

FEMINIST AGENDA: Paul's View of Women in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16

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Abstract

Apostle Paul's view of women in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 has generated strong debate among scholars and theologians over the years. Many have tried to do an exegesis of this passage along the theme of the 'Feminist Agenda'. Furthermore, there has been lot of 21st century cultural prejudices thereby side-lining the cultural milieu in which Paul wrote. This paper will examine 1 Cor. 11:12-16 in the light of the 'Feminist agenda' which has generated much heated debates even from both male and female sexes. Male chauvinists has always argued against inequality of both sexes with the female been subjugated. It becomes more worrisome if their argument is justified using the scriptures. The Church of ages has tried to solve the problems of men and women through a ministry composed exclusively of men. This is no more adequate to redeeming the world at present than an exclusively feminine ministry would be. Feminist's voices and other similar ones will set the tone of this presentation which, simply indicate that there is a cry for "women approach" to their own affairs which must be articulated, controlled and sustained by them. It is against such a mood that I make this contribution by looking deeply to the passage in order to make suggestions and recommendation for modern churches.

Keywords: feminist agenda; Paul; women; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

INTRODUCTION

Apostle Paul's view of women in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 has generated strong debate amongst scholars and theologians over the years. Many have tried to do an exegesis of this passage along the theme of the 'Feminist Agenda'. Furthermore, there has been lot of 21st century cultural prejudices thereby sidelining the cultural milieu in which Paul wrote. This paper examines 1 Corinthians 11:12-16 in the light of the 'Feminist agenda' which has generated much heated debates even from both male and female sexes.

Male chauvinists has always argued against inequality of both sexes with the female been subjugated. It becomes more worrisome if their argument is justified using the scriptures. However, according to Alma White:

Woman's place of co-equality with man in the rulership of the world has been unjustly denied her since the fall in the Garden of Eden, if the world is ever

redeemed from its barbarity and crime, according to the plan of redemption wrought out on Calvary, she will have to occupy a place intended for her by the Creator at the beginning.¹

Rosemary Redford Ruether et al, did argue along the same line she says:

The Church of ages has tried to solve the problems of men and women through a ministry composed exclusively of men. This is no more adequate to redeeming the world at present than an exclusively feminine ministry would be. The Church must quickly make room for trained women fitted to work on the problems of women on a Christian basis.²

Such representative voices and other similar ones set the tone of this presentation which, simply indicate that there is a cry for a “women approach” to their own affairs which must be articulated, controlled and sustained by them. This to me is the “Feminist Agenda” of this Century.

The expedience of this need is captured well by Patricia Crawford, when she notes that:

If historians (as well as theologians) continue to write texts which purport to be universal, but which lack any awareness of gender, they participate in the perpetuation and legitimization of certain kinds of gender hierarchies in their own society.³

According to Bob Deffinbaugh, ‘nothing can be deduced from verses 3-9 than that Paul wants the woman to wear a head covering because such adornment appropriately distinguishes women from men’. Indeed, the focus on male headship over women in verse three shows that Paul wants women to wear a head covering in order to show that they are submissive to male headship.⁴

Instead of looking at Apostle Paul as hater of women, others have perceived him to have been one attracted to women. Walker, in his paper on 1 Corinthians 11:2—16 argue:

This means, of course, that the passage (1 Cor. 11:2—16) cannot be used as a source for determining Paul’s attitude toward the proper status and role of women. If the originality of 1 Tim. 2:8—15; Tit. 2:3—5; Eph. 5:22—33; Col. 3:18—19; and 1 Cor. 14:33—36 (or 34—35 (1 Cor. 14)) is similarly rejected on critical grounds, as I am inclined to do, then the genuine Pauline corpus contains none of the passages which advocate male supremacy and female subordination in

¹ Chinedu A. A. Azuogu. “The place of women in the New Testament house codes”. *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 8, no. 1 (1996): 32.

² Rosemary Ruether & Rosemary Lellar, 1986, 59.

³ Patricia Crawford, 1993, 78.

