

Assessing the Hypotheses Against Women Leadership in African Christianity

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Abstract

Despite the undisputable roles of women as home-makers and nation-builders, many hypotheses had been advanced in support of male chauvinism mostly prevalent in African society. Such discrimination is attributable to two sources: culture and religion. The prejudices, inequalities and injustices suffered by women seem to be deep-rooted. What is even more unfortunate and scandalous is that religion has been and is still being misused to reinforce the oppression and subordination of women. Equally disconcerting is the fact that among the womenfolk themselves there are quite a number who have accepted these conditions as normal and therefore have had no inclination to demand and work for a change. Such women have resigned themselves to an inferior status and sincerely believed that such is their divinely ordered fate.

This paper, therefore, is aimed at evaluating the theological, cultural and philosophical hypotheses that serve as roadblocks against women leadership in order to disprove their logical veracity; and to establish that leadership in the church should transcend the factor of gender but be based on God's prerogative and infinite grace.

Key words: Women leadership; Christianity; Discriminatory factors; Attitudinal changes

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INTRODUCTION

Patriarchal tradition establishes a system that allows the alienation of women in the leadership of any organization. By its enshrined convention, women are expected to play a subservient role in a world where equal beings have been effectively placed. This thinking has been explicitly expressed by Joel Krieger who said thus:

It is a social or political order in which the things that masculine people do are deemed of greater social value – more “productive”, more “serious”, more “skilled” – than the things that feminine people do (Mary, 1985).

In corroborating this apartheid against women as leaders, Geisler¹ submitted that what accounted for such tradition is that obnoxious belief that the male is by nature superior while the female inferior. This therefore suggests that nature bestows upon the male the perpetual right of leadership. This view was not only upheld in Judaism, but also in the old Graeco – Roman and Indian societies where a woman was regarded as a slave, commodity, pest, serpent or even hell (Mala, 1991, p.2). Conversely, Jesus Christ refused to conform to the established norms of his society by giving the women the necessary recognition. This will be fully dealt with later. Jesus viewed such discrimination against women as injustice.

In a Muslim society, the Islamic political system recognizes equality of all citizens before the law. Babs Mala affirmed that a Muslim woman is expected to vote and be voted for (Mala, 1991, p.2). This means her right to be a leader in the society is well spelt out and protected. Although Kamil Oloso did not write on leader in the society is well spelt out and protected. Although Kamil Oloso did not write on leadership right of women but their economic rights according to Islamic teachings; yet the Sharia seems to protect the full right of women in any society. Kamil alludes to this fact when he submits thus:

¹ Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women. *The Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul*, p.3.

Both men and women have rights to own property... Islam also gives them (women) absolute control over their wealth... (Kamil, 2002).

Oyeronke Olademo traces gender classification in Africa to colonial mentality. She establishes the fact that the pre-colonial African society was characterized by mutuality and independency (Oyeronke Olademo). According to her, with the coming of colonization, women's roles in the African polity was greatly minimized and eventually eroded whereas the services of men were encouraged and invested in through western education.

In addition, while leaning on the views of Mark and Engel she denounces the capitalist/patriarchal systems which altered the egalitarian relations within the household by separating the roles of production and reproduction and restricted women from participating in those spheres where they could compete effectively with men (Oyeronke Olademo). Therefore, the contemporary marginality of women in Africa is the product of a system that recognizes men as leaders in and outside the home.

Consequently, the prevalent hierarchical structure of the church in Nigeria (Africa) is built on patriarchy. Hence, the choices of leaders in the church today were based on many parameters of which gender remains obvious. Men monopolise leadership power in the church despite the agreeable fact that women constitute the majority of church membership. This accounts for a few women found in the leadership position of the church in Nigeria.

The pathetic conditioning or limiting of women has contributed significantly not the consequences only to the societal under-development, but also spiritual impoverishment of humanity. In his letter to women, Pope John Paul II avers thus:

Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented, they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.²

There is the need therefore, to redress this unjust disposition by allowing the women to exhibit their God given potentials to the spiritual nourishment of the society. This becomes imperative judging from the fact that the leadership of few women in the church is a blessing to humanity, while some of them even succeed where their male counterparts fail.

