

TANGAZA COLLEGE

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**THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN TODAY'S CHURCH**

Moderator

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Theology

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DEDICATION

TO

Agnes ZANINKA, my Mother

And

Joseph NGABONZIZA, my Father,

As the wife of Zebedee did for her sons (Matt 20:20 – 21)

You trained me to love Jesus in the
Catholic Church, and you wished that I serve God's people as a priest.

EPIGRAPH

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages

for twelve years, came up behind him

and touched the fringe of his cloak,

for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well".

Jesus turned and seeing her he said, "Take heart daughter your faith has made you

well".

And suddenly the woman was made well.

Matthew 9:20 - 22

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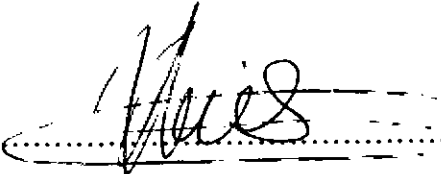
I also express my heartfelt gratitude to the Order of the Discalced Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in a special way to the Washington Province. For this I extend my thanks to Fr. Philip Thomas O.C.D., former Provincial Superior and the current Provincial, Fr. Jude Peters O.C.D. and their Councillors. They have contributed a lot to my education, both in philosophy and theology.

Special thanks also go to my moderator, Rev. Fr. Ambrose Mutinda, C.S.Sp. I owe him a debt of gratitude for his willingness to journey with me in studying, *The Role of Women in the Gospel of Matthew and its Implications in Today's Church*. I also thank Sr. Carmel Powell, F.F.M., who made me to be interested in the topic. The same thanks go to Sr. Irene Daniels for her lovely letters of encouragement and her special gift in providing me with relevant materials for this work all the way from America.

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

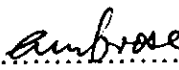
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in theology. It has never been submitted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

Signed:


Name of Student:
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Date:
31/1/2003

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

Signed:


Name of Supervisor:
FR. Ambrose MOTINDA, CSSP

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is to find out whether the love of Jesus, shown to women, one of the marginalized groups of his day, is put into practice in today's Church. The present work has three chapters. To facilitate this study we shall need to begin by looking at the position of women in Graeco-Roman Empire before and during the time of Jesus. This is because the sacred writers of the New Testament, including Matthew, were influenced by different cultures. In the first chapter, we shall look at Greek philosophy and the Roman Law, without however forgetting what the Old Testament says about the position of women.

Our intention is not to show a negative side of looking down upon women by the Bible world. It is rather to let the reader know the impact of prejudices of the patriarchal society on women in the Scriptures.

In chapter two, however, we will study how, Jesus, a male Jew, goes beyond the bias of the Old Testament. Matthew presents to us Jesus who is truly human born of a woman (1:1 – 18). We shall find out why Matthew includes in the genealogy only five names of women among so many names of men. It will be considered important to know motive of the author and the nature of community that was made of the groups of marginalized people in the Jewish society. In this case women were not an exception.

Thereafter, only when we have seen how Jesus preaches and heals both men and women will we now seek to know any longer that he has no discrimination. In addition, the Matthean Jesus sees divorce as an act of undoing what the Creator has done. Women in return, as true disciples will not remain indifferent or passive. They will play an important role by sharing a great sense of fidelity at Jesus' passion, death and burial. Moreover, women will become credible witnesses of the resurrection by announcing to the Apostles that Jesus is risen.

The third chapter will examine whether the teaching of Jesus is put into practice. We shall, briefly, go through the entire history of the Church. We will consider the Church Fathers. They tried to balance the Old Testament with the New Testament. That is why they will allow both married women and virgins to play the key role in the development of the early Church. Some names like Macrina, Paula, Felicita, Perpetua, Monica and the mother of Gregory and Basil are unforgotten.

In medieval period, women in the Church will continue to struggle for holiness. Though they are silenced, women will still remain active in Crusades, Monasteries and mysticism. The role of Catherina of Siena during Avignon Captivity is a factor that will make her a Doctor of the Church one of only three in the history of the Church.

The period of the Reformation and Counter - Reformation, we shall find that reformers and counter – reformers were not only men, but also women. While some nuns were leaving monasteries because of their brothers who forced them to do so, other women had exceptional courage to remain in the monasteries, others joined religious life not only as cloister nuns, but also as active women. While Teresa of Avila busy

reforming the Carmelite Order, Angela Merici and Mary Ward are worked tirelessly to be active in the world for the sake of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council will make way for women's active participation in the Church and in the world. Its work has yet not ceased to make sure that women may enjoy the threefold ministry of Jesus by the virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation. The role of Mary as a woman in the Church, will not be left out. Her apparitions in different places throughout the ages are significant.

CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE TIME OF JESUS

1. Introduction

In this chapter, the emphasis is on different backgrounds of Jewish women during the time of Jesus. Both Jesus and Matthew are Jews. We are reminded that during the time of Jesus, as well as the time the Gospels were written down, the Jews, like all the people of the Roman Empire, were influenced by the encounter of different cultures; that is the Hellenistic culture on one hand and the colonization by the Romans. Besides, the Jews, as the chosen people of God, had made the covenant with God, which brought about the Torah and its different interpretations. All these cultures played a big role in the understanding of women during the time of the Jesus movement.

