has neglected to take
142 into account their spiritual gifts, particularly when it comes to ordination as pastors, since
143 women do work and preach even without a formal title as pastors or are working as organisers.
144 Second, let me say that since Pastor Bhengu never ordained women as pastors and because of
145 the insistence that the landmarks cannot be removed, no one dares to change that. The
146 importance of the church's development cannot be overemphasised, and I think that is the
147 reason why the matter of women's ordination is at the conference level right now.

148 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
149 period like their male counterparts.

150 **Participant 22:** Since the probationary term serves as a test for those aspiring to be ordained
151 as full-fledged pastors, our church has not yet to the point where women are ordained as pastors.
152 As I have already stated, the conference has to make that decision, and as of right now, the
153 conference has not released us.

154 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

155 **Participant 22:** I do not think there are any challenges because in our church women are
156 working and preaching. Some are working as workers in the local churches, but the problem is
157 that they should be freed to work fully because they are already doing the work; many churches
158 were started by them. However, yes sometimes there is a problem with men because when men
159 see that a woman is a powerful preacher, they like to feel small, feel challenged, and may try
160 to silence her. That, I would say is frequently motivated by jealousy and egos. But it is also not
161 done by men alone because women can be quite jealous of one another. When a prominent
162 female preacher receives appreciation, some women would begin to criticize her, and soon
163 after, unfavourable viewpoints about her would start to spread.

164 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
165 adapting to the times?

166 **Participant 22:** The church is trying to adapt to the times because even though the decision of
167 their ordination has not yet been reached, they continue to work as workers leading some locals
168 and they continue to preach in the women's organisation as well. What I like though is that
169 women are also part of that conference. The supervisors are there, the organisers are there, the
170 pastor's wives are part of the conference and there are also women delegates there, so they will
171 have to express their opinion.

172 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

173 **Participant 22:** However, the most beneficial thing for us to do is to get as close to God as
174 possible. Without God, we are helpless, and if we are close to God, we can continue to grow in
175 our faith and avoid being overburdened by life's circumstances. The church is burdened with
176 financial issues because money has a purpose that extends beyond sharing the gospel and
177 necessitates an earnest relationship with God.

178 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
179 change in the BTG church?

180 **Participant 22:** No, I would not say that the church is reluctant beyond the conditions I have
181 already stated, like the way Pastor Bhengu worked with the women and the reasons for that and
182 that pastor Bhengu worked with women based on the vision he had about them, that is to raise
183 funds for this work. But as times are changing perhaps these are things that should be
184 considered, and as I have mentioned the conference is addressing this matter.

185 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
186 Cape to Cairo vision.

187 **Participant 22:** You will find that some things are affected by the issue of money because there
188 is nothing one can do without money. Well! we say mothers' savings are used to spread the
189 gospel, but it turns out that there are other needs as well. For example, even though we can
190 travel to distant locations, we still require support from the savings that mothers have made
191 here. As a result, the gospel is spreading more slowly than it ought to. Thus, I believe that the
192 task would not be as difficult to continue if it were not for the financial issue. So, I think money
193 issues have an impact.

194 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
195 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
196 the outside society?

197 **Participant 22:** You know, it is best to ignore the opinions of people who are not aware of the
198 initial plan when thinking about correcting something. By going back to the original plan or
199 vision and reviewing its purpose, origins, and justifications, one can determine whether or not
200 what they are doing is correct. That individual will be able to reflect if they have strayed. You
201 will never succeed in pleasing individuals who are unaware of the source of your actions. For
202 anything to be effective, you must first be certain of what you are doing and why.

203 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
204 church?

205 **Participant 22:** I have seen a lot of transformative aspects of women's empowerment because
206 I think the church is trying. Mothers' and Girls' organisers are recognised as the full leaders of
207 the church and are not limited to working exclusively with women when doing organisational
208 tasks in their local churches. For this reason, you will discover that, to complete the work,
209 speakers are assigned to preach on Sundays, regardless of whether it is Mother's Day or Girls'
210 Day. However, now women are also becoming deacons in congregations, a position that was
211 reserved for men before.

