

Reforming Pentecostal marriage theology in the aftermath of a schism

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Background: Several scholars have mentioned the Pentecostal paradox, in which Pentecostal churches seem to be liberatory and at the same time very oppressive. Pentecostal churches have been observed to encourage the oppression of women in marriages through their literal translation of the Bible and the support of oppressive cultural practices. The theology of marriage in the Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe (AFMOZ), a Pentecostal church, changed because of the schism in 2018.

Objectives: This article explores how the theology of marriage changed because of a schism in the AFMOZ.

Method: Qualitative data were collected from the 35 purposively selected members of the AFMOZ.

Results: Contrary to the oppressive teaching on marriage, which most Pentecostal churches are associated with, the AFMOZ is now teaching sharing of household chores, submission from both husband and wife, and divorcing or separating in case of gender-based violence, among other things.

Conclusion: The article concludes that this teaching on marriage ushers a positive amendment in the attitude of AFMOZ to marriage, although it still manifests fundamental patriarchal assumptions.

Contribution: This article fills that gap in the literature by highlighting how the AFMOZ Pentecostal church has changed from being oppressive to being liberatory through teaching a marriage theology that gives women agency.

Keywords: Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe; church; liberative; marriage; oppressive; Pentecostalism; schism; theology.

Introduction

Background

Marriage in most African countries, Zimbabwe being no exception, is highly regarded. In Africa, marriage is governed by patriarchal principles in which a woman as the wife is under the authority of a man (Oduyoye 2004). The church also regards marriage highly to the extent that for one to be in leadership, marriage is a requirement. According to Baloyi (2016:3), the institution of marriage is generally under attack. The teaching on marriage in many Pentecostal churches was actually an affront to this fundamental institution, even though many churches thought that it was a way of preserving marriage. Previous studies have consistently shown that many churches encourage inequality in marriages (Vengesai 2024:1). By upholding a teaching that encouraged inequality, Pentecostal churches were threatening the marriage institution. This study, using the Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe (AFMOZ) as a case study, will highlight how the teaching on marriage is now life-giving and empowering to women as a result of the schism in 2018.

Goal number five of sustainable development encourages gender equality, even in marriage. The Zimbabwean government has signed legal conventions that uphold equality. The Zimbabwean constitution also encourages equality. In 2013, the Zimbabwean government adopted a new constitution, which advocates for women's rights (Vengesai 2024:2). Despite the government and the international community advocating for gender equality, the church in Zimbabwe was still not treating women as equals in marriage.

While marriage is an integral part of most African families, the church must take the initiative in empowering women in such unions. If people are to stay in marriage till death do them part,

the union must be fulfilling and life-giving. Only after the split in 2018 did AFMOZ realise that its previous teaching on marriage was an attack on an institution it values so much. After the split, AFMOZ is taking positive steps towards achieving lifelong marriages that are empowering to both men and women through the change in marriage theology. It is now focussing more on encouraging marriages that do not undermine the humanity of a woman.

History of the Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe

Pentecostalism is one of the expressions of Christianity. According to Nel (2019:1), Pentecostalism is a protest against the Protestantism of mainline churches. Pentecostal churches are churches that base their belief in being filled by the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues (Nel 2018:2). The AFMOZ is a Pentecostal church established in 1915 (Togarasei 2016:2). According to Sande and Maforo (2021:2), it is a classical Pentecostal church and the mother of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. In a century of its existence, it has been predominantly under the governance of men, although women are the majority. Patriarchy, which had a great influence on the church's teaching on marriage, drives the running of activities in the AFMOZ (Sande & Maforo 2021:2). Patriarchy, which is a philosophy and social system that views men as natural leaders and women as followers, has increased the partiality against women even in marriage. According to Musoni (2023:2), it is a practice that assumes the superiority of men. Hence, as Kgatle (2019:6) contends, patriarchy is a practice not to be accommodated in a society but to be eliminated. According to Sande and Maforo (2021:2), compared to men in the church, women are exposed to more difficult situations as a result of patriarchy. As reported by Madziyire and Risinamhodzi (2015), the AFMOZ has never had a female president, overseer or elder. Essentially, women do not hold any key decision-making positions in the AFMOZ, except for a few female pastors, who have very limited influence in decision-making (Sande & Maforo 2021). Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe took a long time to accept the ordination of women as pastors, the first of which was only ordained in 1999, 84 years after the church was established (Kwaramba 2004).

