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# TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

by

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Tutor: Fr. CHARLES ODENY. C.P.Sp.

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NAIROBI

16<sup>th</sup> February 1998

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**ELIJAH KAMANDE, OFM. Cap.**

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This is a long essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies.

**NAIROBI**

**16<sup>th</sup> February 1998**

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic Credit to any other Institution. All sources have been cited in full.

  
Signed

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## INTRODUCTION

Women have both legal rights and access to existing means for the improvement of oneself and the society. They are the key players in the well-being of society. They have a role to play in food production, processing, storage and preparation. They perform sixty to eighty percent of all agricultural labour, and ninety five percent of all domestic labour. At homes, they draw water, collect firewood, feed and take care of all members of the family, the sick and the aged people alike. In many Churches, they perform most of the manual and welfare services which both sustain and develop lay women. In most cases, such tasks are undertaken without access to modern tools, training or credit facilities. In spite of all their efforts, their work is rarely given monetary value.

All these data were received from researches I carried out during my May-August 1997 holidays at Wema Parish in Lamu (Kenya), as well as December holidays at Kariobangi Parish (Nairobi), Gaichanjiru Parish (Murang'a) and Nyeri Cathedral. I had prepared some questionnaires which, after explaining their purpose, I distributed to the faithful for answering.<sup>1</sup> I had some irregularities, but at the end of the day, I got what I was after. The collected data, which reads as follows, indicate that women's burdens are the greatest.

Task	men	women
<b>Caring for domestic animals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Drawing water and collecting fuel</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Feeding and caring for family members, the sick and the aged</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Washing utensils, clothes and cooking</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Shopping and marketing</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Sowing, weeding and harvesting</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Tilting soil</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Trimming tree crops, thinning rice, cotton</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Transporting crops like cotton and rice to ginneries and factories</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Hunting</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Preparing altar for mass and services</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>85</b>

In Association of Members Episcopal Conference of Central and Eastern African (AMECEA) countries, especially in Kenya, statistics indicate that there has been an increase

<sup>1</sup> "Sample Questionnaires for Women's ministry in Society."  
Prepared by the Author of this Essay. See the Appendix.

in school enrollment by girls. However, despite the fact that only thirty percent of the three to five year olds participate in early childhood education programmes, participation by sex has been constant between 1989 to 1990 at fifty one percent for boys and forty nine percent for girls. In Kenya only, female enrollment in universities rose from fifteen percent in 1973 to twenty four percent in 1987 and twenty eight point seven percent in 1991. Since then, there has been an active involvement and interest of women in politics. Actually, thirty percent of the legislative body in Kenya are women. Further studies reveal that since 1991, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of girls entering universities in the country, reaching twenty seven percent between 1992 to 1993.<sup>2</sup> I have cited Kenya only as an example, otherwise the same problem is recurring in other African countries and world at large.

Statistics and daily experiences of women subjugation made me choose the title of my essay as it reads. My major objective is to revitalize and empower, with an ever living force, the role and place of women in society who have been subjugated for generations by male domination. I aim at bringing an awareness to women that they should not only be seen, but also be heard.<sup>3</sup> Many people may not immediately know how they are subjugated, but the truth is manifested in the world media and daily experiences.

In Kenya, there are many women liberation movements, like Kenya Anti-Rape Organization, Economic Empowerment of Women, National Council of Women in Kenya, Kenya League of Women Voters, International Federation of Women Lawyers, and Feminist Theologians among others. All these organizations and movements are concerned with women's equality and rights, and with overcoming injustices such as women domination by men - which is largely unquestioned, exclusion of women from decision making bodies, discrimination of women in politics, economic, legal, worship and educational spheres, sexual assault of women among others.<sup>4</sup> They aim at sustaining improvement in the well-being of the individual as well as bestowing benefits to all. They also intend to terminate all cultural prejudices, discrimination, sexism, female harrassment, use of women as objects for advertisements in business sectors by educating them about morality, male domination of women, racism and other similar atrocities, which in one way or another, have caused

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Nzomo, "Beyond the Women's Decade. Women's Decade." in **Wajibu**, (Vol.7,# 4, 1992) p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> **Professional Lady Magazine** (Vol. V. Nov-Dec. 1992) p. 243

<sup>4</sup> Fr. Odeny. Charles, "Women' Discrimination on social, Economic, Educational and legal levels in Africa/ in the world" in **Social Morality**, Class Handouts, ( Nairobi. Tangaza College, 1996 ).

'perpetual' subjugation and instrumentalization of women in all walks of life over a lengthy period of time.

In this essay, I will take into consideration such problems and their possible remedies discursively within four Chapters. In the first Chapter, I will consider the problem of language and its current usage. The way we talk discloses what is abundant within us. Unless we speak out our minds, none can either know what our thoughts are or our attitudes. People's language really can delimit peoples worth. This has happened to women who, for many generations, have been victimized to male domination and are reduced to second class citizens. It is for that reason I consider language as a door through which one 'enters' into a person. This chapter ends with viable suggestions to remedy the problems surrounding the use of exclusive language, instead of the inclusive one. The second Chapter considers some possible root causes of women's delimitation. I will trace this problem back into the Jewish traditions and ancient Greek culture. These two influenced the patristic, medieval, modern and Contemporary mindset of Christian ( Catholic ) theologians. To find a remedy to the situation, I will consider the Gospel Message as cardinal in posing challenges to people's cultures; although the two named cultures had a sensible role in the composition of the scripture. The third chapter, will pay recourse to the doctrines of the Church and see what she teaches about women. It is from this period that the Church started considering women as human persons, through the influence of the personalist view which replaced the former classical view. The fourth chapter will concern Africa. The point of departure is African traditions for the interpretation of the present treatment accorded to women. In contrast, today women are realizing their own giftedness and worth within society. To better that emerging awareness in future, I will give some suggestions after my personal evaluation. That will be followed by conclusion.

Before I embark into the contents of my essay, I invite all my readers to it with an awareness that the problem of my concern is a pastoral one and many scholars are devoting their efforts in revitalizing the dignity of women as well as suggesting a pastoral theology that affords sameness within society. Some theological reflections proposed in this essay are not definitive. They are subject to evaluation and further refinement. It is my sincere hope and believe that this essay will serve as an "eye opener" or the basis for further theological explorations in the pursuit of revitalizing the dignity and rights of women. I confidently say that because I am fully informed that our Christian faith does not warrant any sort of

subjugation or instrumentalization to any human being. All were created in God's image and likeness, Gen 1:27, and therefore there is no male or female, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, Gal 3:28. Instead, we are all one in Christ. No one is more human than the other. Equal human rights and dignity are, therefore, imperative.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

From the very beginning of human existence, the creating hand of God guaranteed uniqueness of every individual human being. In some respects, that uniqueness can both be elusive and impalpable. The distinction between man and woman is clear and beyond equivocation. That distinction is willed by God in whose image and likeness all human beings were created. The book of Gen. 1:27 testify to that truth: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." That means, God created human race in its duality and all essential diversities and differences that constitute man and woman, male and female, masculine and feminine. All those God found very good, Gen. 1:31.

The introduction to my essay has briefly probed into situation in our modern world. It is clear that women do not carry out their roles in society effectively because they are victimized to male domination, discriminated against, unjustly violated against, belittled by cultural prejudices as people of weaker sex when compared to men, and majority are only afforded minimum education since their chief duty is to be in the kitchen and the like. After all, they only sit back at homes waiting for men-"the breadwinners"- to bring them 'prey' from their industrial and technological fields of work. So it was formerly argued that to educate women is to waste money and time. Many people are changing that attitude. Due to all those mentioned and many un-mentioned delimitations, women reduce themselves to men's physical psychological and social requirements. Society has also formed them in such a way that they only obey their husbands ( men ) without questioning. They do not make decisions for the welfare of society, and if they do, they are not listened to. Since they are left without alternative, they end up doing what society and family requires of them, in order to have security and better life with or among ( their ) men.

Most of the women's activities pass un-noticed because women have low esteem in society, except for their roles as mothers. Nevertheless, their role is indispensable and self-explanatory. An elderly man once told me, "...brother, my wife died and left behind four children. I had to feed them, wash them and meet all domestic duties by myself. I know what

a woman means in family life. There is no need to discuss about the importance of womanhood for the whole of humanity, since it is self explanatory."<sup>5</sup>

This truth still holds because many widowers perform all domestic duties by themselves upon the death of their beloved wives. They feel over-burdened with such motherly roles, and to solve them, they end up by marrying again. For some young men who live by themselves, for instance in towns or far from their parents, they keep their houses in mess. They find it difficult to do some duties which are culturally ordained for women like cooking and washing utensils. They fear to be found by their friends performing them. In order to avoid such duties, they opt to eat in hotels, but their pockets do not always allow it. So they are forced to do what they dislike. When things go too far, they sometimes call their sisters or girlfriends to help them tidy up their rooms. With such an awareness, I just wonder why many men consider women as "born to suffer."

To many men, it is a reproach to be considered as a woman. This is something which I have witnessed. I was once coming from Nairobi town in commuter bus number twenty four. One young man did not have enough fare. A stout boy reproached him asking for his due. After some time of negotiation, he told the passenger: "Don't be like a woman! Bring money, else you touch the ground!" One lady who witnessed the drama had pity on the passenger and decided to add his fare. That marked the end of the controversy. I reflected deeply as to why that passenger was told not to behave like a woman, which came as an insult. Well, women are considered as weaklings, without confidence, cowards, and only wait at homes for men to bring them prey which they have not worked for, and so on. Why do people use such a delimitive language and both men and women are equally human beings?

### **1.1 The impact of language in the role of women in society**

Language is a very important tool. It reveals the concealed truths in the depth of human heart. By way of analogy, it is like a door through which one enters a house. If you like it, language is a face or a door to identifying human thought just as the human face is the doorway and mark to identifying and distinguishing one person from the other. Human thought, which commands an action, requires language as a medium of expression. For it to be meaningful, it has to be comprehensible to those for whom it is intended (the audience), otherwise it lacks meaning. Language is an instrument of recognition or vehicle of meaning.

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<sup>5</sup> Mzee Clement, a fifty two old man interviewed by the Author, wema Parish - Lamu, 22nd July 1997.

To illustrate what I mean, I would like to share with my readers an event which caused a fuss in as far as language is concerned. I, one day, accompanied a Capuchin Franciscan priest to a congregation of religious sisters, who had invited him for a Eucharistic celebration. Since this priest is used to staying with his fellow brothers, he forgot ( during homily ) that he was in a different setting. He said: "My dear Brothers, let us rejoice that all men are called to be sons of God" At the first instance, that statement sounded all right to me, but some sisters started looking at one another, others were irritated while others kept on smiling. What was all the fuss about? That statement didn't have meaning to some of those sisters. To some it was offensive, silly or incongruous because it excluded them. To some people, such a language is a serious indicator of sexism. It undervalues a group of a given people for it fails to identify them according to their proper nouns or pronouns.

The argument concerns the use of inclusive language, instead of an exclusive one. It is true that exclusive language may be an indicator of sexism about which the Second Vatican Council says:

"Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the ground of sex, race, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design."<sup>6</sup>

The question of exclusive language is actually a sensitive issue in our days. Formerly that was not the case. This is because language is an existential reality which change, adjust and adapt the circumstances of time and place where it is used.

