Women in the Ethiopian Pentecostal Movement

With Special Reference to the Mulu Wongel Church

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Abstract

In the early 1960s a Pentecostal movement broke out in Ethiopia and formed the Mulu Wongel (the Full Gospel) Church throughout the country. During the free spirited revival at the early stage of the movement and when the church was closed during the socialist regime, women enjoyed key ministerial and leadership positions. However, women ministers were sidelined when peace was restored and an organized body was established. This article is mainly interested in uncovering women's role in the history of Ethiopian Pentecostal revival and its aftermath based on the information gained from main participants of the movement and important secondary documents. It also underlines the eventual achievement of ministerial equality between men and women despite problems that are still hindering women's involvement in the higher ministerial posts.

Keywords

women – Pentecostalism – ministry – home chapels

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1 Introduction

The 1960s was a remarkable decade in the history of Ethiopian politics and religion. The decade was inaugurated by a most daring and unprecedented coup against Haile Selassie’s regime. The coup was an eye-opener for intellectuals; in fact, it gave birth to the most pitiless and militant opposition group of the student movement.1 Parallel with the political agitation of university students, another group quite contrary to them emerged in Haile Selassie I University in the early 1960s. These were the Pentecostals.

Pentecostalism in Ethiopia was started by mainly college and university students who came together for prayer and fasting in search of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. After they were baptized, their number steadily increased and they formed an organized movement. This was a serious threat for the militant radical group of the student movement, ‘Crocodiles’, which had emerged since 1964 and ‘embraced [Marxism] as a creed rather than as a system of thought to help interpret the Ethiopian reality’.2 It is quite intriguing to study the two militant, disciplined, extremist, expansionist, powerful, but antagonistic movements which appeared in Haile Selassie I University simultaneously. Both targeted the young generation, one for a political agenda and the other for religious renewal. In this context we will see women’s role for the emergence and development of Pentecostal movement. Then, how women dynamically and bravely ministered in times of persecution during the imperial and Derg regimes.3 The fall of the Derg regime and the opening of churches ushered a new era for women’s ministry. Initially, women were sidelined from top ministerial positions; however, eventually, they achieved doctrinal victory to serve without restriction.

2 Precursors to the Upcoming Pentecostal Revival

As I indicated, and as most historians have conventionally agreed, the history of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia has been regarded as starting in the early 1960s. However, Tibebe Eshete in his book has thoroughly investigated the presence

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3 The Derg literally means a ‘committee’ or ‘council’. It was the military junta that ruled Ethiopia and present-day Eritrea from 1974 to 1991. The Derg abolished the monarchy and established Ethiopia as a Marxist-Leninist state with itself as the vanguard party in a provisional government.
of Pentecostals before the 1960s in Ethiopia. He has been able to uncover the existence of Pentecostal missionaries in Addis Ababa in 1934. The missionaries were three ladies from the Assembly of God Church of New York, namely, Bertha Dommermuth, Ruth Shippey, and Ellen French. The missionaries taught an English class for young Ethiopians, and they also organized Bible study and prayer sessions along with it. According to the missionaries’ report, their informal spiritual meeting eventually changed into a formal Sunday morning program. They began to preach the Gospel openly and demonstrate Pentecostal faith such as speaking in tongues and performing miracles and healings. Despite or perhaps, because of, their success in attracting young Ethiopians to witness demonstrations of spiritual power, the non-Pentecostal missions opposed them fiercely. Nonetheless, the number of Ethiopian adherents who desperately wanted to perform miracles steadily increased in number. Owing to this, Tibebe suggests that this small congregation ‘perhaps [may] be considered as the first proto-Pentecostal congregation in Ethiopia’.4

However, the revival programs were halted for a time by the Italian invasion. The ladies went to the Swedish Mission station at Entoto Mekane Yesus Church to carry on their Sunday morning program. Their missionary work bore fruit; many young Ethiopians were converted and able to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. ‘If that is the case, one can consider the Entoto Christian youth group as the first generation of the Ethiopian Pentecostal communities’.5 Eventually, the ladies could not stay longer in Ethiopia and were forced by the Italians to quit their ministry and leave the country. The Ethiopians also failed to sustain their experience.6 If it had been sustained, undoubtedly, the impacts of the three ladies would have helped to change the patriarchal attitude of some Christian people and pave the way for women to minister without any restriction.