⁴ Bob Deffinbaugh, *1 Corinthians 11:1 - 16 - Its Issues and Implications*, from http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=802,20/11/13.

any form. On the contrary, the only 'direct Pauline statement on the subject is Gal. 3:28, which insists on absolute equality in Christ.⁵

It is against such a mood that I make this contribution by looking deeply to the passage in order to make suggestions and recommendation for modern churches.

PAUL'S VIEW OF WOMEN

In this discussion, 1 Cor. 11:2-16 was taken to be one of the most problematic passages in the Bible. Interpretations were mostly centred on its content on the one hand and on its context on the other. The meaning of the arguments Paul used, evaluated in terms of their implications for women was the key point in the interpretation of its content. In summarising Paul's view in I Cor:1-16, He admonished women to cover their heads in order to prove to the angels and celestial powers their total submission to God's appointed authority. He does not present head coverings as a matter of his thought, but as an apostolic tradition. Paul does not describe this as a matter of Christian liberty, or as a personal conviction, but as a matter of obedience. Verse six of the passage states that "*she should cover her head*". This is an imperative, buttressed by the "*ought*" in verse 10. No other alternative symbol had been mentioned by Paul nor does he imply there may be some other way to symbolize submission to male headship. He also speaks of the head covering of women as the consistent practice of every Church and not just that of the Corinthian Church.

Matthew Henry noted that Paul lays the foundation for his reprehension by asserting the superiority of the man over the woman: *I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.* Christ, in his mediatorial character and glorified humanity, is at the head of mankind. It is indeed an 'Apostolical canon', that the women *should keep silence in the churches* (1Cor. 14:34; 1Tim. 2:12), which some understand without limitation, as if a woman under inspiration also must keep silence, which seems very well to agree with the connection of the apostle's discourse.⁶ What Apostle Paul is trying to argue out here

⁵ William O. Walker, 1975, "1 Corinthians 11:2—16 and Paul's Views regarding Women," Journal of Biblical Literature, p. 95

⁶ Matthew Henry, 1662 - 1714. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible.* We are exposed to this Bible commentary in my Seminary because it was a commentary of a practical and devotional rather than of a critical kind, covering the whole Bible. Not a work of textual criticism, its attempt at good sense, its high moral tone and simple piety with practical application, made it one of the most popular works of its type.

is the women praying or prophesying uncovered, or the men doing either with heads covered (cf: 1 Cor. 11:4, 1 Cor. 11:5). Paul empowers his point from the natural covering provided for the woman (1 Cor. 11:13-15), and sums up all by directing those who were contentious to abiding with the customs of the churches (1 Cor. 11:16).

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is not just about the rhetorical enforcement of a particular gender-distinctive form of public interaction, but it is also basically tied to Paul's own "understanding" of himself as it is projected outward in his argument. The fact remains that it is difficult to separate one element from the other: the goal to persuade the audience in a particular direction brings about a particular self presentation of Paul, and, vice-versa.⁷

Okland in her book noted that modernist historic-critical exegesis can be characterized by Irigaray's term 'indifference sexually,' indifference towards the fact that Paul is not constructing his anthropology from a symmetrical view of women and men. The indifference towards sexual difference lasts until women become an explicit problem in Paul's text. The strategy of the feminist exegetes protesting against this indifference has been to show that Paul indeed had a view of women – positive or negative liberating or misogynist.⁸

David Dickson's Commentaries on the Epistles presented three arguments that I want to point out here. These are:

Verse 6 - *For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.* It is dishonourable to the Female Sex to lay aside her veil, and against the dignity, as well of her natural head, as of her metaphorical head, *to wit*, the man to whom she owes subjection for the honour of the Masculine Sex; the reason whereof he gives, because it was not less unseemly for the woman to be without her veil, than to be shorn: Here therefore the woman is reprov'd for indecency, which she ought to amend.

Verse 7 - *For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the Image and Glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man.* The man (seeing he is the Glory of God and the representation of his glorious Excellency in respect of the woman over

⁷ Robert L. Deffinbaugh. "1 Corinthians 11:1-16 - Its Issues and Implications". In *True Spirituality: A Study 1 Corinthians*. February 6, 2022. <https://bible.org/seriespage/1-corinthians-111-16-8211-its-issues-and-implications>.