It is, rather, inadequate today to use the word "man" to refer to both male and female human persons with a conviction that the audience will give it a generic meaning. In most cases the generic use of the word "man" escapes people's minds. In preference, inclusive language is used. For example I would not say "Every man is blessed by God" if what I want to say is that "every man and woman is blessed by God." In English, the male nouns of man, brother, sons... are considered exclusive. In their meaning, they don't include female nouns of woman, daughter, sister.... At one time, one can simply say that "all men are created equal," thereby including both men and women. Even then, the truth of such a statement is vulnerable to challenges since it has an obvious difficulty that it specifically refer to masculine only, as in the case of the following sentence: "Men are eligible for this job."

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<sup>6</sup> Austin Flannery, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents: Gaudium et Spes, 29 art 2 ( Bombay: St. Paul Press, 1992).

The fuss that may come about by consistent use of masculine nouns and pronouns when addressing a mixed audience are strong reasons that images, perceptions and expectations are powerfully shaped by language, both consciously and unconsciously. Constant use of such a language may imply male domination and superiority. Such an attitude of superiority is not warranted by our Christian faith as St. Paul says: "In Christ, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free....", Gal 3:28. If that is not so, then why not simply say woman and imply that it also includes man in its meaning? Many a people could say in reply that we are not always used to doing so. A discussion like this is hardly a norm for human rights today.

The truth still holds that women feel discriminated against, belittled or offended by the use of exclusive language. Personally I feel genuinely puzzled when a priest reads the prayers of the "progress of peoples": "Fill the hearts of all men...,fill all men with the Spirit of the sons of God..., one family man...." Since it is a prayer about progress of peoples, why shouldn't the prayers simply say that? Moreover, as one open the newly given English version of "The Catechism of the Catholic Church" it becomes explicitly clear that the document has positively and systematically neglected the use of inclusive language. For example the first chapter reads:

"The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator<sup>7</sup>."

It is needless to give more proves of it since they fill almost the full text. The point I want to drive home is that since the words like "man, him, himself ..." are used to imply woman also in its meaning, why didn't the author put it explicitly? It wouldn't have taken much more space in the text. Besides that, it could have made the text less offensive to both men and women, as well as teach an important message of respect for women or serve as a perpetrator of justice. The message of the text is very orthodox, but the problem is methodology used in its composition. If, for instance, the above quoted passage is read to a congregation of women only, what meaning can it have? To those who do not understand the generic usage of the

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<sup>7</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church (Nairobi. St Paul Publications, 1995) p. 39.

word "man", it can be irrelevant; unless language is taken to be ideological. That means without distinction of gender.

## 1.2 Foundations of exclusive language

In the above exploration, I based my argument on English language since I am conversant in it, and I don't know the structures of other foreign languages as such. Besides that, English is widely used, especially among academicians here in Kenya. Most of the academic materials too are written in English. I am fully aware that in translation of any document into another language, the original meaning of the text becomes distorted or altered in a way. Such happened when Scripture was translated from Hebrew and Greek consecutively.

History tells us that Scripture was originally written in Hebrew. It was later translated into a Greek version popularly known as the Septuagint. Sometimes later, other versions like Peshitta (a Syriac translation) Vulgate for Latin speakers and another paraphrased Bible in Aramaic came about, since Hebrew was no longer in use.<sup>8</sup>

Some of those languages do not have inclusive structures. In spite of that, they have their own ways of dealing with male and female nouns and pronouns. Greek, for example uses the words "aner" to mean "man" (a male human person) and "anthropos" to mean "Person." Here the word "person" includes both male and female human persons. Latin is somehow systematic. It has proper nouns and pronouns for male, female and objects. Male nouns are masculine, female nouns are feminine and nouns that refer to objects are neuters. When referring to "man" (male human person) it uses the word "vir" while the word "homo" is used to mean a "person" (either male or female human person). Hebrew has no neuter gender. In it, every noun is either masculine or feminine.<sup>9</sup> English language has no general terms for male and female, and so whenever words like "he, him, himself, his..." are used, they do not signify the female nouns and pronouns (she, hers, herself...). Comparatively, Swahili language is very specific in meaning. It is rather inclusive. Its structure entails classification of persons, things, places and so on. It uses the word "mtu" (person) to mean male and female human persons. A male human person is "mwanamme" while female human person is "mwanamke," and both are referred to when called "Ndugu." Swahili language has "kitu vitu" for objects. In plural, when we say: "Watu wote ..." it means all human beings (

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Boadt, **Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction**, (N Y: Paulist Press 1984) pp. 74-75

<sup>9</sup> R. K. Harrison, **Biblical Hebrew: Teach Yourself**, (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) pp. 53-57.

men, women and children). Any sentence with “watu wote...” cannot be ambiguous. As it stands in the Scripture, the word “men” has a general meaning, but when a mixed congregation of peoples is addressed, for example using a sentence like: “All men are invited...,” it can be surprising that it is only male human persons who are likely to turn up, reason being that the sentence has multiple meanings of which one seems to exclude women and children.

The dogmatic Constitution known as the “Dei Verbum” in Vatican II documents tells us that the message in the Bible is orthodox, and hence canon. God used human writers as instruments to write only that which He intended.<sup>10</sup> The words are from the writers themselves but the idea is an action of inspiration. From Biblical words we can tell that those writers had a low attitude towards women. This is manifested both in Old and New Testaments. In his letter to Timothy, St. Paul, for instance teaches: “ I do not permit women to teach or to dictate to men; they should keep quiet. For Adam was created first, and Eve afterwards; moreover it was not Adam who was deceived; it was woman who, yielding to deception, fell into sin,” (1 Tim 2:11-14. This passage is borrowed from the first three chapters of the book of Genesis, about which Mary Daly comments:

“ The myth ( of Adam, Eve and the fall) has affected doctrines and laws that concern women’s status in society.... It has contributed to the mindset of those who continue to grind out male centered ethical theories....<sup>11</sup>”

Daly concluded that the Bible is of no use to women in their research for emancipation. She tried to show how the Biblical patriarchal inherent, both in its documents and statements about women, has in one way or another kept women down. In her own words she says:

“The symbol of the Father God ... sustained as plausible has in turn rendered service to (patriarchal) society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting .... If God in His heaven is Father ruling his people, then it is the nature of things and according to divine plan that society be male-dominated.<sup>12</sup>

Mary Daly’s radical view of the Scriptures as the perpetrator of women’s oppression is full of sense. At the same time, we don’t need to focus only in one direction as our faith dictates. Sr. Alice Laffey’s reformist view of Scripture admits that Scripture seems to lack

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<sup>10</sup> Austin Flannery, Op Cit., Dei Verbum No. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Daly, **Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women Liberation** (Boston: Herper and Row, 1973) p 45

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

room for sameness and equality between men and women. Nevertheless, if it is read carefully between lines, it becomes evident that it has male domination simply because final redactors of the text were probably men, and so most of its interpreters. At the same time, it offers hope and inspiration to people, as largely manifested in St. Luke's Gospel.<sup>13</sup>

Feminist Biblical interpreters recount that the Bible is fond of using grammatical masculine forms, like man, he, him, his, himself and the like. That is a cultural prejudice of both Hebrew and Greek traditions. ( More of it will be explained in the following chapter ). The named two traditions have patriarchal cultures that favors men than women, and as a result, women and their role in society are relegated to the background. The Biblical male interpreters pay much attention to those Biblical passages which concern men and give less emphasis to on those which concern women. By doing so, men base their superiority complex in relation to the inferior women. In some respects, all woes are dumped to women as their cause since it was Eve who first fell into sin. That has lessened the Biblical meaning which is both intended for men and women. It has also affected women's (active) participation in worship. When interpreting the first chapters of the book of Genesis, some scholars in reformist view suggest that God created man first and woman later. Today, many men use that theory to justify their superiority over women. Besides that, Pauline letters reiterate the same truth. Some of such texts would include 1 Cor 11 which considers man as head over woman just as Christ is the head of the Church. The other is 1 Tim 2:11-14 which commands women's silence in the presence of men.

In order to show biblical basis of equality between men and women, some reformist scholars suggest that the first chapter of the book of Genesis which reads: "...God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them" doesn't mean man as a male human person, but it is male and female human persons. That is a generic term. To show that truth, they probe into etymology of words used in the Biblical passage. The Hebrew word "Adam" is used to mean "an earthly creature" which was created from soil or earth which is "adamah" in Hebrew. Adam ( the created earthly creature) had no gender. This is so argued from binary logic in which things are known by their opposites. It then follows that if Adam was a male human person then a female human person must have been in existence. That is not true since a female human person was created later from the rib

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<sup>13</sup> Sr. Alice Laffey, **An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective**, quoted by Dr. Victor Zinkurati in **CUEA's ninth Graduation: Programme and Order of Proceedings** (Nairobi: CUEA Publication, 1995) pp. 8-10

of Adam, Gen 2:21-22. It was only after the creation of Eve (from Adam's rib) that distinction in sex came about. That means Adam became a male human person when Eve (the female human person) was created. Hebrew language describes male human person as "ish," while the female human person is described as "ishah."<sup>14</sup>

If that is true, it can be concluded that "Adam" was a generic term used by the redactor to designate male and female human persons. So, when translating the text in other languages, the lack of inclusive language in Hebrew bound those languages in order to keep faithful to the original text.

### 1.3 Recommendations

The point of my discussion is the use of inclusive language instead of the exclusive one. I find this issue important because it deals with respect for the basic human dignity. It is the foundation for all the justice and peace work. I do not intend to dwell much on it because it can be handled easily.

As I noted elsewhere, exclusive language can be a cause of sexism. Actually, there is no a single and sound reason as to why inclusive language should be avoided, in preference to the exclusive one. So, if we are honest and seriously genuine, we can find norms and forms without much difficulty and make our speeches more clear and elegant. That would render meaningful our liturgies, speeches, homilies as well as the use of scripture. Such an effort make every member in the assembly feel addressed and at ease.

Towards a remedy, I suggest that the whole matter start by a change of our attitudes towards women, then we proceed to the control or 'conversion' of our tongues. Although such an effort sounds minor, it counts a lot in the fight for justice and peace. In a way, it will stop the widening of the gap between men and women, and each will feel the impetus of participating actively in the society matters.

We should always struggle and prefer to use inclusive phrases, instead of exclusive ones. For example we use "brothers and sisters" instead of "brothers;" "humanity" instead of "mankind;" "person" instead of "man." Wherever we are constrained to use plural, we can use "everyone" instead of "all men" (although this violates the regulations of English grammar, it is widely accepted today by international press and popular newspapers). We should also make an effort of avoiding the use of masculine pronouns and pronouns that are

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<sup>14</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour, Dictionary of Biblical Theology, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1982) p 663

not exclusively masculine or feminine pronouns and nouns that are not exclusively feminine.

For example:

A driver must look into his side mirrors regularly.

A nurse should keep her hands clean.

Since there are many drivers who are not men, and many nurses who are not women, we should simply use a plural form "drivers and nurses" with a plural pronoun "their." That would make the sentence read:

Drivers must look into their side mirrors regularly.

Nurses should keep their hands clean.

We also ought to avoid using terms that end in "-man" as for chairman or layman. They ought to be replaced by "chairperson" or "laity."

Those named a few suggestions can easily be implemented without much effort; especially in our liturgical functions, like when using our ordinary lectionaries, reciting psalms in breviaries, and in our regular prayer formulars. We should have our eyes fixed ahead of what we are going to read and substitute that which can cause fuss or that which is derogatorial. For example the fourth Eucharistic Prayer can be read that way without much difficulty.

