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The Equality of Women in Leading Positions of the Protestant Churches

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THE EQUALITY OF WOMEN IN LEADING POSITIONS OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES. A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction and Methodology

‘Where there is power, there are no women. Whether in governments, in international organisations, in private economy or in NGOs, although women are on the advance and are increasingly assuming the most different tasks they only rarely make it to the top positions.’ (Micheline Calmy-Rey, Federal Councillor of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation at the Open Forum Davos 2006)

‘More Women in Top Positions!’¹ – this is a claim put forward by women – and occasionally also by men – not only to the address of politics and economy, but also to church institutions. In many countries, the reason for this demand is the gap between the political and legal rights of women to be equally represented in all areas of life and work, and the reality of women to be able to get to positions of power and even more rarely to get to top leadership positions.

The present paper intends to use selected examples to highlight the situation of women in senior positions of power in Protestant churches at the international level. As sources were weak, we proceeded to send out our questions to selected experts in various countries, and upon return of their answers we analysed the findings.² We collected the data of those countries that had information available. Yet, other countries provided us with more general assessments. At any rate, the feedback to our questionnaire sent out to all parts of the world clearly shows that in view of this question there is still an enormous need for research and even more for action.³ At this point, it needs to be pointed out that the present analysis has an exclusive socio-scientific orientation.

1. Women in Church Leadership Positions in Various Regions of the World

1.1. Africa

The issue of women in church leadership positions in the Protestant churches of Africa is closely linked to the ecclesiastical legacy of each denomination. Hence, both the executive and the legislative leadership positions of many denominations in Africa and in other parts of the world are held by ordained clergy. The result is that the question of equality of women in church leadership positions is closely linked with the question of women's ordination (see also section 2 below).⁴

Another aspect that needs to be taken into account is that 'leadership' or 'guidance' in traditional churches in Africa is understood less in structural and hierarchical terms than in West European and North American churches.⁵ Women's sphere of influence does therefore not exclusively depend on their presence in the upper hierarchies.⁶

According to our research, there are no established figures on women's equality in leadership positions in Africa. As in many other countries, this shows clearly how much research is needed as to the issue of women in leadership positions.

For further analysis it would make sense to differentiate between three types of churches, namely between the following:

- a) churches exported from Europe and North-America via the modern missionary enterprise;
- b) African Instituted Churches (AICs) which are in reaction against the above-mentioned missionary churches; and
- c) charismatic and Pentecostal churches formed particularly in the 1980s and 1990s (and till this day) by younger African evangelists.

According to the director of the Programme for Ethics in Eastern Africa (PEEA) in Nairobi, there are almost no women in church leadership positions in category a) churches because of the patriarchal legacy and moral concepts of these denominations that originate from the North Atlantic region. This statement corresponds to the experiences for example in the Philippines where missionary churches have also exacerbated the existing inequalities (see section 1.2 below).

Churches in the category b), e.g. the Aladura churches in Nigeria, were partially founded by women and are often managed equally by women and men. Yet, it is contested whether women have more 'leadership' in the African Instituted Churches than in the churches from the West.⁶

It is interesting to note that category c) churches have comparatively many women on various decision-making levels. For example

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in Kenya, three of the most popular churches are founded and led by women – namely the churches of Akatsa, Wanjiru and Wairimu.

As to the question of how women theologians could increase their influence on church matters in African churches, the Programme Executive for Mission and Ecumenical Formation at the World Council of Churches (WCC) refers to the ‘Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians’. This circle has as its goal to offer a platform for African women theologians to discuss, write, research, and publish their findings on theology. The communal character of this network and its results in the area of feminist theology create an important basis for African female theologians to exert greater influence in particular at the level of leadership positions: ‘We in the Circle must hammer the fact that we cannot be effective, empowering, and responsible leaders without the right skills, tools, and resources.’⁸

1.2. *Asia*

Asia features selected comparative data and statistics. Hence, according to the indications of the Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), out of the 50 CCA member churches in South East Asia, only one woman is on the list of full-time executive posts (see Table 1). She is the chairwoman of the Pasundan Christian Church in Bandung, Indonesia.