The Romans followed their civil law rooted in their culture. The Jews themselves had to live according to the divine revelation handed down to them through Moses. Consequently we are going to see how Greek philosophers, especially Plato and his

student Aristotle, conceived the idea of a woman. Then we shall have a look at the Roman law concerning women. Now Let us look in the following lines at the Jewish background concerning women.

2. Different Backgrounds

2.1 Jewish Background

We have mentioned above that the Jews had the divine revelation that is, the Torah as the guideline of their day-to-day life. At the same time, like many of the ancient societies, the Jewish society was patriarchal. So that revelation was received within a patriarchal and endocentric context. In other words, we are talking of a male dominant culture. In such a society, it is not surprising to see that the Old Testament assigned to a woman a status of subjugation. If we ask ourselves what all that was about, the answer is clear: a married woman was subject to her husband, and a young girl to her father. This is still done today.

This can be explained by the fact that it is the father who gives his daughter in marriage to a man he chose. The choice of the daughter did not matter. While the father had the right to annul a vow made by his daughter the husband did the vow of his wife. A man had also the right to forbid a vow made by his wife or daughter. However, this practice does not concern the widow and divorced women. That is to say that such women did not need anybody to approve their vows because they were already invalid.¹ This shows us how the right of a woman depended on a man in order to be judged valid.

¹ S. A. CAROL –S.H. RINGE, ed., *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 36 – 40.

Moreover, in the danger, a man could deliver his wife or daughter for his own safety. (Gen 19:2; 20:1 – 4; Judg 19:20 – 30). As we shall see in Rome or in Greece, like wise in Israel, a woman could not inherit from her father or her husband: this could only happen if there were no male heirs (Num 27:8)²

Furthermore, for these daughters to inherit are supposed to marry within the same clan (Num 27:1 – 8; 36:1-9). A widow had no legal right to inherit. Though a widow could play the role of her deceased husband's property, this guardianship was not for life. It was to come to an end when the male children came to full age (2Kgs 8:3-6). In case a widow had no male descendant, she had to return to her fathers' house. The ideas behind this practice were that the property of her deceased husband could pass to her husband's brother or to a nearest male relative (Gen 38:11; Lev 28:13). The alternative was that the widow could remain in her husband's family and follow assume marriage (Deut 25: 5-10).

The inequality between sexes began at birth. When a child was born, the mother was considered unclean for some days. If the newborn was a girl child, the woman was unclean for eighty days. However, if the child happens to be a boy the mother was unclean for forty days (Lev 12:1-8)³. This idea of the uncleanness after delivering is still there today. We can question this practice of receiving a newborn, a gift from God, with a bias of condemning the mother through whom that gift comes to birth. Let us note that this so-called uncleanness after birth does not apply to the father. Another sign of inequality between sexes is that only male children belonged to the covenant through

²Cf. S. A. CAROL-S. H. RINGE, ed., 50.

³ Cf. S. A. CAROL --S. H. RINGE, ed., 39.

circumcision on the eighth day after birth (Gen 9:11). We are not advocating female circumcision but we can wonder: since there was no other way of belonging to the covenant but circumcision. Were women not also the children of Abraham?

Let us note that whenever a boy child was born in a Jewish family, there was an increase of esteem to the parents (Gen 25:5 – 6: 29:31-35); the reason of this esteem was that the son could perpetuate the name of the family. This was not the case for the birth of a girl: a daughter would belong to a family until she married.⁴ Can we imagine the perpetuity of a family if there were no women?

On the side of men, the husband had supreme authority over his household, including his wife. A man could divorce his wife any time he wished for any reason (Deut 22:10; 19,28ff; Isa 50:1, Jer 38; Mal 2:16). On the contrary, a woman had no right to divorce her husband. On top of this, an absolute faithfulness was required of the wife. Such faithfulness was not expected of the husband provided that the right of any other man was not injured.⁵

Another interesting point is that, in ancient Israel, the specific role of a woman was, by nature child bearing, which is known as reproductive work. This so-called reproductive work was one of the expectations of each and every woman. The reason behind may be the biblical injunction to be fruitful and to multiply (Gen 1: 22; 35).

⁴ K. KALLENBACH, AJFRW, 59.

⁵ Cf. S. A CAROL · S. H. RINGE, ed. 54.

From time immemorial till today, a Jewish man thanks God in his prayers who created him, not as a slave, as a gentile or as a woman⁶. This prayer gives privilege of worship to men though it is led by a woman in the family. We can imagine a free person comparing himself/herself to a slave. That is the situation of women. In Scriptures, especially in Leviticus, we find that Jews looked at menstrual blood of a woman during her period as something that causes a grave contamination (Lev 15:19-30). The uncleanness lasts for seven days (Lev 15:9). A person who touches a woman is unclean till evening (Lev. 15:9b). Moreover, a woman in her monthly period does not only contaminate other human beings but also anything such as chair, that she comes into contact.