212 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

213 **Participant 22:** What I notice as we are just talking is that we have delayed the church for too
214 long. Only Baba Bhengu recognised women even though we will always make an excuse that
215 he never ordained women. Who knows why maybe he was under pressure as well. You have

216 heard me mention that some mothers and sisters have left the church to start their congregations,
217 but we now recognise that by using their abilities in the ministries they started, these individuals
218 could have benefited our church. Even worse is that although the church has lost these gifts,
219 those gifted women who remain with our church are mistreated and silenced to the point of
220 hurting them.

221 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

222 **Participant 22:** The implications of the past continue because nothing has changed. What I
223 notice as we are just talking is that we have delayed the church for too long. You have heard
224 me mention that some mothers and sisters still leave the church to start their congregations,
225 even men. Many powerful pastors that we never thought would leave have left the church. And
226 as I have mentioned those gifted women who remain with our church are mistreated and
227 silenced to the point of hurting them. In our church, losing souls feels like a non-issue. Even
228 though the original goal of this church was to win people over to God, we are losing more souls
229 than we are gaining. We are going backward rather than forwards, which makes this difficult.
230 The suffering in all of this stems from the fact that we don't seem to comprehend the
231 consequences. We don't appear to know what it's like to be left crippled after losing a limb.
232 Despite being incapacitated, we carry on with our lives as if nothing had occurred. We have
233 killed this church without realizing that.

234 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

235 **Participant 22:** Well, since it has already been discussed, it will depend on the conference's
236 decision. All I can say is that I am looking forward to the best outcome, whatever that may be,
237 to forward the work and ensure that everyone in the congregation is happy. To me fearing God
238 and carrying out the vision are what matter most.

Appendix D23: Interview with Participant 23 (P23)

1 **Researcher:** Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual
2 empowerment.

3 **Participant 23:** At the time when pastor Bhengu was overseas seeking funds to carry out the
4 work of evangelism, it was revealed by God that he should return home, the money he wants is
5 from women wearing big veils. He came back and started the weekly, monthly, and quarterly
6 meetings for the mothers where money was raised. The mothers did the handicrafts that Pastor
7 Bhengu had taught them so that they could sell them and raise funds.

8 **Researcher:** How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to
9 empower women?

10 **Participant 23:** Well, my child, it is shown because mothers meet for their weekly services,
11 which are every Thursday then they meet again for the monthly service, and for the monthlies
12 they meet with other local churches, and they meet again for the quarterlies which is a bigger
13 gathering than the monthly. All of these are in the church year planner. Also, men, the youth,
14 and the girls have their meetings, but the money raised by married women is for spreading the
15 gospel. Until now, God has helped mothers because they have been doing a great job with the
16 fundraising work they are doing.

17 **Researcher:** How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

18 **Participant 23:** This vision of pastor Bhengu has been very relevant. As you can see by the
19 size of Thaba Nchu, its construction was carried out by mothers, and the people who work here
20 in the church at Henley, in Thaba Nchu, and the pastors are also paid with the money that is
21 made by the mothers. The Back to God Crusade is also helped by the mothers however, but the
22 revival tents here in the countryside are so rare that they can be erected once a year and
23 sometimes not at all. In our area, there is a Back to God tent, but it has not been utilized in a
24 very long time. The work of mothers is very high. Mothers' money is no longer working here
25 in the regions, the money is building the Thaba Nchu, Peace Centre, where the whole of South
26 Africa converges for Conventions in December and during Easter. Lesotho, Swaziland, and
27 Mozambique were also present when we had these meetings.

28 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
29 vision reflected in this church

30 **Participant 23:** Well, at the beginning of this work, some mothers were the wives of the main
31 pastors he worked with and his wife. I saw these mothers in 1960 when they went to set up a
32 women's work in King William's Town. Pastor Bhengu was working with them teaching this
33 service to mothers. Some girls preached in the Back to God tents at that time, but I do not know
34 them well now, one more thing is that I am very old now, I am 88 years old, so I do not even
35 know the current pastors.

36 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure –

37 **Participant 23:** There were working girls, they were very strong. But I don't hear new girls
38 coming in. These girls worked extensively in a church with a senior pastor.

39 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
40 the Back to God Crusade.

41 **Participant 23:** The Back to God Crusade's evangelical task force still includes women, but
42 the revivals are no longer happening. However, I also think that women nowadays are educated,
43 so they are pursuing their careers, they are not as available as they once were. In the past married
44 and unmarried women devoted much of their time to preaching because they were not working.