Admittedly, that requires practice, some sense of humour and patience even when things do not go just right: as it can happen when reading the Gospel of St. Mathew about the multiplication of the loaves - " ...the number of men and women who ate was about five thousand, not counting women and children." Of much benefit is the merits that goes with the whole issue. We should not think that we distort the meaning of what we say or read ( although it too can cause some confusion ), otherwise God could not have created both men and women with equal rights and dignity. Both are equally human beings.

When all is said and done, we should not tend to change those nouns and pronouns that are attributed to God under the coverage of guaranteeing or yielding into feminist agenda. Inclusive language can be used when referring to human beings without ( in any way ) making a single statement about the nature of God. We should be careful that our heavy use of male nouns and pronouns in referring to God does not lead us into heretical positions of attributing maleness to the divinity. St. Thomas Aquinas warned us about the use of univocal language in

describing God.<sup>15</sup> The theology of the Trinity and the use of the word Father to God is, therefore, out of my discussion.

Again, if feminist agenda entails the allowing of abortion, ordination of women to ministerial priesthood, family break up due to misunderstandings and the like, then this does not concern the use of inclusive language through which I am seeking to rehabilitate women's role in society. Such are not warranted by our Christian faith and Church traditions.

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<sup>15</sup> Fr. Nicholas Fogliaco, "Systematization of Theology," in Class Handouts on "The Holy Trinity," ( Nairobi: Tangaza College, 1996 ).

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 WOMEN IN JEWISH TRADITION

In the first chapter of this essay, I undertook some efforts to show how language can contribute to delimitation of women. From some prominent scholars,<sup>16</sup> it is evident that the Bible has employed such a language, perhaps deriving from the fact that, most probably, its writers and interpreters were males from cultures which had low attitude towards women.

History tell us that the Bible was originally written in Hebrew. It was later translated into other languages like Greek, Syriac, Latin and so on. In doing so, some impressions were left with it since editors added some of their own words in order to explain the idea contained in the primary version. The Hebrew bible has a negative attitude towards women. That attitude is also expressed in other versions which during translation had to keep faithful to the original text.

Jews had more than six hundred codes of law, of which some are recorded in the Pentateuch. Jewish laws clearly manifest a negative attitude towards women. Just as in the Near Eastern countries, women's inferior position, among Jews, is traceable under articles related to terms like: Adultery, divorce, dowry, family, inheritance, marriage, prostitution, widow.

Female domination in Jewish tradition seem to have been derived from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, otherwise called ancient Near Eastern Cultures. It is a tradition that includes the Babylonians, Assyrians, Akkadians, Hittites. This has been proven by Julius Welhausen in his studies concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch. His observations are recorded in his book entitled "Prolegomena to the History of Israel" (1878). His studies suggest that the final redactor of Pentateuch was a Priestly school. To do that, that school compiled together materials of three other different schools. So, there are mainly four schools connected with the authorship of the Pentateuch, namely: Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist and Priestly schools. These schools had different interests and characteristics. I will not concern myself with their characteristics, but what I would like to drive home is the fact that most of Pentateuch's contents are similar to myths and stories of the Hittites ( especially the forms of covenants), Babylonians (the Enuma Elish about the creation of humans), Akkadians (the Gilgamesh Epic about the

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter One of this essay, footnotes Nos. 11 and 13.

<sup>17</sup> See Ibid , Footnote number 8.

<sup>18</sup> John McKenzie, Dictionary of the Bible, (N Y: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965) p. 936.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by Lawrence Boadt in Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction (N Y: Paulist Press, 1984) p 94.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

flood), and the legend of Adapa (which concerns the fall of man), which portrays a negative attitude towards women. All these reflect the Pentateuch although they have been sifted, selected and molded into the form and style of individual stories that became part of the Pentateuch ( after such a demythologization, but still some external cultural elements might have remained behind within the text). It is an effort that undertook a lengthy period of time, and its completion was sometimes before or shortly after the Babylonian exile.

The Pentateuch is genuinely Jewish by authorship, and it is not necessarily Moses who committed all its contents to writing; although most of its tradition, legal practices and covenant forms dates back to the time of Moses; and its central importance for Israel may even have originated with him or at least with the community of the exodus and conquest.

A book entitled "Ancient Near Eastern Text (ANET)," has preserved quite a good number of Assyrian laws; and most probably Jews had known about them. Those laws greatly portray casual treatment of women. For example, the Assyrians punished women severely if they uttered a blasphemy or if they indulged themselves in loose talks.<sup>21</sup> Again, like Jews, Assyrians considered women as their properties, and could be treated as men wanted, especially in cases of infidelity. Since women were believed to have been ( among the Assyrians ) highly nymphomaniacs, they had to be looked after or taken care of. In case a woman happened to engage herself in sexual promiscuity, she was severely punished ( for instance through stoning, Jn. 8:4-5 ), a thing which did not hold in men.

Israelites had been colonized by the Romans. They, too, took up with them some traditional Roman practices. Romans considered and empowered men as heads of families. Women were permitted to mix freely with men. That was a sexual licence of a kind. Among Romans, women were, therefore, considered as the source of men's pleasure. A Roman town, Pompeii, stand as an evidence since its excavations portray existence of vast brothels.<sup>24</sup>

Athenians also had an encounter with the Jews. For them, they restricted and confined women to domestic activities, with a basic responsibility of bearing and rearing legitimate children. For Jews, a woman was basically restricted to her function as mother, and according to the order of creation, a Jewess' fulfillment was manifested when she became a wife and mother.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p 108.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Pritchard, ANET, ( N.Y. University Press, 1965 ) Nos 180-185.

<sup>23</sup> John Mckenzie. Op Cit

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Like Jews, an Athenian woman had to be faithful to her husband, and failure to that severe penalties were ruled.

Jews considered women as part of men's property. They were counted among properties that men had, Gen 12:12-20; 19: 8; Jgs. 19: 24-27; Ex 20:17. As in the case of Gen 12: 12-20, men could use women as instruments for their own defense. Jews never allowed women to take an active part in worship, although they could join men in dancing during religious festivals, Ex 15:20; Jgs 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6; Ps 68:25. Besides that, they were not obliged to keep the Sabbath rest, Ex 20:10, or take part in pilgrimages, Ex 23:17. Women too were not allowed to eat together with men, Gen 18:6-9; Ruth 2:14.

The code of Jewish law had special laws which considered and protected women. Nevertheless, such laws were exceptional. Such would include the law of the captive in war, Deut 21:10-14, of a woman who is falsely charged of pre-marital intercourse, Deut. 22:13- 21, of a girl who is raped, Deut. 22:28-30.

A Jewess was mainly concerned with kitchen and other domestic works like: milling, baking (Gen 18:6-9), procuring water and fuel (1Kgs 17: 10 - 11), spinning, weaving, sewing, caring for family members as well as the entire house. Although the work of a Jewess was hard and long, it was compensated by their freedom of movement which they enjoyed within community, whether married or not, Gen 24:13-15; Ex 2:16; Deut 12:12; Jgs 21:21; 1 Sam 6. Confined by such laborious duties and male domination, still children were expected to respect their mothers, just as they did to their fathers, Deut 5:16; 21:18; Ex 20:21; Lev 19:3.

In the history of the Israelites, some women were a strong influence to men. Their influence was either constructive or destructive. For instance, Solomon had many foreign wives who turned him into an idolatler, at least he built temples for their gods, 1Kgs 11:1-18; Qoh 7:26; Sir 47:19. Jezebel demonstrated her power in imposing her religion's morals to her husband, 1Kgs 18:13; 19:1-2; 21:25-26. Other destructive women who seem not to have belonged to a depressed class are Delilah, Athaliah. On the other hand, wives of patriarchs ( like Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah ) showed a praise-worthy enthusiasm for fecundity. Although access to worship was forbidden to women in Israel, God made use of some women ( like Deborah, Miriam ) to serve as prophetesses, thus showing that their sex was not a barrier to being God's masterpieces or instruments towards the economy of human salvation.

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<sup>25</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour, Dictionary of the Biblical Theology, ( London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978 ) p. 664.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Mckenzie, Op Cit. p. 936

In the prophets, the relationship between God and His people is expressed in and by the image of man and his wife. The sealing of covenant renders people as God's chosen nation, and God became their God. That understanding is proper to all prophets, especially Hosea who explicitly use the image of husband to designate God, and woman to designate the people of God. In Hosea, like other prophets, people ( wife ) were highly expected to be faithful to God ( the husband ) by keeping covenant stipulations - promises.

Wisdom Literature seems to have a chauvinistic or misogynistic approach towards women. Sages considered women as nymphomaniacs whose sexual drive cannot be easily monitored. Following that, they warned (young) men against seductions of adulteresses and prostitutes, Prov. 6:24-26; 7:5-27, for they knew the monotony of nagging women, Prov. 19: 13; 21:9; 25: 24; 27: 15.

Ben Sira is, perhaps, the most notorious in the field of women. The language, structure and comparative wisdom models in his text betray his bias towards women. It might be due to that reason that his material on women has only received a passing treatment in commentaries as well as brief consideration in certain monographs on women and social issues in the Old Testament or Judaism.<sup>28</sup>

Ben Sirah has great respect to women who are mothers. That is why he uses the words "father and mother" in his text, to refer to the Old Testament's " parents." To him, woman is a partner in parenthood. Virtues of a good wife are understood in relation to her husband, who both obtains and maintains her as a valuable property. Men fathomed women's goodness in terms of tangible benefits she presents to man.<sup>29</sup> That bias attitude reflect the common Ancient Near East Traditions (ANET) and Old Testament identifications of women as one of the depressed classes in society, in need of support and protection. Ben Sira has slight annoyance towards women due to their empty wordiness.

Daughters are troublesome to their fathers than the sons. Whether married or not, daughters present a real or potential economic burden to their fathers. They are often the sources of anxiety and shame to their fathers. They, therefore, needed a special monitoring , Sir 7:24; 26:10f; 42:11f, in order to make them more marriageable, or kept from future divorces due to their irresponsible sexual behaviour. Their sexual passion seemed to be insatiabile, and perhaps that is why Ben Sira wrote: " Man's wickedness is better than woman's goodness," 42:14. That

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<sup>28</sup> Warren C. Trenchard, Ben Sira's View of Women: A Literary Analysis,  
( California. Scholars Press, 1982 ) p 167.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid , p. 38

sort of pessimism is described in Ben Sira's bitterness, contempt and frustration, hence he wrote: "they are burdens to be unloaded"<sup>30</sup> and Sir 7: 25 seems to say it all for him, "give a daughter in marriage and trouble will depart."

To Ben Sira, women are talkative, quarrelsome, malicious, deceptive by their beauty, 25: 16- 18, envious drunkards, promiscuous ( 26: 6 -12 ). He concludes by a statement that sin began with a woman and because of her we all die, 25:24. Most probably, such considerations of women made Jews thank and praise God for not having created them as gentiles, slaves or women.<sup>31</sup> Although wisdom literature says that women are the explanation of all evil, there are some passages which give them (women) a paramount position in society. A good wife is called "good fortune," a gift from God and a crown to her husband, Prov. 18:22; 19:14; 12:4; Sir 26:1-4. Qualities of such a wife are intelligence, beauty, silence, discipline, modesty and diligence as a housekeeper. It is to such a wife whereby the divine wisdom personified as "the lady Hokma" in the wisdom literature.<sup>32</sup>

The New Testament shows that Jesus broke the prejudices of his time, by widely contravening the discriminations practiced in regard to women. The teachings of Jesus are not revolutionary in the proper sense, but his conduct is. His teachings propose principles which are in opposition to both social and legal subjugation of women.