⁸ Jorunn Okland, 2004. *Women in their place: Paul and Corinthian discourse of gender and Sanctuary Space*. T & T Clark International. p.20-21

whom he is appointed head) ought to show forth the Glory of God in his manly deportment: therefore he must beware of this unseemliness in the use of a veil.

Verse 11 and 12 - The woman is the glory of the man, or the image of his dignity, in which (as in a Glass) the excellence of the man (for whose sake she was created) is seen, to whom she ought to profess subjection by the covering of herself. This does not any whits hinder but the woman is created, in respect of her Soul and spiritual state, to the glory and Image of God, as well as the man.⁹

I want to support the above view because they are relevant to our situation in Africa culturally. Let me again point out that Paul was addressing his audience directly with an appeal to their own sound judgement: “judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray for God uncovered?” This question reveals that the behaviour of women, already mentioned in v. 5, is Paul’s major concern. The question partially repeats elements already mentioned in v. 5 but there are some interesting differences as well. With this, Paul seems to refer to a general sense but also a consensus of what can be considered proper behaviour. The reference to what is shameful in vv. 4-6 had a similar function and already made the same point in a more negative way. What Paul considered proper in v. 13 is that which is not shameful. Verse 13b is formulated in the form of a rhetorical question, to which Paul clearly expects a negative answer. In emphasizing what is “suitable” for a particular group of people. He seems more specifically focused on establishing the boundaries of gender identity and activity within the Corinthian community. The final verses further support this particular focus. In vv. 14-15 Paul introduced a new argument, which to modern ears hardly sounds convincing in my own opinion.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Rom 1:26-27 also have one other fundamental concern in common: their respective contexts relate to the appropriate worship of God. There persists, throughout Paul’s rather slanderous assessment of Gentile behaviour, the thread of the rejection of the worship of the “Creator” (Rom 1:25). Masculine identity in the ancient world must be seen as the starting point for understanding Paul’s characterization of himself and the “ideal” Church that is his embodied *ethos*. While 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is often utilized for insight into Pauline theological ideas of creation, in fact

⁹ Extracted from David Dickson's Commentaries on the Epistles. 1659, on the website, <http://www.covenant.org/DDickson/dicksononheadcoverings.htm>, 19/11/13

what we see is “theology” here veiling the rhetorical combat for identity, which Paul is all too willing to win through his appeal to creation/nature.

Recently, David Horrell argued that Paul’s purpose seems clearly to be the establishment of ‘proper’ distinction between men and women and not superiority or authority.¹⁰ In light of the discussion here, however, the various rhetorical features of the argument and the establishment of the Pauline *ethos* would seem to challenge such sentiments rather strongly. Given the cultural ethos of antiquity, the very attempt to emphasize “distinction” brought with it a gendered vocabulary

Craig S. Keener remarked that this passage allows women to minister in the congregation and also calls them to cover their heads lest they detract from God’s glory by distracting men from the worship of God. The book addresses four basic arguments by Paul on why women should wear head covering in Church worship services. They are: the order of home, the order of creation, the order of nature itself and church custom.¹¹

Ben Witherington III in his book, *Women in the early Church* concluded that a creation order or family order problem was not at issue in this passage but rather a church order problem caused by some women in the congregation. He said further that Paul corrects the abuse not by banning women from ever speaking in worship, but by silencing their particular abuse of speech and redirecting their questions to another time and place.¹²

FEMINIST AGENDA IN THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Theological debate on women today has involved both theologians and lay people who have made their own interpretations of the scripture related to the theme. The two sides agree that “masculine pronouns litter the scriptures”, where God has been painted in masculine terms. Even the Holy Trinity, they observed, is never defined as a “Mother, Daughter and Holy Ghost”, but as “Father, Son and Holy Ghost”.

Grenz and Kjesbo correctly asserts that both men and women are made in the image of God, but he wrongly claims that complementariness as a whole teach that men

¹⁰ D. G. Horrell, 1996, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), p.173

¹¹ Craig Keener, 1992, p.17 - 22.