Table 1: Number of women in top executive positions in CCA member churches

Country	Number of CCA member churches in South East Asia	Number of women in top executive position	Position	Name of church and woman in leadership position
1. Indonesia	30	1	Ketua (full-time post) ('Chairman'/ Chairperson)	Pasundan Christian Church in Bandung Rev. Chita R. Bain
2. Laos	1	–	–	–
3. Malaysia	3	–	–	–

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4. Myanmar	7	-	-	-
5. Philippines	7	-	-	-
6. Thailand	1	-	-	-
7. Timor Leste	1	-	-	-
Total	50	1		

Source: CCA Directory 2006

With regard to the CCA National Church and member councils, the situation of women's equality in leadership positions is equally insufficient. Only one woman has the post of General Secretary out of the total of 15 member councils in South East Asia (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of women in the position of General Secretary in CCA Member Councils

Number of CCA member councils⁹	Number of member councils in South East Asia	Number of woman in top executive position	Position of country and woman	Name
15	5	1	General Secretary	Philippines Ms. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz- Duremdes

Source: CCA Directory 2006

Within the CCA organisational structure the number of women leaders is much higher: 10 out of 25 members of the General Committee and 5 out of the 11 members of the Executive Committee are women (see Table 3). Here, it stands out however that very often young women are elected into these bodies. This accumulation can possibly be explained by the fact that women are attributed with a double function, and that they cover both the factor 'age' and 'gender' in these bodies.

Table 3: Women in the CCA organisational structure

CCA structure	No. of members	No. of women	South East Asia women
General Committee*	25	10 (5 young women)	3 (1 young woman)
Executive Committee*	11	5 (2 young women)	1
3 Programme Area Committees*	37	17 (4 young women)	9 (4 young women)
Executive Staff	8	3	2
Total	81	35	15

* 2005-2010

Source: CCA Directory 2006

Remarks: CCA Constitution provides for policy on equal participation of women and men in CCA structures and programmes

To complete the picture, it is noteworthy to say that the Executive Director of the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) is a woman.

There is a general assessment that women are still excluded from leadership positions in the churches of Asia and in particular of South East Asia, despite the Ecumenical Decade of 'Churches in Solidarity with Women'. Rather, there are numerous examples that show how women despite high qualification and proofs of commitment to the Church are denied ordination and/or leadership positions. In Myanmar for example, the Myanmar Baptist Convention refused to ordain a renowned feminist theologian and lecturer at the Myanmar Institute of Theology.

The CCA Secretariat mentions the following aspects as the main reasons for the lack of women in leadership positions of South East Asian church institutions:

- Patriarchal value concepts and gender-specific understanding of roles are essential elements of socialisation and culture in many regions of Asia, in particular in South East Asia. This is reflected in the church structures. Studies show that a patriarchal under-

standing of one's role in the family is very often directly transferred to structures related to society as a whole.¹⁰

- In the churches themselves, very often readings, sermons, liturgies, hymns with a patriarchal orientation dominate and strengthen existing value concepts. The same is true for the church structures that are marked by hierarchies dominated by men and that marginalise women. In addition, the responsibility to lead very often is executed by men according to patriarchal patterns of behaviour.
- There is lack of resources for the formation and further education of women especially in preparation for leadership positions.
- The increasing poverty and human insecurity in South East Asia caused by globalisation have had serious negative effects on women. Equality of these women is much more difficult to obtain due to these socio-economic developments.

Churches in Asia have launched several programmes and instruments to facilitate women's access to leadership positions. Many of these programmes focus on the struggle against violence.

The coordinator of the Women's Desk of the National Council of Churches in the *Philippines* estimates that violence against women is the biggest stumbling block to equality. Only when they can lead a safe and self-determined life and no patriarchal value concepts undermine a supposedly Christian theology will women have the opportunity to assume leadership positions in society and in the churches. To increase women's necessary empowerment and to promote their equality in all areas of life and work, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines has initiated a special ecumenical programme for women in churches. In substantiating this project it was stated that in the Philippines there is a long tradition of various societal discriminations against women and of their political, economic and social exclusion, but that the many colonial, respectively occupational, powers have clearly exacerbated this tradition.

