

TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

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**A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE POSITION OF
WOMEN IN PAUL'S CHURCH, IN LIGHT OF 1 COR 11:2-16.**

Moderator

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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Student's Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay, is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: 

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Date: 16TH MARCH, 2005.

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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Date: 16TH MARCH, 2005.

Dedication

I want dedicate this work to womenfolk all over the world. I wish to exhort women from all walks of life and social status to walk proud and mighty and cherish their sense of womanhood without feeling any qualms. I wish to rally support for those undergoing oppressive situations and exhort them to hold on to their womanhood and not forsake their God-given responsibilities. I want to laud those that continue to lend moral and material support to the feminist cause. I would like to hail those who offer their ideas and opinions which uplift and sustain the feminist cause. I want to raise a hat to those who recognize the invaluable service women play in society often with little gratitude and appreciation being extended to them.

Acknowledgements

I want to register my heartfelt gratitude to Tangaza College in according me the opportunity of writing this essay and in highlighting these issues. I wish to extend a word of thanks and gratitude to the Camillian Order for their support that made the realization of this essay, once a pipe dream into a noble reality. I especially want to acknowledge the encouragement I received from Br. Luca Perletti. I want to laud my moderator, Fr. Christopher Owczarek for his meticulous guidance, tolerance and availability, for being there every inch of the way. I deeply indebted to Sister Janet Crane of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for undertaking the expeditious and painstaking task of proof reading the whole work. I want to hail Antony Muraya for lending me moral and material help. To all who egged me on and for your concern, I say, God bless.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. The Aim and Purpose of the Essay

I propose to dedicate this thesis as a monument to womenfolk in their struggle and aspiration for equality. I am stuck and moved by the plight of many women in the world together with the condition of young girls who face a bleak future on account of their sexual identity. I am prone to ask why they have to encounter mammoth impediments and undergo unparalleled suffering unlike their male counterparts. The women of this world need the atmosphere and opportunity to experience their humanity without undue discrimination and exploitation because of their gender. Thus this paper will aim at nurturing their efforts to uplift their status.

Paul has been vehemently vilified as a male chauvinist whose writings have helped to orchestrate and hold firmly in place the patriarchic interests. More so excerpts of his writings have been singled out as contributing to the undermining of the woman and her position in society. I will try to exonerate Paul of this condemnation by showing that he was a product of his times. What he projects was an accepted norm of the day. Feminist theologians hold that these writings are used against women to perpetuate female subordination in the church. Many hold him responsible for negating the freedom won for women by Christ and to relegating them to a subservient position.¹

I will aspire to undo the negative impact that the Bible has orchestrated in the marginalization and stigmatization of women in the church and society at large. I intend

¹ P. CHAKKALACAL., Paul: *A Challenge to Christians Today*, 128.

to neutralize elements and voices of chauvinism which are based on fear, aim at discrediting women in order to maintain the status quo.

It is my humble plea and prayer that women will hold fast and march on relentlessly till they are accorded their rightful place in society. Without this the human community will remain unaccomplished so long as the crucial women element is left out of its projects. So long as women are marginalized, so long as little girls are made to feel like second class citizens in comparison to their fellow boys, than society will be doing itself a major disservice. Though the strides made in political, social, medical, industrial spheres have been great and monumental. the inequality, the disparity between the gains and position of women and men is invariable, and hence need for amendment.

The endowments, the giftedness, the nature imbued in women are rare gems that the human society stands in need of. The society will not fully benefit from the richness that womanhood is enshrined with if women continue to be kept at the fringe of society and as second-class citizens playing second fiddle to man. Their God given right and sense of full personhood God gave to them should be allowed to flourish without being encumbered by man-made obstacles, such as man-made fears and projections. Here in the Third Millennium, it is high time that women took and assumed their rightful place in society without feeling as if they were trespassing. They need not apologize for the fact of being created distinct yet equal and mutually co-dependent with men.

2. Method

Simple and clear, I am going to make reference to books and quote extensively from them. I will move towards bringing in and incorporating the voice and contribution of feminist theologians. From the vast array of women theologians I will pick a few

voices and present their comments and position on the said biblical passage. By employing the historico-critical method to the text, I expect to reconstruct the situation that prevailed in Corinth at the time of Paul's sojourn there. By the same method. I expect to unearth the factors that prevailed to influence Paul's writing of the text. I will simultaneously seek to uncover factors that influenced the manner in which he wrote.

3. The Structure and Content of the Essay

In this three-chapter format essay, I propose to introduce the notion of gender inequality as it impinges on women. Women have been victims of patriarchal attitudes and have endured long suffering at the hands of men. However, they are these days promoting what they deem to be God given rights of being human and equal in the eyes of God. They have been denied this recognition and they are made to feel as if they were second-class beings and mere vassals.

I hope to bring to light in the first chapter, the position accorded to women in the Corinth society of Paul's time. Through the avenue of feminist theology, women are denouncing all forms of discrimination that deny them full expression of their humanity. In the second chapter, I will delve into the feminist interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16. I will point out how women perceive this text to be androgynous and chauvinistic in its outlook. The third chapter will be dedicated to the African enclave and how traditions and the church can be turned into upholding and safeguarding women's standards in society and in the church.

Chapter 1

Position of Women in Corinth Society and Corinth Church

1. Introduction

In this chapter I am going to delve into the circumstances that prevailed in the Corinth of Paul's time. I intend to give a general background and appraisal of the status accorded to women in Corinthian society. I will pursue and examine the role that Corinthian women played in their Church. I will proceed on by providing a profile of the life and times of St. Paul. Then I will carry out an exegesis of the text. This background will furnish the reader with a grasp of the situation that a woman in Corinth had to face.

2. Historical Background and Demographic Composition of Corinth

Corinth had a long streak of history stretching to its reconstruction by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.² Corinth as the capital of Achaia had a cosmopolitan character due to its central location on the East-West maritime trade route. The call to Christianity was severely put to the test amid the syncretistic and polytheistic nature of religion flourishing in Corinth. Corinth's populace comprised of freed persons, slaves and citizens. Jews in Corinth formed a self-governing entity known as a *politeuma*.³

² C. J. PFEIFER, *First Corinthians Second Corinthians*, 3.

³ J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 82.

3. Position of Women in Greek Society and in Mystery Cult Worship

As regards the status of women in Greece it can be acknowledged that the status of women was abject. They were in essence non-entities with neither civil nor legal claims. They spent much of their life indoors.⁴ They were the exclusive property of their husbands; they neither possessed nor inherited property.⁵ Women were considered important only for the purpose of maternity.

To release their emotions and to experience a sense of freedom from the yoke of male domination, the women took solace in the worship of mystery cults. In the ecstatic worship of Dionysos, women expressed their sense of femininity and overcame inhibitions imposed by the male fraternity.⁶ In the cult of Isis women were prophetesses. It is this background that afforded women justification to claim prophetic and preaching duties in the Corinthian church.

4. St. Paul and Founding of the Corinth Church

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, joined the Christian fraternity and disseminated the Christian faith with an equivalent zeal with which he had once set out to exterminate. Born in Tarsus, shortly before 10A.D.⁷, Paul received ardent Pharisaical learning at the feet of Gamaliel.⁸ Though a highly visible and towering paragon in the propagation of the gospel Paul remains to many, a figure encapsulated in enigma. Victor P. Furnish paints two portraits of Paul. In the first, he portrays Paul as an icon of the church, a Christian par excellence. In the second portrait Furnish depicts Paul as a product of history.⁹

⁴ E. S. FIORENZA, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 1. *A Feminist Introduction*, 304.

⁵ A. EVANS, *The God of Ecstasy*, 16.

⁶ A. EVANS, *The God of Ecstasy*, 18.

⁷ K. QUAST, *Reading the Corinthian Correspondence. An Introduction*, 4.

⁸ H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence: Ministering in the Best and Worst of Times*, 3.

⁹ V. P. FURNISH, "On Putting Paul in his Place", 7.

Paul was an itinerant apostle who made vast inroads into Asia Minor. This gave him a first hand experience and appreciation of Hellenism. A living testament of his life is enshrined in the many letters and epistles he wrote. 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Philemon.¹⁰ He died as a martyr in Rome having surrendered the better albeit latter part of his life to the Christian life and ministry.

Paul came to Corinth in 50 A.D. and the city's strategic location served Paul's evangelical mission because from it the seed of the gospel could be disseminated to the Mediterranean world.¹¹ The majority of converts were pagans and slaves. They also included members of nobility. Paganism continued to flourish because the Greeks were unwilling to give up their independent thinking in favour of Christian principles as preached by Paul.¹²

In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul presents an unbiased portrayal of the early church and his personal and pastoral struggle in its budding. However, in spite of his being the founder of Christian faith in Corinth, Paul had a terse relationship with his church. Paul exercised great patience and used the art of diplomacy in dealing with the Corinthians who according to Murphy-O'Connor were "conceited, stubborn, oversensitive, argumentative, infantile, pushy..."¹³

5. Position of Women in the Corinth Church

Women were full-fledged members of the church and played a similar role as the men, their femininity notwithstanding. This in view of the fact that at the Christian

¹⁰ H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence: Ministering in the Best and Worst of Times*, 6.

¹¹ C. J. PFEIFER, *First Corinthians Second Corinthians*, 5.

¹² C.J. PEIFER, *First Corinthians Second Corinthians*, 5- 6.