Biri (2014) observed that Pentecostal churches taught submission only from women in marriage. Hence, the teaching on marriage before the split in AFMOZ emphasised women being submissive to their husbands and the husband being the head of the family. This teaching meant that the woman, as the wife, had no say in all decisions in the home. This was the practice even though the AFMOZ believes in the work of the Holy Spirit, its trademark from the beginning (Togarasei 2016). The AFMOZ acknowledges that the Holy Spirit does not discriminate based on gender (Togarasei 2016). From that perspective, one can view the AFMOZ as democratic in its affairs; however, it is not so in practice. This points to the Pentecostal paradox that Kaunda and Pokol (2019) highlight, in which Pentecostal churches seem to be liberatory while at the same time being oppressive.

Kwaramba and Dreyer (2019) observed that the AFMOZ upheld male headship; hence, women were and are not allowed to decide, even in marriage. The emphasis was on the husband having the final say on all decisions in marriage (Kwaramba & Dreyer 2019).

Pentecostalism and marriage

Pentecostalism has been growing spontaneously in Africa, Zimbabwe included. According to Muguti and Sande (2019:186), although growing at such a fast rate, Pentecostalism has contributed to the suffering and exclusion of women both in society and in the church. Gabaitse (2015) records that in Pentecostal churches, the Bible has been interpreted in a way that disempowers a woman in marriage, leading to a lot of women experiencing domestic violence in marriage. Chisale (2018) records that some women experience all forms of domestic violence, while others experience specific forms such as emotional abuse in marriage. The impact of the abuse on some women is visible, while on others, it is not. The abuse women experience in marriages is mainly because of teachings on marriage which emphasise male headship (Van Klinken 2011).

Sande and Samushonga (2020) aver that Pentecostalism in Africa has failed to completely break ties with culture because it easily adapts to different social contexts. This attitude has been worsened by the influence of Shona and Ndebele cultures on Pentecostalism, which encourages women to be silent about marital issues even if suffering in marriage (Makaudze 2015). Many Pentecostal members are still being so much influenced by culture, despite their claim of having broken all ties with their culture. Ukah (2020:431) also highlights how the concept of being born again, which includes breaking with all that has to do with culture, is emphasised in Pentecostal churches.

Several studies by African feminist theologians on Christian marriages indicate that the church, although being aware of the abuse some women are going through in marriage, turns a blind eye and expects the victims to sort their troubles on their own (Kapuma 2015; Roux 2012). Concurring, Kapuma (2015) states that the church blames women and teaches that women are responsible for the abuse they are going through. Phiri and Nadar (2010) aver that this blame led to women resorting to silence and not talking about the abuse for fear of being blamed for causing the domestic violence. Roux (2012:51) argues that the church in Africa is making minimal efforts to address sexual violence; instead, it promotes gender discrimination and sexually violent practices through its teachings and open endorsement of such behaviours. Some churches totally avoid discussing gender violence issues in marriages, thereby indirectly perpetuating it (Musendekwa 2016).

The ongoing prevalence of abuse, oppression and violence within Christian marriages underscores the urgent need to

re-evaluate and reform the prevailing theological teachings on marriage. In many Pentecostal contexts, women are consistently taught how to be virtuous and submissive wives, often through church-based programmes and teachings (Biri 2014). According to Biri (2024:65), an equivalent instruction directed at men is noticeably lacking as a result of the teaching and theology that emphasise that it is the sole responsibility of a woman to fight for a marriage. This lacuna results in a pedagogical and theological imbalance in which the formation and moral accountability of husbands are neglected. Consequently, churches need to critically develop intentional strategies and outreach efforts that engage men and promote equitable teachings on marital roles and responsibilities.