1. HIGHLIGHTING THE DISCRIMINATORY FACTORS

1.1 Biological Configuration/Natural Factor

This discrimination spans through the entirety of the girl child's life. When it comes to education, the girl child in most African societies is usually restricted to the home, based on the fact that education given her wouldn't be useful for her since she is going to end up in her husband's house and kitchen. Thus, she is to be taught all she needs to know from her mother. She is taught in the preparation of food, housekeeping, and how to generally fend for her family.

Bareness is a taboo in the African culture, thus, after marriage, the woman is expected to become pregnant after a couple of months; if she does not get pregnant, all hell was bound to get loosed. She would face a lot of rigors due to the fact that a woman who has not conceived or given birth to any child especially a male child for her husband is usually placed under consequent threat of expulsion from her home and it is only when she had conceived and delivered that she is considered a full member of the family she is married into. The fact is that this discrimination continues for the whole life time of the woman, and continues even after her generation into the next and on and on. Thus, the girl child grows into womanhood with the notion that it is right for her to be discriminated against. She accepts the fact that the male child is better than she is and thus develops a subservient stance to life. She sees it as natural phenomenon. Commenting on this situation, Funmi Iyanda comments, "I don't like the way women are raised here. I would like to raise a girl who understands that she is as important as the next person in building a society and building our country".³ Thus, since time immemorial, women have had their rights discriminated against. Esther Lasebikan identifies the areas where women are highly discriminated against. These include rape, genital mutilation and wife battering among others (Esther, 2001).

Leadership discrimination against women is a pointer to the deficiency in the status of the African women. Certain positions have been rendered inaccessible to the female gender as a result of their status. Unfortunately, this does not even stop at the societal level but is being embraced by the church.

1.2 Cultural Factor

In several traditional societies women are excluded from secret cults because they are not supposed to have knowledge of esoteric matters. For example, among the Yoruba, women generally do not actively participate in the *Oro*⁴ and *Egungun*⁵ cults. As a matter of fact they are expected to be in confinement during the period of the

² Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women. *The Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul*, p.2.

³ *The Nations*, An interview with Funmi Iyanda, Jan. 8 2012, A36

Oro festival. Several reasons may account for this. Leo Frobenius (Kasomo Daniel, 2010) suggested that men merely used this occasion to terrify women in order to keep them in holy fear of the great roarer. In our view, there are some other more obvious reasons. One is that women are believed to be inquisitive but yet cannot keep secrets. Two and more importantly, women's tenderness may hinder swift and drastic decisions which elders of the Oro cult are bound to take from time to time. Russell (1975, p.14) holds that women should particularly be commended for cooperating with the entire members of the community which places the ban on them to go into religious confinement. He says that "obedience as a sacred role is emphasized by the fact that if defiled, it is believed to result in misfortune for the entire community."

In the traditional society, the economic roles of women were generally segregated; even where both the man and wife farmed; there was usually a division of labour into male and female tasks. Men often prepared the soil and planted the crops while women would weed and help with the harvest. In several communities the men grew cash crops while the women's interest was in the food crops. Among the Achipawa situated in the Sakaba District of Kontogora province (Northern Nigeria) the men cultivate as own the cereals while the women own only beans and yakua.

In agricultural production among the Afikpo-Igbo, men grow yams, the prestige crop of Afikpo while the women grow cassava, cocoa yams, maize and various leaf crops. Among the Babur who inhabit the Babur District in the Gubja Division of Bornu province, even though a woman owns a separate farm from her husband's, she was bound to work on her husband's farm for three days in a week.

J.H. Elder recounts that the Babur women suffer from high mortality rate because they engage in excessive manual labour (Akintunde, 2009). However the situation differs in other African societies. For instance, the Yoruba women have long been fairly independent of their husbands because they are engaged in trading. This accumulation of wealth by women which enables them to increase their status in society at least in the domestic sphere is also very obvious among the Nupe.

1.3 Biblical Based Arguments

1.3.1 Masculinity of God

Complementarians have traditionally held that Christian ministers ought to be men, because of the need to represent Jesus Christ, who was the "Son" of God, and incarnate as a male human being (Lewis, 1970, p.52). A related position is that while both male and female were made in the image of God, the woman shares in the divine image through the man because she was created out of him, and is his "glory" (1 Cor 11: 7-8).

Wayne Grudem (1997, p.92) takes exception to these egalitarian arguments, insisting that Christ's maleness was theologically necessary; he also alleges that egalitarians are increasingly advocating that God should be thought of as a "Mother" as well as "Father", a move which he sees as theologically liberal.