¹³ H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence: Ministering in the Best and Worst of Times*, 19.

assemblies men and women were at par¹⁴ contrary to the prevalent custom where domestic household units men reigned supreme, claiming all prestige and power.¹⁵ It can be observed that in the *ekklesia*, roles were assigned to persons according to their charismatic gifts. Natural and social factors did not come into play.¹⁶

In household communities, many women proved themselves worthy of the task and were assigned leadership mantle. S.L. Love contests this and states that women in leadership was an exception rather than the rule. He infers that only a few wealthy, widowed women were leaders of house communities. He states that this state of affairs arose out of the fact that “equality and freedom are social anachronisms. The subordinate status of women was accepted without question in Jewish, Greek, and Roman society....”¹⁷

Contrary to the “Lukan silence”¹⁸ that Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza observed in the early church about women presence and activity, the Pauline church accorded women roles and active participation in the church. Jesus embraced women fully during his ministry and never ostracized them.¹⁹ Paul sets a precedent by which he acknowledged women ministers to have an equal stature to himself (Paul). Women carved a niche for themselves as missionaries in the propagation of the early church; they founded house churches and the ministry they exercised was not gender specific.²⁰

¹⁴ H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence: Ministering in the Best and Worst of Times*, 91.

¹⁵ E. S. FIORENZA, ed., *Searching the Scriptures, Vol 1 A Feminist Introduction*, 304.

¹⁶ H. DOOHAN, *The Corinthian Correspondence: Ministering in the Best and Worst of Times*, 92.

¹⁷ N. BAUMERT, *Woman and Man in Paul*, 179.

¹⁸ N. BAUMERT, *Woman and Man in Paul*, 177.

¹⁹ A. J. SCHMIDT, *Veiled and Silenced: How Culture Shaped Sexist Theology*, 165.

²⁰ N. BAUMERT, *Woman and Man in Paul*, 178.

6. What was the Significance of Head Cover in Corinth?

It is not clear what circumstances prevailed in Corinth which necessitated Paul's prescription and directive for the veiling of women's heads. Further, it can be noted that the Corinthians did not in their correspondence with Paul ask his directions about the proper attire for women.²¹

Paul himself seems to have conceived the notion and hence tried to implement it. The import of insistence on head cover for the women probably arose out of fear that the women were being insubordinate to their husbands because of their newfound freedom in Christ.²² The rite of baptism had obliterated all differences that existed between the sexes. To rein in their rebellion they were obliged to wear the veil as a mark of their subordinate state. What is of greater significance and which contributed to the women discarding their veils in worship is the fact that they had become pneumatological and were no longer bound by corporeal interests and matters.²³ Their eschatological outlook and hopes looked forward to an immediate reunion in Christ.

The Roman factor has also been identified as a contributing force that led to the emergence of head cover in Corinth. Being a Roman colony, Roman mannerisms and cultural traits left their mark on the city. Ostensibly in the Roman society distinction and clear demarcation of clothing was emphasized. Thus historical studies reveal that men were expected to refrain from wearing any clothing that would disguise their gender or which could send implicit or explicit sexual innuendos. Women too were expected to maintain their dignity by putting on the veil as a mark of respectability.²⁴

²¹ R. S. SUGIRTHATRAJAH, *Voices from the Margin*, 207.

²² G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 497.

²³ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 186-187.

²⁴ A. C. THISELTON, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 801.

What does the term “uncover” or to be “covered” entail in regard to the wearing of the headdress? Three interpretations have been postulated. First and foremost, it has been argued it refers to the discarding of some external covering.²⁵ The women were being castigated for breaking the rules and entering worship without an essential piece of clothing that kept their heads covered.

The second line of interpretation suggests that the cover in reference was the long hair.²⁶ Women wore long hair as protection as they participated in public worship. By cutting their long hair short or by being bald was disgraceful for women. It gave connotations of a life of prostitution, a state of divorce or adulterous behaviour on the part of the woman. So they were exhorted to keep it long. A third argument proposed that the term “covered” was used in reference to loosening of hair. The woman’s act of letting her hair dangle freely from her head (when in ecstasy) was provocative and evoked shame and embarrassment to the worshippers.²⁷ I hold that the term “uncovered” referred to the external form of clothing that they wore. I infer this because I believe that Paul wanted an orderly worship in which men and women participated as equals. Therefore each gender had to be present in worship in the right attire as customs dictated.

The women led worship with uncovered heads as an assertion of their equality to men. Paul does not condone this practice, not because it accords women equal status to men, but because it obscured the sexual distinctions between men and women.²⁸ While

²⁵ G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 496.

²⁶ G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 496.

²⁷ G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 496.

²⁸ R. S. SUGIRTHARAJAH, *Voices from the Margins*, 208.

Paul recognized men and women to be equal. he aspired that they maintained the cultural symbols of deference and subordination.²⁹

Paul launched a three-pronged assail and disclaimer against women prophesying without their veils. He stated this conduct went against nature, violated taboos that designated gender codes to be adhered to. It was anti-juridical. The act of worship without veils by women broke ranks and violated the tradition which was practiced by the other churches.³⁰ Paul was against any act or exhibition of practices that could scandalize non-Christians. He wanted Christianity to be a role model religion abounding in high moral standards, exemplary behaviour and exercise of propriety. For a Christian to be a source of scandal was a misdemeanour of the highest order to Paul.

7. Source Criticism

1 Cor 11:2-16 is a self-contained unit in terms of language, context and purpose. According to some scholars like Walker Junior this text is a later insertion to the letter. They infer that Paul never addressed the issue of women's veils.³¹ A common ploy employed to circumvent around the difficulty of reconciling the authorship of the text to Paul is to argue that it is non-Pauline and to attribute its addition to the text of 1 Corinthians by a later redactor.³² 1 Cor 11:2-16 is a prescriptive text³³ in the sense that it offers guidelines and directions from a masculine viewpoint outlining the normative activities their female counterparts should perform within the church precincts.³⁴

²⁹ R. S. SUGIRTHARAJAH, *Voices from the Margins*, 212.

³⁰ D. E. SMITH · M. E. WILLIAMS, ed., *New Testament Women: The Storytellers Companion*, Vol 13, 185.

³¹ K. QUAST, *Reading the Corinthian Correspondence*, 68.

³² D. G. HORRELL, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement*, 168.

³³ D. E. SMITH · M. E. WILLIAMS ed., *New Testament Women: The Storytellers Companion to the Bible Vol 13*, 183.

³⁴ D. E. SMITH · M. E. WILLIAMS ed., *New Testament Women, The Storytellers Companion to*

8. Analysis of the Text

A careful analysis of our text is very important for it will help unravel and enlighten the intention, purpose and message of the author.³⁵ Every author and text is a product of the environment and prevailing circumstances. These factors need to be put under the microscope and be investigated to see what role they played in the evolution of a text. This text presents numerous exegetical difficulties. First, the logic of its argument is found wanting because of several contradictions that it contains. Secondly, some key terms have a plethora of meanings. Lastly, it is the inadequacy or dearth of information concerning the Corinth of Paul' time and data concerning practices of existing churches.³⁶

Paul resolves the issues at stake in the Church of Corinth by tenets that are eternal.³⁷ In this text, St. Paul addresses a norm applicable to the whole Christian church in general and a particular culture, namely that of the Corinthians. The fundamental principle that he discerns is an equality of status before Christ; but he sees that there is a difference of function.³⁸

The verses and their translation are from NRSV³⁹ and BNT⁴⁰.

Verse 2: παινώ δὲ ὑμᾶς ὅτι πάντα μου μέμνησθε καί, καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε.⁴¹ Verse 3: Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.⁴²

the Bible Vol 13, 183.

³⁵ P. CHAKKALACAL, *Paul, A Challenge to Christians Today*, 132.

³⁶ G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 492.

³⁷ W. BARCLAY, *The Letter to the Corinthians*, 99.

³⁸ S. GLYN, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Creed*, 112.

³⁹ New Revised Standard Version, 1989.

⁴⁰ Bible Works NT (NA 27)

⁴¹ I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you.

The importance of accepting well-established doctrines and principles of culture cannot be gainsaid. Tradition should safeguard human welfare, without edging towards one party to the disadvantage of the other party. Paul is therefore advocating and justifying the women's right to participate actively in worship alongside men⁴³ Christ is the head of the Church and deserving of homage and worship. It is Paul's ardent desire that order prevails in society. Promotion of common good overrides all other considerations. The exercise of complementarity between the sexes is not to be achieved at the expense of either sex.⁴⁴

Verse 4. πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ.⁴⁵ The exercise of authority and duties should be by proper persons and should be directed in the right channels. An office bearer renders service to a community.⁴⁶ To be God's messenger in the assembly requires humility since all we are and all we have is the gift of God. To act to the contrary is to make us makers and custodians of our lives.

Verse 5: ἄσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα ἀκατακαλύπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς· ἔν γάρ ἐστιν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρημένῃ.⁴⁷ Verse 6: εἰ γὰρ οὐ κατακαλύπτεται γυνή, καὶ κειράσθω· εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι, κατακαλυπτέσθω.⁴⁸ The veil is an integral and distinguishing mark of

⁴² But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.

⁴³ K. QUAST, *Reading the Corinthian Correspondence*, 68.

⁴⁴ L. SCHÖTTROFF, *Let the Oppressed Go Free*, 41.

⁴⁵ Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head,

⁴⁶ E. S. FIORENZA, *The Power of Naming*, 208-209.

⁴⁷ but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head, it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved.