According to Biri (2014) and Gabaitse (2015), women in Pentecostal churches are expected to be silent. A woman voicing her opinions is viewed as exercising authority over a man. Hence, as Phiri and Nadar (2010) observed, women are now accustomed to listening and have been silent for long. In the church, women spent much of their lives listening to male voices, because most pastors and those who lead are male. According to Morkel (2015:141), once men reflect on the importance of allowing women to speak and share their ideas, positive change in the church is assured. Morkel (2015:142) further argues that men can support women's participation by sharing power, fostering ambition and encouraging women to express themselves directly. This idea aligns with the advocacy of the Circle of Concerned African women theologians, which calls for collaboration between men and women within the church to drive transformation in Africa (Oduyoye 2001). The concept of transformative masculinities advocated by Chitando (2019) reinforces this approach, urging boys and men to stand alongside girls and women in the pursuit of gender justice. This concept encourages men to challenge male headship ideologies, confront sexual and gender-based violence, and work in partnership with women in both religious and social spaces. Such men who challenge toxic masculinities both in society and in marriages are applauded for advancing gender justice.

The existing literature affirms that many Christians view marriage as a lifelong commitment. For instance, Biri (2024:65) states that Pentecostal churches teach submission of women to their husbands in marriage for the marriage to last lifelong. The teaching is one-sided and does not expect husbands to submit to their wives, too. According to Biri (2024:65), this teaching has oppressed and abused women in marriages. Perry (2018) highlighted that conservative Christians, who belong to many Pentecostal churches, strictly adhere to biblical teachings, particularly the belief that God disapproves of divorce. As marriage is viewed as a covenant in the Bible, divorce then becomes not an option (Familiusi 2019). In a Pentecostal church, it is shameful to divorce and be single, especially if you are a woman (Odimegwu, Somefun & De Wet 2017).

Additionally, the Pentecostal theology on marriage emphasises prayer as the only solution to the challenges that

women face in marriage. According to Biri (2024:65), married women in Pentecostal churches stay in toxic marriages because they are taught to be hopeful in prayer and that the prayer will one day change the behaviour of the husband. This teaching makes the woman focus not 'on the current abuses but on the imagined future period of marital bliss' (Biri 2024:65). This, in a way, makes the women not consider other available options, such as separation or divorce, which can solve their marital challenges.

As highlighted by the literature in this section, the teaching on marriage in Pentecostal churches has been greatly oppressive to women. The main aim of this paper is to demonstrate the turnaround in the AFMOZ as a result of a split, leading to the teaching on marriage becoming affirmative and life-giving to women.

Shona culture and marriage

Although it can be found among the Ndebele, Tonga, Kalanga and Venda people, most of the assemblies of the AFMOZ are found among the Shona. In the Shona, just like in any other African culture, marriage is of great importance, and a married person is more highly regarded than a single person (Owadasa 2022). According to Oduyoye (2001), every person among the Shona is expected to marry in their lifetime. Per Biri (2021), singlehood is looked down on among them. If single, a person in the Shona culture is considered a child. Through marriage, one can attain the status of adulthood and be considered mature enough to also contribute to decision-making (Sande 2019:5). A woman, because of her gender in the Shona culture, is considered a child, and if she is not married, her status in society becomes even lower. Culture plays a great role in shaping gender dynamics among the Shona in ways that can be either empowering or oppressive.

In many African societies, culture is used to stipulate what is expected of a woman and to establish her roles in life. As a result, culture is being utilised by men as a means to control women. Hence, many women do not question the status quo, and they silently accept what culture prescribes for them. Through culture, women are denied fundamental rights expected to be enjoyed by every human being in marriage (Vengeyi 2021).

Some Shona cultural practices greatly integrate with Pentecostal practices in Zimbabwe (Biri 2020). Patriarchy is one such cultural practice that can be gleaned in Pentecostal churches. According to Rutoro (2015:309), the Shona culture is highly patriarchal. As a man is the leader in patriarchal cultures like the Shona, he is expected to pay a bride price. The bride price, among other things, gives a man the right to be the head in a marriage, taking away all the decision-making rights from a woman. Women are expected to be keepers of such a culture, even though it strips them of their right to proper treatment in marriage (Phiri 1997).