Australian theologian Kelvin Giles (2006, p.70) has more recently responded that complementarians have adopted a heretical view of the Trinity similar to Arianism. A vigorous debate had ensued, with some egalitarians moving towards the idea that there is "mutual dependence" within the Trinity, including "subordination of the Father to the Son", which must be reflected in gender role relations. Wayne Grudem has countered this by asserting that mutual submission in the Trinity cannot be supported by scripture and church history.

1.3.2 Argument from Male Apostolate

That is, all the twelve apostles of Jesus were men. It is indisputable that Jesus had twelve male apostles. But as Jewett rightly observed, the choice of the twelve Jewish males was a "matter of time and circumstance, not an inviolable truth of revelation" (Jewett, 1980, p.90).

1.3.3 Paul's Instructions

Many scholars have argued that Saint Paul forbade Women to speak in the church. Two specific injunctions which Paul gave to the Church in Corinth as well as Timothy have been interpreted as constituting Paul's opposition to women speaking (in a leadership role) during worship:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression (1 Tim. 2: 11-14).

And again,

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (1 Cor. 14: 33-35).

1.3.4 Ecclesiastical Historical Evidences

A study of Church history has revealed that controversies and equivocation about the continued leadership role of women in the Church crept in from the middle of the third century of the Christian era. By the fifth century the prohibition of women from these roles had become part of church tradition. As brilliantly analysed by Torjessen (1995, p.278) and Wijngaards (2001) among others, the adoption of this stance by the church was due to the influence of Greek and Roman socio-cultural views in which women were regarded and treated as inferior and subordinate to men.

⁴Oro is a Yoruba cult believed to be exclusively meant for men. Women are forbidden in its participation.

⁵Egungun is a masquerader whose festivals allows both male and female to participate.

It is most unfortunate that pagan cultural views were imbibed by the Church and became part of its tradition; while the “royal law of love and liberty” as taught and lived out by Christ was jettisoned.

Origen (AD 185-254) stated that, Even if it is granted to a woman to show the sign of prophecy, she is nevertheless not permitted to speak in an assembly. When Miriam the prophetess spoke, she was leading a choir of women... for (as Paul declares) “I don not permit a woman to teach”, and even less “to tell a man what to do”.⁶

Tertullian, the second century Latin father added that “It is not permitted to a woman to speak in church. Neither may she teach, baptize, offer, nor claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacerdotal office.”

In early centuries, the Eastern Church allowed women to participate to a limited extent in ecclesiastical office by ordaining deaconesses. In Middle Ages, with the establishment of Christian monasticism, other influential role became available to women. From the 5th century onward, Christian convents provided opportunities for some women to escape the path of marriage and child-rearing, acquire literacy and learning, and play a more active religious role. In the later Middle Ages, women such as Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa of Avila, played significant roles in the development of theological ideas and discussion within the church, and were later declared Doctors of the Roman Catholic Church.

Post Reformation records show that the Protestant Reformation ended female convents, which had existed within Roman Catholicism, and which the Reformers saw as bondage.⁷ By shutting down female convents within the movement, Protestantism effectively closed off the opinion of a full-time religious role for Protestant women, as well as one which had provided some women a life in academic study. Among the many nuns who abandoned the monastic life was the wife of Martin Luther, Katherine von Bora.

The majority of Protestant churches upheld the traditional position and restricted ruling and preaching roles within the Church to men until the twentieth century, although there were early exceptions among some groups such as the Quakers and within some Pentecostal holiness movements.

John Knox (1510 – 1572) also denied women the right to rule in the civic sphere, as he asserted in his famous First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.

Methodist founder, John Wesley (1703-1791) and

Methodist theologian Adam Clarke (1762-1832) both upheld male headship, but allowed that spiritual Christian women could publicly speak in church meetings If they “are under an extraordinary impulse of the spirit.”⁸

1.3.5 Philosophical Dimension

Bristow (1991, p.3) traces the source of what is patently the Western European and North American world’s formalized conviction that women are inferior to men” to Greek philosophers.

The most outstanding Greek philosophers in the fifth to fourth centuries B.C. were Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. According to Bristow, Socrates (ca. 470-399 B.C) who immortalized the Athenian disdain for women argued that being born a woman was a divine punishment, since a woman is halfway between a man and an animal.