⁴⁸ For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil.

womanhood. It plays a dual role: (a) it was a sign of inferiority. (b) but it was also a great protection.⁴⁹ A woman will always remain a woman and similarly for a man in spite of all cosmetic changes and radical surgery that they may undergo to disguise or transform their personality.⁵⁰

Verse 7: Ἄνθρωπος μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός ἐστίν.⁵¹ The phrase εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ comprises of anathrous substantives which are definite. The glory of God needs to be solely accorded to him. To deny God his due magnificence and try to usurp his role and glory is to court anarchy.⁵² Similarly a household wherein scuffle persists due to lack of lack of failure to define roles is a sure recipe to domestic chaos.⁵³

Verse 8: οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γυναικὸς ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρός.⁵⁴ Verse 9: καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἄνθρωπος διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα.⁵⁵ Mutuality and co-dependence between the two sexes is the key to social harmony. Seeking one-sided living independent of the other is lop-sided.⁵⁶ Man and woman as created by God are meant to live together not only to supplement but complement one another. Neither is complete without the other. Each was created to fill the void that exists in the other.

⁴⁹ W. BARCLAY, (*The Letter to the Corinthians*). 97.

⁵⁰ E. S. FIORENZA, *The Power of Naming*, 204.

⁵¹ For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man.

⁵² A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*. 120-121.

⁵³ N. BAUMERT, *Woman and Man in Paul*, 178

⁵⁴ Indeed, man was not made from woman. but woman from man.

⁵⁵ Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man.

⁵⁶ R. R. RUETHER, *Women and Redemption*. 9.

Verse 10: διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους.⁵⁷ The veil is a sign of a woman exercising her own authority. It is a symbol of her honour and modesty.⁵⁸ Without the veil, a woman is vulnerable to hostile forces that will attack her personality. With the veil she is hidden from prying eyes and from ogling minds that can assail her womanhood.

Verse 11: λήν οὔτε γυνὴ χωρὶς ἀνδρὸς οὔτε ἀνὴρ χωρὶς γυναικὸς ἐν κυρίῳ.⁵⁹

Verse 12: ὡςπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικός· τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ.⁶⁰ All differences that exist and distinguish man and woman dissolve in the Lord. In God does equality between the sexes emanate and subsist.⁶¹ Both woman and man are important and indispensable players in nurturing life, the gift of God.

Verse 13: Ἐν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς κρίνατε· πρέπον ἐστὶν γυναῖκα ἀκατακάλυπτον τῷ θεῷ προσεύχεσθαι,⁶² Is it justified for us to forsake tradition in order to fulfill and achieve egoistic longings? To be vogue and in tune with fads of the day does not necessitate we part with customs that instill order in the cycle of life.

Verse 14: οὐδὲ ἡ φύσις αὐτὴ διδάσκει ὑμᾶς ὅτι ἀνὴρ μὲν ἐὰν κομᾶ ἀτιμία αὐτῷ ἐστίν,⁶³ Verse 15: γυνὴ δὲ ἐὰν κομᾶ δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστίν; ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται [αὐτῇ].⁶⁴ What does it profit one to go against the precepts of nature? Will harmony and order prevail in such circumstances? To be in accord with the customary

⁵⁷ For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

⁵⁸ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 118.

⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman.

⁶⁰ For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.

⁶¹ R. A. WINGARD, *Paul and the Corinthians*, 72.

⁶² Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled?

⁶³ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him,

⁶⁴ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

conventions promotes self-esteem. The natural endowments given to a woman are for enhancing her personhood, her sense of decency and honour. To spurn long held customs without proper cause and deviate into dissonant acts is to rupture peaceful co-existence and to spark off aggression from aggrieved parties.⁶⁵

Verse 16: Εἰ δέ τις δοκεῖ φιλόνηκος εἶναι, ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν οὐκ ἔχομεν οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ.⁶⁶ Traditions passed on in institutions over the ages need not be changed overnight to suit a few people's whims and satisfy their narrow egoistic ambitions. Where these traditions are by consensus of the community found to have outlived their usefulness and where they are seen to be in need of review, then the necessary channel by way of dialogue, compromise and consensus can be used to resolve the problem amicably.⁶⁷

9. Interpretation of 1Cor 11:2-16 Over Time

There has never been unanimous agreement for the meaning(s) to be gleaned from this text. The reaction has oscillated from one extreme to an opposite pole of opinion. This complex situation may arise out of the fact that the text is awash with difficulties in the interpretation of some of its key terms.⁶⁸ This lack of certainty and obscurity in the meaning Paul assigns to the terms has paved room for exegetes to maneuver around terms and has given rise to all manner of innuendo.

Among the terms that pose and are fraught with difficulty in interpretation include *kephale* (vv3-10), *because of the angels* v 10, *have authority over her head* v 10,

⁶⁵ A. J. SMITH, *Veiled and Silenced*, 6.

⁶⁶ But if anyone is disposed to be contentious-- we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

⁵⁹ D. G. HORRELL, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 168.

⁶⁷ N. BAUMERT, *Woman and Man in Paul*, 181.

glory v7. The usage and the meaning of these terms is obscure. There has ranged debate as to what Paul intended to achieve by writing down this text.

There are those protagonists like William Barclay, Walker Junior and Josef Kurzinger who hold it that he was vouching for male superiority and advancing for women subordination. Such scholars hold that the quotation of the creation account of woman having her source in man clearly denotes such a purpose in Paul. They also cite Paul's rabbinical background⁶⁹ to support their case in that in the Jewish panorama, women were vassals of men. I don't agree with this argument that this text is a manifestation of male chauvinism and downgrading of women.

Another school of thought that N. Baumert and D.G. Horrell advances the view that Paul's express preoccupation in the text is with decent appearance and mode of dress in worship. It is their avowed contention that Paul's primary concern is not asserting male authority and female subordination.⁷⁰

Robertson and Plummer interpret verse 9: (καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἀνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναικα ἀλλὰ γυνή διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα) as denoting woman's possession of her own authority.⁷¹ They deduce that rather than project a woman's inferior status and hence her subjection, a woman's head covering is a symbol of her authority to pray or prophesy, or that a woman should exercise control, power, or freedom over her head.⁷² This verse they surmise, asserts a woman's right to independence, exercise of power and being in control irrespective of social fetters. There is no allusion to any form of subjection or to her playing secondary being to man. This is an extremely radical stance. It is revolutionary in

⁶⁹ S. FLYN, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Creed*, 111.

⁷⁰ D. G. HORRELL., *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 175.

⁷¹ D. G. HORRELL, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 172.

⁷² D. G. HORRELL, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 172-173.

that accords a sense of humanity and recognition that women were here before denied. I concur with this interpretation, which states that the veil confers authority on women.

10. Conclusion

Paul's intention in 1 Cor 11:2-16 was to draw prescriptions and directions regarding appropriate attire in worship. These directives were primarily directed at women. Principally, Paul allowed women to preach and prophesy in the church. There were no constraints laid upon them except being modest in attire. The aim of Paul was to guard against Christianity becoming a mockery circus and hence a source of scandal to non-Christians through indecent appearance. Paul used theological arguments derived from the Book of Genesis, arguments from nature and from the customs as practiced by other churches in order to drive home his point. He had no aim of making women to be subordinate. He extended equal treatment to men and women.

Paul intended to elevate the status of women by giving them the privilege and prerogative of praying and preaching in the church. This was a faculty that hitherto they had been denied. Prophecy had been a male dominated sphere. Paul by breaking down the wall of sexual discrimination in the realm of worship opens up doors that had been closed indefinitely to women. Women too claim a right to prophetic role by virtue of their baptism. They have become spiritual beings for whom sexual differences no longer exist. They feel justified in praying and prophesying with unveiled heads. The women do not feel that they have contravened social norms by going into worship with uncovered heads.

Chapter II

Feminist Interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will dwell on the feminist interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16. This text has been used and quoted by women theologians to put across the fact that the exercise of prophetic office by women gave them a sense of surety to make theological statement of their experiences. They relate their experiences with those of other women outlined in the scripture.⁷³ 1 Cor 11:2-16 is a source of inspiration and encouragement to women and persons undergoing oppression and discrimination. This text can be employed to oppose to any theological presuppositions that deny that both men and women bear the fullness of the image and glory of God.⁷⁴

2. History of Feminism

The feminist movement traces its seminal origins to the 19th century. This comprises the first wave or outbreak of feminist expression against sexism and repression

⁷³ D. E. SMITH – M. E. WILLIAMS, ed., *New Testament Women: The Storytellers Companion*. Vol 13, 184.

⁷⁴ D. E. SMITH – M. E. WILLIAMS, ed., *New Testament Women*. Vol 13, 185.

of women by men.⁷⁵ Feminist theology as the second phase of feminism traces its roots to North America and Europe since the late 1960's.⁷⁶

The third stage of feminism geared at achieving justice for women around the universe took centre-stage since the 1980's.⁷⁷ In the dawn and aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789 and the period of the Enlightenment, the status quo that favoured male domination of society was upset and a revolution in political, social and economic spheres inaugurated. In the epochs cited previously, protagonist women denounced forms of discrimination and alienation directed against womenfolk. Their purpose was geared towards giving women their rightful place in human society and the accompanying recognition of the fullness of humanity present in them.

In identifying with this goal, Elizabeth S. Schussler asserts "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people."⁷⁸ It was a clarion call for women to be viewed as first class human beings on par with men. They did not countenance women being viewed as playing second fiddle to men. Stemming from this concern with women related issues, feminist theology has been called an advocacy theology with its agenda being the liberation of women from oppressive structures. It seeks to obtain the dignity and worthiness of women as human beings.⁷⁹

One of the pioneers of the feminist movement was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She was credited with fronting for women's enfranchisement, right to education and property ownership. She wrote the book, *The Woman's Bible*⁸⁰ as a way of vindicating the harm

⁷⁵ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 4.

⁷⁶ U. KING, ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World. A Reader*, 1.

⁷⁷ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 5.