African feminist missiology

African feminist missiology falls under African liberation theology (Sprong 2011). Its major proponents are members of the Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians (Maseno 2021). Their focus is to challenge gender injustices and to uphold gender equality in all spheres. This aim is achieved through challenging patriarchy and calling for power-sharing. For Amoah (1995), men and women should not be treated differently, as they are both created in the likeness of God. Sprong (2011) and Kanyoro (2001) aver that God, from the beginning, wanted both men and women to be equally in control and not oppress each other. Hence, Oduyoye (2001) advocates for substituting hierarchy with mutuality in relationships.

African feminist theologians avow that the church should appreciate that no gender is superior to the other. Their goal is to change society and acknowledge the full humanity of all people. African feminist missiology is for the emancipation of all women from the socio-cultural structures that degrade and subjugate them (Phiri 1997). This perspective is particularly relevant in analysing the AFMOZ, in which teachings on marriage often reinforce male dominance. The study advocates for AFMOZ to promote mutuality and equality in marriage, making it a model of good relationships.

According to African feminist theologians, married couples should complement rather than dominate each other. For Oduyoye (2001), any relationship that dehumanises, is tyrannical and does not allow women to make decisions can be likened to a one-winged bird that lacks balance and struggles when flying. Similarly, a marriage in which only the husband makes decisions is bound to struggle. According to Chirongoma and Mupangwa (2023), giving women opportunities to decide creates strong bonds – a balance and synchronisation in relationships. A bloated male leadership stifles creativity and growth. African feminist theologians are against a patriarchy that defines a woman as inferior to men. The belief that only the husband should decide denies both spouses the opportunity to develop through shared leadership.

Okure (1993:77) emphasise that African feminist missiology does not seek to replace male authority with female dominance but to establish real cooperation between men and women. This approach aligns with the argument of the study that the church must actively promote equal rights within marriage. Amoah (1995) reiterates that both men and women, being created in God's image, should never be marginalised.

The liberation espoused by African feminist missiology is holistic, aiming to free both men and women from oppression (Sprong 2011). True freedom comes not from exercising power over others but from sharing it. For AFMOZ men, true emancipation lies in including their wives in decision-making and rejecting oppressive practices. A marriage based on

mutual respect and shared responsibility ultimately leads to a more fulfilling partnership for both spouses.

Research methods and design

This research was a qualitative study that used a case study research design to purposively select a sample of 35 participants who are members of the AFMOZ. The main objective of the study was to explore the effect of the schism on women. The participants included 8 male pastors, 8 female pastors, 10 general members of the church and 9 young adults (5 women and 4 men). This research relied largely on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The male and female pastors participated in interviews, and the rest in focus group discussions. Two focus group discussions were conducted, one with 9 young adults and the other with 10 female general members of the church. The criteria for selecting participants were age, number of years as a member and availability. Anyone who was above the age of 18 and had been a member of the AFMOZ for more than 5 years was selected to be a participant. However, availability was also critical because some qualified in the other two criteria but were not available to participate as a result of some constraints. The data collected were thematically analysed. Having read the transcribed document carefully, I used manual coding to generate a logical and understandable analysis for readers who might not be familiar with the social context of the research participants. The data were presented in accordance with the themes that emerged from the findings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Cape Town, Department of the Study of Religions (No. #2023/01).

Participants' consent was sought before they participated, to observe research ethics. A consent form that explained the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary was distributed to the participants before the research started. The form also explained that the participants were free to opt out of the study whenever they felt compelled to do so. Codes were used to protect the participant's anonymity.

Results of the study

The marriage teachings of the Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe after the split

This section explores the shifts in marital theology within the AFMOZ, focussing on emerging interpretations and practices that reflect a more gender-sensitive and contextually responsive understanding of marriage. Three themes were generated from the data. Hence, the discussion is structured under the three thematic headings, which are: (1) mutual submission between spouses, (2) shared household responsibilities, and (3) divorce and separation as valid options.