According to the evaluation of the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, a feminist leadership is specifically characterised by five basic elements: a spirit of integration caring about human relationships; a spirit of sharing and consensus-based decision-making; a spirit of mutuality not based on hierarchies; a spirit of subjectivity also allowing emotions and compassion; and a spirit of creativity constantly looking for new ways of doing and thinking.

In analogy to the CCA-Secretariat, the General Secretary also defines the deeply entrenched patriarchy in the Philippines to be the biggest barrier to women's equality in church leadership positions.

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Even if there is a rather superficial comprehension of feminism, structures and contents have not changed much. Hence, in the name of feminism women are elected into bodies who do not represent the best choices available to strengthen the position of women. And, in her eyes the disunity between the secular and the church women's movement represents an additional obstacle in the Philippines.

The development of the Protestant churches in *South Korea* has to be assessed in close connection to the influence of colonial powers and missionary activities. The split into numerous denominations is the result of Western missionaries, in particular Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists, who flocked into the country since 1884. The majority of these missionaries were characterised by their fundamentalist view of Christianity which, together with the widespread Confucianism – which has long been the national philosophy in Korea – caused women's oppression and discrimination to be rather reinforced.¹¹

Despite their oppression women played a central role in early Christianity and in founding Protestant churches in Korea. In this regard, the devotion of Korean Christian women – the so-called 'Bible-Women'¹² – has been exemplary. At the same time, women's self-confidence and self-determination was strengthened through the Gospel and selected Bible readings.

However, in church structures women were still marginalised and men took on leadership positions. To this day, women have not reached equality in leadership positions, despite a general strengthening of women's organisations such as the large and influential National Organisation of the Korea Presbyterian Women. The theological faculties show a similar situation; only a few women can be found there and often these women do not represent feminist approaches.¹³

In South Korea as in other countries, the absence of women's ordination plays an essential role when it comes to women's equality in church institutions.¹⁴ Only when feminist theologians come into play is it possible to break through patriarchal structures. Amongst others women have been ordained in the largest Presbyterian church since 1995 (Presbyterian Church of Korea, PCK, Tonghap), and this is also true for the Anglican church since 2001. The position of minister was already accessible to women in more progressive smaller Protestant churches and in the Methodist Church since 1955. And the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK, Kijang) has ordained women for many decades.¹⁵ As of May 2006, the Presbyterian Church of Korea lists 560 women ministers and 260 women elders, whereas the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea numbers 169 women ministers and 252 women elders.

In *India*, women are sometimes very prominently represented. Out of the total of 28 states three are governed by women. However,

if we compare India to international women's equality indicators, then the picture looks unfavourable for this country.¹⁶ There exists for example still considerable discrimination against young women and their access to education. Seen from the overall societal perspective, there is hence a contradictory situation for women in India.

In the Protestant churches in India,¹⁷ almost no women assume leadership positions.¹⁸ If asked to give names of women in church leadership positions, people often mention two names: on the one hand it is the general secretary of the Synod of the Church of South India, Pauline Sathiamurthy, and on the other it is the (recently deceased) president of the National Council of Churches in India, Prasanna Kumari Samuel. Apart from these individual cases, the wives of bishops usually chair the different women's groups ('women's fellowships') in the dioceses and regional councils. But even here, exceptions are common, as the leadership of the women's group in the 'Mar Thoma' Church is assumed by a man.

1.3. Europe

Looking at the available statistics, the women's share in the Eglise réformée de France (ERF) can be called considerable. At the national level, 7 out of the 20 members of the national council (*conseil national*) are women, as are 54 out of the 150 members of the national synod ('synode national'). Women hold half the positions of national coordinators of the ERF (*coordinations nationales*). The *Commission des ministères* is responsible for the high share of women as well as for raising the issue of women in leadership positions in general. This commission has indeed essential decision-making powers on the selection of future officers of the ERF. Here, 4 out of the 10 commission members are women. But out of the 8 chairpersons of the regional councils (*conseils régionaux*) in the ERF regions, only one is a woman. These *présidents des régions* exert a great influence on the staffing in parishes and regions.