The philosophy of Socrates was reinforced by both his star pupil, Plato (ca. 427-347 BC), and the latter’s most distinguished disciple Aristotle (384-322. Bristow, 1991. p.5). Thomas Aquinas against the ordination of women as priests is an outcome of this integration. Thomas Aquinas, a foremost medieval scholar and theologian argued that the female sex cannot signify eminence of degree (Wijngaards, 2001, p.3). His argument is based on a presumed threefold inferiority of women.

- *Women are biologically inferior:* Following Aristotle’s view of procreation, Aquinas believed that a woman is born by some defect in the generative process. A woman is a ‘defective male’. The biologically secondary status is also clear from the belief that the male seed contains the generative power. The mother only provides a womb that gives nourishment to the seed/fetus. This view was common among the fathers...
- *Women are socially inferior:* A woman is subject to man by nature, because human reason, though common to both men and women to some extent, predominates in the male.
- *Women are created as dependent on men.* Man was created first. Though both men and women are the image of God as to our intellectual nature, man is the image of God in a special sense.

Aquinas argues that, on account of these inherent defects, women cannot signify eminence of degree and cannot, therefore, represent Christ as an ordained minister.

Today, with advancements in scientific knowledge, especially the biological and with the demonstrated equal capabilities and abilities of women and men in all areas of human endeavour, people will not argue as crudely as Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and others like them.

⁶Origen, *Fragmenta ex Commentariis in epistulam ad Corinthios*.

⁷Case study 9: *The Impact of the Reformation on Women in Germany* Henry J. Cohn, University of Warwick, 2000.

⁸John Wesley’s notes on the Bible, 1 Cor 14: 34, 35

1.3.6 Women Leadership: An Impediment to Ecumenism

The Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches do not accept the women in the priesthood. The ordination of women, it is argued by some, will constitute an impediment to talks on Christian unity.

“It is very significant to not that, in the light of the overwhelming evidence of women in the ordained ministry in the Roman Catholic Church in the early centuries of Christianity, and “...as implied in the devotion to Mary as priest... today... many Catholic women feel called to be priests”.

2. ASSESSING THE HYPOTHESES AGAINST WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN CHRISTIANITY

At this juncture, we want to consider various cogent issues raised by scholars which negate the hypotheses mounted against women to assume leadership position in African Christianity.

2.1 Women in the Gospel Narration

The genealogy of Christ as recorded in the synoptic gospels placed women in a vintage position against the traditional Jewish view which saw them as mere property. Mention is made of Rahab, Ruth, Mary, Anna the prophetess and Joanna the disciple, Mary Magdalene among others. In the gospel of John however, he is seen to be especially sympathetic to women. He is even argued according to Schussler Fiorenza to have depicted an ‘alternative’ Christian community in which women share fully in leadership (Edwards, 2003, p.106). In his gospel some women were portrayed sensitively, other ambiguously, but they were not represented in such a stance as bad a Judas. Reacting to comments by different scholars which tend to portray women in bad light, Schneiders (1999, p.137) is highly critical of their treatment in the major commentaries, describing it as case of the trivialization, marginalization, and even sexual demonization of biblical women, which she sees as reflecting and promoting similar treatment of real women in the church. Either way, John makes a good representation of women and men on equal grounds (Jn. 11:5).

When it came to the narration of resurrection story of Jesus Christ, women were also said to have played tremendous roles. All four gospels recount that women were first to go to the tomb and found it empty. Mark describes the women at the cross to the indicative of discipleship when he says that they “had followed him and ministered to him” (Mk. 15:14). He also mentioned the women as eyewitnesses of the Crucifixion in anticipation of their eyewitness role at Jesus’ burial (15:47) and His resurrection (16:1-8). Their devotion surpassed that of the

11 disciples who had deserted Him (14:50). Mark may have intended these words as an encouragement of faithful discipleship among women in the church at Rome.

The use of the term ‘minister’, in Luke 8:3 probably conveys the same logic and this is also true of the story of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-15; Mk. 1:29-31; Lk 4:38-39), whose concluding notice that she “ministered to them/him” adds the notion of discipleship to a healing story.