Here again, before the upsurge of the 1960s Pentecostal movement, another lady, Mrs. J.C. Jane Daoud came to Addis Ababa with her husband in 1952. They came to Addis Ababa with the permission of Emperor Haile Selassie for six weeks of open air preaching and healing meetings. She was the main leader in conducting the healing service and got public acceptance from the wider population. Although her ministry was too short, her influence was immense.7 This was also another encouragement for women which brought them close to

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5 Eshete, The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia, p. 150.
6 Eshete, The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia, p. 150.
7 Eshete, The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia, p. 152. Their program attracted the attention of the public media, and the lady is still now known by her nickname Cambologi Mariam. Cambologi refers to the National Stadium, the place where she conducted the healing
the pulpit and to offering their ministry. Mrs. Daoud is always remembered by women who aspire to minister God publicly.

3 Women in the Outbreak of the Pentecostal Movement

In the early 1960s, the Ethiopian Pentecostal movement broke out. It was typically an urban phenomenon. It occurred in different urban areas at the same time. The Harare, Awassa, and Nazareth tributaries converged with Addis Ababa and flooded into the capital city. As Tibebe noted,

> From a small and scattered beginning in the early 1960s, however, a vibrant independent Pentecostal movement eventually crystallized in the formation of the *Mulu Wongel* church, one of the most powerful agents in the diffusion of Pentecostal experiences across the other non-Pentecostal denominations.8

The main actors of the movement were young high school, college and university students. The Pentecostal revival manifested Christianity in a new and unusual fashion. It really gave fresh energy and power for the established evangelical churches to preach the Gospel in urban areas.9

As Tormod Engelsviken witnessed, the revival movement has broken out after a long desiring for the baptism of the Holy Spirit through prayer, Bible study, and strong fellowship among handful Haile Selassie I University students in the fall of 1965. They began to preach the Gospel aggressively and enthusiastically in the campus. They also invited other non-Pentecostal evangelical students to join the movement and to form fellowship.10

Mrs. Yinagu Dasse was the first evangelical female university student identified by the pioneers, and they invited her to come to their prayer sessions. She witnessed that the programs were quite informal, unceremonious, and mainly focused on the work of the Holy Spirit. As the number of attendants increased the number of female students in the movement also increased. The informality of the programs gave much freedom for female students to minister service and *Mariam* is St. Mary, to indicate that her healing power could be compared with St. Mary’s.

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8 Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, p. 147.
without any restrictions. She argued, ‘if we let the Holy Spirit to become at the center, the discriminations between sexes, races and classes would vanish. This was exactly what happened in our meetings’.\(^{11}\) Both men and women were equally baptized by the Holy Spirit and served the Lord together. Women used to preach, prophesy and lead prayer sessions freely in the congregation.

According to Yinagu’s opinion, there were certain factors which contributed to this egalitarian way of ministry. The independence of the Pentecostal movement either from missionaries or established churches significantly helped female students to gain unrestricted ministerial opportunities. As a free religious movement binding ministerial regulations were not yet constituted. Public ministry was based on the merits of Holy Spirit gifts not gender. Since they were students, professionally untrained and inexperienced ministers, no ‘experts’ with qualifications could take the lead and push others aside. Additionally, they had a better understanding of gender equality than other believers to defy the stereotypical attitudes towards women and not to make any discrimination between the sexes.\(^{12}\)

Mrs. Tenagne Lemma was one of the converted female students by the Pentecostals in the University and the first deaconesses of *Mulu Wongel* church. She further corroborated the idea,

> Our primary concern was how to reveal the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the unsaved people so as to convert them rather than to forbid women from public ministry by quoting texts like some in Paul’s Epistles. As a matter of fact, no one then had even reached to that of level knowledge and confidence to be able to argue against and to rebuke women ministers.\(^{13}\)

In this formative stage of the Pentecostal movement women were active participants along with men counterparts in core ministerial services of preaching the Gospel and praying for the sick and for the Holy Spirit baptism. Without any strife both were equal stakeholders of the movement. This of course

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11 Interviews: Mrs. Yinagu Desse. She embraced Protestantism in 1956 when she was 12 years old. She was one of the first women who actively participated in the formative stage of the Pentecostal movement. From a long time, she has dedicated her life as an itinerant evangelist. All the interviews were conducted by the author.