On the regional level, two ERF regions are herewith presented as examples. The region Provence-Côte d'Azur-Corse is known for tourism, the settlement of new companies and research facilities as well as for its relatively high share of well-off and educated senior citizens. In the Reformed Church of the Region Provence-Côte d'Azur-Corse, 12 out of the 26 church parishes have women presidents (*associations culturelles*). In addition, 146 out of a total of 275 chairpersons of the parish councils are women (*président-e* or *vice-président-e de conseils presbytéraux*). The top body of the region, the *conseil régional*, numbers 14 people, out of which four are women.

The Reformed Church of the region Centre-Alpes-Rhône is the biggest ERF region and represents the overall situation in France in a

nutshell. The region Centre-Alpes-Rhône includes both territories that are traditionally reformed and those where Protestants live in a minority, such as in the metropolitan agglomerations of Lyon and Grenoble. The president of the regional council (*conseil régional*) is a man and one of his deputies is a woman. Three out of the nine members of the regional council are women. Out of the 108 chairpersons of the parish councils – the presbyteries – 44 are women (*président-e or vice-président-e de conseils presbytéraux*).¹⁹

To answer the question of women's equality in leadership positions of the German Protestant churches, we can resort to the May 2004 statistics of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) referring to the years 2002 and 2003.²⁰ Here, three levels of church leadership positions are being differentiated: the synod; the bodies of the church councils of the particular territories (the *Länder*); and the governing bodies of church management.

As to the level of the *synods*, we need to identify that the proportion of women among the members of the synod of the national Protestant churches accounts to an average of 35 %, i.e. to a total of 885 out of the 2508 members of the synod. The differences are even bigger depending on the relevant member church of the EKD.²¹ In the case of *church councils and spiritual offices* the average proportion of women is lower – amounting to 27 %. However, there has been an increase since 1993, when the share accounted for only 19 %. Also, the regional differences are rather important. Here, we need to mention that there are three female Lutheran bishops in Germany. Today, the Council of the EKD includes 15 members, out of which seven are women.²² The proportion of women is most unfavourable in the *management of church administrations*. Although the proportion of women was raised from a low 8,3 % in the year 1993, it remained at a low level in 2003, with 19,5 %.²³

Another important aspect that the statistics do not highlight is the distribution of the areas of responsibility within the church leadership. Here, women may be represented in the leadership, but very often 'powerful' responsibilities such as finances or the judiciary are assumed by men, whereas ecumenism, Christian social service or education are left to women. Even if a numerical equality can be achieved in the church leadership, it does not necessarily reflect women's equality on the level of decision-making competences.

Using the illustrative example of Germany, the relevance of women's equality within church associations can also be shown. Hence, diaconal institutions for example have traditionally served as large targets for criticism from the advocates of women's equality. It has been a long tradition that such church-based social service institutions are typically male-dominated in the upper hierarchies. This is manifested in the fact that approximately three-quarters of the full-

time and of the voluntary staff working in the diaconal institutions are women. But these women are part of low wage groups and are almost non-existent in the leadership positions.²⁴ Yet, there are exceptions. For example, the executive director of the campaign of the church-based development cooperation Bread for the World and executive of the head office of the Social Service Agency of the Protestant Church in Germany is a woman.

Also in response to the Ecumenical Decade, Churches in Solidarity with Women, an agreement on the principles of equality was adopted in the head office of the Social Service Agency of the EKD in 1991. This increased commitment for women's issues was based on the understanding that women's equality will not automatically materialise but needs deliberate decision and planning strategies.

1.4. North America

Due to the waves of immigration during the 19th and 20th century, religious diversity is a distinct feature of the *United States of America* (USA). Religious pluralism has led to a few positive effects on women's equality in church institutions. In the USA, the first women were ordained as early as in the 19th century, amongst others Antoinette Brown in 1853. In the early 20th century, women then founded their first denominations, and the number of churches that implemented the ordination of women grew considerably after the Second World War. Afro-American churches formed the backbone of the civil rights movement in the 1920s, in which women also played an important role.