Mutual submission between spouses

Before the split, the emphasis in the AFMOZ was on women submitting to their husbands. Submission of a woman to her husband is a fundamental pillar of marriage taught in Pentecostal churches, even though the Bible commands both husband and wife to submit to one another. Because of the split, some assemblies did not have any male congregants. Responding during an interview about how the church is caring for the needs of women in the church, one of the participants, during an interview said:

'We are addressing issues that have to do with marriage. For women to submit in marriage, they must be loved. She cannot submit to an abusive husband, and we have come to realise that most Christian husbands have tendencies to abuse their wives, mostly emotionally and not physically. For, if they physically abuse their wives, it will be noticed quickly and easily. To help the women in the church, we are now emphasising on both the husband loving and submitting to their wives and the submission of wives to their husbands.' (MP1, married, male, pastor, 50)

In the focus group discussion, one of the women, narrated (which the other women unanimously agreed with) that:

'The teachings that our husbands are getting in the recently introduced men's fellowship on submitting to us as well as their wives has really helped me in my marriage. My husband is now yielding to my opinions and suggestions. Before this, my husband would declare that "I make the final decision in this house".' (MW1, married, female, lawyer, 44)

Concurring, another said:

'Submission according to the Bible is not expected from wives only in a marriage set up. The Bible commands both husband and wife to submit one to another, but because of patriarchy, it is the wife only who is expected to submit. Through the men's fellowship, which was introduced after the split, we are now also teaching the submission of men in marriages. Our hope is that through these teachings, many marriages will be transformed, especially those that were abusive.' (MP3, married, male, pastor, 56)

In the focus group discussion with the youths, one of the girls narrated the following:

'At our assembly, the theme for this year is from Numbers, which talks about the daughters of Zelophehad, who refused to be silenced and claimed their right to be given land. Our pastor is teaching us that as women we need to be like the daughters of Zelophehad and not just submit to what men say, whether married or not. This is quite empowering because before, the teaching was "wife, submit to your husbands".' (YG2, single, female, pilot, 22)

These narratives show that there has been a change in the teaching and theology on marriage because they are showing a contrast to what Biri (2024:65) had alluded to, that Pentecostal churches emphasise the submission only from the wife in a marriage. The teaching in AFMOZ is now emphasising both love and submission, while acknowledging the existence of emotional abuse in the church. The abuse acknowledged by the participants testifies to the fact that the institution of marriage is under

attack, as Baloyi (2016) avers. The AFMOZ has introduced a new theology of husbands submitting to their wives, which may suggest that it is now interpreting the scriptures in a life-affirming way, recognising women as normative human beings in a marriage union. For too long, women have been silenced and could not speak for themselves. If practised, the submission of men in marriage to their wives will give women the opportunity to 'talk back' and to be listened to, as Phiri and Nadar (2010) encourage. African feminist theology challenges oppressive interpretations of submission and calls for a marriage framework based on mutual love, respect and empowerment. This perspective ensures that marriage is not a site of silent suffering for women but a space in which both partners thrive. Empowerment in marriage should be a two-way process. African theological scholars, such as Nyengele (2004) and Dube (2019), argue for a model of marriage based on justice, equity and mutual empowerment, rather than dominance and submission. In African traditional settings, marriage was often seen as a collective partnership, with both partners contributing to the stability of the household. The marriage teaching of AFMOZ before the split did not consider the experiences of women in formulating theology. The current teaching shows that they are not using the Bible only as the source of theology but are blending scriptures with the experiences of women in formulating theology. This approach is what African feminist theologians like Oduyoye (1994) and Phiri and Nadar (2010), among others, have been advocating for. It shows that AFMOZ has shifted from the literal interpretation of scriptures to the interpretation that values a woman and her circumstances.

While physical abuse is more visible and can lead to social and legal consequences, emotional abuse is often ignored or normalised in many African Christian marriages (Phiri 1997). African feminist scholars highlight that emotional abuse, which includes manipulation, control and psychological intimidation, is just as harmful as physical violence (Oduyoye 2001). Studies in African gender discourse show that many women endure emotional suffering because leaving a marriage is often stigmatised, and churches sometimes encourage endurance rather than intervention (Biri 2014; Chisale 2018). This fact reinforces the argument that Christian teachings should emphasise both love from the husband and submission from the wife, ensuring that submission is not a tool for subjugation, but a reciprocal act rooted in love and respect.