The gestures and attitudes Jesus portrayed in relation to women made for an example of gospel tradition, which was transmitted to the early church and thus made for the subsequent way in which women were treated. Women were considered disciples and equally with men. It was said that the ministry of Jesus was supported by these women, whom He had interacted with.

2.2 On the Masculinity of God

Though most of the biblical imagery of God is masculine, there are some feminine ones too. Jewett (1980), as quoted by Sowunmi (2009, p.11), drew attention was to some Biblical examples of the feminine imagery, all of them picturing God as mother. For example, Moses, in the words of a song to the assembly of the Israelites in which he chided them for their frequent rebellion against God, and warned them against further rebellion after his imminent death, said, among other things: “you were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deut. 32: 18). In addition, Moses, exasperated and overwhelmed by his inability to meet the basic physical requirements of the Israelites in the wilderness, cried out to God in frustration: Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them that you should say to me, carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child to the land which you swore to their father (Numbers, 11:12).

Jewett (Jewett, 1980, p.39) opined that Moses was saying in effect: “Since the Lord is the One who conceived Israel, let the Lord carry them in her bosom as a nurse carries a sucking child in hers”! Furthermore, a portion of the lamentation of Jesus over Jerusalem goes thus: O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often have I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gather her brood under her wings, but you were not willing (Luke, 13:34).

Moreover, God did send some female prophets, such as Deborah and Huldah to represent Him to represent Him, by being his mouthpieces to the children of Israel. This clearly shows that women have been and will continue to be God’s representatives. They are God’s representatives and the choice of who represents Him is His absolute prerogative. Humans should not try to play God in this respect!

2.3 Gross Misconception of Paul’s Idea

As pointed out earlier, the two specific injunctions which Paul gave to the Church in Corinth -1 Cor. 14:34-35 as

well as to Timothy-1 Tim. 2: 11-14, have been erroneously interpreted as constituting Paul's opposition to women speaking (in a leadership role) during worship.

We need to ask what was the context of these two passages? The first and greater part of 1 Corinthians 14 is a teaching on the relative values of prophesying and speaking in tongues, and the need to have tongues interpreted for the benefit of all. The second part, from which the two verses quoted above come, is a lesson on orderliness in church during worship. It is necessary to discuss this in some detail. In enjoining the Corinthians to maintain orderliness and reverence during worship, Paul mentions four scenarios that could cause confusion, disorder or chaos (Sowunmi, 2009, p.13).

I. Everyone speaking in tongues at the same time; if such happened, there would be absolute bedlam and a visitor would think he was in a madhouse:

Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? (Verse 23)

II. Numerous messages in incomprehensible tongues, uttered simultaneously and without immediate interpretation:

If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God (Verses 27-28).

III. The speaking of too many prophesies simultaneously;

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged? And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (Verses 29-33 – emphasis mine).

IV. Women speaking during worship. The pronouncement of Paul on this is contained in the verses quoted above, which will be repeated at this juncture:

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

In ending the lessons on the necessity of maintaining order and reverence during worship, Paul gives a final, terse summary: *Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14: 40).*

Furthermore, it seems to me a very strange logic that the injunctions have been interpreted to mean an order that women should not be ordained. A careful and objective study of the two verses (1 Cor. 14:34-35) in their context will show clearly that Paul could not have been referring to women teaching in the church, but to

their speaking freely and thus disturbing worship. The Greek word used here for "to speak", as Torjessen (1995, p.41), for example, reiterates, is *lalein*, which in Greek society was used for "free-ranging discussion rather than formal teachings". Women and men most probably sat apart during worship, hence, Paul enjoined the former to keep their questions till they got home instead of shouting across to their husbands.

2.4 Equality of Men and Women Before God

One of the most heartening and reassuring verse of scripture is from Genesis 1:27. It is significant because it counters the discrimination directly. It underscores the fundamental scriptural truth that women and men are of equal value in the sight of God, who created them in His own image. It should be stated right at the outset and without any equivocation, that it is blasphemous and heretical to consider one gender (invariably the female) inferior to the other. Such a heretical view is illogical. If women and men are both made in the image of God, how can one be intrinsically inferior or superior to the other?