Without going into details of the religious complexity,²⁵ the USA serves as an appropriate example to discuss another central aspect of the issue of women in church leadership positions. Here, we talk about the connection of the categories of gender and race. In the United Methodist Church for example, the proportion of women in the group of active bishops is on the increase, but the proportion of women among the 'racial ethnic' bishops continues to be very low (see Table 4). In the South-East region of the United Methodist Church, three out of the 13 bishops are staffed with 'white' women and two with 'racial ethnic' men. 'Racial ethnic' women are not represented.

The programme The Black Women in Ministerial Leadership, for example, starts with the problem outlined above. This programme was formed by the Interdenominational Theological Centre in 2005, and because of a donation of the Lilly Endowment Foundation amounting to USD 1,4 million it could immediately start to be operational. Its goal is to facilitate Afro-American women's access to church leadership positions.²⁶

Table 4: Proportion of women in the U.S. Colleges of Bishops of the United Methodist Church

2005-2008 Make-Up of the U.S. Colleges of Bishops of the United Methodist Church

Jurisdiction	Total active bishops	‘White’		‘Racial ethnic’		Total women
		Men	Women	Men	Women	
North Central	10	3	3	3	1	4
North-Eastern	11	3	2	5	1	3
South Central	11	6	2	3	0	2
South-Eastern	13	8	3	2	0	3
Western	6	1	1	2	2	3

2001-2004 Make-Up of the U.S. Colleges of Bishops of the United Methodist Church

Jurisdiction	Total active bishops	‘White’		‘Racial ethnic’		Total women
		Men	Women	Men	Women	
North Central	10	4	2	3	1	3
North-Eastern	11	3	2	5	1	3
South Central	11	6	2	3	0	2
South-Eastern	13	9	1	3	0	1
Western	6	2	1	2	1	2

Source: The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (2006) Make-up of the U.S. Colleges of Bishops (<http://www.gcsrw.org/research/COB.htm>).

The Presbyterian Church in *Canada* has c. 125,000 members.²⁷ Its highest decision-making body is the Annual General Meeting, in which usually men and female Elders as well as ministers can participate. The percentage of women in the eldership amounts to about

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40 % (as per 2006). On request of the committee 'Women in Ministry Committee,' the Presbyterian Church collected and published the proportion of women in the eldership of the individual congregations of the presbyteries in 2002. Hence, out of the 974 congregations, 872 did send back statistical data differentiating between man and women. These statistics show that overall in this category of 'eldership' 6181 men and 4178 women are represented. This corresponds to a proportion of women of c. 40 %.

1.5. Latin America

Even if there is no systematic overview on women's equality in Protestant churches and institutions in Latin America, it can be assumed that on the basis of the available material women's equality in church leadership positions suffers from great deficits in Latin America.²⁸ However, there are some positive examples, such as Nelida Ritchie, a Methodist bishop in Argentina, Gabriela Mulder, vice-president of the Reformed Church of Argentina and Gloria Rojas, president of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Chile. Also, a few Pentecostal churches are led by women in Latin America, amongst others the Iglesia Misión Apostólica Universal in Chile. Theological institutes are mostly governed by men, one of the rare exceptions being the president of the Comunidad Teológica Evangélica in Chile. Presently, two of the 16 Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Latin America and in the Caribbean are led by women.

Yet, the overall impression brings us back to reality again. In view of the existing deficits of women's equality in church leadership positions it is of special relevance that on the April 2006 Latin American Church Leader Conference (*Conferencia de Liderazgo – COL*) in Costa Rica it was decided that a working group on the issue of women in church leadership positions in Latin America should be established. Judith Van Osdol was nominated as the person in charge of the working group and became the coordinator of the Continental Programme for Women and Gender Issues of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI). She was to analyse a study that was submitted to the COL in April on 'Ministry and Power from a Gender-Perspective. Searching a Common Road',²⁹ of which she intended to submit a revised version by September 2006. The working group's primary task is 'to elaborate further proposals for an intensive and broad dialogue as to the issue of women and gender questions on the bases of the revised document and of a dialogue that includes all the churches of the region.'³⁰ The goal of such consultations is to identify concrete recommendations to be discussed and adopted on the occasion of the COL 2007.