¹² Ben Witherington III, 1988. *Women in the early Church*. Cambridge University Press. p.90-104

are closer to God's image than women. We are also in agreement that the "Fatherhood" of God and his self revelation as "he" does not indicate that God is "male." The language is analogical, and Grenz and Kjesbo rightly remarks that feminine metaphors of God are found in the scriptures as well. In her paper "*Place to Call "Home": A feminist ethical inquiry into women's experience of Alienation*", delivered at the Coalition for Feminist agenda, Betty McLellan, argued that the extreme masculinist culture which constitutes today's world is a culture of violence in which conflict is never actually resolved. As such, a situation exists where most women do not and cannot feel at home". She noted that this resulted in prolonged "homelessness" or "alienation" which I quiet agreed with because of the evil done on women by men.¹³

The scripture have been used to prejudice women in not only secular affairs, but also in religious matters. Today, the most crucial question the biblical feminists (Letha Scanzoni, Hancy Hardesty, Virginia R. Mollenkott and Paul K. Jewett) have raised is how to interpret the Bible. They have therefore proposed "deculturization" as part of the biblical feminists hermeneutic. They think that since the Bible was written in a patriarchal culture, the Biblical writers are prejudiced by that culture against female terms. For them, Patriarchal ideas in the Bible are not to be considered authoritative for all times and places. The resultant effect of Feminism today is that they reject most of the Bible as hostile to women with possible exception of Jesus, whose attitude to women is summarized by Dorothy Sayers thus:

They (women) had never known a man like this man, there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized, who made arch jokes about them... who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to feminine or jeered at them for being unselfish conscious.

I want us to note that Jesus broke gender barriers by relating with women amidst Pharisaic condemnations. The ministry of Jesus, however, clarified decisively the value and essential equality of women. Jesus countered the culture of his day by treating women as equal to men. The radical agenda of Jesus, according to Grenz & Kjesbo, was

¹³ Betty Mclellan 2003. "*Place to Call "Home": A feminist ethical inquiry into women's experience of Alienation*" BIRLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY & SCIENCE, Pilani, Rajasthan, India. <http://www.feministagenda.org.au/CoFA/No%20Place3.htm>, 9/11/13; Coalition for a Feminist Agenda, *Feminist Action: Justice for All*, November 9, 2013. <http://www.feministagenda.org.au/CoFA/No%20Place3.htm>, 9/11/13.

implemented in the post Pentecost period. Women, like men, functioned as authoritative prophets in the community (cf. Acts 2:16-17; 21:8-19; 1 Cor. 11:5).¹⁴

This is relevant today particularly for those who profess faith and claim to live by teaching with conviction. On the other hand, “the man Paul has been accused as the one who, in his writing, planted a feminist ‘time bomb’ which has continued to explode”. Patricia Crawford notes that no teaching of the New Testament has ever been done cunningly perverted concerning the “headship” of the husband, and this is the heart of every message specifically addressed to married men in the New Testament.¹⁵ But an awareness of Paul’s setting makes it easy to understand him.

Brian J. Dodd has provided a clue to Paul’s time that women and children had a far lower status than they do today. He said according to Acts 16: 11 – 15, the social role of women remained largely that of homemaker and wife, though they could become successful in certain business. Women were largely uneducated and illiterate, as were the vast majority of women in Roman Empire. Men took positions of leadership within the community, whereas women generally stayed in the background.¹⁶ This could still be noted among Africans and his observation buttressed the fact that the Bible evolved from historic-cultural contexts of human cultures through which God has communicated and revealed himself to the world.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a renowned Feminist theologian, situates the situation in Africa thus:

Women constitute the majority in many Christian congregations in Africa. African women seem at home in most of the manifestations of the Church in Africa. Whether they contribute as much to its mission as they could is another matter. The Church’s deafening silence in the face of indescribable cruelty to the girl-child as she is prepared to please men, is for me, an indication that the whole Church, men and women, has yet to wake up to its calling. The global challenge of the church’s solidarity with women is particularly acute in Africa. It is up to women to demonstrate why the status quo is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*, 45-56; K. Wa Gatumu. “Ephesians 5: 21-33 and Gender Equity: Towards a Mutual, Egalitarian and Gender-Balanced Church Leadership.” *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research* 4, no. 2 (2022): 24-52. <https://doi.org/10.71064/spu.amjr.4.2.59>.