His dealings with women are revealing. Jesus was aware of the daily life and tasks of women. He had interest in them, and this is evident from his parables: baking ( Mt 13:33), the lost coin ( Lk 15: 8ff), the widow with a lawsuit ( Lk 18:1ff), the ten virgins who form a bridal party (Mt 25:1ff). He also performed miracles upon their request just as He did to men: Peter's mother in law ( Mt 8:14f; Mk 1:29-31; Lk 4:38 ), the daughter of Jairus and the woman who suffered from hemorrhage for thirty eight years ( Mt 9:18-26; Mk 5: 21-43; Lk 8:40-56), the woman of Syria ( Mt 15:12-28; Mk 7:24-30), the woman with a deformed back ( Lk 13: 10-17), the widow of Naim ( Lk 7:11-17). Jesus also accepted to be anointed with oil by Mary Magdalene and defended her against criticism ( Mt 26:10; Mk 14:6). A group of devoted women served his needs ( Lk 8: 2f) of whom some witnessed his death and resurrection. Jesus spoke, without embarrassment, to a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob ( Jn 4:ff, 27) a thing which his disciples thought to have been a departure from a good form. All these events portray that Jesus

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid . p 165

<sup>31</sup> McKenzie. Op. Cit., p. 937

<sup>32</sup> Fr Lacomala, Class Handouts on "The Wisdom Literature," (Nairobi: Tangaza College, 1996).

was not a misogynist. He transcended the subordination of women which prevailed in the Jewish world of his time.

St. Paul's letters demanded women to be submissive to their husbands, Eph 5:21ff, who are their heads, just as Christ is the head of the Church 1Cor 11:3-12. That submissiveness meant love. It should be based on the fear of God. To Paul, the male gender is higher than that of women. It is due to that reason that men reflect the glory of God while women reflect the glory of men, from whom they were created. That describes the origin of woman and her subjection intensified by sin as recorded in Gen 1-3; it is not man who sinned first, but woman. Since woman is of a lesser degree and dignity, her role in the Church should be minimum, 1 Tim 2: 11-14. Nevertheless, there is a reciprocal love relationship between the two. Men should love their wives just as Christ love the Church, 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15. It should be a redemptive love, for Christ came to strengthen the broken relationship between God and human beings. Henceforth, there is a degree of equality for all are one in Christ, Gal 3:28.

In another development, St. Paul worked a theology of woman showing how differences of sex has been overcome and consecrated by Christ, 1Cor 7. That was a discovery of a new dimension in woman in which life of virginity was exalted and extolled. It tends to contradict the book of Genesis which says: "... it is not good for man to be alone...", Gen 2:18." Both men and women can and do consecrate themselves in virginity. Today this is widely accepted and there are many people who have assumed it in religious life ( although some cultural values are foregone by it, and so, some tribes do not feel comfortable with it). Life of consecrated virginity has to have a purpose, namely to please God, which is a kingdom value. Mary, Mother of Jesus, stand as the model of virginity. Due to her virginity, all generations remember and call her blessed. That being the case, distinction by gender need not to be stressed as the explanation of dominating and subjugating women. It is through woman that God brought His Son into this world, and the same woman is the model of all Christians in obedience, chastity and similar virtues.

## **2.1 WOMEN PERSPECTIVE IN GREEK CULTURE**

The Hellenistic world used to discuss things pertinent to sciences of matter and mind, the origin of things, what man is and his origin, objective in life and his destiny. Greeks had many theories surrounding all those fields.

They believed that man and woman are not their own causes. They originate from one source, although they are different in nature. Plato's myth in his symposium tells us that human

beings were created by God but entrusted them to gods for care. The first human beings were round in shape, had four hands and four legs, male and female sex organs in that single body ( but facing opposite directions ) two faces sharing one head and a neck. These beings were very intelligent. Fearing that they may one day overcome the gods, one god suggested to split them into two in order to reduce their powers. That happened and resulted into two separate human beings as male and female. From then onwards, those splited parts tirelessly seek for their proper part and once they meet they live for life inseparably as husband and wife, joyfully fulfilling one another.

Men, women and children comprise of what is called human beings. The major objective in life in most of human beings is happiness. ( I say that because some people like hedonists and sadists express pleasure in accordance with vice, although they may not be consistent ). Aristotle described happiness as a good at which all things aim. Human beings find their highest and most lasting happiness in the active life of soul in accordance with virtue. Virtue may either be intellectual ( the excellence of reasoning powers, that is, prudence and wisdom ) or moral ( the control of emotions and desires in obedience to reason, that is, liberty and temperance).<sup>33</sup>

Greeks believed that men are endowed intellectually, while women operates under dictates of emotions and feelings. They are compassionate. Their difference comes from their very nature. It is due to that reason that the performance of duties are different. Admittedly, men and women were considered to belong to different natures, so they should perform duties each one according to his or her nature. About that, Sophocles wrote: "... each single person must do his or her own one business according to nature."

Plato shared the same conviction. In a discussion with his pupils, he concluded that some women are more active than some men. In spite of that, women belong to weaker sex when compared to men. " ... no practice or recalling in the life of the city belongs to woman as woman, or man as man, but the various natures are dispersed among both sexes alike: by nature woman has a share in all practices, and so has man, but in all women is weaker than men."<sup>34</sup> So, even

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<sup>33</sup> The Philosophy of Plato, The Jowett Translation, Ed. Irwin Edman, Symposium, ( N.Y: The Modern Library, 1928, p. 356 as related and cited by John A. Sanford, The Invisible Partners, ( N.Y / Ramsey/ N.J: Paulist Press, 1980 ) pp. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> Fr Gololombe, Lukas, Class Handouts on "Aristotle: Nichomachean Ethics," ( Lusaka. St. Bonaventure College, 1992)

<sup>35</sup> Fr G. Lukas, Class Handouts extracted from Aristotle's Book entitled "The Man in the Universe," ( 1943 ). ( Lusaka: St. Bonaventure College, 1992) p. 271

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, "Plato: The Republic," Chapter 5, p. 253.

when women perform duties better than men, they are always a weaker sex. This is a clear indication that Greeks had great lack of interest in women.

Plato's dialogue with Meno presents Socrates who sustains that there is a fundamental difference between men and women. Man's virtue enables him to become a competent city manager, while woman's virtue enables her to become a good house wife careful with her stores and ever obedient to her husband.<sup>17</sup> This gives an implication that, the value of men is manifested in their capacity to reason and give commands, while that of women is manifested in their capacity to obey their husbands and carry out their domestic works effectively.

From the poet Sophocles, we learn that women were denied honour of taking an active role in society: " Woman, for women silence is a grace."<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle's political philosophy outlines the thought pattern on womanhood more clearly. He presents woman as being subjected to the 'constitutional' rule of her husband. Following that, Aristotle formulated a philosophical principle which says: "... although the parts of the soul are present in all human beings, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature."<sup>19</sup>

When all is said about the perspective of women in Greek culture, it becomes clear that women had no say. They were relegated into the second rank. What would come of it when intertwined with the Jewish culture?

## 2.2 Pastoral Suggestion on Cultures

One of the themes discussed during the last African Synod was inculturation. The major intention was to harmonize Christian faith with African culture(s). That would render Gospel message in Africa be fully accommodated in African culture in such a way that Africans may feel at home with it. In other words to plant Christian faith in African soil and all people feel addressed by it when by tackling their difficulties. The proposed model of inculturation is the theology of incarnation, through which the Son of God became a human being, just as we are.

In this chapter, I outlined some cultural elements which seem to challenge Christian faith. Faith is a revelation from above, and hence is superior to any culture. When faith is properly inculturated, all people would feel addressed as well as their problems. Since the question of

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<sup>17</sup> Plato, "Plato's dialogue with Meno," in **The Great Dialogues of Plato**, ( N.Y: New American Library, Inc., 1956) p 29, 71E

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, Op Cit. when quoting the poet Sophocles II, p 270

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

inculturation is spread in Africa today than in former days, we need to give a proper interpretation to revelation and always remember its supremacy over people's cultures. From that angle, it will then challenge all our cultural elements that tend to contradict the divine plan of human salvation or that which perpetrate subjugation and discrimination of some members of our communities (like women) ; a thing which is not warranted by our Christian faith.

If that is done, the African Synod would be an event and an experience of hope for all Africans, in particular, as well as all people of all walks of life. Whether done or not, the suggestions of African Synod are a challenge to action, to stand against injustice, in the pursuit of bringing the Good News to all.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 THE MISOGYNISTIC CASTE OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

In this part, I will present the outcome of the synergy of both Jewish and Greek cultures upon which Christian faith was grafted and developed. In the above chapter, we saw how biased the two cultures were towards women. That is something which was carried into Christian faith, and lasted up to the pre - Vatican II period. The period of enlightenment did not affect the two thought patterns.

#### 3.1) Women in the Patristic Period

The major sources of Christian theology are Greek Philosophy and Jewish tradition. Through the two cultures, Christian faith developed and was expressed rationally in the pursuit of eradicating heresies that undermined Christian faith. The history of that development and systematization of Christian faith permeates the patristic, medieval, modern and contemporary philosophies. Each philosophy intended to perfect the latter.

Throughout all those epochs, the question of women's role in society was hectic. Even today, it has hit yet another thorny issue of ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood. The role of women in society, and in particular in the Catholic Church, is a burning theological, pastoral and ecumenical question that cannot be resolved solely through disciplinary ecclesiastical regulations. Without a single doubt, it remains an open issue.

The activating event(s) to this problem was the synergy of Jewish and Greek cultures. The two cultures caused a 'cross fertilization' of Christian faith and Greek way of reasoning, whose results were new pagan converts into Christianity and systematization of Christian faith. The use of Greek philosophy in Christian faith resulted into systematic theology in which certain aspects of Christian faith or revelation, formerly understood only implicitly, were rationally explicated. For example in the New Testament, there is no mention of the word "Trinity." In the attempt to explain what it entails, Christians needed rational words in order to explain what they meant by saying that the Father and the Son are of equal dignity, avoiding the interpretation of the Son as the Greek's logos ( a lesser god which emanates out of the Godhead, similar to philosopher Plotinus' World-Soul).<sup>40</sup> Such a merging of Jewish and Greek thought patterns attracted many

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<sup>40</sup> Anthony E. Gilles, The Evolution of Philosoph Christian Tradition: An Overview of the Western Thought as it relates to Judeo-Christian Tradition ( N.Y Alba House, 1987 ) pp. 37 - 40

unbelievers into Christian faith, since they realized that their thinking pattern was compatible to it.

It was an effort that took some time because it was believed that Christian faith, as a revealed religion, had nothing to do with speculation. St. Paul, for instance was uncomfortable among philosophers at Athens, Acts 17:22-23; 1 Cor 2:3. He had a particular distaste of philosophy. In his time, Paul bore testimony to two women ministries: deaconess and Widow, Rom 16; 1Tim 3:11; 5:9-10. Paul Himself decreed that those who are to assume such ministries must be of good reputation and trustworthy ( be serious and not slanderous gossips). Their duties were to intercede for the sick, conduct prayers in women's gatherings at their homes, care for the sick, bring up children in Christian faith, offer hospitality<sup>42</sup> and the like.