In addition, after this period, a woman was to take two turtledoves and two pigeons to a priest in order to offer a single sacrifice so that she may become clean (Lev 15:19-30). How can one confess the biological status that is given by God? All these and the false interpretations of the story of “the Fall” in Genesis 3, give to woman a special responsibility of sinning. Did the man create himself before he condemns a woman that her biological status is evil? If we come to the story of the fall, was the man god so that he could not refuse to sin when the serpent tempted them? Let us now look at the Greek society.

2.2 Greek Culture and Model of Society

As the Law, the Torah, was given to the Jews; we can also say that philosophy was given to the Greeks. It is in this perspective of philosophy that we shall see how

⁶ <French. page@wanadoo.fr> This is from Internet about the statement of Sister Christine Vladimiroff on Monday, September 17, 2001.

ancient Greece looked at women. Without forgetting that the Holy Land has been under Greek authority, Hellenistic philosophy has also influenced the ancient societies in their way of thinking. Even today, a good number of people base their way of life on Greek philosophy. In academic circles a person is given esteem according to his/her intellectual performance. During the time of Jesus, Greek language was still influential. There is no doubt that a language is a vital vehicle of a culture. That is why Greek philosophy had a role to play in ancient societies. In our study we will base our arguments on two great Greek thinkers: Plato and Aristotle. We are aware of the role of Platonism in St. Augustine's theology. At the same time we also remember the influence Aristotle had in Thomistic and Scholastic theology.

As in many ancient societies, Greece was also a male-dominated society in such way that the Hellenistic culture reduced woman's status to a lower level than any other civilization did, so to speak. This is not only because the Greeks adopted slavery, but rather because of the male monosexual mania⁷. Plato is not an exception in this matter. The wise Socrates, the Father of Greek philosophy and the master of Plato, believed that women are evil and at the same time males need them as their wives⁸. Then, since Socrates needed a wife, he opted for such an ugly figure. When he was asked why he went for such a option the answer was, "*minima de malis.*" This is exactly like the principle of lesser evil because it means that "a woman is a lesser evil." The explanation is that though a woman is evil by nature, sometimes she is necessary. It is better,

⁷ D. GEORGES -P. MICHELLE, ed., *History of Women*, 1, 60.

⁸ Cf. D. GEORGES -P. MICHELLE, ed., 61.

according to Socrates, to have a small wife instead of a big one and an ugly one instead of a beautiful one.

Those who are less wise than Socrates would prefer homosexuality to heterosexuality in order to avoid women. Homosexuality, was an idealized practice of sexuality⁹. Let us come back to our Greek philosophers. Plato, to start with, he believed that women are not to acquire real education. He went on to say that women are passive and that even the best of them are still inferior to men. That is why the society of the day decided that women were to be given few activities requiring skill and competence. To mention a few, we can talk of weaving, management of the household and the care of children.

Aristotle, following his master, supported Plato in saying that women are inferior to men in every respect, anatomy, and physiology. Aristotle states that this inferiority is due to women's metaphysical passivity. We can see that the same topic does not differ from the one of his master Plato who held that the souls of men who had behaved cowardly were to be reincarnated in bodies of women.¹⁰

It is also this bias that influenced the society of the time of Jesus and Matthew's time. Thanks to God that Jesus was to go beyond this Jewish, and Hellenistic bias and even the Roman civil law. We now look at the influence of Roman law in the following lines.

⁹ Cf. D. GEORGES -P. MICHELLE, ed.,42.

¹⁰Cf. D. GEORGES P. MICHELLE, 61.

2.3 Roman Government and Its Influence on Peoples' Lives

In previous pages, we have seen the attitude of Greek philosophy in ancient world concerning women. We now move to the Roman society. Its role in the understanding of women is not to be minimized. It is not possible to understand the position of women without having a look at the one of men. That is why we are going at both men and women in the Roman society whose guidelines were rooted in civil laws.

2.3.1 Men

In ancient Rome, the civil law treated sex division as a judicial matter. The *Patria potestas*¹¹, literally the power of the nation has a male as the head of the family or the household. This title gives the male a power of life and death over those who are his subjects. This does not mean only slaves, but also his wife and his children. The male had the right as executive, legislate and judge. That is to say that the father had monopoly of enjoying political and public life.

A Roman father had right to accept or refuse a child after it is born. At the same time he had the right to give his daughter in marriage to anyone he wishes without the her consent. This right was not granted to the mothers. The women could not become the legal guardians to designate a name of another man who will take his existence *post mortem*. In other words men had continuous authority even after death because of gender. While women had no history in their families, the essence of the families paternal bond

¹¹ McD. J. WILLIAM, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIV, 993.

between a man and his children was very strong. This paternal bond was realized in and through death.¹²

Let us look at the responsibility of a man Roman citizen. In case a member of his family commits a crime, the *Patria potestas* was to hold the responsibility. This gives him a couple of privileges, to mention a few, we can say honor, to be given a dowry before marriage, and to divorce his wife any time he wishes. It is interesting to see that even an impotent man had the right to marry because consummation of marriage was not a requirement for its validity. An impotent man had also the right to adopt children. He could also enjoy being the legitimate father of children that his wife brought forth. A man was known as *paterfamilias*, literally, the father of the family. He was not only the father of the children, but of his wife for marriage the bride was to ask the bridegroom this question: "do you wish to become my *paterfamilias*"? But a woman was not asked to be the *materfamilias* of his husband¹³.