45 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women

46 **Participant 23:** I do not think there are any changes, my child, apart from the fact that the Back
47 to God tents are no longer in operation. But I understand where your question is going.
48 Remember that in the past the sisters and mothers did not have much to do because they were
49 unemployed and illiterate, so they spent most of their time evangelizing, now times are
50 different, and it is no longer the same as before. These days, women are pursuing their careers
51 as I have mentioned. Women are too busy these days, I think they have dedicated their time to
52 other things.

53 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
54 women's empowerment?

55 **Participant 23:** Pastor Bhengu would not just act, even when he came to the meeting, he would
56 say what God said. It is not easy to step into the feet of such a person and use your wisdom,
57 you have to wait for God to speak again.

58 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
59 the church?

60 **Participant 23:** Please hear me well, I do not have a problem with women being ordained. I
61 am not against that, but it is not easy to change something that does not belong to you.
62 Ordaining women was never done even by pastor Bhengu, the owner of the vision. What we
63 know is that women were never ordained as pastors, but they were spiritually strong and
64 productive, they planted churches, but they frequently worked under the local pastor. I also had
65 some who worked under me when I was still an active pastor, even though some of them started
66 churches, they were never ordained, and now it will be difficult for other people to start doing
67 that. You see you have to respect something that is not yours. God had spoken to Reverend
68 Bhengu, and when we arrived at this church, it was already running.

69 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG

70 **Participant 23:** Besides being Supervisors and the organisers of the work of women which
71 Bhengu started I have no clue now. I only know what happened during Bhengu's time because
72 I am very old now, I am 88 years old.

73 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

74 **Participant 23:** No, my daughter, I do not think it would be good if we change this, pastor
75 Bhengu said, never to remove the landmarks of this church. I am afraid because who will face
76 God's wrath when it is broken because we have done things that God did not say must be done?
77 Bhengu also did not just act; he waited for God to speak first.

78 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
79 comes to church positions?

80 **Participant 23:** This is the time we are in now, evil is at the highest level, and the things that
81 happen now did not exist in our time. In our time we rebuked the speaking demons; and when
82 the gospel came, people wanted to beat us and people were imprisoned. The evilness we are in
83 is at a high level.

84 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
85 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

86 **Participant 23:** The biggest problem I see is the safety of women. It is not the same as before,
87 a woman cannot just say she is going to preach in this day and age. In our time we used to travel
88 with our sisters, as I mentioned earlier, and we openly preached on buses and trains, but judging
89 by the rise in the level of cruelty, I do not know if women can continue to do that in this day

90 and age. Not to mention the abuse and the brutal killing of women. Imagine if the female pastor
91 has to stay alone in the mission house, in which case she may be strangled there, because
92 sometimes the husband might not be there, or it would be an unmarried female pastor. These
93 thugs dare to enter the packed church and take not just the male pastor's phone but also clean
94 the phones and bags of the parishioners. Contrary to what I just said, though, I also want to
95 emphasise that if the church had been in prayer, God would have brought the powers to justice
96 this time.

97 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
98 period like their male counterparts.

99 **Participant 23:** A person is placed on probation because, following that procedure, he will be
100 ordained. Women are currently prohibited from going through probation because, the moment
101 they do, their hopes of becoming ordained pastors are raised. I heard that the matter of women's
102 ordination is being discussed at the conference level, I was not there. Because all of the changes
103 need to be approved at the conference level, the leadership cannot bypass the conference.

104 **Researcher:** What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

105 **Participant 23:** You see what needs to happen is that women and men should be able to work
106 together, without criticizing each other. No one else should believe they are superior to others.
107 Another thing is that when a woman is gifted, she should be supported by everyone so that her
108 gift can develop even more. Men should not view women as a threat because women do not
109 always get a chance to preach, it is not like she is going to take their positions.

110 **Researcher:** By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative how is the church
111 adapting to the times?

112 **Participant 23:** The church is adapting to the times because the women will continue to preach
113 and work as they do even if they are not ordained until God gives direction.

114 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

115 **Participant 23:** When the right time comes, God will show us the way, we cannot go ahead of
116 God, lest we make mistakes that will anger God.