The "Didascalia Apostolorum" ( The teachings of the Apostles) also recognized the role of women. They could be sent, as deaconesses, to administer to other women, anoint them in baptism, instruct them on Christian faith, visit the sick and administer to the needy persons. Such women were ordained deaconesses by laying on of hands in the presence of the presbyters, deacons and other deaconesses.

During that time, bishops were the chief ministers of Eucharist. Priests and deacons were their collaborators. As time lapsed, priests were sent by bishops to preside over Eucharistic celebrations, for there were only a few bishops, who at the same time served as city magistrates. Due to political changes and the rise of Christianity, there emerged many priests and deacons, such that the works of widows and deaconesses were taken over by priests. That lost women's prestige as deaconesses and widows. Later on, the councils of Epaon (517) and Orleans (533) officially suppressed the ministries of deaconess.<sup>43</sup>

St. Augustine, as one of the Patristic Fathers, had a negative attitude towards women. He traced the origin of sin back to them. The spread of sin is mostly perpetrated by those women who are unmarried. Patristic period was basically ascetic. Christians aimed at mastering themselves for a better union with God. The greatest challenge was sexuality: women were seen as those sinful sirens whose image could always burst on a person even when engaged in contemplation. This period identified women with sexuality and was reputed as a temptress as long as she was unmarried. That owed to the fact: " woman together with her husband is the image of God... But when she is assigned as a helpmate, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Richard McBrien, Op.Cit., p 773

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

of God..."<sup>44</sup> It was St. Augustine who championed for the synergy of both Jewish and Greek cultures,<sup>45</sup> after which the role of women remained the same in the society, ( there was no change of attitude towards them ). That affected them in all walks of life: at homes, at work, in the cities and so forth. This has existed to date as what is seen as a disparaging morality towards women. The effect of the two traditions lasted upto the Vatican Councils which caused a major shift in considering a human being as a human person. Nevertheless, the trauma caused initially has not fully ceased, but there are many women liberation movements committed to putting things straight so that women may understand and realize their giftedness.

### 3.2) WOMEN IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The major protagonist in this era was Thomas Aquinas, whose philosophy and Theology was (is) used by Catholic Church as the standard or arbiter of Catholic faith and thought.<sup>46</sup> I, therefore, believe that by looking into his teaching, I will have at least brought to the fore the perspective of women in the medieval period since Thomas' teaching is binding in Catholic Church. Thomas developed a very negative attitude towards women, and this is portrayed by his teaching. He believed that just as God is the principle of the whole universe, so too the first created man (Adam) in God's image and likeness is the principle to the whole human race. At the same time, man is obliged to love his wife because he knows that although he is the head of the entire human race, woman was made out of his side (rib).<sup>47</sup>

St. Thomas believed that woman was 'produced' from man, not by natural generation, but by divine power as a helper to man. To him, a woman was not created as man's helpmate in other works since God could have created another man to help Adam efficiently. Instead, she is man's helper in the work of generation.

In another development, Thomas saw women as misbegotten or defective male human persons. This is so from the individual nature of woman, in which she plays a passive role in generation, while man (male) plays an active role. On the other hand, as regards the human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation. This latter intention depends on God, the Universal author of nature. In producing nature, God created both male and female. The understanding of woman

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<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine, The Trinity, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963) p. 352.

<sup>45</sup> Athony E. Giles, Op. Cit , pp. 37-40

<sup>46</sup> The New Code of Canon Law, Canon, ( Bangalore: Colins, 1983) 252\$\$\$ 3

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Q 92, Art. 2, Pt. I.

as man's helpmate in the work of generation implies subjection. Subjection could either be of servility, in which the superior makes use of the subject for his own benefits, or economic (civil) subjection in which the superior makes use of the subject for their own benefits and goods. The latter subjection has subjects directed by the superior, who is open to discretion of reason. In man reason is pre-dominant. This why woman is subordinated to man.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.3) THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

The best outlined philosopher who at length talked about women and who is likewise influential in the twentieth century is Nietzsche. He died in 1900 and left behind many written and unwritten documents among which the one entitled "Thus Spake Zarathustra" talks about women in detail. The book was named after a Persian sage.<sup>49</sup>

The first part of that book concerns the idea of the superman or an overman and the transvaluation of values. Nietzsche tirelessly attacked the distinction between our world which is characterized by the will to power. He knew that will to power is a phenomenological reality, hence does not exist in transcendence. Will to power is the world's intelligible character and is expressed and manifested everywhere in everything.<sup>50</sup> Due to the prompting of will to power, every individual seek above all to discharge its force on every other individual, trying the best possible to subordinate the development of the outstanding individuals. The aim of doing so is to become an overman or superman.

Superman is characterized by strength, power, knowledge, independence, capacity to use force and giving commands. Superman is, therefore, a highly cultured being with all skills and has nothing forbidden for he is the teacher of all doctrines. Superman finds pleasure in subjugating everything ( even God , who according to Nietzsche does not exist ) by using force. To superman, perfect joy is achieved not in the use of peace and dialogue. but by the use of violence<sup>51</sup>. Nietzsche believed that whoever dies in violence dies on his way towards becoming a superman. Superman is always a becoming. Every man in his macrocosm strive to becoming a superman.

Talking about man's relationship with women, Nietzsche held that: "women are only half human beings at best, more like cats and cows. What is great in them is the passion of love,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Fredrick Copiestone, A History of Philosophy: Fichte to Nietzsche (N.Y: Image Books, 1985) pp 393

<sup>50</sup> Ibid . p. 407

<sup>51</sup> Fr Lukas G.," Thus Spake Zarathustra", in History of Philosophy:Philosophy of Nietzsche. Class Handouts. ( Lusaka. St Bonaventure College. 1993)

and out of that love all creation comes into being. So, the solution to all woman's problems is child bearing; and that is the only interest women ever have in men. A man needs two things in life, namely, danger and play. His interest in woman is that she is 'the most dangerous playing thing.' She is the recreation of a warrior... and her hope is that one day she will give birth to a superman. Men, on the other hand, are merely evil, but women are bad. That is why they are dangerous. Men can overcome them by subjugating them completely."<sup>52</sup>

Women can never become overpersons because they are compassionate and follow emotions ( passion for love - pity ), which is the most dangerous cause of error. Men use strength and intelligence.

### 3.4) WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE IN THE VATICAN II COUNCIL AND BEYOND

The question pertinent to the use of inclusive language is voiced out widely in the Catholic Church as well as in the secular world more than it was in the previous days. So far, it is only a few people who realize its significance. For example I remember sometimes back in our Capuchin Friary, there was a heated debate between students in theology and one Capuchin priest from Tanzania. He was infuriated by brothers' tendency of inserting the words "and sisters" (in the prayer of " I confess to Almighty God... ) during the examination of conscience during compline or at other liturgical functions in the absence of women or females. The priest argued that it is superfluous to do so. Brothers are convinced that whenever we pray, it is the whole Church which prays, hence it is imperative to include "sisters" even when they are not present.

Likewise, some scholars too, think that the Vatican Council II was convoked to meet needs and crisis of that time, after which it ended. It is the lot of such scholars who resist and even reject the outcomes of Vatican Council II. They argue that it does not solve their problems. They sit back waiting for the Vatican III Council in order to solve their problems and fulfill their unfulfilled hopes.<sup>53</sup> Some of their unfulfilled hopes would perhaps include :

\* The thorny issue of women's ordination to ministerial priesthood, which Catholic Church has refuted as against the traditions of the Church. About this issue, Pope John Paul II has advised us to be content with 'no',<sup>54</sup> at least for the time being.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Rene Latourelle, Dictionary of Fundamental Theology, ( N Y St Pauls, 1984 ) p 1161

<sup>54</sup> Benard Haring, Living with the Popes 'no' in The Tablet ( 11th June 1994 ) p. 736.

- \* The continued 'imposition' of obligatory celibacy to religious persons and priests.<sup>55</sup>
- \* Women's denial of license to carry out abortion freely,<sup>56</sup> yet the bodies are theirs and they would like to do with them as it pleases them owing to the fact that they are free.
- \* Equality between women and men so that they may effectively carry out their roles in society.

Actually, the Church is bombarded with many crisis today. From history, she realize that crisis are inescapable; but they are opportunities given for her growth or new temptations to repress or regress. Some of them emanate from people's carelessness, imprudence or incompetence.<sup>57</sup>

Women had assumed an active role during the infant Church,<sup>58</sup> but they faded away without much explanation. From then up to the pontificate of John XXIII, who convoked the Vatican Council II, women were not mentioned explicitly in the Church or in the papal encyclicals, not unless when referring to 'men' in generic sense to mean human beings.<sup>59</sup> We need not, therefore, to down play the role of the Vatican Council II which has effected a significant change in human society. From then, the Church has always considered herself as the teacher of faith and morals, although she does not have solutions to all human problems.<sup>60</sup> That move was prophetically initiated by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 when he intended to terminate all oppressive motifs of capitalism and socialism and implant in their place the balance of the two.<sup>61</sup> This pope's world view clearly defined each one's role in society. Women and children were to work in homesteads, and it was an aberration for them to work outside homes.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, the rich had to give a just wage to men so that their women and children would be economically dependent on it.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Richard McBrien, *Op Cit* , p. 806

<sup>56</sup> **Pope Paul IV, "Humanae Vitae"** ( 1968 ) in Flannery Austin, **Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents.**

<sup>57</sup> *Op. Cit.* pp. 3 - 4

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p 937; See also "**Women in Patristic Period**" in this essay Chapter 3

<sup>59</sup> Judith A. Dwyer, **The Dictionary of Catholic Social Teaching.** ( Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1984 ) p 986

<sup>60</sup> " Gaudium et Spes," Art. No. 33, in Flannery, Austin, *Op.Cit.*

<sup>61</sup> Pope Leo XIII, **Rerum Novarum,** ( Nairobi: St Paul Publications - Africa, 1942 ) ;

Cf Fr Odeny Charles, *Op Cit.*

<sup>62</sup> This understanding is also reiterated by the encyclical '**Quadragesimo Anno**' of Pope Pius XI in 1931.

<sup>63</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Op Cit.*, No 60

The world was favoured women's admission in various professionalisms like lawyers, doctors, scientists and so on<sup>64</sup>. This perhaps was caused by philosophy of Nietzsche which anticipated the World Wars as an opposition to any sort of subjugation, like colonialism which existed by then. All had to struggle to becoming 'overpersons.' With that effect, all that which was formerly considered a 'masculine world' began to experience an incursion of the undeniable ability to women. Such a shift was not without effect on the Church.

In 1952, Pope Pius XII allowed women to pursue theological degrees. He also founded a Pontifical Institute in Rome, Regina Mundi, which prepared women to teach theology in Catholic women's colleges.<sup>65</sup>

Pope John XXIII's encyclical, "Pacem in Terris," viewed the struggle of women for greater equality as a key sign of the times. He wrote: "It is obvious to every one that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations with a Christian tradition, and more slowly but broadly, among peoples who have inherited other traditions or cultures. Since women are becoming more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments, but claim, both in domestic and public life, the rights and duties that befit a human person."<sup>66</sup> That was an explicit indication that women have rights to work or taking an active role in whatever field in the society according to their abilities, taking precautions that their health, morals and development are not endangered,<sup>67</sup> as well as following any vocation owing to the fact that all human beings are free to choose freely any state of life,<sup>68</sup> except ministerial priesthood.<sup>69</sup>

In short, the world view of Pope Leo XIII has changed to a world view that is shaped by historical consciousness, and it considers human freedom, giftedness and potentials. This has been effected by the writings of Pope John XXIII and the Vatican II Council. Catholic theologians and moralists present in the Vatican II Council realized that to consider human beings seriously is tantamount to considering their Creator seriously.<sup>70</sup> With that awareness, the Council caused a major shift by guaranteeing human beings a personalistic approach (considering human beings as human persons and not human nature). This understanding is

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<sup>64</sup> Hekima Review, Journal of Hekima College ( No. 12, January 1995, Nairobi - Kenya: Jesuit School of Theology ) p 48.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Footnote No 13, Quotation from Lacugna, " Catholic Women....," p. 240.