¹⁵ Patricia Crawford 1993. *Women and religion in England 1500 – 1720*. London, Routledge. 86-91

¹⁶ Marian Refat. “The Background of New Testament Household Codes: Towards a Historical Evaluation of the Roots Shaping Present-day African Families and Gender Roles.” *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research* 9, no. 1 (2024): 42-59. <https://doi.org/10.71064/spu.amjr.9.1.298>; Brian J. Dodd 1996. *The problem with Paul*. (IL: Inter-Versity Press), 98-101

The Feminist debate or agenda therefore seeks to “re-discover” women’s role in God’s blue print as one of the creatures made in the “image of God” (Gen. 1: 27).

THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE IN AFRICA

As a true African theologian, I will present my views from an African perspective. Men have dominated the theological discourse in Africa. From the Church Fathers till date, men dominated the scene of theological discussion. Some of these include Tertullian, credited as the creator of the Latin Christianity in its traditional form. Others are Origen, Cyprian, Athanasius and Augustine. 20th Century has produced theologians such as Byang H. Kato, Tite Tienou, Kwame Bediak, Kwesi Dickson, Charles Nyamiti, John Pobee, Bolaji Idowu, David M. Gitari, Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak, Osadolor Imasioge, Justin Ukong, Daniel N. Wambutda and Turaki Yusufu, among others. Some of these theologians have proposed African Theology, Black Theology, Savannah and Enculturation Theology. These emphasize various aspects of the Christian message in Africa with the view towards relating more meaningfully to the Africans in their own peculiar historical and cultural setting. Mercy Amba Oduyoye captures this scenario well when she notes:

Contemporary African Christian theology is investing a great deal of study and reflection in Christology, trying to answer the question, “who is Jesus to Africa?” The theme of salvation, liberation, transformation and reconstruction are all passed through the prism of Jesus story. A Christian theology relevant to Africa is one that enables African Christians to live in peace (total well being) in multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-racial contexts. Only then, will it be truly a theology that serves God’s mission in Africa.¹⁷

One can notice from Oduyoye’s observation that women are not a focus for theological discourse in Africa and I have not read anything related to this among the western world scholars. But we do know that within Christian circles in Africa, the status of women as to their roles in the Church, has assumed prominence as the churches battle to settle the dust raised by this “sensitive” and “controversial” question.

Rosemary Edet captures the burden of female theologians in Africa thus:

Writing an article on “Women and evangelization: a New Testament perspective” for an established theological conference is as dangerous as travelling on roads these days. You may reach your goal or you may not. Feminists may interpret your endeavour as co-operation with “old brigade” while professional theologians

¹⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye 1996. “The Church of the future, its mission and theology: a view from Africa” in *Theology Today*, Eds, Thomas G. Long & Patrick S. Miller, Vol. 54, No. 4, Princeton, January. p.34

might see your endeavour as an already beaten track and so either refuse to take it seriously or react emotionally against it. Because the “women issue” has made itself felt in the Nigerian scene, it is surrounded by confusion, derision, and outright refusal to listen to its theologians. I am vitally interested in mediation between Feminism and theology.

From Edet’s observation, it becomes quite clear that Feminist theologians in Africa are suspect and could hardly be heard by their counterparts, possibly for fear of excesses or simply due to sheer “emotion” on the part of men.

Prejudice and other negative reactions to Feminist quests in diverse fields are observed in most world cultures including popular religious traditions. From Jewish religious traditions to the Greco-Roman, to Islam and Africa traditions, women have been victims of alienation, exclusion, and subject to outright disregard in human societies. In biblical tradition, which is a mixed bag of diverse cultural matrices, women have been subjected to the caprices of men using religion to legitimize their actions.¹⁸ In my culture, lots of restrictions are placed on women especially when their husband dies. The husband’s family may even accuse the woman of killing her husband.