117 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
118 change in the BTG church?

119 **Participant 23:** There are no consequences, and I do not think we are reluctant, but we must
120 pray and listen to the Holy Spirit. We need to give God a chance to speak to us and when he
121 speaks, we must be sure that we understand what He is saying. Secondly, we need to give God
122 a chance to lead us so that we do not go down the cliff with the whole church.

123 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
124 Cape to Cairo vision. 33:12

125 **Participant 23:** From Cape to Cairo, as he put it. He intended to preach the gospel from Cape
126 Town to Cairo, but God took him. He said that he had not finished the work. He said that he
127 was going but he had not completed the task. He lamented that I have preached but I have not
128 taught the congregation. We do not know if we will ever make it to Cairo because of the times
129 we live in. I would like to state that the situation has changed, things are not the same as before,
130 at that time, the move of the Gospel came strongly from Port Elizabeth. We preached alongside
131 the big sisters in buses, trains, and on farms throughout the place. A pastor serves exclusively
132 in the church to which he was assigned. "Hambani" meaning "Go ye, therefore," is motionless.
133 The command "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations" is no longer happening.
134 "Hambani", "Go", you will arrive hard in Cairo. In our time, it was bad but not like it is now.
135 This situation needs people who pray and fast, it needs people who preach, it needs people who
136 keep themselves Holy.

137 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
138 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
139 the outside society

140 **Participant 23:** I think that the leadership has confidence in the women, and that is why they
141 allow them to manage their organisations independently and without any interference. And yet
142 they also give them opportunities to deliver sermons to a packed congregation with men and
143 pastors sitting down and listening. Outsiders cannot know everything that goes on inside the
144 church, they will discover that their preconceived notions are incorrect upon visiting and
145 witnessing a woman preaching.

146 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
147 church?

148 **Participant 23:** The transformation started a long time ago in this church because this church
149 was the first to allow women to preach in public. Still, it was the first organisation with women's

150 organisation, where women led by example and accomplished their own goals. Women are now
151 welcome to preach even on Sundays as long as they have the gift to edify the church as a whole.

152 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

153 **Participant 23:** I do not know any, like I said to me the church has never been resistant to
154 women. Bhengu worked with women.

155 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

156 **Participant 23:** None. Keep in mind that even people who are reported to have left the church
157 might have done so because they were unaware that this church was founded on a vision and
158 that the senior leadership was limited in what they could accomplish. What I can say is that a
159 lot of people—men and women alike—have gone to start their churches, but some of them now
160 want to come back because when they first left, they were not acting rationally. As much as I
161 may say, we need them, and we need each other.

162 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

163 **Participant 23:** We need to pray to God, and He will lead us. Jesus declares, "I am the life, the
164 way, and the truth." The things of God require good listeners, they require humble people, not
165 geniuses.

Appendix D24: Interview with Participant 24 (P24)

Researcher: Please tell us what Bhengu's historical vision was for women's spiritual empowerment.

Participant 24: His vision was to evangelize and make sure that people get to know of God, and that they were getting saved. So, he went overseas looking for money because he thought that to spread the Gospel, he would need some tents and resources. His main objective was to make sure that people are reconciled with God. He wanted the evangelists to go around preaching the gospel. Those pastors were not working, they were called by God. He used to make sure that they got something to put food on the table. He went overseas to ask for some donations. But while he was there, he got a vision God asked him what he wanted overseas, and he said I want some money to support my ministers. God said no, the money is there in South Africa. Go back you will find a woman wearing a headscarf, in that headscarf there is money. He came back and shared his vision with the supervisors. He taught these women Bible verses that talk about women and how to do handwork and told them that they must teach other women so that they can raise funds. In the past, only husbands worked, and mothers would remain at home and take care of children and do the housework. Now he taught them that they should not rely on their husbands especially when it comes to finances. So, he started teaching the women handwork.

Researcher: How well does the church's constitution reflect the Bhengu's determination to empower women?

Participant 24: They used to meet weekly as mothers, and they were empowered spiritually and would also do handwork and sell and get money and they would bring that money to the church from the local and the district. That money was to make the capital to spread the gospel and for themselves to support their families.

Researcher: How relevant is Bhengu's vision for the church today?