<sup>66</sup> Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, ( Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1967 ), No. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., No. 19

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., No. 15.

<sup>69</sup> The New Code of Canon Law, Op. Cit., No. 1024

See also The New Catechism of Catholic Church, No. 1577

<sup>70</sup> Benard Gula, Reason Informed by Faith, ( Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989 ) pp. 63 - 74.

very evident in the first part of 'Gaudium et Spes' in Vatican Council II documents. The document considers a human being both as an integral being and as an embodied subject. That means both men and women are understood in the eyes of faith and reason, and none is to be understood in isolation for they are all relational beings, without subjugation whatsoever.<sup>71</sup> The Vatican II Council document reads: "Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the ground of sex, race, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design."<sup>72</sup> A human being is integral. It is such a person that the Church consolidate and incorporate into herself, through baptism, as the a people of God that they may equally share Christ's kingly, prophetic and priestly functions<sup>73</sup> ( otherwise called common priesthood ), each according to given divine graces through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and ministry sacraments ( Matrimony or Holy Orders ).

There are many other Papal encyclicals that oppose gender discrimination.<sup>74</sup> They all aim at making the image of God which shines on every human being be respected, by asserting same value, dignity, equality and rights. In " Mulieris dignitatem," Pope John Paul II invites his brothers, sons and daughters to a better understanding of the Church's attitude towards women.

Truly, women are biologically different from men, but are equally human beings with same universal rights. That difference is willed by the Creator whose image and likeness they carry around with them. Their difference should not cause favourism to one group of people and ignore the other, yet we should not impose false equality in those two natures. Difference of nature has complementary purposes within a society,<sup>75</sup> that means, it is not based on "better than." Consequently, each of those two members is an artisan and author of their community's culture.<sup>76</sup> So, they both participate and contribute into their cultural activities each according to his or her nature<sup>77</sup> and capacity. All that they bring into culture need to be appreciated, acknowledged and fostered.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid , p. 67

<sup>72</sup> Flanner Austin, Op. Cit., Gaudium et Spes, Art. 29

See also Footnote No. 8 in this essay.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Lumen Gentium, Chapter One.

<sup>74</sup> For an example, see Pope John Paul II. "Familiaris Consortio." (1981), No. 23-24 in Flannry Austin, **Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents, ( Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1992)**; also by the same Pope, **Mulieris Dignitatem.**(Nairobi. St. Paul Publications- Africa, 1988), Part six, Pope Pius XI,

**Quadragesimo Anno, ( 1931 ), No. 13 among others.**

<sup>75</sup> Op Cit . No. 8

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., No. 55

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., No. 60.

The Church is in full realization of, and has acknowledged, the roles that women play in society, especially in Church's call to evangelization. She encourages them to assume their divine given mission in the world and at their homes. At the same time, she vividly recalls some women foundresses of religious families like St. Clare and Teresa of Avila, as well as other women like Catherine of Siena among others, who left behind rich documents in spirituality for the sustenance and growth of Christian faith. She also encourages and supports the family life because there are prominent mothers in the Church who have had great influence in their families as mothers, particularly in passing faith to their children. Other unforgettable women, according to *The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration: On the Question of the admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, (1977), are those who consecrated their entire life for the exercise of charity or for missions. With an awareness of all such and other un-mentioned realities, the Church, in its *The New Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1024, continually ask women to take part in all Church activities, except that one of ministerial priesthood.

The Church use similar words of encouragement today to the Church in Africa. This is because the role of women is indispensable, especially in family life. The Church use the image of family to describe what the African Church ought to be. She need to live in harmony with everyone, together sharing their experiences as brothers and sisters. Such is a family model of the Church - the domestic Church. Both the father and mother are its leaders, and a down-play of anyone of them can hamper its growth.

Now that the African Synod is over, it is the responsibility of every African Christian to implement its teaching. It would be better to say that the African Synod has started. We need always, as a Church, to bear in mind the role of women in Africa, and in the world at large.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN IN AFRICAN TRADITIONS.

The second chapter of this essay, cited that women had no say among Greeks and Jews. I thought considering those two named cultures because they were decisive in the mindset of Christian Theologians. In this chapter, I would like to see whether African traditional cultures were biased towards women as were the Greeks and the Jews; and whether societal attitudes hampered, or not, the participation of women in development. To reach that end, I will limit myself in three basic fields, namely:

- \* women's political and legal status
- \* Property ownership and inheritance
- \* and division of labour.

I consider these fields important because many women liberation movements are addressing them in our days, either implicitly or explicitly. The concern is work, which is divine gift. Work calls us to be imitators of God in His work of creation. Work elevates human dignity. It is also source of human sustenance.

Some people hold that African traditions had great respect to women. This is because they were seen as the springs of life. They were helped in all stages of growth - from childhood to motherhood. All helps were geared towards women's fulfillment of their roles as responsible mothers.

Women formed the majority of traditional African population, just as it is today. They were, therefore, major agents of production and consumption of resources. Women in general, and African women in particular, hold their families and societies together, in spite of the rapid socio-economic, political, scientific and technological advancements among which a modern woman finds herself. Women's role in society is not something new. It is something which is naturally theirs owing to their biological make up which provides them with motherly instincts. From times immemorial, women were considered as people of talents in all spheres of life. Each woman was basically concerned with her husband and children.<sup>78</sup> In some communities, her value derived from benefits she secures for her husband and children.

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<sup>78</sup> R. Njau and G. Mulaki, **Kenya: Women Heroes and their Mystical Powers**, (Nairobi: Risk Publications, 1984), p. 1

Many oral and written African traditions presents women as happy, owning property, making decisions ( not a single decision could be made without her consultation ), their social, religious and legal rights were clearly defined. Women had significant and an indispensable roles to play in society. The poet, Okot p` Bitek, summarizes roles of an African woman in words:

“Woman of Africa  
sweeper  
Smearing floors and walls  
with cowdung and black soil  
cook. Aya, the baby on your back  
washer of dishes,  
Planting, weeding, harvesting  
storekeeper, builder  
Runner of errands,  
Cart, lorry, donkey... ( for transportation )  
Woman of African  
What are you not?”<sup>79</sup>

In actual fact, if we are to draft a list of women’s roles without forgetting to portray their genuine representation, it can be endless. This is because men try the best possible to distance themselves from some roles claiming that they belong to women.

Researchers like Hopley seem to overshadow the above understanding of women’s roles in African traditions. He says: “ African woman ... is not obtrusive: she is perpetually busy... Her inner thoughts and beliefs are a sealed book to the investigator, and one is, at first, inclined to believe that her influence is not worth consideration.”<sup>80</sup> It is an understanding that lines up with some colonial scholars who believed that African women are like “unhappy beasts of burden and slaves to men” who never got respect or sympathy from society.<sup>81</sup>

It is true that African traditional women were respected and some held influential positions in society, as Njau and Mulaki stressed,<sup>82</sup> but that cannot be universalized. This is

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<sup>79</sup> Okot p`Bitek, “ Song of Ocol ” in Kabira. Wanjiku, and Nzioka, Elizabeth A., Celebrating Women’s Resistance: A Case Study of Women Groups Movement, (Nairobi: New Earth Publications, 1994), p. 24

<sup>80</sup> A. Calgnolo, The Agikuyu: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore. ( Nyeri (Kenya): 1933 ), p. 274.

<sup>81</sup> R. Njau and G. Mulaki, Op Cit, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid



They also had to be conversant with their traditional laws. These people settled down all types of disputes in community.<sup>85</sup>

The traditional Akan community of Ghana never permitted women to participate in decision making meetings. They could not own or inherit property of their husbands or parents. Kitchen was the only place where they had full autonomy in decision making. There were taboo morality that said that kitchen is out of bound to boys and men. Kitchen was woman's strong weapon since men were not allowed "to eat outside." Women ridiculed men who entered kitchen, their sacred domain and haven.<sup>86</sup>

The Kikuyu people have many myths to explain the status of women. One of them say that in the past women used to rule, but their rule was tyrannic and disastrous. They forced men to perform all agricultural labour, take care of domestic animals, and all domestic duties like cooking, washing, nursing children and so on. Men were treated like slaves. Due to their bitterness, they conspired against women by making them pregnant and in the period of their weakness dethrone them. When they did that, the Kikuyu men have experienced peace, love and harmony to date.

The Kikuyu elders traced back all chaos back to women at different historic periods. That exonerated and legitimized men's action of excluding women from all political and legal matters, even participating in the making of community decisions. They considered women as stupid, disloyal, disagreeable, untrustworthy, easily cheated and the like.<sup>87</sup>

The Tharaka, Embu, Samburu, Turkana, Abagusii, Digo, Taita and Duruma people's attitudes towards women in politics can be summarized thus: "...by implication, women are unlikely to display maturity, impartiality or wisdom."<sup>88</sup>

### **Modern woman in African in Politics**

It is true that I did not probe into all African societies, but the same truth implicated in the societies mentioned applies to most of the African societies. Policies for marginalization of women can be said to be deeply rooted in our African traditions. For redress, we need to face the entire reality of our past with openness, humility and honesty. None of the qualities demanded by the elders, for instance wisdom, generosity, kindness, sense of justice, patience,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid , p 9

<sup>86</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyove, Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy, ( N Y: Orbis Books, 1995 ), p. 53.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid p 13

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

impartiality, among others, are intrinsically male. They are human qualities that can be found in both genders. In respect to that, the tendency of excluding women from full participation in politics and decision making processes cannot be warranted or justified whatsoever. It is an attitude that, at best, denies women the opportunity to contributing meaningfully to the development process and to work towards equality and autonomy.

Modern women are realizing their own talents and giftedness in politics and legal matters. They realize that the time has gone when men used to sit back to give commands while women did the obeying without questioning, for they were impaired in making decisions, even for their own marriages as the following Maasai song displays:

My father  
why do you send me  
to Ole Kareso  
why do you send me  
to such an old man  
Ole Kareso has eleven wives  
Ole Kareso cannot look after himself  
You say Ole Kareso can look after me  
but he  
cannot even look after himself  
Ole Kareso is too old  
Father why do you send me  
to Ole Kareso.<sup>89</sup>

This does not apply today, because for a marriage to be established, there has to be a free expression and exchange of consent by both marriage partners: who must have reached the age of discretion. Civil and religious authorities have so ensured. Consequently, there is an outcry for their involvement in decision making bodies all over the continent. Women have formed many liberation movements, associations and movements to effect their claims. Unlike in the past, many African societies no longer arrange marriages for their daughters.

The World Nations have reconsidered the issue of women with sympathy and great concern. That has resulted into decreeing of sameness of human rights; a thing which has been put into consideration by many countries. It introduced the period between 1976 and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid

1985 as "United Nations Decade for Women." Its major objectives were equality of men and women, peace and development.<sup>90</sup> Towards the end of that decade, women in Africa sought governments' concern, especially by reviewing laws that relate to them. That was because laws may be barriers to their advancement.