This other gave to the man the right that all the members of the household are his subjects, including both his wife and his children. Furthermore, the practice of levirate marriage was to ensure that a man who died childless was to be remembered. This remembrance means the deceased man's wife to get married to his brother in-law in order to beget children in honor of the deceased man. It was not the same case for a woman who died without children. Let us look at women from the perspective of Roman Law.

¹²Cf. D. GEORGES -P. MICHELLE, ed, 130.

¹³ Cf. D. GEORGES · P. MICHELLE, ed, 87.

2.3.2 Women

We have seen briefly the status of men according to the Roman law. In the following lines, we shall look at how that patriarchal male-dominated society has used the law at the expense of women. The pretext behind this is that women were regarded as *infirmas sexus*; weak sex, *imbecilitas mentis*.¹⁴ Literally, weakness of mind. Men took this advantage and looked down upon women, thinking the females are ignorant. The reason for their ignorance men believed is that women were not given the chance to study law as men did.

In order to understand the status of a woman, we need to look at some practices: for instance, women could not establish the legitimacy of their children. This is because the law implied that a woman was the beginning and the end of her family. To make matters worse, a woman could not have any right to represent others. How was she to do if that she was considered as ignorant of law in a society based on law? Since women were considered inferior human beings, they were confined to domestic activities. Public and political life was a monopoly of men. The following adage can shed some light upon what we are saying: "Marriage is to women what a war is to men."¹⁵ It is true that not every woman was a slave but all the same free men were to enjoy their rights as citizens. The law for men was quite different from the one for women. How can we claim that women were free if they were not allowed to choose their own religion but their husband's had to choose for them.

¹⁴Cf. D. GEORGES -P. MICHELLE, ed, 82.

¹⁵Cf. D. GEORGES -P. MICHELLE, 85.

Women were excluded from the order of succession. This can be linked with the fact that daughters were the subjects of their fathers' authority. But the sons were entitled to participate in probate. We have seen that a legitimate father had a legal right to choose an heir by adoption. On the contrary women were not allowed to do the same. The law claims that a mother had no proper heirs. These things have not changed in many societies. Thanks to God, that at least in the ancient Roman Empire things changed drastically.

3. Conclusion

Having treated this chapter, we can conclude that we have seen woman's status in the Greco-Roman Empire during the time of Jesus. We could not limit ourselves to the last century before the Common Era. This is because culture is something that goes beyond a chronological limit.

What we have said in the above paragraph is also applicable to the Greeks with their philosophy. No matter how wise Socrates, Plato and Aristotle might have been, they had to philosophize in the Greek context. They had to talk of women according to the way the Greek society saw them. They were not talking of a woman in the world ideas, but of their sisters, mothers and wives. In the same way the Romans based their civil law on their own understanding of woman of their time. However, we are going to see in the following chapter, that Jesus is going to go beyond all these biases.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

1. Introduction

This present chapter looks at Jesus's concern about women. Although Jesus is known as a human being, except sin, we shall examine why Matthew provides only five names of women in his genealogy (1:1 – 18). In fighting against divorce Jesus challenged the Jewish custom in order show that women have equal dignity with men because the Creator created them as one body (19:3 – 12). As a sign of gratitude, women remained faithful to Jesus even during his desperate moment namely his passion (26:31 – 27:44), death (27:45 – 67) and his burial (27:57 – 61) as well. Interestingly, it is they the women who proclaimed his resurrection (28:1 – 10) to the Apostles who, in turn then spread that good news to the whole world (28:16 – 20).

2. Matthean Community

Agenda/Motive of the Author and Community

Peter Edmonds suggests some reasons why Matthew wrote his gospel. First off, Matthew's Gospel takes the form of a foundation story, to give pastoral answers to the crisis of identity. Because of difficulties, the Antiochene Church faced in the second generation in which it struggled to define itself over against both Judaism and paganism.¹⁶

Secondly, Matthew presents a Christ who is a more majestic figure and, his disciples are models for whom the Church can identify and imitate¹⁷. Thirdly, to provide the catechist, the Christian teacher, with a handbook on the teaching of Jesus. Lastly,

To raise the quality of the Christian life, a community like the Church of Ephesus in Revelation that had lost its enthusiasm (Rev 2:1 - 7). Hence the greater emphasis on the reality of the coming judgment compared with other gospels.¹⁸

For Michael H. Crosby asserts that, the Matthean community is composed of both men and women, Jew or Greek. In addition everybody is charged with being perfect no distinction of sex is made.(Matt.5: 48). Further, the community needed a rabbi like Jesus to teach them with authority, "ἐξουσίαν," for the sake of the reign of heaven, "βασιλεία του ουρανού".¹⁹

Jesus who is compassionate "Σπλαγχνίσασθαι" has no discrimination in him.²⁰

¹⁶ E. PETER, *Three Portraits of Jesus*, 28.

¹⁷ Cf. E. PETER, 28.

¹⁸ Cf. E. PETER, 28.

¹⁹ H. -B. WES - S. H. RINGE, ed, *The NITIWD*, 23

²⁰ Cf. H -B. WES - S. H. RINGE, ed, 35.