Participant 24: The mothers are still busy teaching other mothers from the local level to be responsible and to love God and also to preach the Gospel. By so doing if we can check all the locals, if 10 mothers from one local can reach out to other mothers and bring one each, can you imagine how many people can be saved? Mothers equip each other with spiritual knowledge (the Bible), so that when they are out there, even if they are taking care of their houses they

30 must be spreading the Gospel. Bhengu empowered women because even in his crusades he had
31 women who preached the Gospel.

32 **Researcher:** Bhengu's vision affirmed women in every way, how is Bhengu's progressive
33 vision reflected in this church?

34 **Participant 24:** His vision was saying we are reaching out to people starting from Cape to
35 Cairo. But somewhere somehow because the church also has some challenges. The devil is not
36 happy with the work of God. Now you will remember even during the time of COVID-19 there
37 was no tent pitched, now after that, I think the leadership is trying to build up the work so that
38 the work can be revived, and the Gospel must continue. If you can check since he said from
39 Cape to Cairo and check where we are now, you will see that the progress is very slow. We still
40 have mothers in the tents, but they are no longer the same as in the past because even in our
41 local it was easy to get a lady to come and do revival, but they are very scarce now. After
42 COVID-19, there was a big challenge. A lot of things have changed now but through the grace
43 of God, the leadership is busy trying to do something. You will realize when the chairman of
44 the Executive is addressing something he would always say we must move.

45 **Researcher:** How has the position of women changed following Bhengu's departure

46 **Participant 24:** I think it is just a challenge because all those people who are pastors whenever
47 they move with the tents, let me say the tents are going to be in our area, some women are
48 supposed to be part of the revival tent, preaching the Gospel. That has not yet changed. But
49 these challenges have disturbed women to continue and to get those who are called to put them
50 in the field to do the work.

51 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why women are no longer a part of the evangelistic task force for
52 the Back to God Crusade.

53 **Participant 24:** According to my understanding we do have, the only challenge is that the old
54 ones have grown old and now the challenge that we have is we do not get the new ones to join.
55 That is where I see the challenge. But I think the Back to God Crusades have not been
56 functioning since after COVID-19. It is only now that they are trying to revive it. But with the
57 grace of God, I think God might open the way, although; you know we are talking about the
58 vision of Bhengu – those that remained – that is why Bhengu did not appoint anyone to take
59 his position when he left. He said I am leaving this church upon the Holy Spirit. Whoever wants
60 to lead this church must be full of the Holy Spirit. I think that is what we need to pray to God

61 to help us with so that He identify people who are called to get into the field and do the work.
62 And then the leadership today maybe might have missed that focus, or they are not strong on
63 that point. With this question, you are reminding me now of a lot of things that I think we must
64 also check with our leadership from the local level, and regional level as a region because what
65 you are saying has opened my mind. To also check with the leadership if we are not missing
66 the mark and see what we can do. Let us do something. I remember in our area we had those
67 ladies who were given opportunities in the tents, and then our leadership in the area took those
68 mothers to look after the smaller local churches and that is not their responsibility. Their work
69 was to spread the Gospel. I have two ladies who I know two ladies who were part of those but
70 now they were given local churches.

71 **Researcher:** What prompted the changes that have been made regarding women?

72 **Participant 24:** I think the weakness of the Back to God Crusade in the area, especially the
73 leadership of the Back to God Crusade. It is because it is no longer operating, if it was operating,
74 they were going to take them and even identify the new ones who are called to preach the
75 Gospel. And they could continue like that. I think this is one of the biggest mistakes that was
76 overlooked by our leadership.

77 **Researcher:** Why has Bhengu's vision not evolved with the times, particularly in terms of
78 women's empowerment?

79 **Participant 24:** I do not see the problem there because it is not like women will pitch a tent
80 and be alone. There will be back up especially some men as security to guard, to help where
81 there is a need for manpower, but we make sure that we give the platform to women. Even
82 when we go to mothers' conventions, men are always there to support and also as security. Like
83 I remember in our planning for 2024, last year with our pastor we said we must start going to
84 the street and pick up a point where we will be doing our services for a week every day.

85 **Researcher:** What are the issues that are holding back the process of women's ordination in
86 the church?