⁷⁸ E. S. FIORENZA, *But She Said*, 27.

⁷⁹ U. KING, ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, 4.

⁸⁰ E. S. FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures Vol 2. Feminist Commentary*, 1.

done to womenfolk by a Bible written from a male point of view and which advanced men's position whilst denigrating the woman's. E. C. Stanton and fellow protagonists advocating for women's rights released a Declaration of Sentiments as a mouthpiece that denounced the oppression of woman over the ages.

Their quest was geared towards disengaging the continued suppression of the female person. They set out to assert her humanness and denounce her wanton exploitation and degradation at the hands of her male counterpart. They believed and asserted that women and men were created equal. Over time woman has been the victim of male domination and history can bear this out. Man has established a reign of lordship over the woman.⁸¹

3. What Are the Goals of Feminism?

Feminist theology is liberating in approach. It is rooted in the experience of women. It seeks to rouse consciousness of the historical construction of women's place and their roles as determined by culture and religion. It is charged with the negative task of undertaking a critique of and struggle against patriarchy, sexism, and androcentricism. Its positive task is one of reform and reconstruction.⁸² This remedial reconstruction entails according the woman her long denied place in society. It employs extracanonical and cross-cultural research of women in antiquity.⁸³ This is done in order to find evidence that the women have made significant contributions in the past. These inputs were minimized or expunged in history as written by men. By sifting through history and finding evidence in Apocryphal Acts, Gnostic Literature, cf. Montanism, women are

⁸¹ R. R. RUETHER, *Women and Redemption*, 168.

⁸² U. KING, ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, 4.

⁸³ E. S. SCHUSSLER, *But she Said*, 22.

constructing a positive image of themselves and appreciating their gender without having to seek approval or recognition from men.

The onus and challenge that faces feminist theology is manifold. It involves breaking down barriers that have been built and reinforced by time and space. The backlash of feelings of anger and hostility erupt at attempts to transform conservative beliefs and put up new structures. The challenges that beset feminist theology, I submit, pertain to the image of God and Jesus that has been presented. God is viewed as wholly masculine and Jesus as his son. In this state of affairs where can women perceive themselves as daughters of God and sisters of Jesus?⁸⁴ In this scenario, women find themselves disengaged from God. They experience a limited familial love towards God the father. It is known that God is genderless. How can we make gender inclusive reference to God?⁸⁵

This male dominated symbolism accorded to God and his son Jesus is chief among the fundamental issues that feminist theology has to contend. Women are coming up with images of God that they can relate to and identify with. The imaging of God as Goddess known as thealogy⁸⁶ is gaining prominence. It is a celebration and appreciation of femininity per se. Other issues pertain to the clerical institutions which are built with patriarchal roots. The entry of women is seen as a threat to the male preserve of the clerical office.⁸⁷

At the heart of feminist theology is the use of inclusive language in liturgy. The use of gender-exclusive language focused on the male gender has made women feel

⁸⁴ L. JAPINGA, *Feminism and Christianity*, 58-60.

⁸⁵ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 93.

⁸⁶ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 93.

⁸⁷ A. M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 139-140.

excluded as persons who have no important role to play in the church and in society. This inferior image has been in female minds for a long time and perpetuates male domination of all spheres of society. Some high profile roles have been designated as male preserves whilst menial ones have been consigned to the women.⁸⁸

The task of deconstructing traditional positions and roles accorded to women by the society was facilitated by the access of women to theology.⁸⁹ Feminist theology is pluralistic and dynamic in approach by appealing to experiences of women that transcend race, tribe or religion. Feminist theology is not a systematically developed body of knowledge handed down in traditional institutions of learning.⁹⁰

Using the Bible as their major tool, together with theological knowledge and background, feminist theologians have pointed and pinpointed the way that Scripture has been used to portray women negatively. They read the Bible from the experience and perspective of being women and as persons isolated on the ground of their sex. In the liberating message espoused by Jesus Christ, who broke social taboos to embrace women, they find strength and impetus to chart the feminist cause. They pick texts that identify with their lives and apply them to their situations in order to experience the liberation that the Bible engenders. This process is referred to as conscientization.⁹¹

Within the realm of feminist-historical research endeavours they incorporate the historical critical and socio-historical methods. The feminists have tried to reconstruct the historical and social contexts as they were. They seek to discover and to filter out

⁸⁸ P. CHAKKALACAL, *Paul, A Challenge to Christians Today*, 132.

⁸⁹ U. KING ed., *Religion and Gender*, 121.

⁹⁰ U. KING, ed, *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, 4.

⁹¹ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 36.

male influences that might have tainted the writings of the bible and other works.⁹² The challenge is for feminist theology to steer clear of fundamentalism. This is a key weakness plaguing feminist theology. If feminist theologians insist on taking one-sided positions and shun dialogue with their detractors, they are bound to lose the goodwill of people who are in support of social change, particularly in uplifting women's status.

Among the key achievements of feminism is that women related issues have given expression and are receiving the due attention on a global scale. That March 8th is designated as International Day of Women is no less an achievement wherein women can celebrate their femininity. That 1975 was named as the International Year of Women is a landmark occasion in the annals of history. That a decade long, 1975-1985 UN Plan for Women, was inaugurated, that a further-up 1989 Beijing Platform for Action was held, are milestone events that women need be proud of.⁹³

Increased enrolment of girls in primary and secondary and women in tertiary colleges are laud worthy. Universal woman suffrage enabling women to participate in the electoral process and determination of governance is a major feat. Greater attention is paid to women's health and provision of basic health and water facilities need to be acknowledged. Nonetheless, a phenomenon described as the feminization of poverty and the fact that women suffer from an endemic state of insecurity in their homes and in public are eyesore issues that require urgent redress.⁹⁴

The status of single women is a critical issue particularly in African circles. Unmarried single women seem to be sidelined because of not being under a man's roof as

⁹² R. S. KRAEMER, *Her Share of Blessings*, 5.

⁹³ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 14.

⁹⁴ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 14-15.

is taken to be the norm. Single unmarried women are viewed as an anathema because of leading autonomous life and shunning marriage.⁹⁵ Being an aberration, they are marginalized and are made to feel as being an oddity. They are classified as being of loose morals and are even sidelined by the church.⁹⁶ Those without economic empowerment feel the economic crunch and may end up in prostitution and brewing of illicit brews.

It is noteworthy to allude to cracks and divisions within feminism. These mostly centre on racial and social backgrounds. The White versus Black paradigm together with the First and Third World dichotomies tends to tear women interests and issues apart.⁹⁷ The abyss between the levels of development between Third and First World countries (access to education, health, freedom of expression) tends to make women from the different areas speak on different wavelengths. Similarly the notion of race is a diving factor where Black is pitted against the Whites or Asians.

4. Feminist Theologians' Appraisal of Paul and His Teaching in Reference to 1 Cor 11:2-16.

The appraisal of 1 Cor 11:2-16 ranges from fervent support to condemnation. Some scholars commend Paul for writing this passage and cite it as being ample evidence of the fact that "...the traditional "female roles" are divinely ordained..."⁹⁸ Some feminists have vehemently denounced Paul as one of chief male chauvinists⁹⁹ who was out to denigrate women and to deny them access to rights, privileges and fringe benefits enjoyed by the male fraternity. This stems from the notion that Paul harboured

⁹⁵ P. N. WACHEGE, *African Single Mothers, Socio-Ethical and Religious Investigations*, 1

⁹⁶ P. N. WACHEGE, *African Single Mothers, Socio-Ethical and Religious Investigations*, 143.

⁹⁷ E. S. FIORENZA, *Searching the scriptures*, Vol 1, *A Feminist Introduction*, 102-104.

⁹⁸ WALKER JR, W. O., "1 Cor 11: 2-16 and Paul's View Regarding Women", 94.

⁹⁹ WALKER JR, W. O., "1 Cor 11: 2-16 and Paul's View Regarding Women", 94.

patriarchal interests and safeguarded parochial position whose territory was encroached upon by women. Preaching and prophesying was mainly a male domain. The women's intrusion threatened this male stronghold.

On the other hand, Paul wins sympathy from scholars such as Madeleine Boucher. M. Boucher thinks that Paul's enigmatic standpoint of elevating and downgrading women simultaneously as a result of their rebirth in Christ was acceptable in Paul's time. She argues that Paul's view of women's full and yet subordinate integration in to Christ is not strange in his world and yet presents an intolerable contradiction to us.¹⁰⁰ In actual fact, Robert Scroggs designates Paul as an ardent champion of women's rights. He describes him as "...the one clear voice in the New Testament asserting the freedom and equality of women in the eschatological community."¹⁰¹ Scroggs' position (that Paul championed egalitarianism) is untenable today and is unpalatable to some female theologians. To them it smacks of discrimination and gender insensitivity.

To understand the position of women, let us consider the forces at work at determining their rank and file in Corinth. Six factors were at work, the first three being ethnic group, condition of servitude, and gender.¹⁰² The other three determinant factors are wisdom, power, and family name or honour.¹⁰³ Looking closely at these factors, the emerging reality is that women were forced to assume a subordinate position and status. Women like children did not count as bona fide members of the community.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 220.

¹⁰¹ WALKER JR, W. O., "1 Cor 11: 2-16 and Paul's View Regarding Women", 96.

¹⁰² A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 62.

¹⁰³ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ C. H. FELDER, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Racial, Class, and Family*, 142.

On the question of exercise of power, it is worthy to note that women wielded none and had no influence to exert in the decision making process. They could impart partial influence as mothers and wives but in a very limited capacity. Those who were under the yoke of slavery did not have any civil, political, or social rights. The women did not have access to the privileges such as (inheritance, economic power, exercise of political authority, priestly office), enjoyed by their male counterparts solely based on their gender.