According to the estimation of the Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean at the LWF, the COL document reminds us of

the recommendation the LWF already adopted, which clearly states a need for action at the level of the Latin American LWF member churches. This is especially true for the recommendation to work out a Plan of Action emphasising the equality of men and women in church, and to work out concrete measures to pave the way for women to assume ordained ministries (in accordance with the 8th LWF Assembly in Curitiba, 1990). The indication in the COL document that there is a comprehensive need for action is an essential consensus and precondition for strengthening women's equality in church leadership positions. Furthermore, the document refers to the fact that some progress has been achieved in the church-related gender and women's issues, but that overall this progress needs to be analysed in more details. Similarly, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines states that despite the regular use of a corresponding 'gender' terminology, there has been no sign of transformation of structures, contents and behaviour of the decision-making circles.

There are complex reasons for the lack of equality between men and women in church leadership positions in Latin America, and certainly both cultural aspects and also theological justifications play a role. With regard to the cultural barriers, patriarchal value and behaviour concepts, we need to state that they are still distinctive within society despite some improvements. Hence, the whole development must be questioned in as much as certain churches and theologies respond to these progressive transformation processes by tenaciously sticking to old traditions.

Apart from the COL process, let us mention a second example of positive developments: the activities of Con-Spirando, a women's collective that was created in Chile out of a common interest in spirituality, theology and ethics from a feminist perspective in 1991. The collective contributes a great deal to the feminist debate in Latin America by publishing, creating educational programmes, organising seminars and workshops, and in particular by celebrating seasonal and women-specific rituals. Within these activities, a panel discussion was staged in September 2005, putting nine women in leadership positions from churches, academy, politics and culture into the limelight. They were asked to talk about the barriers they had to overcome on their way to power, their experiences, and how to strengthen women's equality in leading positions. As it is, the patterns of experience that were shared at this panel looked similar to those of other countries. At different occasions, the burden of isolation felt by women in top positions of power was expressed by very different women such as Gloria Rojas, the president of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Chile, who stated that 'to be a leader means to live alone' ('un liderazgo es vivir sola') and Micheline Calmy-Rey,

the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, who said that 'Women taking over leadership positions are perceived as women who are leaving their innermost sphere and are forming a new, third category: [...] They remain strangers in the community of women and strangers in the community of men.'³¹ Another controversial issue is the question whether women foster another style of leadership and to what extent is this leadership style marked by women-specific experiences and values. As to the question of which preconditions need to be fulfilled in order to have women assume leadership positions in a sustainable way, it was mentioned that for women it is especially important to have strong solidarity links and to be able to rely on a supportive network.

2. Women's Ordination

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) conducted a survey on the issue of women's ordination for the years 1993 to 1999. The results showed that about 64 % of WARC member churches have approved of, and implemented, the ordination of women, whereas in 27 % of the member churches, no women were ordained. No figures have been indicated for about 8 % of the WARC member churches.

The WARC study was updated in 2003. Hence, 153 churches ordained women ministers (71 %), 48 did not allow women's ordination (22 %), and no information was available for 16 member churches (7 %).

However, these figures are only trends. Detailed statistics would for example be required to analyse the statements together with the number of members of the individual WARC member churches.³²

In the many denominations where women are excluded from ordination, it is impossible for them to access leadership positions. Apart from patriarchal moral concepts that dominate the overall society (see section 1.2), the denial of women's ordination is one of the central obstacles for women to access church leadership positions. To combat this trend, WARC initiated in 1992 the Programme to Affirm, Challenge and Transform. Women and Men in Partnership in Church and Society (PACT). Among others, this programme conducted regional consultations, in particular on the issue of 'Women and Men in Church Leadership'.