12 Interview, Mrs. Yinagu Desse.

13 Interviews: Mrs. Tenagne Lemma. Mrs. Tenagne was one of the converted female students by the Pentecostals while she was in Haile Selassie I university in 1967. She became an active participant of the Pentecostal movement. She served as a leader in the Ethiopia University Students Christian Fellowship (*EUSCF*) and was elected as the first women deacon together with Haddas Waldab when *Mulu Wongel* was formally established.
deviated from the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and even at some point affected some evangelical churches. Tibebe Eshete further elaborated the situation:

The Pentecostal religious practices presented a strikingly visible contrast with the traditional Orthodox faith practices, even in what appear to be simple cases like the preaching of the Bible by unordained laymen and women who stood in the pulpit without wearing priestly vestments. Overall, the Pentecostal movement and its egalitarian tendency presented a cultural shock to the established church’s standard of religious ethos and regularized pattern of expression of faith and worship.14

After the revival had been started by a few students, it became very successful in converting many students regardless of ethnic, gender and class differences. Their first chapel was crowded by students who desperately wanted to speak in tongues and also experience physical as well as spiritual healings. To accommodate the increasing number of the adherents, they moved into another bigger chapel.15

4 The Establishment of *Mulu Wongel* Church and the Changing Role of Women’s Ministry

The unprecedented growth initiated the idea of crystallizing the free revivalist movement into an organized religious body. Two historic national Pentecostal conferences were held in Addis Ababa in 1966. Delegates including women who had Pentecostal experience from different provinces of Harare, Nazareth, Jimma, Mekale, Asmara, Awassa, Debre Zeit and other places participated. Despite the first meeting ended without consensus, the second conference marked the establishment of the first independent Pentecostal church in Ethiopia, named Addis Ababa Full Gospel Believers’ Church (AAFGB); *Mulu Wongel* (Full Gospel) for short.16

Immediately after the conference, an election board was organized to elect new permanent elders and deacons. The board took the Pauline Epistles of 1 Tim. 3.1–13 and Titus 1.5–9 as guiding principles to elect elders and deacons.

It was not helpful to women’s equal role in ministry that these passages indicate an exclusive male leadership (some modern translations try to modify this). Besides this, the board also decided to elect from the candidates those who had been part of the movement since its conception. Finally, they elected seven elders and seven deacons. They presented the candidates to the congregation and the congregation approved them unanimously. All of the elected elders were men. In order to make women part of the leadership, only two women deaconesses were then also elected.17

However, in spite of their independence, they began to share administrative and ministerial trends with other already established mainline churches. Because of this women became systematically excluded from the leadership because women had never held such positions in other mainline churches. According to Mrs. Tenagne Lemma, when the movement substituted an organized and bureaucratic system, women began to lose their former freedom and equal participation in church affairs, just as the system itself pushed them away from ministry in their mainstream church services.18 This has been a general feature and pattern of Pentecostalism worldwide. As Stanley Burgess puts it in a precise remark, ‘while in the early years women enjoyed considerable freedom in ministry, often surpassing that of women in the established Protestant denominations, their prominence has declined with but few exceptions’.19

In the years between 1968–1972, Mulu Wongel church had shown a remarkable growth in number of adherents and chapels. In order to maintain and spread the revival into other as yet unreached areas, the elders realized the need to organize different committees and women’s committee was one of them. Their ministry was more of focused on equipping, supporting and organizing women for spiritual and social endeavors, which aimed at making women the great assets of the church.20 Very often they met Friday night to pray, to compose new hymns which might be used in the Sunday morning program and make fellowship with each other. Women, especially deaconesses, fasted and prepared the wine and the bread for the sacred rites of the Holy