The first of two other passages, among many, in the scriptures, which proclaim the fundamental Biblical truth of the equality of men and women before God, is Romans 8: 16-17:

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The second is Galatians 3: 28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28 – emphasis mine)

Indeed, the latter is one of the most powerful and compelling Biblical pronouncements in favour of not discriminating against anyone, let alone fellow believers in Christ, on the basis of race, social status and gender. This verse states categorically and specifically the equality of all believers in Christ. It also underscores the equality of all God's creatures. This teaching was pointedly made by Paul in view of the situation in the Early Church when there was a prevalent view among Jewish and Greek cultures, from which many of the early Christians had come, in which women were generally regarded as inferior to men. In the preceding verse, Paul said: *For a many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).*

Therefore it is illogical to present or conceive of God as being male. He is neither man nor woman. He is beyond gender. He is spirit, as underscored by Jesus Christ: *God is Spirit...* (John 4:24a). But He manifests attributes which we humans have come to associate with either male or female. True enough He came to earth as a man, but he came through a woman!

3. A CALL FOR ATTITUDINAL CHANGE

Having considered the influence of the aforementioned factors and their attending issues, one can see in recent times a great diversion from these influences as regards the treatment that should be given women. In recent times women are seen in the fore front in all areas of life as a result of the growing awareness about their status, their talent and gift which is nothing inferior to those of their male counterparts. The shift has to do with drastic change in the roles of women from the expected traditional one to that of modified expectancy in the home, society and church.

According to Hope Amolo (Amolo, 2003, p.145), the fact that women were avid followers of Jesus' life from the beginning to the end gives a paradigm for women's place in the ministry.

It can also be discovered that the first change from the traditional belief that women should be limited to the homes was lifted in the twentieth century when there was a great attack on the male dominance and thus brought a change in the attitude in which women were regarded, thus they were allowed to take paid employments outside the home and this led to the drastic change in their economic life. At this point, roles which were usually not given women in the church were given them. This has brought about the change in traditional roles of women owing to acculturation, acquisition of western education, and civilization.

This further has led to changes all over the church in her policies and so many sectors such that is encouraged for women ordination to be suggested and a few churches accepted this movement. It resulted in certain churches like the Episcopalians, United Methodist Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Christian Church, the Presbyterian Church of the USA, and the United Church of Christ, all gave in to the ordination of women.

It is of great interest to note the radical changes that have occurred in the Middle East, regarding the role of women in religion, particularly in view of the strongly patriarchal culture in that region. Furthermore, the region is the cradle of Christianity. It is particularly gratifying and heartening to note that there are now women deacons and priests in the Episcopal (Anglican) Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

There has occurred a similar, fundamental departure from tradition in the sister religion, Judaism, out of which Christianity grew. Among the Reformed and Conservative synagogues, women are being ordained as rabbis, just like men, although in the Orthodox Jewish society, the traditional status quo remains intact.

Evidently, the section of the Jewish community which has opened the rabbinate to women no longer shares this

opinion. As observed by Hein (n.d.) "most women rabbis today have been ordained from Conservative, Reformed and Reconstructionists. Nevertheless, a few Orthodox women have also become rabbis and an effort is underway to incorporate more women in the Orthodox rabbinate".⁹

CONCLUSION

The fact that many traditions are giving way for new and progressive innovations that we see in other facets of life, calls for an articulate rethinking of the position of women in the 21st century church in Africa. The dynamism of tradition has affected societal structures and resulted in some women from various societies emerging as President of nations, Vice Presidents, Directors of World organizations, Deputy Governors, Senate Presidents, Speakers of House of Assembly, Chairpersons of governmental establishments or institutions and of course Vice Chancellors of universities. Presidents Orroyo of the Philippines and Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia are typical examples of this claim.

It is high time, therefore, that Christian men (and of course some Christian women too) overcame their fear as observed by Russell, and allow women leadership of the church in Africa in order for them to contribute more to the religious sphere of the society. If consideration is given to this advocacy, then the church in Africa, most especially the Anglican churches would be pulling down the evil wall of apartheid against women. Besides, the evangelistic programmes would no longer be stifled. The doggedness, commitment and unflinching faith of women are essential ingredients to move the church forward.

In concluding this paper, I wish to state categorically and unequivocally that those factors always used in preventing women leadership in the church in Africa are no longer tenable. If other continents have outlived such prejudices, Africa should stop lagging behind in implementing divine mandate of giving the women the room to display their God given talents. In addition, the fact that such recognition of women leadership exists in some indigenous churches, the mainline churches should wake up and join the dynamic train of change.

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