Jesus is more concerned with the marginalized such as sinners and tax collectors (9:10). In the heavenly banquet he is inviting everyone who is found able to come (22:14). He does not hesitate to lay his hand on the sick if the need be men and women alike. He allows women to serve him, which goes to show that they too could be his disciples²¹.

3. About Women in Matthew's Gospel

3.1 The Place of Five Women in The Genealogy (1:1-16)

Some people ask why Matthew gives only five names of women while the whole list contains forty-two men in genealogy. Those five names are Tamar²² (1:3) a Canaanite; Rahab²³ (1:5) a Moabite; Uriah's wife (1:6) known as Bathsheba whose husband is a Hittite and Mary (1:16) a Jewess.

According to Raymond E. Brown the four women, apart from Mary, have a few things in common. The inclusion of sinful women shows the role of Jesus as the Saviour of sinners. Secondly, they are regarded as foreigners. This is to say that Jesus is not only the Messiah of the Jews, but also his messianic mission is related to the Gentiles. This explains why Jesus' mission is universal.²⁴

However, these four women share with Mary two things: one is their irregular union with their partners. This reminds us of the virginal conception of Mary. Although their

²¹ S. C. DAVID, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 22 - 23.

²² The Bible is silent as long as Tamar's genealogy is concerned. All that is known is that she was a Canaanite as her heathen name suggests. When widowed for the second time she returned to her father's home. She married into the family of Judah. Cf. Herbert Lockyer, *All Women of the Bible*, Michigan 1995, p.162.

²³ Some of the ancient Jewish fathers held in high reputation reckoned that Rahab was the wife of Joshua himself, but in the royal genealogy of Jesus. She is referred to as the wife of Solomon one of the two spies she sheltered. At the end she became the mother of Boaz who married Ruth from whose son Obed, Jesse the father of David through whose line Jesus was born. Cf. Herbert Lackyer, 130.

²⁴ B. E. RAYMOND, *BM*, 71-73.

relation looks scandalous, it continues the lineage of the Messiah. The second element is that all the five women play an important role in God's plan. In other words, all these women became instruments of God.²⁵

To make the matter clear, let us note that Tamar took the initiative to seduce Judah (Gen 38) and she conceived two twins. Rahab's initiative to hide two Hebrew spies who came to her lodge to reconnoiter the land helped Israel to come to the promised land (Gen 2.6: 22-25). The whole book of Ruth²⁶ tells us how this woman's initiative made the Davidic line to come into being. Bathsheba²⁷, Uriah's wife, also took initiative to seduce David while she was bathing. And thereafter she became the mother of Solomon the successor of David (1Kgs 1 - 2).

We can notice that Matthew mentioned names of these women to show the reader the unusualness of each one surrounding the birth of the Messiah. We realize that these four women foreshadow the role of Mary. Her child, Jesus, was God made not man made.²⁸ That is to say that through the Holy Spirit, Jesus was conceived in Mary (Matt 1:21). If we analyze the Greek text we see that the four women are not the subjects of the verb *γεννώ*, to beget. But rather, they are connected with the verb by the proposition *ἐκ* that literally show the origin. The four women are not mentioned at the end of the phrase.

²⁵Cf. B.E RAYMOND, 74.

²⁶ Ruth was a friendly foreign widow who left her land of Moab and returned to Bethlehem with the mother in law Naomi. Rather than waiting for the local gentry to come a courting, she went a gleaning in the field of Boaz and soon had harvested herself a husband. Their child was Obed, the grand father of King David. Cf. Daniel Durken "*The Jenes in Jesus' Genealogy*" in *The Bible Today* 28(1990) 369.

²⁷ Bathsheba is the mother of Solomon, the wife of Uriah. As she was bathing she made King David's lust quickly to degenerate into adultery and to murder Uriah later on. As Queen mother, Bathsheba reminded doddering David that he had promised to let their son Solomon succeed to the royal throne. Cf. D. DANIEL, 369.

²⁸ D. DANIEL, *The Bible Today* 28(1990) 369.

Their sons are mentioned first, and then, the mothers. But when it comes to Mary, Matthew is clear that Joseph is not Jesus' biological father. Instead, in the place of a human father, God beget Jesus²⁹

Let us have a look at the Greek text: **1:3** Ἰούδας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Φαρὲς καὶ τὸν Ζαρὰ ἐκ τῆς Θάμαρ, **1:5** Σαλιμὼν δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Βοὲζ ἐκ τῆς Ῥαχάβ, Βοὲζ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωβὴδ ἐκ τῆς Ῥούθ, **1:6** Δαυὶδ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Σολομῶνα ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Οὐρίου, **1:16** Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος³⁰

1:3 Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar; 1:5 Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab (and) Boaz begot Obed by Ruth; 1:6 David begot Solomon by Uriah's; 1:16 Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born.

We can conclude that the presence of these five women can be related to Matthew's theology of inclusion of the marginalized in the salvation of humanity.

3.2 Women as Jesus' Disciples

In order to understand who is a disciple, we can use the definition given by Anne M. Clifford. She sees disciples as *those who follow Jesus and carry out his mission*³¹. To comprehend this definition we need to read the Matthean gospel with new eyes so that we can understand who are Jesus' disciples.