17 Interviews: Mrs. Haddas Waldab; Eshete, The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia, p. 408. Mrs. Haddas was converted in 1966 when the Pentecostal revival was in a dynamic stage. She became involved actively in the movement along with the pioneers and was elected to be the first woman deacons when Mulu Wongel church commenced. The names of the elected elders were Assefa Zeleke, Betta, Philipos Gamare, Kebede Walda Mariam, Zeleke Alemu, Mellese Wagu, and Fantahun Gebre. Among the elected seven deacons, Tenage Lemma and Haddas Waldab were the first women deacons in Mulu Wongel history.
18 Interviews: Mrs. Tenagne Lemma.
19 Burgess, pp. XVIII–XIX.
20 Interviews: Mrs. Haddas Waldab.
Communion program. Socially, they engaged in activities like supporting poor women, visiting prisoners and backsliders, and helping people at the time of childbearing, weddings, and also mourning. Generally, they were the spiritual and social backbone of the Mulu Wongel church; women’s ministry began to take a shape of concentrating mainly behind the pulpit ministry.21

In relation with composing hymns the Addis Ababa Mulu Wongel church ‘A’ choir had an immense importance in initiating the indigenous Ethiopian Gospel songs. They revolutionized the worship style from singing translated European hymns in a very dogmatic and passive way, to a new brand of Amharic hymns which made worshipers active, vibrant and emotionally zealous.22 As one Pentecostal testified,

Our chorus is very famous, especially when it sings Ethiopian songs. The Ethiopian tunes and texts speak to our hearts. When I hear European songs, I cannot really understand them. They do not really touch me even though I may understand the words ...23

Again, Brian Fargher further noted,

The renewal movement brought a powerful new figure into Ethiopian church history: the soloist. Many of these men and women were able to make the whole congregation dissolve into tears or shout out ‘halleluiah’ and ‘amen’ ... the introduction of chorus singing has enabled the whole congregation to share in music in a way which was previously impossible ... in doing so many unlearned people got the chance to participate in the worship which in turn made the worship more meaningful to worshippers.24

Women comprised more than half of this chorus and they played a significant role in producing new Amharic songs as well as playing musical instruments. The choir introduced modern musical instruments like accordions, guitars and

21 Interviews: Mrs. Haddas Waldab and Pastor Ashenafi Zemat. Since 1966, Ashenafi has been an active member of the Pentecostal movement. He became full-time and served as an evangelist in Mulu Wongel church during the Haile Sellassie and Derg periods. Now he is the pastor of one of the local churches of Mulu Wongel church in Addis Ababa.
23 Engelsviken, Mulu Wengel, p. 56.
Another interesting feature of Ethiopian Pentecostal revival was the great concern for women’s style of dress. Renewal movements like this one have the tendency of being revolutionary to break social norms and being odd to reject traditions. In this regard the Pentecostal movement had a paradoxical effect. The male revivalists held traditional views on women’s dress. They rebuked women who wore miniskirts. Wearing jewelry was considered a sin and strictly forbidden. They often quoted from the Bible, such as 1 Pet. 3:3–4, to affirm their views were correct. However, there were certain bold women who made arguments that the Holy Spirit would rebuke them personally if they dressed inappropriately and that therefore they did not need human injunctions and reprimands from men.

The most serious persecution against the Pentecostals in the capital came in August 1972. The imperial regime disliked the fast growing new revivalist sect in the capital and preferred to shut down their worship center and put all of them in jail. The church was closed for two years and went underground until the Derg came into power. While operating covertly, the formal church structure changed into an informal and loose home cell structure. The home chapels offered unrestricted freedom for women and lay ministers to take key ministerial roles. The closure of the church had a paradoxical effect of to disseminate the Gospel into every local districts or Säfar of Addis Ababa. Among prisoners, women prisoners steadfastly stood in their faith amid violent persecution and even able to attract others to their faith by preaching the Gospel.