The results of these consultations are quite similar despite different societal contexts. In Kenya, it was pointed out that there are considerable country-specific differences even within one region when it comes to women's ordination for example. In Edinburgh, it was pointed out that the comprehensive equality of women in the church, in particular in leadership positions, represented a *processus confessionis*. In India,

women's equality in church leadership positions was discussed in the context of religious and cultural diversity. In the USA, the consultation showed that the opportunity to be ordained has not automatically led to women's equality in leadership positions. The consultation in the Netherlands questioned the extent to which the ordination of women had actually resulted in reforms in terms of content.³³

3. Outlook

Women carry the Protestant churches of the world, men lead them – this theme seems to still be valid. However, not only the example of the church councillors of the Protestant churches in Switzerland but also the processes, programmes, initiatives and consultations on the way to women's equality in church leadership positions clearly show that there are some encouraging examples.

At the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the union of Orthodox churches, churches from the historic tradition of the Protestant reformation, as well as united and independent churches came together. In the new Central Committee, 42 % out of the 150 delegates are women. However, it has to be underlined that similarly to the Christian Conference of Asia, women delegates were often young women delegates and therefore cover two criteria. In addition, out of the eight WCC presidents three as well as one vice-moderator of the executive committee are women.

Despite many success stories there are also clear backlashes. As examples we refer to the Protestant churches of the Ukraine, the Lutherans in Poland and Latvia or even to the Old Reformed of the Netherlands. Hence, in the Ukraine, a decision taken by the synod ruled that the 'ordination of women to a spiritual ministry, their eligibility to become pastors of congregations and their authorisation to administer the sacraments' was repealed again in 2006. Among others, the protection of women from the hardships of difficult working conditions in unheated churches was mentioned to be a reason for the repeal.³⁴ We need to observe such steps backwards within the Protestant churches with great attention and to name all involved.

Furthermore, the incomplete analysis and open questions of the present article show that on the whole there is an enormous need for research on the question of discussing the lack of women in leadership positions in international and systematic terms. To do so, the church institutions would be required to undertake comprehensive efforts to collect differentiated statistics on the situation of women and men at the local, national, regional and international levels. In order to strengthen women for leadership positions such statistics must then be translated into political strategies to be implemented by the churches.

NOTES

- ¹ This was the title of a panel discussion of the 2006 Open Forum in Davos, organised by the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and the World Economic Forum. The original motivation for writing this article resulted from the women presidents of Protestant church councils in Switzerland, who published a book on the extraordinary high number of women represented in the highest leadership positions of the Protestant cantonal churches. In mid-2006, 9 of the existing 26 cantonal churches are led by women! See Bandixen, Claudia/Worbs, Frank/Pfeiffer, Silvia (eds), *Wenn Frauen Kirchen leiten*, Zurich: TVZ, 2006.
- ² The authors express their gratitude to Baffour Amoah, Evangeline Anderson, Nancy Carrasco Paredes, Meehyun Chung, Juliette Davaine, Josefina Hurtado, Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, Martin Junge, Stephen Kendall, Liza Lamis, Jesse Mugambi, Setri Nyomi, Nyambura Njoroge, Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, Cora Tabing-Reyes, Evelyn Tiercet, Heike Walz and numerous others for their deep and sound evaluations and feedback as to the issue of women's equality in leadership positions of Protestant churches in the prevailing contexts of their own country. It needs to be pointed out that the two authors assume the full responsibility for the present text.
- ³ The fundamental questions of how different religious traditions respond to women's claim for equality and how they deal with this claim are of central significance, but cannot be included at this point. Cf. to this the theme-journal 'La Religion: Frein à l'égalité hommes/femmes?', in: *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 41 (95), 1996, among other things with articles by Roland Campiche.
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- ⁵ 'Traditional women leaders', as research project by Isabel Phiri and Lindiwi Mkasi on <http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/sinomlando/Women%20traditional%20leaders.htm> (last accessed 21 July 2006).
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- ¹³ *Ibid*.
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- ¹⁵ Information differs when it comes to the year of the first women's ordination: in 1974 or in 1977. As to a general assessment, also consult Beek, Huibert van, *A Handbook of Churches and Councils. Profiles of Ecumenical Relationships*, Geneva: WCC, 2006, pp. 286f.
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