These factors denote deficiencies suffered by women as a result of their femininity and structural position (either as free or slave), which deprived them of advantages enjoyed by the men. These six factors favoured and facilitated an upward thrust in the fortunes of Corinthian women.¹⁰⁵ They became prophets in a male dominated sphere of activity. They accumulated wealth of wisdom, garnered power and overcame barriers that hitherto were imposed on them due to their gender.¹⁰⁶ The enslaved women broke off the fetters of serfdom; their status was no longer hinged on their place of racial, social, political or economic status.

Clothing and hairstyles are means of identification. They have semiotic significance in the performance of the task of according status to people within the social spectrum. Mary Douglas through her anthropological study of different societies has come to the inference that hairstyles exhibit and signify the level of social control in a given society. The hair, she postulates, is a metaphor or representation of the society that individuals belong to. The way it is styled indicates how such a society executes control

¹⁰⁵ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ E. S. FIORENZA, *Searching the Scriptures, Vol 1, A Feminist Introduction*, 297-298.

over its composite members. In effect she deduces that “hairstyles convey messages about degrees of social constraints...”¹⁰⁷

In this regard therefore “... tightly bound styles seem to reflect tight social control; wild, uncontrolled hair is expressive of relaxed social control and protest. Elaborate, formal hairstyles may be typical of high grid...”¹⁰⁸ Therefore the question of appropriate head cover was significant in Corinth in that it exhibited loose control over the Corinthian women. The predilection towards ecstatic revelry in the prophetic arena indicates that the Corinthian’s enthusiasm for heightened religious experience stems from loose bonding by the society. The loose, unbound and freely flowing hairstyles that they wore is a clear indication of this tendency. Paul’s decided to rein in their unmitigated and euphoric display of reaching the heights of prophetic expressions wherein they lost control over self and became wild.

Paul’s attempts to reinstate a semblance of order and to avert chaos in the worshipping assembly was his way of instilling hierarchy by initiating domination of the women prophets by the men. The issue of men losing control over their women came about as a result of the differing attitudes of how women were to behave in public domain and within the private spheres of their households. In the public realm, they were constrained to act with decorum. In the public eye they were susceptible to shame if they broke flouted the code of behaviour.¹⁰⁹

In contrast, playing the hospitable hostesses alongside their husbands, in the domestic church, they laid aside fear of shame. They behaved as they deemed fit within their own domain. Within this space, they enjoyed the privilege and honour of bearing

¹⁰⁷ R. S. KRAEMER, *Her Share of Blessings*, 146.

¹⁰⁸ R. S. KRAEMER, *Her Share of Blessings*, 147.

¹⁰⁹ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets. A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric*, 21.

Christ's spirit, which is neuter.¹¹⁰ In assertion of their newfound autonomy, the women prophets engaged in sexual asceticism, that is withdrawal from carnal relationships with their husbands.¹¹¹ The renunciation of the body was an expression of their having overcome their bodies.

Feminist theologians have found justification for the enthusiastic exhibition of ecstatic state by the women prophets. The Corinthian women felt no restraint in exhibiting their ecstatic wives and by so doing they were giving God glory. Seeing themselves recreated in Christ, in God's image, and demonstrating God's glory, they experienced as shame anything that blocked, obscured, or denied this reality.¹¹² They gave glory to God by exercising their God-given ministry of praying and prophesying, notwithstanding the fact, that they did so with unveiled heads.

A. C. Wire has presented a different approach concerning head cover as it pertains to Corinth. She utilizes the perspective of rhetoric. Paul employed various facets of persuasive argumentation to convince or dissuade the Corinthians.¹¹³ In this context Paul used the tool of rhetoric, in which he was well grounded, to drive sense into the Corinthians' minds and bring them to his way of thinking.¹¹⁴ It seems plausible to argue that Paul composed with conscious rhetorical technique,¹¹⁵ texts such as 1 Cor 11:2-16 with the outright motive of persuading his audience and congregation.

Through rhetorical investigations of the *Letter to the Corinthians*, historical reconstruction of society in Corinth of Paul's time is made feasible. In this regard, it is

¹¹⁰ R. S. KRAEMER, *Her Share of Blessings*, 148.

¹¹¹ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*,

¹¹² A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 127.

¹¹³ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 3.

¹¹⁴ D. H. MAY, *Pauline Theology: I and II Corinthians*, 38.

¹¹⁵ J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 85.

cognizant to recognize the art of rhetoric is not used with the aim of proving the truth. It is aimed at winning support for his arguments. The way a text is received and perceived depends chiefly on the way it commands authority or exerts its influence on the real reader.¹¹⁶ The controversy that 1 Cor 11: 2-16 has provoked over the years, is because Paul was used by God to transmit his message. Consequently, it cannot be dismissed as inappropriate without firm and unflinching reasons.

In the context of head cover, Paul had the overwhelming task of persuading the men and women to put on the appropriate garb in accord with one's sex. This was to avoid incurring shame and bringing disrepute to the act of worship, to oneself and other worshippers, to would be converts and the general populace. To attain this he employed an argument from Genesis dissociating shame from honour and human from divine.¹¹⁷

He appealed to the women whose newly established status as prophets was at stake. He sought to win their sympathy and made them understand that their honour would be repudiated and dealt a heavy blow if they insisted on prophesying and praying with uncovered heads. They incurred irreparable shame by ignoring his plea. He tried to make them perceive that they were vying for God's glory in worshipping with unveiled heads. This arose from the fact that the exclusive right of God to glory is the foundation of Paul's theology.¹¹⁸ The honour is not due to the human being but to the divine. By appearing with uncovered heads in the worshipping assembly, the women prophets were seeking and vying for the glory that is God's due alone.

¹¹⁶ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 3.

¹¹⁷ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* 118.

¹¹⁸ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 120.

¹¹⁸ A. C. WIRE, *The Corinthian Women Prophets, A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, 122.

The women prophets on the other hand perceived that by baptism, they had become new beings; they had put on Christ, and therefore they needed to set aside any reminder of their old self. Therefore they had a right and duty to dispose of the veil. Furthermore, they borrowed a leaf from Jewish women "...such as Aseneth or Thecla, who put aside women's dress or head covering when taking on new responsibility."¹¹⁹ The usurpation of prophetic roles by women prompted in them the dictate of discarding any distinguishing mark of their old lifestyle. Consequently, the veil had no place in their new state of life. They experienced no qualms or guilt feelings in doing so because it was a God-ordained change. They sought to discharge their duty of prophesying and praying in his name irrespective of how the society perceives them.¹²⁰

In her review of 1 Cor 11:2-16, Elizabeth Fiorenza Schusler proposes that "...Paul places a limit and qualification on the pneumatic participation of women in the worship service of the community..."¹²¹ She considers these constraints imposed as unfair stumbling blocks meant to cripple and circumvent full participation of the women in worship alongside their male companions. This to her is a clear manifestation of andocentrism, the male based orchestration of their ego meant to make women subservient to them.

In coming to this inference, Schussler has incorporated the method of "hermeneutics of suspicion."¹²² Using this method, she scrutinizes biblical texts under the assumption that there is more to the text than meets the eye. In other words, she does not take the text at its face value, but looks deeper into hidden meanings that the text may not

¹¹⁹ L. SCHOTTROFF, *Let the Oppressed Go Free*, 51.

¹²⁰ N. BAUMERT, *Woman and Man in Paul*, 178.

¹²¹ L. SCHOTTROFF, *Let the Oppressed Go Free*, 51.

¹²² L. M. RUSSELL, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 130.

show forthwith. By examining 1 Cor 11:2-16, Fiorenza Schussler detects nuances of Paul subverting women by denying them equality with men. This state of affairs she believes, is a man-orchestrated move to keep women docile and dependent on men. This text together with other Pauline texts such as 1 Cor 14: 34-36 is a forerunner she attests of the "...gradual exclusion of all women from ecclesial office and to the gradual patriarchalization of the whole church."¹²³

Mary J. Evans in her book, "*Woman in the Bible*", conceives that in 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul advocates for female subordination. She sees this in his insistence on women to be veiled during in worship. J. M. Bouette holds that Paul is a chauvinist who though not denying women functional equality in worship wants them to acknowledge their secondary status by wearing the veil.¹²⁴ Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike interprets 1 Cor 11:7-9 and infers that Paul denies women a share in God's glory, implying women are not the image of God.¹²⁵

Pauline Chakkalacal in reading 1 Cor 11:2-16 detects patriarchal tendency in Paul to keep women subservient. She states that patriarchy has been given divine legitimacy by Paul who claim it is God ordained state of affairs. Patriarchy as espoused by Paul keeps women faceless, voiceless and invisible.¹²⁶ Karen Jo Torjesen interprets Paul dictum to women prophets to don the veil in worship as a mark of parochialism. She states that Paul insisted on the veil for the women as a sign of their passivity and

¹²³ L. SCHIOTTROFF, *Let the Oppressed go Free*, 52.

¹²⁴ C. SHINGE, ed., *Women's Bible Commentary*, 321.

¹²⁵ J. N. K. MUGAMBI – L. MAGESA, *The Church in African Christianity*, 60.