The Kenyan Constitution provides fundamental rights and freedoms of men, women, children, under chapter five. They includes:

Protection of right to life, personal liberty, slavery, forced labour, inhuman treatment, deprivation of property, of freedom of conscience, freedom of movement, expression association, protection from all sorts of discrimination irrespective of political opinions, race, tribe, place of origin, color, creed, sex and so on.<sup>91</sup>

The fourth United Conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 provide a forum for African women to undertake gender advocacy in Africa.<sup>92</sup> That means, subjugation of women has not been terminated completely. In 1992, there was a women workshop in Nairobi. It focused on "Women and democratization process in Kenya." The seminar addressed central roles of women in initiating a democratic change, influencing and intervening in policy making as well as implementation. The Seminar's aim was to have some women put in the mainstream of leadership in general, and politics in particular. That is because, politics, in most of the African countries, is basically considered as a field for men. My research portrays that, most women take part in domestic related projects or works: a thing which casts light into Beijing's claim.

In Kenya, there is an association, "Kenya League of Women Voters." It wishes to make it clear that politics, which was formerly believed to be an arena for men, also belong to women, the vast majority of Kenyan population. They have right to vote whomever they want.

There is a steady increase of women politicians here in Kenya. Last year had one woman in Cabinet ministry, plus some others in the Parliament. Last general elections saw some women in parliament, various ministries and at least there were two women presidential candidates. It is the high time for Kenyan women to rise from their sleep and elect women representatives in political arena to voice out their cries. They failed to do so in the just concluded Kenyan general elections, perhaps because many pre-literate women still believe

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<sup>90</sup> Association of African Women in Research and Development ( AAWORD ), **From Strategies to Action: A Research Perspective**, ( Nairobi, AAWORD, 1995 ), p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> **Kenya Constitutions**, Section 70, ( Nairobi: Government Pres. 1981 ).

<sup>92</sup> "Concerns in Beijing" in **AMECEA Documentation Services**, ADS 18/1995 No. 445. ( September 15th, 1995 )

that politics is an arena for men only. Most probably that is why women candidates failed (or may be they were not competent), although we need to vote wisely and freely.

Women should liberate themselves, and prove to the world that they realize their own talents and giftedness. Consequently, they can correct people's mentalities and attitudes who say that they "cannot elect a woman just because she is a woman, or because women have small brains."<sup>93</sup>

#### 4.2 Property ownership and inheritance in African Traditional Setup

Ownership and inheritance patterns outlined here are selected from a few African societies. It is a reality reflected either directly or indirectly by most of the African tribes. I hope it will help us in analysing and appreciating the struggle for ownership of property by women groups and individuals in the pursuit of their own empowerment.

The Maasai had clear guidelines as to who would own what. The land was owned by the entire community, especially men who grazed their cattle on it. Women only did little cultivation, but never claimed for its ownership. Men, on the other hand, controlled people, made decisions related to marriages and dowry. Women were part of men's property. Women owned only ornaments, household utensils, furnishings, milk, skins and slaughtering animals was part of their duties. They also took care of sick animal near homesteads, which could not be taken to graze with other healthy animals.<sup>94</sup> So, the question of women's ownership or inheritance of animals and land is out of topic. Cattle being Maasai's status symbol were passed on to male children, and if an elder happens to die without a son, then his properties were distributed among his brothers.

The Luo people do not permit women to inherit property or participate in decision making, especially concerning inheritance. Women had great interest in shares allocated to them by their husbands. Wives and widows were considered as custodians of land for their sons. If a widow had no son(s), under the traditional system, she stood to lose the land to brothers or male relatives of the dead husband.<sup>95</sup>

Yoruba people did not allow women ownership or inheritance of property. Before marriage, a girl was allowed to have as many things as she wanted according to her uses.

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<sup>93</sup> "Women Head of State? No way!" in Daily Nation, ( Saturday 27th December, 1997 ) p. 4, also Daily Nation, "Polls sad Commentary on Women," ( January 8th, 1998 ) p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> Wanjiku M. Kabira and Elizabeth Nzioka, Op Cit, pp. 15-16

<sup>95</sup> Fr. Francis Jabelo, O.F.M. Cap., A Luo Priest aged 37 years. Comes from Kabol - Kisumu. Interviewed by the Author. Ruiru Parish, Jan. 1998

After marriage, all that she possessed became part of her husband's property. When a husband gave a present to his wife, it was meant for her use, but not ownership.<sup>96</sup>

The Lozi, Bemba, Chewa, and Tonga people of Zambia, women too enjoyed the usage of their husband's property, but never inherited it upon their husband's death, if they had no male children. Their key duties were domestic based. The same case applies to Fulani people of Nigeria, who are more or less like Maasai and Karamojong people.

### **Ownership and Inheritance of property in modern African societies**

The charter of human rights endorses human rights to possess property, regardless gender differences. This applies under some conditions. If a woman is not married, she can inherit her parents' properties. Her very action of getting married makes her lose her right to inherit her parents.

Many countries have likewise appropriated some of those laws. Kenya, for instance, has its "Law of Succession Act" which was passed in 1972. From it, it is clear that male, female and children enjoy equal rights of inheritance. Widows and widowers are also entitled to equal rights with an exception that widow's right to her deceased husband's immovable property is terminated by her consequent marriage. Muslims are exempted from that law. Section five in paragraph two confers a right to female person, whether married or not, to make will just as a man can. The Act provides extensive measures to ensure rights of widows and children in monogamous or polygamous marriages. Widows without children are also provided for. The Act hails an achievement towards ensuring equality between sexes. It has far reaching consequences for women, particularly those who are governed by customary laws in rural communities where land and livestock are the most important forms of property. In some communities, customary laws give wives and daughters right of maintenance only, but not ownership.

### **4.3 Division of Labour in Africa**

In most African traditional societies ( as my collected data shows<sup>97</sup> ) the reproductive activities such as fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking, washing, transportation and agricultural work, among others, seem to be the domain of women.

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<sup>96</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Op Cit*, p. 64.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Introduction and Appendix of this essay.

The Maasai divide their works according to gender. Women build huts ( Manyatta), nurse children, make ornaments, do the cooking, slaughter animals, take care of sick animals, clean pens, remove ticks from cows ( together with men ), milk cows, fetch water, collect firewood. On the other hand men assumed supervisory and managerial roles. Each knows his or her duties consistently, and there is no need of asking of what to do next.

The Pokomo women mainly performed agricultural labour like weeding, harvesting, transporting crops from gardens to homes and domestic duties. Men are mainly fishermen, hunters and decision makers. They also clear forests in preparation for gardens and brew beer. Like Kikuyu people of Kenya, Chagga of Tanzania have men as decision makers and agriculturalists. Women are restricted to domestic chores, smearing houses with cowdung, fetching water, collecting firewood, weeding, harvesting, transporting crops from gardens to homes among others. If a Kikuyu man was traditionally caught in the kitchen by other men, he was heavily fined by his agemates, and girls ridiculed him and none could easily accepted to be married by such a person.<sup>98</sup>

Like Kisii and Embu, Luo women were responsible for the cultivation of crops, digging, planting, threshing, grinding grains, storing food, plastering house's walls with mud, and all domestic activities. Often, men built and repaired boats for fishing, took care of sugarcane coffee, cotton which are the main sources of their income.

It is pointless to go across Africa seeking what the duties of men and women are. It should be apparent that there is a clear division of labour. In general, there seems to have been a silent conspiracy among African communities in regards to their treatment of women, especially in political policies, ownership and inheritance of property as well as in the division of labour. It portrays that women perform more than sixty per cent of all labour. They are almost "everything" and the center of every family. Their roles are indispensable.

#### **4.4 Personal Evaluation**

From this enterprise, one can conclude that women perform over eighty percent of domestic labour, over sixty percent of agricultural activities among others. At the same time, the results of my questionnaires<sup>99</sup> indicate that they suffer many difficulties which hinder

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<sup>98</sup> Rebecca Waceke. My deceased grandmother aged 105 years (by then). A conclusion made from a collection of narrated stories on how to become a man among the Kikuyu Community Murang'a, ( December. 1991 )

<sup>99</sup> See the Appendix

them from participating actively in both Church's and society's development affairs. Their difficulties can be classified as follows:

- \* They lack economic empowerment: this refers to lack of resources and support from husband, family, Church, their ethnic societies and civil governments. They are deprived of rights to ownership and inheritance, even though some countries so authorizes.
- \* The male superiority and supremacy takes control of everything, for instance in family planning, consent and collaboration of both spouses is highly required.
- \* Violence against women.

Although women perform most of the household chores, their valuable role and contribution to the society is not recognized as such. That is a trend that has survived through many generations. It is against God's will, who created men and women in His own image and likeness, and ordered them to be His regents in the world by both subduing and perpetuating human life through generation in it. That is continuing God's work of creation. In order to truly respond to that, we need to portray women's true picture, as our Christian value dictates, we need to empower them today than ever before. It is a work that entails seeing God in them, loving them just as Jesus commanded. We should honestly humble and relate ourselves with all those whom society rejects, marginalizes and discriminates against.

These are the outcomes of my researches, whose collected data are distributed discursively within four chapters in this essay. The first Chapter show how some groups or individual members of society can be discriminated against by the language which people use in their daily life. This has happened, as chapter two and three indicates, among the Jews and Greeks, whose setting contributed greatly to the systematization and formation of Christian faith. Chapter three looked into women in the Catholic faith, especially in theologies of St. Augustine and Thomas. Most of our modern theology is based on the theology of St. Thomas, and that is why I considered him important in my research. In the same chapter, I spent some time in showing how the Vatican II council and Post Vatican II periods developed their conception of women, who were formerly regarded as 'slaves of men' from the treatment they

acquired from them. The last chapter trace if women subjugation is a reality only in the Western cultures or it is also a reality here in Africa. The synergy of all chapters suggest that instrumentalization of women is something deeply rooted in people's cultures. To reach that end, I read some books, articles, periodicals, did some surveys in different places in the country with a help of questionnaires which I had drafted as well as interrogations to a few people. Empowerment of women ought to start with consideration of critical issues that continually bring them down.<sup>100</sup> Such would include their health, economic, education, political, reproduction health care, social and cultural status, among others.

### **Health Status of Women**

Many women die during their reproductive periods due to pregnancy related cases like termination of early and unwanted pregnancies, too many and close pregnancies, too late pregnancies or child bearing complications.

In our days we need to look for means of helping them in the situation they find themselves in, with an eye cast in future.

### **Women's Economic Status**

My collected data indicates that more than sixty percent of agricultural labour is performed by women. Their contribution here is substantial, yet they neither have ownership rights to the land, nor are they entitled to agricultural income. It is only a few women, if not none, may be having a small portion of land, or access to credit or loan facilities. If women work so hard, and at the end of the day they have no coins in their pockets to purchase their basic needs, how do we expect them to be economically empowered? The society has to start empowering them by addressing the ownership and control of means of production such as land, labour, capital and the like. Create income earning opportunities, skill development programs to address needs of women ( both young and the old ) who are poorly educated and cannot afford or secure a regular income through paid employment. At the same time, Africa informal sectors, like "jua Kali," need to create new job opportunities for pre-literates.

