

ABSTRACT

The Thorny Problem of Gender Inequality and Leadership in the Jamaican Church, 1944-2002: A Case Study of Six Women

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Almost any study which concentrates on the contribution of women to the development of the Christian church is bound to grapple with the presentation of women in history. Invariably, women have not entered major leadership positions in large numbers relative to the extent of their overall participation in church activities. However, a few examples of stalwarts do protrude. This study focuses on the experiences of six Jamaican women from various denominations who have, against serious odds, achieved reasonably senior leadership positions in the church.

In-depth interviews conducted with these women revealed factors that influenced their choice of vocation, encouragement received, and the nature of the resistance with which they contended and generally overcame. The focus group interview offered additional richness to the data on the same theme and, significantly, had the benefit of a male participant.

The main finding is that, despite their awareness and personal experience of discrimination they have continued to serve with great commitment. However, there is a strong yet somewhat muted desire, for equality of opportunity to prevail within the top echelons of the church. Accompanying this overall desire is at least one dissenting voice denying the existence of a problem and another who, while recognizing the problem refuses to openly engage in activity aimed at changing the status quo which favours the dominance of men in church leadership roles.

A more focused and sustained commitment to change should guide approach and policy with the women themselves being centrally involved.