5 The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution

Given their hostility with the imperial government undoubtedly Pentecostals eagerly awaited the downfall of the regime and widely welcomed the 1974
Ethiopian revolution. Initially the Socialist Derg government allowed them to reopen their chapels in 1975 after a three years ban and granted them a plot of land to construct a church. However, after a year the government favours waned immediately when the government officially declared ‘Scientific Socialism’ (Marxism-Leninism) as the driving principle of the Ethiopian revolution, i.e. religion was condemned, and atheism was preached proudly in public. The first conflict between the church and the political cadres started on the issue of attending compulsory political indoctrination meetings. The cadres began to arrange meetings on Sunday morning at 9 A.M. to clash purposely with church worship. Some churches changed their schedules, others persistently continued conducting their regular programs in the morning.29

After the regime had scored a stunning victory against Somalia in the Ogaden war of 1977, it became even more dogmatic and radical. Now things were going to be very difficult especially for evangelicals to maintain their Christian faith under the atheist regime. Pentecostals and then other evangelical denominations became the Derg’s foremost target because they were considered as latecomers who constituted the minority, and the fact that ‘Marxism was antithetical to religion especially to those that appear to be radical, expansive and unwilling to yield easily to any pressure’.30

Moreover, Pentecostals constituted the young elite generation who had already become well acquainted with the tenets of Marxism since the 1960s. Their unwavering past record of boldness coupled with the expansiveness of Pentecostalism to other evangelicals highly alarmed the government. As a result, the government laid its harsh hands-on Pentecostals. In 1978, the government confiscated Mulu Wongel’s new building and persecuted some of the members. Consequently, the church went back to their underground work.31

6 Women Thrived in Clandestine Ministry

In fact, the underground work was more suitable for Pentecostals than for others. House chapels are more inclined to informal programs like long and fervent prayers usually with laying hands on individuals for exorcism and

30 Eshete, The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia, p. 223.
healing plus declaring of prophetic words. For these kinds of ministries home cell chapels and small groups are the perfect places. ‘Such practices could easily slide in the context of houses churches, characterized by the absence of a strong doctrinal emphasis and a hierarchical institution’.\(^{32}\) The church leaders made a thorough investigation to map out the home chapels in every corner of the city and in every local district. In fact, Mulu Wongel really benefited from the underground work. The revolution affected the church paradoxically so that despite persecution the number of Pentecostals increased astonishingly.

House churches or home chapels have diversified attributes which make them unique and different from the regular congregation. Many of their unique characters have benefited women and other lay ministers. They provided a better opportunity for creating strong social solidarity among the members than the usual church environment. House churches are smaller in size, which gives an opportunity for every member to interact freely and informally. It allowed members to participate actively and equally to share their weakness and seek support for challenges to home cell members. Believers were expected to serve according to their spiritual gifts. And this would help to identify believers’ hidden talents and give them a chance to develop them. Additionally, the home chapel ministry was very important to follow up every activity of members’ lives. It was also helpful to keep track of the new converts so as not to lose them into the large crowd. Home chapels also had the great potential to increase the number of believers. Members invited their relatives, colleagues and friends to the program and once they came to home meetings, they tended to stay there. The genuine brotherhood and sisterhood love would attract them and make them want to be part. Unlike formally established and authorized churches, it was very difficult to control and destroy house churches. Their clandestine work, the existence of many leaders and scattered house churches, made it difficult for the government to trace the root and destroy it.\(^{33}\)

Although women were not ordained, their contribution was not less than compared to male full-time ministers. There were women who dedicated their entire life to the church and served many brothers and sisters in this period of much trouble. Women were busy visiting the incarcerated and poor people. They raised money tirelessly to support poor members of the church and those who had lost family members by war or had been put in jail. Apart from these

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\(^{33}\) Interviews: Pastor Ashanafi Zemat, Pastor Bekele Wolda Kidan and Mrs. Tenagne Lemma. See also Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, pp. 290–91. Pastor Bekele Wolda Kidan was the senior pastor of the largest Mulu Wongel congregation in Addis Ababa and an author of multiple books.
they were responsible for preparing and taking the Holy Communion together with home cells members.\(^{34}\)

History of charismatic movement and clandestine ministry of women were also shared by Meserete Kristos Church (MKC),\(^{35}\) and I think it is worth mentioning women’s active and versatile role during the harsh Derg period.