87 **Participant 24:** I think it is the politics of our church. You remember during the time of Bhengu
88 you could not even see a lady on Sunday standing in front of men in the church, preaching the
89 Word. But I think if Bhengu was alive by now, we could be having women preaching in the
90 church. Because of the way God gave that man wisdom, he was moving with the times. The
91 way he was operating after so many changes in the world he was going to adapt to the changes.

92 I think by this time we could have ordained women. You know the problem with men, the men
93 have the challenge of saying a woman is a weaker vessel. That is the character and the nature
94 of men. But spiritually you would realize that a woman can stand there and preach. You
95 remember even in the quarterly meetings, we give the mothers' speaker to preach on Saturday,
96 on Sunday it does not matter if the service is hot on Saturday, we will call a man to come and
97 preach on Sunday. You could even say, hay this man is diluting the message that we got
98 yesterday. That is the challenge, but I think if Bhengu was still alive this time, he could have
99 ordained women. But I think with time some of the things God will push. He will do it himself.
100 He will reveal himself until people realize that we have to do this. According to the rules of
101 procedure. Maybe the current leadership would say we are moving away from the foundations
102 of the old man whereas if he was alive, he could have changed a lot of things. Unfortunately,
103 they are afraid, they do not have that courage. If you can remember what happened during the
104 conference –I realized that no one wants to boldly say we are following this route because he
105 is not sure of his position, but I hope God will do something. It is his work it will never fail; it
106 will never fail – it will continue.

107 **Researcher:** What is the current status of women's roles in BTG?

108 **Participant 24:** I can say the current status of women is coming. They are being recognised. I
109 can tell you in my local church – when we do plan especially for preaching together with our
110 pastor. There are some Sundays where we plan a woman. To preach the Word of God

111 **Researcher:** Can you please share how you feel about women's ordination in your church?

112 **Participant 24:** Remember in terms of the Word of God, we are not looking at the gender. Our
113 focus should be on the vessel itself. This person has got a gift. The main purpose of the gift is
114 to help the church. That is the bottom line. We forget whether it is a sister or a mother or a
115 father or a brother. We need the gift. You remember the Bible which talks about the gifts. The
116 purpose of the gift is to build the church, to strengthen to empower the church. There is nowhere
117 in the Bible where it says – for the work of God or for God to speak in the church we need men.
118 There is no such thing. No, no, no, no, no – we are all children of God – and then given the
119 grace. But God has given us different gifts. And when God gives gifts to people, according to
120 my understanding, God does not look at gender, God looks at the heart. This heart is mine; this
121 heart is well related to me. This heart is open to carry my work. The most important thing that
122 God is looking at in us is just to - uplift the state of people from no knowledge of God to the
123 realization of God, especially salvation. Now we do not talk about gender otherwise if that was

124 the case, according to the current situation – otherwise, women would not be allowed to sing.
125 Just imagine if there were only men there that were supposed to sing – what would happen?

126 **Researcher:** What could be the circumstances that prevent gender transformation when it
127 comes? to church positions?

128 **Participant 24:** I even indicated the issue of our nature, of our tradition, even myself – some
129 men even if a wife can ask – that baba – what if you can do this to uplift the house – the man
130 will say no, no, no, no not now we have to do one two, three but in his heart he says ja, she is
131 correct. Men have got that tendency – for the weakness of saying I am the leader; I am the head,
132 I cannot depend on the advice of a woman or other people, but I think now is the time. I used
133 to tell my wife, my dear thanks you very much on this one, I did not see it. And I am busy
134 teaching men to do the same. Because even if women can bring up a very important issue
135 because it has been brought by women, men will say we will look at it later – so that later it
136 does not come from women another man brings it up. So, we cannot say this issue was brought
137 up by that lady. That pride of a man being a leader. I think it is one of our weaknesses as men.

138 **Researcher:** What are the factors that contribute to the exclusion of women from ministerial
139 positions, as an example of equal treatment, in the development of the church?

140 **Participant 24:** is it not that – eh even in my culture "ya etwa pele eke tsabe iwela lehopeng"
141 meaning that if a goat is led by a female one, there is no way that they will reach the destination
142 – they will end up falling into the pit. According to this idiom, women do not have foresight.
143 They only have limited sight. They are shortsighted. That idiom also contributes to saying
144 women are born weaker vessels therefore as weaker vessels they cannot think more than men,
145 they cannot bring change, and their capacity of thinking is poor. That is holding the progress of
146 recognizing women and placing them their rightful positions.