### **Women's Education Status**

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<sup>100</sup> Lutha Musyimi Ogana, " Empowerment of Women as Equal Partners in the Family," in "Wajibu", Vol. 9, No 4, (1994), pp 5 - 6.

Lack of education in most of the Africans has been the major cause of poverty or only little development. Traditionally, it has been believed that to educate a girl is tantamount to wasting money. This was so because girls could get married to rich and educated men, who would look after them; and after all, their key duties are kitchen related. So, they educated male children only.<sup>101</sup> In line with that, some parents could seek employment for their daughters as house-maids, so that their salaries may be used to educate their brothers, if not keeping their families surviving on it. It is a myth that tends to make people forget that children are divine gifts to their parents, who are also entitled to seeing their welfare by providing them with their basic needs like education, health facilities, food, shelter, clothes and the like.<sup>102</sup>

Suggestions such as pleading to civil authorities to enforce, at least, basic education to all children would be ideal. Those families which are economically poor such that they cannot see their children into formal education, governments should come to their rescue by creating or adding bursary schemes, fund skill development projects. For adults who missed school during their early ages, government should start adult literacy programmes. The major aim of doing that is to restore human dignity. It should ever be born in mind that when one educates one woman, the entire family becomes educated.

### **Women's Reproductive Health Care**

In our days, Catholic moral theologians try the best possible to educate people the value of human life, which starts immediately after conception. All abortifacient methods are condemned as contradiction of divine will, "do not kill," ( one of the ten commandments).

Modern days have suffered loss of many innocent souls through abortion due to unwanted or unplanned pregnancies, early pregnancies or even pregnancies got when trying efficiency of some contraception by youths ( which Catholic moral theologians considers as un-natural ).

In order to make African women acquire knowledge and skills, and prosper in whatever field she is working in, she must be able to plan and control her body. The family setup has to empower her so as to decide how, when and under what circumstances she should have children. Upon deciding to plan her family, she should be helped to have access to available services and enjoy free choice of whatever method of family planning she prefers to employ,

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<sup>101</sup> "To Train a Mother is to Train a Nation," in AMECEA Documentation Service, Op Cit , pp. 8-9.

<sup>102</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Familiaris Consortio" (1981), Nos. 36 - 41, in Flannery Austin. Op Cit

preferably natural family planning.<sup>103</sup> Other methods would include: quality counseling, advantages and disadvantages of using contraceptives ( like coils, foams and condoms ), information or education on sexual transmitted diseases, HIV, advantages of using natural family planning methods.

At the final analysis, women should be allowed to make their own decisions on which method to use. Their decision should be made in consultation with their husbands, taking care that family and society values are not tampered with. The issue of empowerment of women calls for reproductive rights

Planning of a family reduces gender bias, conflicts between spouses and sexual abuses or violence because any born child comes when the spouses want. Besides reflecting women as true springs of life, family planning minimizes cases of unwanted children, who are candidates to abortion.

### **Social and Cultural Status**

African traditional setting, as we have seen, presents woman as somebody who produce children and serve her husband in all ways without questioning as expected by him and the society. In order to do that, the society permitted her to use all household resources like land, cattle for milk, food storage systems without owning them.

The introduction of the Western culture in Africa ( in science and advanced technologies ) brought about new roles of women. It caused confusion, new demands and challenges to African women. For the empowerment of a modern woman in our society, we need to impart knowledge and different formal skills to her, instill in her a sense of self-confidence to enable her be an efficient decision maker in areas that concern her own development. On the other hand, she must endeavour to flee herself from socio-cultural practices that constrain her development and prey on her rights as an individual and a member of a society.

### **4.5 THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN WOMAN**

One of the criterion of women's belongingness to a man was traditionally considered to be payment of bride-wealth. In our modern days, some women reciprocate abuses from their husbands by reminding them that they have not paid bride-wealth to their parents; so they are not fully their properties ( women were part of men's property ). That worsens the situation.

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<sup>103</sup> "Humanae Vitae" (1968), in Flannery, Austin, Ibid.

The Catholic Church has abolished such traditions of paying bride-wealth as a condition necessary for the validity of marriage. Marriage is established by mutual and free exchange of spouses' consent. Spouses can be married in the Church even without having paid bride-wealth. However, when registering their intentions of marriage in the Church, spouses sometimes find forms bearing questions like: "Have you paid your dowry?" If it has not been paid without a sound reason, then marriage is postponed until everything is settled down, between the spouse and parents to the bridegroom. This is something which I witnessed in my home parish (Gaichanjiru in Murang'a diocese ), during my last December holidays (1997). The issue of bride-wealth reminds men their obligation to pay dowry. I suggest that in future the Church offer sound catechesis because many people are blocked outside the sacrament of matrimony by paying of bride-wealth. This has increased the rate of co-habitation.

Education also contribute to looking down of one of the married parties, perhaps because one is educated than the other. In most cases, the educated fails to recognize the good of the other, especially in their discussions. Their marriage fails to picture the reality of marriage. The Church , here, need to stress the importance of education to both boys and girls. It helps in showing equal responsibility of parenthood.

Many African women are dependent on their husbands economically. When some husbands realize that their wives have some money whose source is unknown to them, they become suspicious that they are unfaithful in their marriage. Their marriage, consequently, starts to loose taste. The Church and the society need to implore men to support their wives in having their own properties and recognize their rights in inheritance. Governments, on the other hand, need to make women accessible to credit and loan facilities so that they may start income generating activities for their own empowerment. That would mitigate burdens of women in going now and then to their husbands to ask for money to purchase their own basic needs. It will lessen the burden of bringing up children.

Some cultural traditions still expect women to obey their husbands in everything. They are not given chance to make their own decisions. If it does not affect family and society values, such traditions need to be eradicated, and empower women in making their decisions, especially those pertinent to planning family. Her decisions should be respected. Together with their husbands, they should plan and bear only those children they are able to care for.

In politics, women should be encouraged to take part so as to make known their needs and the problems they face. Although governments have granted protection and freedoms to

women, they are not always implemented. The governments should enforce them, and ensure that natural resources are generously shared among all citizens regardless of gender and status.

The United Nations, Non - governmental Organizations, Churches, all institutions working for human rights need to be accredited for their efforts in liberating and empowering women. I appeal to them that they may develop effective mechanisms of accountability to convert the named women's commitments in society affairs into concrete and measurable actions.

The Church also has a role to play towards the empowerment and liberation of women. This is continuation of Christ's task of liberating the poor. The African Synod Fathers said that women should be given quality formation to prepare them as wives and mothers; as well as opening all social careers from which traditional and modern society tend to exclude her without reasons. The Synod Fathers ask that women be given that place which corresponds to the real importance conferred upon them by the responsibilities she already exercise.<sup>104</sup> That can be realized, in future, through programmes with increased support for education, health, community development, income generating activities and other basic social services. These are to be made accessible to women at grass level so that they can equally participate with men in development processes. It has to be geared to women's self-reliance. That way the Church will respond to the call of the African Synod.

## CONCLUSION

Reviewing all that has been said in this essay, one may affirm that the role and place of women in the Church has improved greatly. The work of evangelization does not call for discrimination. Instead, each one is called to bear witness to Christ by way of live, each finding others better than themselves. That has effected change in women isolation, who henceforth are experiencing some benefits of cooperating with men Christians. This change was manifested from the second Vatican council onwards, although it has been gradual, and at times catechesis are not implemented.

The early Christians aimed at avoiding inequalities, but following the pattern of Christ, believers devoted their services to the poor, weary, the sick, and the like under the prompting of grace bestowed upon them. Their services were not distributed according to gender. The

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<sup>104</sup> "Message of the Synod," in *African Synod*, ( Nairobi: St. Paul Publications- Africa, 1994 ). Nos. 65- 66.

Jewish sexism in the Old Testament lost value. To be a Christian was understood to be a servant of others.

The "cross-fertilization" of Jewish, Greek cultures and Roman rule hardened the social milieu. That raised problems in Church's pastoral activities. As Mary Daly recalls, " St. Paul was greatly preoccupied with order in society and in Christian assemblies. In modern parlance, it seemed necessary to sustain the good image of the Church. Thus it appeared to him an important consideration that women should not talk too much , unveil their heads or assume prominent places in assemblies. That could have brought about the scandal of immorality and effeminacy.... Paul was protecting the Church against scandal. Thus he repeatedly insisted upon correction of gender behaviour, including subjugation of women at meetings."<sup>105</sup>

The contemporary inferiority of women was reflected upon and for the sake of good relations with non Christian communities, Christians thought of rehabilitating womanhood in the Church. It is against human dignity and rights to under utilize a certain group of people, and yet all are equally human beings. The Second Vatican Council and beyond tried the best possible to eradicate all oppressive and discriminative forms of some people within society, since they contradict Christian values.<sup>106</sup> This becomes even more clear in the words of Pope John XXIII: "The long lasting inferiority complex of certain classes because of their economic and social status, sex or position in the state, and the corresponding superiority complex of other classes, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past."<sup>107</sup> We need to try the best possible to sustain the momentum of that change, keeping in mind the above suggestions regarding the improvement of women's empowerment. Although they are future oriented, they need to start to be implemented NOW since future refers to any time to come from NOW.

That is a community responsibility, because Christians are called to build the body of Christ. So, we need to give Christ his due role and place within our communities, as our faith dictates. Again faith is divine originated, so it stands in a position of challenging our cultures when they do not favour the development of community life. For example, we should not be reluctant in choosing as a chairperson any woman who has qualities for that responsibility.

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<sup>105</sup> Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, ( N.Y. Harper and Row, 1968 ), p 38

<sup>106</sup> see Footnote No. 5.

<sup>107</sup> Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Teris in The Ecyclicals and other Messages of John XXIII, ( 1964 ), pp 337-338

just because she is a woman. The very action of choosing her contribute to the development and improvement of our culture, we also act truthfully, in fidelity to the norms of our apostolic ancestors.

We have heard enough about the past. Now let our African traditions concentrate in the future where Christian tradition points constantly preparing herself for the eschatological life that is to come at the second coming of our Lord Jesus.

## Appendix

### Sample Questionnaires for women's ministry in Society.

( Please, write your name, age, marital status, highest education level and occupation on the answer sheets provided. Then, read carefully each question and answer it as faithfully as possible. Through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, we are all fully incorporated into the full membership of the Church. Each has same rights as others. It is existence of that parity which I wish to trace in these questionnaires. I will greatly appreciate your contributions. Thanks in advance).

1. Which are the ministries available in your locality?
2. Do these cover the total ministry?
3. Which ministry is mostly emphasized?
4. Are women involved in any of those ministries?
5. How are women involved?
6. Are women's ministries recognized and given importance? How?
7. About how many women are involved in political, educational and church activities in your Church Parish?
8. Are the Church leaders open to women's ministry in your Church or Parish?
9. In which responsible roles are women presently serving the Church / Parish?
10. If women seem not to be active in your Church / Parish, why are they not?
11. Are women given opportunities to voice out their opinions ? How?
12. Do you offer any training programmes to women in leadership?
13. Are women and the young ladies offered any training to enable them serve their own peers? In which way?
14. Are the young ladies interested in the service programmes of their own peers, juniors and adults?
15. In what ways can the efforts of the Church Parish be co-ordinated to serve women more effectively?
16. What is your vision of a model Parish / Church ?
17. List as many needs of women in your Parish / Church as you observe.
18. What are the main problems in your Parish . Church?
19. Describe in few words the situation of women in your Parish . Church.
20. Prepare a total and a balanced women ministry for your Parish . Church.

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