When the MKC was confiscated by the government in 1982 and Derg’s ruthless sword stretched out missionaries were forced to leave the country immediately. Some church leaders and ministers fled to abroad and others bravely challenging the government but fail to imprisonment. Such terrible happenings opened ministerial gate broadly and widely for women. A committee chaired by a woman was formed to set up home cell groups to maintain the ministry in underground. Because of this MKC could establish a very organized, disciplined, flexible and effective clandestine home cell ministry in Addis Ababa within six weeks after the Bole congregation had been banned.\(^{36}\)

Women thrived in home cell ministry. Tibebe writes:

> Women displayed an unusual interest and commitment in the underground work. The new situation provided them with fresh outlets and expanded opportunities to serve. Through the default position obtained,

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\(^{34}\) Interviews: Pastor Ashanafi Zemat, Pastor Bekele Wolda Kidan and Evangelist Emebet Gethane. See also Mesfine, *Ba Meriye Ege*, pp. 42–43. Emebet is an Evangelist in one of Mulu Wongel’s local churches. She was ordained in 1997.

\(^{35}\) Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) was established by Mennonite missionaries. The first Mennonite missionaries came to Ethiopia in 1947. They established a school at the capital in 1952 and started formal worship in the next year. This gathering steadily increased and established the famous Bole Meserete Kristos church in Addis Ababa. The charismatic preacher Daniel Mekonnen and the Tsion (Zion) choir both who had the Pentecostal background made the MKC popular in the capital in the 1970s. Many young people flocked to the church looking for comforting prophetic messages for future hope and to get healing. To accommodate the large crowd, Sunday program was arranged in three shifts. The fact that too many young people were attracted by religion was a great political disaster and an ideological defeat for the Marxists. Eventually, armed men came on Sunday night, January 24, 1982 and closed the church.

\(^{36}\) Interviews: Dr. Tesfatsion Dalellew and Mr. Solomon Kebede. Dr. Tesfatsion was the second Executive Secretary of MKC and led the church in the time of the Revolution from 1974 to 1978. Mr. Solomon was a very prominent person in the history of MKC and Ethiopian evangelical churches. He was involved in the early stage of the Pentecostal movement in Nazareth. Then he served as church elder in Nazareth MKC and played a significant role in mapping out the home cell strategies in Nazareth during the Derg period. He prepared apologetics manuals for the Protestant faith against Marxist-Leninism. He also served in higher church positions, for twenty.
they were able to channel their energies, which had in the past been confined to certain spheres such as serving in the choir and prayer sessions.37

Women were largely involved in giving important social services for prisoners and their family members. Women courageously went to jail and transported secret messages from church leaders to home cell leaders. Besides this, they visited and comforted prisoners frequently and delivered meals most of the time. While visiting, they pray and share the Word of God to console anxious and bereaved people; and also to bring back backsliders to faith.38

The clandestine ministry was more favorable for women than men since political cadres tended to attempt a strong detection towards men rather than women. So, women were wisely conducting spiritual programs under the disguise of social meetings like Mahibär (local social gatherings), birthday parties, and others. They maintained believers’ spiritual bondages and designed new outlets to evangelize people.39 As Nathan Hege concludes, ‘women served as watchers, elders, and teachers and they participated equally in ministry with the men’.40 As a result, MKC experienced exponential growth within a decade from few thousands to a hundred thousand by the selfless underground ministry of women.