In the story of the multiplication of bread and fish, we are told that women and children were not counted (14:21; 15:38). This reality can serve as an argument from

²⁹ W.J. C. WIM, ed., *CBQ* 59((April 1997) 289 - 292.

³⁰ Cf. D. DANIEL, 291.

³¹ C. M. ANNE, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 267.

silence that Jesus had female disciples. It must be noted that although women are not counted, they are fed. And all of them ate and were filled (15:37a).

Salome's devotion indicates that she is one of the women who followed Jesus in Galilee and ministered to him.³² She, no doubt, finds Jesus' message irresistible and recognizes him as a prophet, as someone of God. For that reason she begged Jesus Christ for her sons, James and John to seat one at the right hand and the other one at the left to be more close to Jesus in order to gain his reign (20:20-21). Jesus does not blame her positive ambition. However, Jesus corrects her, showing that to follow him is to accept to drink the cup of martyrdom (20:23), to share in his cross.

Another woman that plays a key role in Jesus' ministry is Mary Magdalene. Matthew presents her to the reader as the one among other women who followed Jesus to Jerusalem to witness the death of Christ on the cross (27:56; Mark 15:40). We also read the narrative that shows us how Mary, mother of James or the other Mary (27:61) or the wife of Cleophas or Alpheus (10:3) are among the disciples of Jesus.

Herbert points out that Mary Magdalene left her home in Magdala to follow Jesus. She is described as some one who is free to follow Jesus in his journeying as if she has no home obligation.³³ This can testify to her availability to witness for the sake of Jesus. In other words, her personal presence and her service in the company of the other disciples must be affirmed.

Moreover, let us have a quick look at some unnamed women who are worthy to be called disciples. Apart from Matthew, there is no other evangelist who wrote the story of the wife of Pilate, who, intervened to advocate for Jesus during his trial (27:10). Which is

³² L. HERBERT, *AWB*, 151.

³³ Cf. L. HERBERT, 100.

certainly striking as she is a woman and a foreigner while twelve disciples and others run away from Jesus.³⁴ We shall see more at the end of this chapter when dealing with the passion, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord.

3.3 The Healing of Women

It is interesting to see that Matthew the Apostle is called when Jesus is busy healing people (9:9), both men and women. We see that chapters 8,9 and 15 present Jesus as the healer. Let us mention some of the healings: a leper (8:1-9), the Centurions servant (8:5-13), the healing of the many including Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15); the Genazarene demoniacs (8:23-24), a paralytic (9:2-8), a girl's restoration to life and a woman with hemorrhage (9:18-26); the healing of two blind men (9:27-31), one who was mute (9:32-34); the Canaanite daughter (15:21 – 28) and the cure of many people (15:29-31). This shows that there is no gender discrimination in Jesus' healing.

As indicated above, let us now have a look at the women healed by Jesus. To start with Peter's mother-in-law, (8:14-15) we see that it is Jesus who takes initiative. Five verbs are very important: He "saw" her, he "touched" her hand, the fever "left" her, she "rose" and she served.³⁵ Unlike in Mark, in Matthew Peter's mother-in-law is healed in addition to other marginalized people.³⁶ In Mark, however, she is alone (Mark1: 29-31). We can conclude that the active participation of serving upon Jesus being healed qualifies her to be one of Jesus' female disciples.

³⁴W. ELAINE, *Shall We Look for Another?*, 115-116.

³⁵ F. S. ELISABETH, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, II, 648.

³⁶ M. CAROL S.H. RINGE, ed, *Women in Scriptures*, 480.

Matthew 9:18-26 contains two healing narratives. But, one is more than a mere healing because it is about restoration to life (9; 18-19,23). Unlike Peter's mother in law, the father of the dead girl requests Jesus to restore her life. Jesus touches the corpse, which is prohibited in the Jewish law (Lev 15:25). According to Amy-Jill Levine this anticipates the resurrection of Jesus.³⁷

With the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage, this case is different from the previous healings. Here, is no one to take initiative, no one to request the healing for her, save herself alone. She is alone in her affliction and she makes an effort to touch the garment of Jesus (9:20) On realizing her deed, Jesus does not rebuke her. Instead, he encourages her to "take heart" as his daughter (9:20). Jesus is not worried, on the contrary, he congratulates her "your faith has made you well (9: 22). The Matthean Jesus does not feel that his power has gone from him (Mark 5:30). The girl and the woman are two healing stories that show how Jesus liberates and does include the marginalized in the reign of God.³⁸

Jesus' healings goes beyond political boundaries. As proof consider the story of the healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman (15:21-28). The woman is the one who asks for the healing of her daughter, just as the centurion for his servant (8; 5-13). Her request is not granted immediately (15:23). But she does not give up. She shouts (15:22a) and insists, that she be granted her request (15:25). She knows the strangeness of her request as she is a Gentile, not a Jew and a woman (15:27). By calling Jesus, son of David, she recognizes him as the Messiah.

³⁷N. A. CAROL – S.H. RINGE, ed., 380.

³⁸ F. S. ELISABETH, ed., 650.