¹²⁶ P. CHAKKALACAL, *Paul: A Challenge to Christians Today*, 132-133.

docility in spite of being in leadership positions. This infers that they still recognized the superiority and authority of men over them.¹²⁷

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I paid attention to the feminist interpretation of 1 Cor 11: 2-16. I have shown the role that rhetoric played in Paul's argumentation and the role that the social grid played in uplifting women's status. Feminist theologians have been appalled by Paul's androcentric language which seems to impute that women are lesser beings and that they are to be subservient to the authority of men. They read into texts such as 1 Cor 11: 2-16 ill motives as perpetrated by Paul in entrenching male hegemony. The Bible they believe is the tool to be used in spearheading women liberation. By historical-critical methods made possible historical reconstruction, feminist theologians have set out to improve on the distorted image accorded to women. They use female images of figures such as Miriam, Deborah, to accentuate the key roles women played of prophetesses or judges in their respective societies.

¹²⁷ E. S. FIORENZA, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 1. *A Feminist Introduction*, 302-303.

Chapter III

Feminist Interpretation of 1 Cor 11.2-16

And its Relevance to the African Context

1. Introduction

In this final chapter, which is dedicated to pastoral application, I am going to highlight the plight of women in the African Church emphasizing the Catholic denomination. As a prelude statement, I wish to observe that the humanization of any culture or the mark of societal development is best indicated by the treatment accorded to its womenfolk.¹²⁸ I will give treatment to the evolution of feminist theology in Africa. I will examine what facets it takes in the continent. I will unravel the challenges that feminist theology is facing in the African realm. I intend to focus on women who seek to uplift their lot, be accorded greater limelight and have roles in the Church.

I propose to give attention to the general condition of women in the African society and pinpoint the structures that undermine their position. I need to pay credence to the historical research that has unearthed findings to the end that women in Africa just like in other societies were accorded a peripheral, marginal and even non-existent role in

¹²⁸ C. H. KYUNG, "*Women as Agents in the Transformation of Religion and Culture*", 51.

the “malestream” patriarchal societies.¹²⁹ In the task of rewriting “herstory” and hence giving the African woman, her rightful place and due credit in history, it is an acknowledged fact that her shadowed position in the traditional set-up was further exacerbated by the onset of colonialism whose policies entrenched her subordination.¹³⁰

The diversity of life and conditions prevailing in every aspect of the gigantic African continent cannot be overemphasized. There is a huge conglomeration of societies and facets of life that transpire in Mother Africa. I will apply general principles in highlighting the plight of the African woman. This will not apply across the board to every African woman, but will provide a broad perspective.

2. Feminist Theology in Africa

First and foremost, it is worth noting that African Christian women regard the Bible as the source of empowerment and a channel of bequeathing liberty from oppressive situations that they have to contend with.¹³¹ The Bible has indisputable authority for them and it holds a sacrosanct place in their lives. They garner guidelines and prescriptions to run their daily lives from the holy book. This is grounded on the fact that the Bible is the word of God. It commands an unparalleled respect in the communion of their lives. Their lives are enmeshed in the labyrinth of culture and myriad traditional demands that seemingly suffocate their lives.¹³²

African feminist theology is in essence geared to building the community and redefining relations. This stems from the fact that women are the channels through which

¹²⁹ A. IMAM - A. MAMA - F. SOU, *Engendering African Social Sciences*, 81.

¹³⁰ A. IMAM - A. MAMA - F. SOU, *Engendering African Social Sciences*, 103.

¹³¹ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 93.

¹³² A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 83.

life is transmitted. They have a crucial role in the creation of a community. It is incumbent that they foster relationships of interdependence.¹³³

In such mutual existence, the community thrives. The African feminist theologians aim at building an all-inclusive community where hierarchy does not dominate and where one's gender is not the determinant of one's fate and fortunes in society.¹³⁴ Only when women are accorded their rightful place in church and society, will the dysfunction of the church and society cease.¹³⁵ By correcting gender inequalities will a state of normalcy in society be achieved. All members will feel at home, appreciated and imbued with the spirit of having a contribution to make for the common wellbeing and a role to play in promoting the genuine community.

The crux of feminist theology in Africa is its liberationist outlook. Its goal aims at emancipating women and restoring them to the fullness of humanity. Patriarchy, the church and its structures have contributed in making the women have a low status and little esteem in society.¹³⁶ To reconstruct their image that has been eroded by the stigma of culture and historical prejudice, African feminist theologians, are giving woman their place of pride. They want fellow African women to feel human and to be proud of their gender and feminine bodies and qualities.¹³⁷

African feminist theologians have taken the cause and are challenging the established order that keeps them subjective, docile and dependent on men in aspects of their life ranging from education, politics, business enterprises, economic survival to religion. The weapon they are wielding to wage battle against the shackles of cultures,

¹³³ M. A. ADUYOYE, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 16-17.

¹³⁴ M. A. ADUYOYE, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 17.

¹³⁵ V. FABELLA - M. A. ADUYOYE, *With Passion and Compassion*, 4.

¹³⁶ A. E. OROBATOR, *The Church as Family, African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*, 39.

¹³⁷ A. E. OROBATOR, *The Church as Family, African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*, 40.

yoke of male domination and years of subjugation is the Bible.¹³⁸ They are taking courage and encouragement from the fact that the Bible highlights conditions that parallel or mirror their own present circumstances. As Mercy Oduyoye attests, "African Women reading the scriptures have begun to see that God's call for them is not passive. It is compelling and compulsory. It is a call to action and wholeness that challenges the will and the intellect."¹³⁹

The creation of bodies such as The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians¹⁴⁰ and Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)¹⁴¹ provide the fora through which feminist theologians highlight their experiences of God in their lives. They jointly seek solutions to myriad problems affecting women and Third World concerns. These bodies serve as networks of interaction, exchange of literature, provide resources for writing books (for example *The Will to Arise, Groaning in Faith*) to accentuate African issues concerning women.¹⁴²

African feminist theology is staking claiming issues that are contemporary to the African milieu as it concerns women. It is independent of Western feminist thinking. Only African women can best explicate their inherent experiences.¹⁴³ The conditions of women on a universal scale are similar, only the intensity and magnitude differs. Hence the outlook and approach to women's issues in Africa, Europe, Asia or Latin America takes different expression depending on the context.¹⁴⁴ Though arising out of the womb of Western feminism, the African feminist theologian is an independent entity speaking

¹³⁸ D. A. JUSCHKA, ed., *Feminism in the Study of Religion*, 6.

¹³⁹ M. A. ODUYOYE, *The Will to Arise*, 1.

¹⁴⁰ M. KANYORO, "African Women's Quest for Justice", 15.

¹⁴¹ M. N. GETUI - E. A. OBENG ed., *Theology of Reconstruction*, 2.

¹⁴² E. S. FIORENZA, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 2, 77.

¹⁴³ A. E. OROBATOR, *The Church as Family, African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*, 40

¹⁴⁴ C. J. ADAMS - M. M. FORTUNE, ed., *Violence Against Women and Children*, 16.

her mind on issues that are close to her heart.¹⁴⁵ She speaks from the aspect of being a woman, a Christian, an African and theologian. All these faces she dons and roles she undertakes simultaneously, since there is no compartmentalization.

The road that African feminist theology has had to trudge to reach its present state and stage has been one of struggle and facing sexist indifference, cultural prejudice, challenging patriarchal stereotypes and cynicism from and doubt on chances of succeeding from the male dominated African society.¹⁴⁶ They have to overcome racist discrimination from feminist theologians hailing from the West.¹⁴⁷ However, dogged determination has seen the African feminist theologians through the valleys and hills. African feminist theology has suffered from pecuniary difficulties in funding its programmes and its scholarship endeavours have been plagued by the handicap of insufficiency of books.¹⁴⁸

3. Contemporary Situation of the African Woman

The dawn of independence in African countries and the watershed culmination of Vatican II are two factors that have played a key role in the uplifting of the standards of life in Africa.¹⁴⁹ Vatican II opened doors to dialogue, to seeing things from different perspective; it initiated reform and more so gave the laity greater participation in the administration of the church. Women became beneficiaries of this reform as they were afforded opportunities to partake in the practical roles of the church as active members and not as docile ones. By reading *Gaudium et Spes*, feminist theologians were able to

¹⁴⁵ E. S. FIORENZA, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 2. 76.

¹⁴⁶ V. FABELLA – M. A. ADUYOYE, ed., *With Passion and Compassion*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ U. KING., *Feminist Theology from the Third world*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ M. KANYORO, "African Women's Quest for Justice", 14.

¹⁴⁹ S. BOTTIGNOLE, *Kikuyu Traditional Culture and Christianity*, 1.

campaign for “an enhanced sense of full personhood and moral and social responsibility”¹⁵⁰ to be accorded to women.

The attainment of independence by African states brought women’s issues to the fore. In their manifestoes of planning, the newly independent African states vowed to give greater attention and prominence to women related issues. The need to uplift the standards of life in general meant elevation of women. The stronghold of culture on women’s lives continues to be strong and impacts negatively on women. Though great strides in social and economic development have been achieved, the status of African woman though better, is still precarious.¹⁵¹

Though there has been marked improvement in the life of the African woman, she still remains in the shadow of the man. There is a carry over from the traditional African societal set-up where patrilocal interests and the vanquishing of women’s rights is the norm.¹⁵² This situation of women subjugation, confronts the African girl child early, in her life, starting from the moment of her conception. The gender of a newly born child is key to the acceptance of that child. In most African communities, the preferred sex is a male child who will not sire and carry on the family name but who will inherit the property of the father and take care of elderly parents in the twilight of their lives.¹⁵³

The worst predicament that can befall an African woman is to be barren and to be unable to bring forth offspring. Barrenness is in such circumstances tantamount to a death sentence being pronounced on her. She is ridiculed, ostracized on her failure to conceive.

¹⁵⁰ J. A. DWYER, *Questions of Special Urgency*, 55.

¹⁵¹ V. FABELLA - M. A. ADUYOYE, *With Passion and Compassion*, 5-7.