The fact that both general members and the church leaders were aware that some women in their assemblies were being abused, and yet they continued to preach a gospel of submission, is an indication that the woman is the one who is expected to persevere and endure for the marriage to work. This finding goes in line with what Oduyoye (1994) states, that a lot is expected from a woman and very little from a man. African feminist missiology advocates for a joint effort from all people in church, marriage and any other relationship. They equate a relationship that excludes,

marginalises or oppresses the other gender to a one-winged bird that cannot fly properly (Oduyoye 2001). By advocating for submission from both husband and wife, AFMOZ is now calling for effort from both the husband and the wife for the marriage to work.

Divorce and separation as valid options

Whilst AFMOZ, before the split, had been teaching that marriage is a contract between a husband and wife, which was started by God and cannot be terminated, it has relaxed the teaching to allow separation and/or divorce wherever necessary. One of the participants narrated the following during an interview:

'Of late, we have realised that gender-based violence is rampant even in Christian marriages, especially in our church. Some of the incidents have been reported in newspapers and have been circulating on social media. In such instances, we encourage the spouse that is in danger to run away from such a toxic environment through a separation at first. If the marriage cannot be salvaged, we allow them to divorce even though we know that God hates divorce. Some people do not change at all, even after a long process of counselling. This is what we are now teaching in church. This kind of teaching was a taboo before, but we must change as to meet the needs of our members, who are mainly woman.' (MP4, married, male, pastor, 40)

The women during the focus group discussion also highlighted that:

'Before the split, a lot of ungodly things were taking place, which has resulted in the change of the teaching on marriage. For example, some male pastors were engaging in extra-marital activities, exposing their wives to sexually transmitted diseases. In other instances, some women were being beaten by their husbands. Several pastor's wives were suffering in silence. They pretend as if they are happy. I am hoping they are going to put into practice this new teaching that is now accommodating separation or even divorce. Before the split, teaching was "God hates divorce and *unofira mumba nyangwe zvakaoma*." [You can only come out due to death even if it is tough.].' (MW3, married, female, teacher, 44)

As Biri (2024:65) noted earlier, Pentecostal churches are characterised by their encouraging women to pray for their marriages, even if they are being abused, and hope that the prayer will change the circumstances. From this observation, one can have the view that the church, for a long time, has been an accomplice in the suffering of women by teaching that prayer will be the only answer to their marital problems. African feminist theologians and gender scholars have long critiqued the church's complicity in sustaining harmful gender norms that tolerate abuse in the name of submission and marital endurance (Oduyoye 2001). However, a change can be observed in the narrations on marriage theology in this Pentecostal church. The direction taken by AFMOZ of allowing both separation and divorce is a positive thing that will liberate women in abusive marriages. This move is an acknowledgement that prayer is not the only solution to marital problems.

From the narrations, the media, in a way, assisted women in debunking and exposing the abuse they were going through. This lines up with Chisale (2018), who avers that modern platforms are amplifying the voices of abused women, who were previously silenced by religious and cultural expectations. Reports in the newspapers and on social media exposed the secret of domestic abuse, which was happening in the church. This publicity then gave the opportunity to pastors to address the issue by advocating for divorce, which is not conventional in Christian circles and even in culture. Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe is setting up a new culture. African feminist theologians argue that the culture is not static. Culture must change as the needs of people also change. This view resonates with the argument of Oduyoye (2001), who calls for theology to be dynamic and responsive to the realities of people's lives.

Pentecostal scholars such as Biri (2014) argue that the church prioritising the sanctity of marriage over the well-being of women has compelled women to endure suffering. However, the recognition that some individuals, despite counselling, continue to abuse women shows a shift towards making the church a safe place for women and giving precedence to well-being over strict and harmful observance of doctrine. This shift concurs with advocacy from scholars like Dube (2019) and Gabaitse (2015), who call for an interpretation of scripture that prioritises justice and human flourishing over dogmatic rigidity.

The AFMOZ is contextualising theology through flexible marriage teaching, allowing women to make a safe decision. Context for African feminist missiology is of importance (Maseno 2021). By moving beyond traditional interpretations that have historically trapped women in abusive relationships, the church is embracing a more just and compassionate approach.