147 **Researcher:** Kindly explain why the current female pastors have not undergone a probationary
148 period like their male counterparts.

149 **Participant 24:** Is it not that they must amend the constitution and all that? Whenever we
150 ordain workers, we should not look at their gender, we look at the gift. If one is called – is doing
151 the work – we must ordain that person. There were a lot of some items left by the Executive
152 during the conference. They will have to deal with them because you can see they keep on
153 postponing. But I think the way things are coming, God is working. We are heading towards
154 that position. They will end up doing it, there is no other way. They do not go through the

probation period because they call them workers although we as people when we see what they are doing, they are doing the work of a pastor. In my region, I have two locals that I know these female pastors have been transferred to those churches. They are working there as pastors. They are taking care of the local church but what I have realized is that when they pay them from the office - to show that there is a problem – there is a form where it says the pastor for this local is this one – but those churches which are led by women, it has got no pastor or it is either they will put the pastor of the mother church. You can see that they are not recognised. I think the region is afraid because they are not ordained so they can not refer to them as pastors. I think that is the decision of the conference. We need to challenge the conference; we are part of the conference. When we are there, we must talk. In my region, I will talk about this to say brethren why are we not ordaining her because she is taking care of the church, and she is doing the work of the ordained pastor.

Researcher: What challenges do women bring to men in terms of employment in the church?

Participant 24: What I have realized with many women. Where I used to work, and we are in a meeting. If we are discussing an issue, it is not good for a man to say the way you do that thing is not right, let us do it this way – challenging the leader. The female leader instead of saying oh I was not aware I now understand - instead, she will say no I am the leader here when I say we have to do things this way, we must do them that way. Even in the churches, I do not know but I will just do research where there are female pastors and check what is happening in the church. In other words, their authority should not be questioned or challenged. When I say questioned or challenged is because in a meeting, we discuss issues, we argue, and we oppose each other. At the end of the day, we read the regulations but for most women, once you challenge them, that thing remains in the favour of that one and it becomes personal. They become emotional.

Researcher: By not ordaining women you might be viewed as conservative, how is the church adapting to the times?

Participant 24: That is why I say, now it is about time. Like myself, we had one woman who was brought to our church for about six months. But according to my observation leadership was supposed to support her and I said OK – her duty was to preach the Word. We were not supposed to involve her in the issues of the church because we were going to disturb her gift. The only problem is the administration of the church and the spiritual part. They should be separated because the person can stand on the pulpit and preach the real Gospel but when it

187 comes to administration we should sit down and argue and that when you see that for most of
188 the women it is not their line. That is why I say in fact as leadership we need to have a vision
189 or open up our minds whenever we are discussing administrative or church issues. Fortunately,
190 my pastor in my local church does not talk – he just listens to you. Sometimes he does not even
191 chair the meeting, he would tell you that today you will chair the meeting, so, draft the agenda.
192 The leadership should discuss issues. It is only at some point when he would say, okay, my
193 advice is this on this point. He would say I do not take this; I say this is my advice. He would
194 say I think this is still alright, but I think you could still do it this way. And I think that is the
195 way the church is getting empowered. The pastor is reserving himself for the spiritual work
196 only but in the other areas, he must know what is taking place and yes here and there he gives
197 advice. I think our church since we started last year has grown – because we are transparent in
198 our church. It does not get too much in many things.

199 **Researcher:** What do you think should be done to change this situation?

200 **Participant 24:** I think as I am saying to you, God is moving with times – things are coming,
201 the only thing maybe is that we see him moving at a slow pace. I also want to challenge our
202 RCC and ask them, where are our women going to end up so that this could be shared at the
203 conference as an item so that it can be deliberated on – maybe then it could be adopted and
204 spread to other regions. I think we must also caution the women to say as the time is moving,
205 your time is coming. Do not be harsh, and in conferences raise your point but do not fight
206 because when you become emotional, they will not take you seriously. Women will eventually
207 be given a chance. They will be taught to align themselves because you can be a good preacher
208 but if you do not know the know how you might destroy the church unaware. My local pastor
209 has introduced something very important. Monday to Wednesday every week we pray. The
210 prayer is taking place from 6 am till 7 o'clock. If you are going to work, he will open up the
211 church at 5 o'clock for you to come and pray. But on Monday and Tuesday, we just pray and
212 go. The church needs to pray - prayer is the key

213 **Researcher:** Can you please explain the consequences of the reluctance to accept gender
214 change in the BTG church?