¹⁵² C. COQUERY-VIDROVITCH, *African Women, A Modern History*, 46.

¹⁵³ B. BUJO, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, 110.

She is a demonized person all because she cannot conceive children who will perpetuate the ancestral lineage.¹⁵⁴

Women played a significant role in the emancipation of African states from the yoke of colonialism. Their pivotal contribution in Africa's independence struggle has not been matched with an equivalent position in post-Africa's political and economic structure. On the contrary, women have been sidelined and more or less confined to the margins in the political and economic policymaking process. Politics has been a male-patronized activity and this can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of many African communities. It has been the male's institution to make decisions not only within the home but also at the community level. Women have been passive and played no role in the decisions that are promulgated and are binding on them. This peripheral role is maintained even today. Few women occupy key positions in the political strata.

With the advent of multi-partyism in the 1990's, men have continued to be dominant with a few female faces. For instance, Charity Ngilu stood for the presidency in Kenya's 1997 General Elections. Specioza Kazibwe has served as Uganda's Premier so has Slyvia Kinigi and Agathe Uwilinginyima in Burundi and Rwanda respectively.¹⁵⁵ These are good signs that women are slowly but laboriously making breakthrough into mainstream politics. Women representation in parliament in South Africa, the Seychelles, Mozambique, Namibia and Uganda stood at 30%, 23%, 25%, 22%, 20% respectively.¹⁵⁶ Comparatively, in Kenya's 212 member-strong parliament, there are only 17 female parliamentarians.

¹⁵⁴ S. A. KHASIANI, *Women's Status and Poverty in Kenya*, 21-22.

¹⁵⁵ G. P. OKOTH, ed., *Africa at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, 392.

¹⁵⁶ G. P. OKOTH, ed., *Africa at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, 392.

Women are the mainstay of Africa's economic activities particularly in the agricultural sector.¹⁵⁷ Their input in terms of labour is gigantic, yet the fruits of their labour accrue to the men. It is the men who bankroll the proceedings from the sale of cash crops such as tea, coffee, pyrethrum and so on. The women have little to show for all their sweat and toil expended in production. It seems that men live off the sweat from the brows of women. This is an offshoot of patriarchy where women are passive participants and men take the lion's share of resource allocation. There is need to realign the political climate in Africa to foster greater female participation to offset the imbalance currently being experienced. Women have been economically vulnerable because of dependence on men and are hardest hit by the wave of poverty currently sweeping across Africa.¹⁵⁸

The imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on African governments by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as measures to initiate and kick start Africa's ailing economy has backfired and had negative impact.¹⁵⁹ These programmes involve cost-sharing in health, education, retrenchment and downsizing of bloated civil services. Similarly, Africa's spiraling level of indebtedness has hit the African woman greater and made her already pathetic situation even more precarious. The combination of high ratio of indebtedness, massive corruption, vicious cycle of poverty, rampant unemployment, natural catastrophes such as famine, floods augmented by endemic political instability have made life for the African woman to be woeful.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ I. AMADIUME, *Reinventing Africa, Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*, 194.

¹⁵⁸ A. SHORTER - J. N. NJIRU, *New Religious Movements in Africa*, 70.

¹⁵⁹ G. P. OKOTH, ed., *Africa at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, 113-114.

¹⁶⁰ G. P. OKOTH, ed., *Africa at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, 254-255.

A grim future faces the African woman and makes her life to be seemingly on the edge of death. This is due to the threat posed by HIV/AIDS. This arises due to cultural and religious conditioning of women, on how they are trained to be submissive to a man. The core result of this habituation is grim reality that even in the face of death borne by a tested and confirmed HIV positive husband, a wife will give in to his sex demands. She cannot dare say “no”, because the repercussions would be far-reaching: violent abuse or being kicked out of their matrimonial home.¹⁶¹ In such scenarios, it is telling that even in marital circles, she is not an equal partner in the marriage covenant; she has no semblance of security. The issue of safe sex practices in the visage of HIV/AIDS becomes an urgent matter since it is a question of life and death. Yet, when it comes to matters of procreation, the woman is the submissive party, the man takes the leading role.

In this time and place, there is no room for wife inheritance, a cultural practice that denigrates women and makes them sex vassals as well as economic providers for the well-being of men. It is a practice that has been abused and whose relevance today is questionable. Women today can be given the right environment, education and equal job opportunities to fend well for themselves without looking over their shoulders for material support of men. More so this practice of wife levirate has become an avenue for the transmission of HIV/AIDS to an unwary woman population besieged by obsolete traditional demands.¹⁶²

A practice that has outgrown its usefulness in contemporary society is clitoridectomy. Female Genital Mutilation is a gross abuse of woman sexuality. Yet it is accorded a sacrosanct status amongst some societies like the Meru, Gusii, Kikuyu and

¹⁶¹ M. R. A. KANYORO – N. J. NJORGE eds., *Groaning in Faith: Household of God*, 211..

¹⁶² M. R. A. KANYORO – N. J. NJORGE eds., *Groaning in Faith: Household of God*, 212.

Kalenjin of Kenya.¹⁶³ It is acclaimed as a practice by which women reach their maturity and accords them respect and acceptance not only amongst women counterparts but also in the general society where they can now seek marriage without being looked down upon.

This practice is ostensibly meant to control a woman's enjoyment of sex. It curtails their capacity to engage in sex and is used as a means of guarding women from engaging in promiscuity by mutilating the clitoris, the female equivalent of the penis. Clitoridectomy is a practice that has overtones of seeking to put women in submissive position. It is a mark of parochialism and patriarchy where men want to continue exercising control over women. Women have a right to enjoy their sexuality and to engage in sex without any inhibitions and as equal sex partners to men.¹⁶⁴

Besides inherent health risks, the act of female genital mutilation is a denial of fundamental human rights to the women. They may incur life-long side effects such as failure to conceive, incontinence or succumb to death in the very process of circumcision. As a demonstration of the inbuilt power that the Bible accords to its faithful adherents, feminist members of the Pentecostal Church in Kenya in 1922 led a massive onslaught campaign against Female Genital Mutilation. This crusade reached its crescendo in receiving a continental outreach that spanned the whole of Africa.¹⁶⁵ The extent of the practice of clitoridectomy is quite expansive: 2 million women are mutilated each year in Africa, whilst 100 to 130 million African women have undergone the cut.¹⁶⁶ This

¹⁶³ M. R. A. KANYORO – N. J. NJOROGE eds., *Groaning in Faith: Household of God*, 177.

¹⁶⁴ M. R. A. KANYORO · N. J. NJOROGE ed., *Groaning in Faith: Household of God*, 227.

¹⁶⁵ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 83.

¹⁶⁶ M. TURSHEN, *African women's Health*, 126.

estimate may be just a tip of the iceberg because clitoridectomy is done covertly and is a testimony; to how people may become attached to customs.

In the spectrum of sexuality, the rising number of rape of women and minors, here in Kenya presents alarm and portends danger for the status of women. The proliferation of sexual assaults on women and infant girls is a deplorable state of affairs. Are women viewed as objects for gratification of men's sexual desires? The rise in incidences of female rape is a harbinger of a society with little regard for morality. It calls for a sober reflection on the place of women in Kenyan society and in Africa as a whole.

Women have become vulnerable to these attacks and the worst it seems is yet to come. This prediction of a worse, yet to come, can be inferred from the fact that these attacks are growing by the day and seem to be endless. The intensity and extent of brutality of the attacks is not subsiding. Rather like a crescendo, these assaults are gaining momentum. It seems as if it has become an accepted way of life. When these attacks occur, the public raises its hue and cry, but soon enough the matter is forgotten. Although heavier sentences are being handed out to the perpetrators, instances of leniency in courts of law, where sex offenders are given light sentences does not help matters. A woman's sexuality is an essential channel of life and an integral part of a woman's life. It needs guidance, protection and appreciation.¹⁶⁷ It can be argued that the relentless and sporadic acts of forced carnal knowledge are indicators of the deeply entrenched patriarchal system under which African men and women operate. That a man can abuse an infant let alone an adult woman points to how, low a level, men can bend in order to quench their sexual thirst.

¹⁶⁷ M. R. A. KANYORO – N. J. NJOROGE eds., *Groaning in Faith: Household of God*, 215.

The rising cases of domestic violence is a trend that is of concern. The number of homicide cases has been growing. This calls into question the notion of how men perceive women. The forms that domestic violence manifests itself are inclusive of wife battering, psychological abuse, economic exploitation, incest, and in the ultimate, death.¹⁶⁸ That wife beating, that was a norm in traditional societies, seems to have been carried into modern times. The Kenyan Chapter of The Federation of International Lawyers (FIDA) has compiled evidence to the effect that in Kenya, the orgy of violence in homes has reached epidemic proportions with women casualties reaching 5,000 on an annual basis. According to a report by UNIFEM, Kenya is on record as having the highest rate of wife battering in Africa.¹⁶⁹

The spectre of violence directed towards women by male spouses, relatives, colleagues and the general public is a misnomer for patriarchy (an assertion of male power over women) that abounds in many African communities.¹⁷⁰ That the perpetrators go unpunished is an indicator that violence is tolerated and accepted in African life.¹⁷¹ Women and men are up in arms to fight this form of abuse that is practiced by both men and women, but women are by far the frequent victims. Other patriarchal practices that are still perpetuated in Africa include early marriages, female-child labour as well as child betrothal.¹⁷²

Feminist theology has been criticized for pronouncements that its detractors consider as not promoting family life. Feminist theologians have been accused of encouraging women's right to their reproductive including use of contraception and most

¹⁶⁸ M. TURSHEN, *African Women's Health*, 107.