7 The Road to Institutionalize Women’s Ministry

In May 1992 the Transitional Government of Ethiopia proclaimed freedom of religion in Ethiopia. After the declaration, evangelical churches could not hold and accommodate the influx of many adherents. Many home cell chapels turned into official churches. Evangelicals recorded unprecedented expansion and growth in Addis Ababa and other places. For instance, the members of Addis Ababa Mulu Wongel church overflowed and were forced to open additional nine branches. In fact such unexpected expansion brought a ministerial opportunity for women and lay ministers. In Addis Ababa Mulu Wongel church some women were ordained as full-time evangelists after 1991.41

38 Interviews: Mrs. Metasabiya Ayale. Mrs. Metasabiya has been a member of Bole MKC since the late 1960s. She is a nurse professionally and played a great role in organizing MKC home cell groups after the Bole church was closed in 1982.
39 Interviews: Mrs. Metasabiya Ayale.
41 Interviews: Pastor Ashanafi Zemat, Pastor Bekele Wolda Kidan and Teacher Mesekerem Kebede. Mesekerem is the first ordained woman Teacher in Mulu Wongel church in
As most evangelicals agreed that the new political and social conditions in the country and the flooding of people to churches so rapidly, made things complicated for church leaders. They became confused, disorganized and unable to control the situation. As a result, the notable evangelical quality of Christian life and solidarity among brothers and spiritual fervour declined. Freedom disbanded the home cell meetings in many places and replaced them with formal church programs. Evangelical Christianity was in danger of becoming a matter of routine observances.42

Under such circumstances many women were removed from leadership and public ministry. Their noble and sacrificial ministry was forgotten, and they were obliged to relapse to their former service-giving positions, teaching Sunday school, singing in the choir, and holding prayer groups. Former male church leaders and pastors who were in exile during the Derg period returned and held their pervious ministerial positions. Women who had remained in the country and suffered a lot were told to leave their positions. It seemed women were thrown away after giving a sacrificial ministry under the entire Socialist regime. The hearts of many women were broken.43

Although in Addis Ababa local Mulu Wongel churches women were being ordained as evangelists, they were still forbidden to minister in eldership and pastoral ship. While the church experienced a continuous growth, administration disputes arose between AAFGBC and the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers’ Church (EFGBC) over the local churches. AAFGBC separated from the regional Mulu Wongel churches which were under the administration of EFGBC. The disagreement stayed for years and the issue of elevating women’s ministry to the higher positions was also suspended. Eventually, the problem was solved by the incorporation of AAFGBC into EFGBC in 2008. To address women’s cause and other issues a new and historical constitution was promulgated by EFGBC in 2011. The constitution acknowledges the ministerial equality of men and women and proclaimed women’s unrestricted right of service in the church. Furthermore, as it is stipulated in Mulu Wongel Doctrinal Statement, the church accepts the five ministerial offices of Eph. 4.11; apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. The church fully accepted the appointment of

42 Interviews: Mrs.Blene Moltotal, Pastor Bekele Wolda Kidan, Dr.Tesfatsion Dalellew, and Mrs. Metasabiya Ayale. Mrs. Blene embraced Protestantism at Bole MKC church in 1982. She passed all through the MKC home cell meetings.

43 Interviews: Mrs. Haddas Waldab, Mrs. Tenagne Lemma, Mrs. Blene Moltotal, and Mrs. Metasabiya Ayale.
both men and women ministers in these five offices without making any gender discrimination.\textsuperscript{44}

Despite women achieving legal victory, Mulu Wongel local churches and parishes are way behind in ordaining women pastors and appointing women elders. The accomplishment is very unsatisfactory and observers associated the factors with cultural, attitudinal, and knowledge problems. Since women are living in a male dominated society and a culture that does not endorse women's public role, many of them are afraid to take big responsibilities in the church. They are shy and lack confidence. Furthermore, men ministers and leaders who still have a patriarchal mentality, theological, and doctrinal difficulties to accept women's unrestricted ministry, poses a serious challenge to women's ordination. They always tried to quench women's zeal and passion to minister by invoking bible verses. Besides as many of them have come from an Ethiopian Orthodox Church background this does not of course accept women's ministry as deaconesses, priests, or bishops.\textsuperscript{45}