215 **Participant 24:** What is happening - let me just set one example that I see. I was talking to one
216 lady; it might be 15 years back in our area. No woman could put an earring standing on the
217 pulpit whether to sing or give testimony or do what. And no woman would be referred to as
218 saved wearing a trouser, not just in the church but also in town. Once I see you then I say this

219 lady is not saved. But as I was saying my pastor is giving some other women an opportunity to
220 preach Some have left the church - remember there are some other ministries, and they are
221 posing a challenge to our church. Pastors should think of using the gifted women so that they
222 do not leave the church. If those women who are doing the handwork that is making the money
223 for the church could leave the church would struggle. However, I believe God will never leave
224 His work to fall. You know it is like driving on the road, sometimes the road is flat and straight,
225 but sometimes it is steep, and you have to change the gears. God has got his way of doing
226 things. Let us allow him and pray.

227 **Researcher:** Please tell me how the reluctance to embrace women's ordination has affected the
228 Cape to Cairo vision.

229 **Participant 24:** We are not moving. Maybe by now, we should be around Congo, somewhere
230 there but when I checked we managed to reach some parts of Zimbabwe a long time ago and
231 they do not even fellowship with us in our conventions. I am told they said we will not come
232 to Thaba Nchu. Even though Namibia was here it is not that much. If women were ordained,
233 they were going to push the crusades to happen but unfortunately, due to their limitations, they
234 cannot even though they are the ones that are raising the funds for the crusades according to
235 the vision. Women do not have the power to push the work themselves because they are not
236 ordained pastors, therefore they wait to hear the plan of the leadership. There is a lot to be
237 done, unfortunately by the Back to God Crusade. May God help us to get many women who
238 are called to say let us go. There is another one from Mpumalanga, even though she is an
239 organiser, but she is doing revivals in Mozambique. She is very powerful.

240 **Researcher:** Non-ordination reflects non-confidence and lack of value in women – by
241 representing this as a church – how will this make this denomination look to the members and
242 the outside society?

243 **Participant 24:** We are contradicting ourselves because there in Thaba Nchu you can witness
244 that. You remember during Easter time, they gave some women to preach, yesses the church
245 was upside down with all the leadership being there to say this one is doing more than I can do.
246 It is proof that they can do the work but at the same time, you say we do not have confidence
247 in them. Now we are failing to recognise them. We are contradicting ourselves. How society is
248 going to view us is the challenge – even in our culture, these people that are not saved they
249 have not recognised women. But we need to lead by example.

250 **Researcher:** What are the transformative aspects of women's empowerment that you see in this
251 church?

252 **Participant 24:** We have women preachers, some are leading locals, and we have some
253 evangelists. We appreciate the gifts – what comes out of that person. If this is the Word that can
254 help the church, why can we not use this gift? If this person can help the community, why can
255 we not use that person because the main aim is to edify the church and to uplift the spiritual life
256 of the people? We must expose them to doing these things. Some can even say that this woman
257 preaches like a man.

258 **Researcher:** What were the implications of resistance in the past?

259 **Participant 24:** Misunderstanding of the Bible – you know that verse of Paul speaking to
260 Timothy saying I do not allow women to teach. They just took that verse, and they stood on it.
261 So there is a misunderstanding. Sometimes if you do not pray and you do not read the Bible
262 you will end up preaching one verse and relying on it.

263 **Researcher:** What are the current implications of resistance?

264 **Participant 24:** We are denied of the word that can edify the church. Some people come with
265 problems and leave with them because the person who has got answers for them is being denied
266 an opportunity. In my church I am grooming a young boy who is still at school he is doing a
267 great job.

268 **Researcher:** What are the expected aspects of change in the future?

269 **Participant 24:** Great things are coming, let us wait for God's timing. Let us keep on praying.