¹⁶⁹ F. OYEKANMI ed., *Men, Women and Violence*, 30.

¹⁷⁰ F. OYEKANMI ed., *Men, Women and Violence*, 80.

¹⁷¹ F. OYEKANMI ed., *Men, Women and Violence*, 4.

¹⁷² E. H. O. AYIEMBA, "Fertility and Development Issues", 3.

of all to abortion.¹⁷³ The surge of abortion related cases have been attributed to feminists, who uphold that the woman has the indispensable right to terminate or carry a pregnancy to term. Feminists have been attacked for encouraging break up of families by backing separation and divorce of women from their husbands. They have been under siege for behaviour that is considered unethical. Accusations of lesbianism have been leveled against them. Lesbianism is considered by feminists as a viable option to women who consider heterosexual relationships as dehumanizing and unfulfilling. Lesbianism is a show and manifestation of women power over their bodies and sexuality. It is a woman's way of breaking the chain that patriarchy has put on her sexuality.¹⁷⁴

4. The Issue of Proper Dress in African Societies

Many societies advocate proper mode of dressing and a sense of etiquette in personal presentation. To disregard such prescriptions and dress in mundane manner is to court displeasure of the society. Much attention and close scrutiny is paid to the way women present themselves in the private and public domain. Women are conditioned from a tender age in the etiquette of upholding their themselves and dignity as women. Severe penalties are meted to women that fail to abide by these prescriptions. The worst picture that an African woman can portray is to expose her nudity. It is a taboo for her to fail to cover her body adequately leaving her body parts particularly the bosom, breasts and its cleavage or her womanhood exposed. It is the worst affront in African circles for a woman to expose her nudity. It is tantamount to a curse thus propriety in dress is a sensitive and sore issue in African communities.

¹⁷³ R. R. RUETHER, *Women and Redemption*, 260.

¹⁷⁴ R. R. RUETHER, *Women and Redemption*, 228.

The attention and care given to the head and its hair cover is close to the African heart. Decency necessitates proper grooming of the head and the hair lest one incurs the wrath of one's community for failing to abide by the norm of upholding one's head and hair in honour. The way the hair is cropped up, the hair-do donned, the way of plaiting or maintaining the hair, is a matter close to the African society. The Shantim women of Ghana and the Kamba of Kenya plait their hair. In communities such as the Luo of Kenya, shorning of the head for the woman, is not encouraged except in the period of mourning. Maasai women maintain clean-shaven heads.¹⁷⁵

Congregations of Religious Sisters don the veil as a mark of their consecration¹⁷⁶ and it gives them a sense of identity and belonging. Due to the wave of modernity and liberalism sweeping across the world with no exception to the church, the attitude towards the habits and particularly to the veil has undergone some transformation since the convocation of Vatican II.¹⁷⁷ While some congregations have given the members the liberty of wearing the distinctive habits together with the veil, others opted to adapt a simple form of dress similar to women they minister. This move has received mixed reactions from both the sisters and Catholic faithful in general.

5. Position of Women in the African Church

A question has been posed as to whether the church has contributed to the marginalization and subjugation of women in the African society? M. A. Oduyoye readily answers in the affirmative and she observes that it is a myth that Christianity liberated the African woman from the yoke of bondage that she had been living under.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ J. HASKINS, *From Afar to Zulu. A Dictionary of African Cultures*, 122.

¹⁷⁶ J. F. BURKE, *These Catholic Sisters are all Mamas*, 97.

¹⁷⁷ J. F. BURKE, *These Catholic Sisters are all Mamas*, 97.

¹⁷⁸ M. A. ODUYOYE, *Daughters of Anowa, African Women and Patriarchy*, 172.

I believe that the coming of Christianity into the realm of the African continent brought with it both blessings and misfortunes to the African woman. On the one hand, the church sought to eradicate traditions that it considered primitive and which impinged on the rights of women. Traditions that the church considered repugnant and inimical to the full acknowledgement and realization of women as God's children include clitoridectomy, polygamy, payment of dowry inheritance of land by male progeny.¹⁷⁹

On the other hand, Christianity collaborated with the forces of colonialism to make the woman submissive. It entrenched patriarchal tendencies that were already embedded in African societies. The church preached a message of docility and accepting of one's lot in society and perseverance whatever the prevalent circumstances (the message of the beatitudes). The women listened and continued to suffer in silence because they were conditioned to believe that women are to lead hushed lives and not to raise their voices in protest.¹⁸⁰

The office and functions of priesthood in the Catholic Church has not been open to women. There is no biblical foundation for such a position. It is more or less an effect of patrimony that has been the characteristic of the church from of old. The church's reasons for denying women ordination to the priestly office are three, namely, (1) long held tradition, (2) witness of sacred scripture (3) the religious person in persona Christi.¹⁸¹

Women were ordained as deacons in Pauline churches. There is evidence of women being ordained to the priesthood. For instance, Pope Gelasius in 494 A.D. sent out an admonition to three churches in Italy that contravened official catholic tradition of

¹⁷⁹ M. KANYORO, "African Woman's Quest for Justice", *JCT* 2, 1996, 13.

¹⁸⁰ M. A. ADUYOYE, *Daughters of Anowa, African Women and Patriarchy*, 15.

¹⁸¹ A. M. CLIFFORD, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 143.

having male priests by ordaining women. In his admonition he states “Nevertheless, we have heard to our annoyance that divine affairs have come to such a low state that women are encouraged to officiate at the sacred altars and to take part in all matters delegated only to the offices of the male sex, to which they do not belong.”¹⁸²

An emerging trend especially in the West especially in Switzerland and Germany, is the phenomenon of women serving as “unordained lay ministers.”¹⁸³ They are assisting and leading in services ranging from baptism to weddings. This is due to the shortage of priests occasioned by vocation crisis. To sustain the faith in defunct Communist Czechoslovakia, women were ordained as priests.¹⁸⁴ Whereas as in African Independent Churches, women play leadership roles as prophets this is a major departure from mainstream religious bodies such as Catholicism and the Orthodox Church, which contend to be maintaining the apostolic tradition of an exclusive male priesthood. Pentecostalism religious movement has seen women take up leadership roles and overcoming gender based positions.¹⁸⁵

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to highlight the present day status of African women I have highlighted the condition of women in contemporary Africa. I have traced the path of African feminist theology has trod since its inauguration. I have pinpointed the challenges that African feminist theology has to confront. In this section, I have brought to the surface, the numerous difficulties that women in Africa have to contend with as a result of the patriarchal structure of society that they are living in. I too tried to zero on

¹⁸² R.S. KRAEMER, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 168.

¹⁸³ F. LOBINGER - P. ZULEHNER, “Priests for Tomorrow”, *The Tablet*, 15th February 2003, 12.

¹⁸⁴ C. PONGRATZ-LIPPIT, “A Priest Called Ludmila”, *The Tablet*, 6th October, 2001, 1406

¹⁸⁵ A. SHORTER - J. N. NJIRU, *New Religious Movements in Africa*, 71.

the aberrations that have arisen out of an overzealous spirit that feminism has brought to the African continent. I have pointed the way forward into the future.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In my understanding of the passage 1Cor 11:2-16 I present that Paul is not an anti-feminist. What he expresses in this passage is borne out of peculiar circumstances that were particular to Corinth where mystery cults in which ecstatic prophesying abounded. It was Paul's purpose to circumvent such practices from infiltrating into the Christian church and being a source of disrepute to non-Christians. Paul wants to maintain the respect accorded to the differences between man and woman that arise out of creation and nature. Paul is wrongly vilified as anti-woman and an advocate of parochialism. It is just that certain of his passages have been interpreted out of context.

Paul seeks to maintain modesty in the church by insisting on the right attire. He also advocates for the interdependence between man and woman and shows that neither can exist without the other. If either seeks to exist without the other sex, he/she suffers irreparable loss and detriment. The church today is at a crossroad whereby women are seeking full participation in the church especially in ordination. The way gender related matters are handled by the church will determine the future prospect of either losing or gaining women to the church particularly the educated ones.

The church has the role of encouraging women liberation by doing away with traditions that impinge on the equality of women within her circles. Opening ministry to women and incorporating inclusive language in liturgy will be stepping stones that will

engender egalitarianism not only within the church as well in the society. I wholeheartedly, applaud and echo the sentiments of Pope John Paul II who stated “without discrimination women should be participants in the life of the church and also in consultation and the process of coming to decisions.” Pope John Paul II apologized to womenfolk for the church appalling treatment of women and her silence in the wake of women subjugation over the ages. The opportune time to act is now. It is a chance of a life-time, to make amends, to heal long festering wounds, to embrace reconciliation in the church, and to enjoin women in her life as equal partners with men.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I would advocate for greater opportunities of education to be accorded to girls and women in general. Civil education about women's rights to be given to both men and women. Stiffer penalties to be meted to sex offenders. Special courts to deal with domestic violence and sex offences against women need to be set up. Cultural beliefs and practices such as clitoridectomy need to be outlawed and be replaced with alternatives such as initiation of girls through school and church programmes. In these programmes whatever sex education and transmission of cultural norms that was being effected through traditional cultural practices would now take place. I would advocate the church to continue use of gender inclusive language and allow greater pastoral roles to women.

Appendix 1: **Abbreviations**

AIDS-Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome

BNT-Bible Works NT (NA 27)

EATWOT- Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

HIV- Immuno Deficiency Virus

JBL- Journal of Biblical Literature

JCT- Journal of Constructive Theology

NRSV-New Revised Standard Version, 1989

UN- United Nations

UNIFEM- United Nations Development Fund For Women

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JCT- Journal of Constructive Theology

JBL-Journal of Biblical Literature

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