For example, Susan T. Foh had noted that such outlooks go to creation story of Genesis: Eve was created only as an afterthought; she was the first to sin and this makes her the “devil’s gateway” to human’s lives. Foh goes further to state that; “some state that man was created in God’s image and women in man’s image so that the image of God in women is a second hand reflection image.”¹⁹ I however strongly disagree with this school of thought since the bible states in Gen. 1: 27 that “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”. Base on this Biblical fact, I will rather say that we are all made in His image and God being sovereign is free to use anybody he chooses ‘male or female’ provided there is a divine conviction. Thomas Aquinas, in his famous *Summa theologiae* shares a similar view when he noted that women was made to be a help to man.²⁰ This is evidence in vs. 7 - 10. But she was not fitted to be a help to man in generation, because another man would

¹⁸ Karen Armstrong 1996. “Divinity and Gender – a God for both Sexes” in *The Economist*, 21st December. p.15

¹⁹ Susan T. Foh 1979. *Women and the Word of God: A response to Biblical Feminism*. Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company.

²⁰ Timothy Mcdermott (ed.), 1997, *Aquinas Thomas: Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, Ave Maria, p.348. Aquinas, While Studying At The University Of Naples, Joined The Dominican Monastic Order in 1244. Under St. Albert The Great he embarked on A Life Of Teaching, Preaching, and Writing. He was formally Canonized In 1323.

prove a more effective help in anything else. Sara Maitland, p.47 has observed that Thomas Aquinas built his theological position on gender on totally erroneous foundations.

Similar opinions about women are still prevalent within some theological circles involving both the male and female. For example, in 1959, the Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council. There were no women delegates except one US Nun, St. Luke Tobid. At the end of the Council, women did not attract any serious discussion in such an important World Christian Council which decisions have been influential to world Christianity in the 20th century. By January 1977, the Vatican released its declaration that the “question of the exclusion of women was founded on Christ’s conscious will and is basic to the Church’s understanding of priesthood and therefore cannot be altered”.²¹

The cultural aspect of my African heritage of male domination over female has been implanted in our Christian tradition. With a Jewish background, which was strictly patriarchal, it was easy for African Christians to find parallel, which they have exploited to further perpetuate and sustain the status quo. But no culture is sacrosanct or static. All cultures are human creations, which are subsumed within God’s universal plan for humanity. Along with the cultural heritage is the “male arrogance” arising from this heritage including some men in the Church circles who still oppose female’s place in the Church ministries at higher levels. In the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), which I belong to as an ordained priest, debate is still on whether to ordain women in the Church. The reality on ground does not favour women’s ordination because of our prevailing negative orientation on women’s equality. Not a few in Nigeria believe women do not have the maturity (as weaker vessels) to take such exalted ecclesiastical position.

This seems to be major challenge to Christianity in Africa today as “deculturizing” Christianity from its cultural trappings will yield great dividends for Feminist quest. It is to be stated also that female excesses in this ongoing debate has its evils in any meaningful theological discourse or debate. A situation where women have equated “submission to husbands” as “idolizing” their husbands, and outright disregard for

²¹ J. D. Gwamna, 2001, *Feminist/Masculine Agenda*, Seminar Paper delivered on the 4th Feb. 2001 at West Africa Theological Seminary, Lagos. p.21

husbands or women rights with license to remain single without necessary religious avowal, is to say the least, extreme.

Biblical feminism has opened a new dimension to current theological development in Africa. Despite the seemingly cold reception to this debate as we have seen, the scenario is not completely hopeless. This optimism is hanged on historical antecedents, which bear witness to female participation in “divine matters” even today.²² The Old Testament, though patriarchal, depicted female as sharing in the humanity creation by God (Gen. 1: 26 - 31). Susan T. Foh, p.43 has noted that, “the Hebrew wife usually occupied position of dignity and respect”. There was a group of female who ministered at the door of the tent of meeting (Ex. 38: 8; I Sam. 2: 22). Female could be prophetesses, as Deborah was (Jud. 4:4), Huldah (II Kings 22:14) and Miriam (Num. 12, Joel 2:28-29). Women were of good understanding, full of wisdom (ISam. 25:3, IISam. 14:2; 20:16-22). Foh says of them as women were not kept out of public, and they do appear to have been treated as individuals of worth. If they were not, we should never have heard of Ruth, Esther, the two Mary(s), Lois, and Marther.