Because of her persistent cry for “mercy” (15:22-23), and her strong faith (15:28), Jesus goes beyond political boundaries and its political exclusivity in order to let the woman have a share in God’s reign destined for the chosen ones.³⁹ This Canaanite woman, a gentile, reminds us of the role of gentile women who are the fore- mothers of Jesus such as Tamar, (1: 3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:15) and Uriah’s wife (1:6).

3.5 Women and Divorce

In the first chapter we saw that in the Old Testament unlike men, women are required to be virgins when they get married.⁴⁰ In addition to this difference man could dispossess or divorce his wife while women were not granted similar right (Deut 24:1-4).

In Matthews’ gospel, Jesus vehemently opposes divorce. When the Pharisees ask him whether a woman can be divorced as Moses prescribed, Jesus brings a new law or rather, restores what God intended from the beginning. For the Old Testament, anything objectionable about a woman was sufficient reason for her to be given a certificate of divorce (Deut. 24:1). This is because a wife was viewed as a property of her husband (Deut 24:13-24).⁴¹ The Jesus of Matthew finds divorce as an act of undoing what God has done.⁴²

However, Jesus gives one condition for divorce to take place. Matthew uses the Greek word *πορνεία*. Andrei Kokany shows, after his research, that *πορνεία* has so many translations in English: for Donald in CSB, the New America Bible, “it is unlawful

³⁹ H. B. WES, *NTIWD*, 28.

⁴⁰ MacH. J. BARBARA, *Her Story*, 7.

⁴¹ Cf. F. ANNE, 72.

⁴² M. J. PAUL, *Matthew*, 215.

marriage”. As for John L. Mackenzie, *πορνεία* is “unlawful sexual intercourse”. “The CTC translated the expression by saying that, there is no divorce if marriage is not contracted between people related by blood. The NJBC gives two translations: “unchastity” or “uncleanness”.⁴³ *πορνεία* refers to sexual immorality.

About “except in *πορνεία*”, it is interesting to find that Matthew’s narrative is different from Mark. Matthew does not give equal obligations in marriage relationship (5:31-32; 19:1-9). On the contrary, Mark gives the same right and obligation to both man and woman (Mark 10:1-12). Mark sees a woman who marries a divorced man as a cause of adultery to her husband as well. We can agree with John P. Meier that it is because of particular problems that the Matthean community is facing.⁴⁴ In our analysis what attracts our attention is the challenge brought about by Jesus in Matthew when he speaks in favour of women. To understand this new law we need to keep in mind at this time for husband to divorce a wife was a common practice provided that the husband gives his wife a certificate. Even though we are talking of the practice of divorce during the time of Jesus, till now there is no much change. It seems very little has changed.

Let us mention few examples: according to the school of Hillel⁴⁵, if a woman spoils dinner, that was sufficient reason for her divorce. If a woman goes out with unbound hair, her husband could divorce her. To speak with a man other than one’s husband in the street, to backbite one’s in-laws, are two more lawful reasons for a man to divorce his wife. Apart from committing adultery or being a sterile, it was allowed for a

⁴³ K. ANDREI, *Marriage and Divorce*, 15.

⁴⁴ Cf. M. J. PAUL, 116.

⁴⁵ C. F. RAYMOND, ed., *DNT*, 75.

man to divorce his wife anytime he finds another good-looking woman.⁴⁶ In other words, if the first wife is no longer pleasant in the eyes of her husband, she was liable to be divorced.

Jesus challenges all these practices. He shows that marriage is not by chance, but is rather the will of God (Gen 1: 27; 2:24). Jesus holds that God created one flesh, man and woman as one body (19:4).

3.6 Women at the Passion, Death and Burial

As a common saying goes, “There is no resurrection without the cross”. This is to say, in other words, that there is no Easter joy without the painful experience of the Good Friday. A genuine friend is seen during the sorrowful moment, hence the saying, ‘a friend in need is a friend indeed’. These universal sayings can help us understand the role of women during the passion, death of Jesus.

It is important to look at the role of the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus as anticipation of his burial (26:13). But Matthew does not call this woman the sinful one. Though Matthew recognizes that the oil for ointment is costly, he does not tell the reader the price. According to Elizabeth, S. Male, the anointing of the head is a sign of royal commission.⁴⁷ It is not; therefore, a “waste” as the disciples put it (26:8). It is rather a representation of discipleship and service.⁴⁸

Again without mentioning names of women, we see, in Jesus; trial before a gentile woman who advocates for Jesus. It is the wife of Pilate who warns her husband to have

⁴⁶Cf. K. ANDREI, 13-18.

⁴⁷Cf. M. CAROL, 480.

⁴⁸Cf. M. CAROL, 419.

nothing to do with that innocent man. She offers him this wise warning because she suffered a great deal in her dream about Jesus (27:19). But her intervention was just ignored by Pilate.

Let us have a look at the role of two maids, who remarked that Peter had been with Jesus (26:69,72). Their remark fulfills the prediction of Jesus, “The cock will crow twice, Peter will deny him three times (26:34)⁴⁹. The remark may sound negative, but it makes clear Jesus’ prediction mentioned above.

Unlike Peter who denies Jesus (26:69-75), the women are among the few who show a great sign of solidarity with Jesus during his crucial moments. The presence of women near the cross qualifies them to be the first witnesses to Jesus’ death and resurrection.⁵⁰ We find in Matthews’ narratives women present at the cross (27:56-57), and even at the tomb (27:1). They are there in order “to see” (27:55,28:1). They witness to the crucifixion (27:51-53).