To finalize our discussion, the trend in MKC is also similar to Mulu Wongel church. According to Nathan Hege's estimate, during the Derg period 70\% of home cell chapels were under the leadership of women. Women used to organize and lead home to home ministries. However, after Derg was overthrown and when religious freedom was declared, women were sidelined from leadership and higher ministerial positions. Opponents were uncomfortable with women's leadership role and the church elders decided to suspend women's leadership until they got a new understanding.\textsuperscript{46}

The issue of women's role in the MKC's supra-structural hierarchy was once again raised by some members in the late 1990s. According to Pastor Teku Kebede, there were three factors that helped to raise the issue. The first factor was the Mennonite missionaries. The sisterly relation between MKC and Mennonite prompted them to insist MKC leaders bring women into leadership and ordination. Secondly, MKC ministers and elders had the exposure to visit Europe and America; and to meet with prominent women pastors and leaders that presumably changed their attitude towards women's role in the church. Thirdly, the number of women compared with males giving dedicated services increased in the lower level of ministries and observed women's participation.

\textsuperscript{44} Interviews: Teacher Mesekerem Kebede. The agreement which forbade women to serve in eldership and pastoral ship was cancelled and new article which stated the equality of men and women in church ministry was proclaimed according to the guiding verse of Gal. 3:28 (‘There is neither ... male nor female’).


always exceeds men. So that MKC elders motivated to bring forth eligible women leaders and pastors to the higher ministerial services.47

In 2005, the MKC General Assembly was summoned to Addis Ababa. More than three-hundred people attended the meeting. The issue of women's participation at supra-structural level was raised and more than 90% of the attendants approved women's unlimited and equal ministerial services with men counterparts. This landmark declaration allowed women to minister in the pastorate, in church eldership, as evangelists, as Gospel workers and also as teachers.48

In order to improve women’s holistic participation, MKC established a Women's Coordinating Office at head office level. Basically it was intended to encourage and elevate women's morals and their involvement in the church's supra-structural ministries. The office is working to establish a women’s ministry in each local MKC church to empower women in the church. According to the 2011 MKC national report, there were 23 women evangelists, 9 teachers, and 150 women elders but still only 1 pastor. But this figure compared with the total number of MKC elders and full-time evangelists and pastors does not account for more than 3%.49

8 Conclusion

In the 1960s Pentecostalism reached Ethiopia. Youngsters, mainly university and college students, were a formidable counterweight against the radical Marxist-Leninist youth and resisted the sporadic persecution of the imperial regime also. The Pentecostal movement at first totally eliminated sexism, yet when the free revival movement crystallized into Mulu Wongel church, women steadily lost their significant roles and positions. In the Derg period, all evangelical churches suffered the regime’s restrictions and condemnation and even harsh persecution, particularly Pentecostals. The regime’s attack on institutional structures made evangelicals turn to less structured forms, especially home cell churches. In these home cells women’s ministry was very prominent. The social, political, and economic crises gave a heavy ministerial burden for

47 Interviews: Pastor Teku Kebede. From 1988 up to now he has served as Evangelist, Pastor, a teacher in MKC Theology College and Director of Teaching Department in MKC Head office. Teku was convinced by the ordination of women when he went to the USA for scholarship.

48 Interviews: Pastor Teku Kebede and Mrs. Kelamua Tefera. Mrs. Kelamua was the coordinator of women’s ministry in the Ethiopian MKC head office.

49 Interviews: Mrs. Kelamua Tefera.
laywomen members. They were involved in all aspects of ministry to fill the
gaps. Although the period was tough, women enjoyed their unprecedented
freedom of ministry.

Religious freedom returned with the fall of the *Derg*. The evangelical
churches increased in their numbers. Yet women, who had preserved the
faith under militant and aggressive atheism, were ungratefully pushed away
from the major positions. Later on and after intense and long debate, women’s
equal ministerial role was proclaimed in *Mulu Wonge* land other evangelical
churches. But as the old saying goes, ‘old habits die hard’, the patriarchal atti-
tude still restricts the number of women in positions of authority.