Shared household responsibilities

As Pentecostal churches are patriarchal, the place of a woman is the home, in which she is expected to do all the household chores. However, the narrations below indicate that there is a change in the teaching of how married couples should relate with regard to household chores and church responsibilities, like leading an assembly. One participant narrated the following:

'These days, women are now working as well, and we need to help each other in the home. If you help your wife, especially with household chores, you make life a lot easier for her. We now have a men's fellowship, where we encourage sharing responsibilities in the home, including household chores, because women are also contributing financially.' (FM2, female, pastor, 55)

Another also narrated similar sentiments and said:

'In the men's fellowship, the teaching is not focussing on us husbands dominating but on us accepting that our wives are not servants in the home. We are being encouraged to complement each other in the home, including in household chores.' (MP6, male, pastor, 52)

In the focus group discussions with the youth, one of the boys, narrated what happened in their home in the following way:

'One day, we were surprised to see our father helping my mother in the kitchen. We asked him what led him to help prepare supper. He only said, "These are results of teachings at the men's fellowship. We were taught helping your wife does not make you less of a man." This is a great change because I still remember before the split when we had the builder's conference. By then, overseer Madawo preached rebuking women who ask and make their husbands help with household chores.' (YB3, male, IT consultant, 30)

There is a reformation and a shift towards flexible gender roles within marriages in the AFMOZ. This reformation encourages gender equity in the home. No one gender will bear the brunt of marriage. The new teaching introduces a break in the cultural expectation of gender roles. Usually, among the Shona, work in the home is the responsibility of women, even if she works in the public sphere as well. A man, as the head of the family, is supposed to be served by the woman in the home. A woman doing all the household chores is considered an honour to the husband. In society, a man doing domestic work is considered a lack of submission on the part of the wife, and it is assumed that the man would have been bewitched (*kudyiswa*) by the wife. This new teaching in AFMOZ that accommodates flexibility concurs with Makaudze's (2015) argument that among the Shona, gender roles used to be flexible. He blames colonialism and Christianity for the change that assigned household chores to women and provisioning to men. According to him, a woman was not a servant to a man, as is the case in many marriages nowadays. Helping with household chores is not a sign of weakness but of caring and viewing a woman as an equal and normative human being. The sharing of household responsibilities without considering gender fosters partnership rather than male dominance and female servitude.

However, although men are being encouraged to share in household responsibilities, men's participation in domestic work seems to be on the condition that women are also contributing financially. This view gives the impression that women must earn equality by contributing financially, rather than men recognising household work as a shared duty. Marriage is thus viewed as a transaction, thus taking away the partnership which African feminist theologians encourage (Oduyoye 2001). This attitude makes the men's participation optional, based on financial contributions from the wife. True gender justice should recognise household labour as work which needs both the husband and wife, whether a woman is employed outside the home or not. This view reflects a deep-rooted patriarchal mindset that makes men gatekeepers of change in the liberation of women. Sharing household chores is part of living together in the home without expecting women to carry this disproportionate burden of both paid and unpaid labour. Women should have a say in defining the changes that they need in the home and

not wait for men to be gatekeepers for change to take place. By reinforcing patriarchy, the church will be placing a husband as the head and principal decision-maker and wife as the chief caretaker of the children, thus strengthening the Shona cultural practices (Sande 2019:4)

Conclusion

In this article, the split was observed to facilitate a change in the theology of marriage. This teaching on marriage signals a positive change in the approach of AFMOZ to marriage but still reflects underlying patriarchal assumptions. African feminist theology would push for a deeper transformation, in which men's church teachings should reinforce partnership, not hierarchy, ensuring that marriage truly reflects the gospel's liberating power. However, this is a good starting point in the Pentecostal fraternity, serving as a ray of hope in achieving the total emancipation of women in the future.

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Competing interests

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CRedit authorship contribution

Terence Mupangwa: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Data collection, Data analysis, Writing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The data will be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author Terence Mupangwa. It was saved on an audio recorder. There are no any restrictions to data availability.

Disclaimer

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