New Testament is also saturated with the roles women played in the ministry of Jesus and early Christian history. Rosemary Edet has rightly noted that: Female were part of the assembly of the kingdom called by Jesus in which they were not simply accidental components, but active participants and even privilege beneficiaries of his love and works of his power (Lk. 8:2ff, 10:28-42, Mk. 1:29-31, 7:24-30). Jesus’ treatment of female was therefore a radical breakaway from the status quo. Where rabbis did not speak to women in public, Jesus interacted with them freely, healed them, talked to them and called them to witness to their faith in him (Matt. 15:21-28, John 7ff, Mk. 5:25-43). Kari Torjesen Malcolm has observed that; “Jesus saw women as children of God, not wives of husbands”. Some of these women became the first witnesses to the resurrection event, with Mary Magdalene as their indisputable light bearer.²³ Thus, Christian faith could be said to be based upon the witness and proclamation of these women.

²² Chinedu A. A. Azuogu 1996. “The place of women in the New Testament house codes” in The Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology, Vol. 8. 1

²³ Shi-Min Lu. "Woman's Role in New Testament Household Codes". *Priscilla Papers* 30, no. 1 (2006): 9-15. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/womans-role-new-testament-household-codes>.

One point to be made here according to Thiselton, is that among the Jewish traditions which is mostly similar to African traditions which find their way into New Testament, those in which angels are perceived as “guardians of order” as well as “participants in the church’s praise to God” provide the best clue to Paul’s meaning.²⁴

History has produced great women in the Church circles which include, Macrina of Cappadocia (4th Century), Marcella, Melania, and Ethelberga. Others include Hilda of Whitby (614 - 80 AD), Elizabeth of Hungary and Catherine of Siena (1347 – 80 AD). This Century has produced Mother Theresa of Calcutta who died in 1997 and she could best be described as the most outstanding woman of love and charity in the 20th Century.

The 20th Century has also witnessed some significant development towards women. In 1948, World Council of Churches established a Study Commission on the position of women within Christianity. By 1954, it had become department for the Co-operation of Men and Women in the Church. Aimee Semple McPherson is one of the best-known evangelists of the 20th Century and founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.²⁵

CONCLUSION.

It is pertinent to note that Paul was not necessarily biased against women. He wrote based on the position of women in 1st Century. Paul simply affirms the cultural mode of discourse which is not to say that it is a “patriarchal” or “male” framework or that egalitarian notions were in principle excluded. However, masculine identity in the ancient world must be seen as the genesis for understanding Paul’s characterization of himself and the ideal Church. It is a fact that, “at every point in history, the Church is and has been caught in the tension between Christianity and culture”. Craig S. Keener has caught this situation well when he noted that: one of the greatest tragedies of interpreting the Holy Scripture is addressing a particular situation out of context and then of course ignoring the larger context of scripture. Jewish Laws constantly guilty of unjust partiality in favour of the male sex, but we have to consider that most of these legal and religious disabilities of women can be explained from the social conditions

²⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, 2000, *1Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Peternoster Press, 838-844.

²⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, 2000, *1Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Peternoster Press, 838-844.

prevailing at the time of enactment.²⁶ Though the New Testament contain traces of this prejudice against the women, religious discrimination between the sexes has practically ceased, as is evident from Gal. 3:28 : “There can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus” (cf 1Pet. 3:7). Keener conclude with a word for “anti-Feminist activists” from diverse fields including theologians, that; “those who today will admit that slavery is wrong but still maintain that husbands must have authority over their wives are inconsistent”. This is the “tragedy” of theology in Africa where cultural garbs have beclouded true scriptural hermeneutics to the advantage of men.

In this work, we can notice some presentation of a Biblical view of male/female role relationships. That is, God has created men and women equal in their important dignity and human personhood, but different and complementary in their function with male headship being understood as a part of God's created design. Walker's interpolation idea is absolute equality in Christ and this is because he looked through Pauline corpus and concluded that there are none of the passages which advocate male supremacy and female subordination in any form. To me, men and women are equal in Christ but they are distinct and they have different functions in the home and in the Church. Generally speaking, the evangelical Churches today in Africa denied this school of thought. It easily manifest in Churches in Africa which promote women as officers and preachers in the Church and of course it also manifest in homes where the argument is that there should be no single person who is the head of a home except Christ and the human headship is something jointly exercised by both couple.

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²⁶ Bible.org, http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=802

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