We can affirm that the witness of women is authentic because they had followed Jesus from Galilee and used to minister to him and his disciples. Matthew gives some names of the women present at the foot of the cross. Among these women of Galilee⁵¹ that are identified we have Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (27:55-56).

As we are dealing with the role of women during Jesus’ crucial moment, we must note recall the faithfulness of one woman in particular, the wife of Zebedee. She keeps the promises Jesus made with her sons when he asked them to drink the cup (20:20-22).⁵²

⁴⁹Cf. F. S. ELISABETH, 663.

⁵⁰ F. N. DANIEL, *ABD*, XV, 689.

⁵¹ Cf. F. S. ELISABETH, 64

⁵² Cf. F. S. ELISABETH, 64.

While Matthew present only two women Mary Magdala and the other Mary sitting opposite the tomb (27:61) Mark adds Salome (Mark 16:1) whom he calls the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Mark 15:40). These women are the reliable witnesses to the empty tomb (28:6). Stated briefly, these women saw Jesus die (27:26), they saw him buried (27:61) and discovered the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning (28:1).⁵³

3.7 Women at the Resurrection

The extraordinary fidelity demonstrated by women is manifested by their presence at the empty tomb (27:67). They witness the appearance of the Risen Lord (28:9). In addition they worship him. This gesture of worship attests the claim of the resurrection of the body.⁵⁴ Matthew identifies again those women as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (28:1). They are commissioned to report the Good News to the other disciples (28:10). They go to see the tomb but they end up by witnessing the Crucified, that he is risen. They witnessed the burial by Joseph Aritmathea (27:57) but they only see the place where they lay Jesus (28:6). They go back with fear and joy (28:8).

Elaine Wainwright states that Angel through Jesus gives the commission to women in person.⁵⁵ The message is to proclaim to the disciples that Jesus is alive. Benedict, T. Viviano defines the role of women as an important witness to resurrection to counter the Jewish leaders fabricated a claim that Jesus' body is stolen⁵⁶ (28:14-15). On the other hand Meier says that the women show great love to Jesus and reverence by touching the risen Lord (28:9). Elaine Wainwright again affirms that the entire focus of the narrative is on

⁵³ B. E. RAYMOND, al., ed., *NJBC*, 673.

⁵⁴ B. E. RAYMOND, al., ed., 673.

⁵⁵ Cf. F. S. ELISABETH, 65.

⁵⁶ Cf. F. N. DANIEL, 689.

the commissioning of female and male⁵⁷. We can close this chapter with the position of Benedict T. Viviano who believes that the women, by Jesus' commission become apostles to the Apostles. Furthermore, their testimony that was discountable in rabbinic law is now historically credible.⁵⁸

4. Conclusion

Apart from genealogy, we find women journeying with Jesus as his disciples. As part of the historical ministry of Jesus. In the narrative of multiplication of bread (14:21), though they are not counted women are fed among other disciples (15:37).

In his healing miracles, Jesus cures men and women, Jews and Gentiles like, the centurion's servant (8:5 – 13) and the Canaanite woman's daughter (15:21 – 28), Peter mother-in-law and the woman with a hemorrhage (9:18 – 26). These healings bear witness to Jesus' identity as Messiah.

Regarding divorce, for Jesus, it is not enough for a woman to be given a certificate. What matters is to be kept in mind is that married people have become one flesh. There are no more two but one (19:5 – 6).

At Jesus' passion, death, women stand as faithful disciples who do not desert him. This faithfulness makes them to be beneficiaries of the appearances of the Risen Lord (28:1 – 16).

⁵⁷ F. S. ELISABETH, ed., 65.

⁵⁸ Cf. B. E. RAYMOND, ed., 673.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLICATIONS IN THE CHURCH: WOMEN'S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have examined the status of women in the Gospel of Matthew. Our present chapter will take a snapshot look through history at women in Christianity. During the Patristic period, both men and women carry out the message (Gospel) in monastic as well as in active life. During the Medieval Period, women seem to be silenced. But, by all means, they maintain up the same zeal for the Church.

Reformation and Counter - Reformation follow as a work of both sexes. In today's Church, the Vatican II rediscovers the concept of full participation, and in this way we see the Virgin Mary, as a woman, being active in her Son's Church who is honoured with the title of Mother of the Church. Lastly, we shall briefly have a look at the contributions of Feminist Theology in the Church.

2. Christianity and Women

2.1 The Church Fathers Period

The term Patristic authors, or Church Fathers refers to Christian writers marked by keen theological insights marked by orthodoxy of doctrine, a significant corpus at that, holiness of life, ecclesiastical approval and antiquity. In our study we shall focus on the position of women as conceived by these Church Fathers and other Christian writers of Patristic period. Thus, our period begins with the post apostolic era till the first half of ninth century because it is during that time that the Council of Paris (829 AD) barred women from any contact with liturgical act.⁵⁹

We have closed the previous chapter with the theme of women as Jesus' disciples, who witnessed the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The mission of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus' resurrection did not end on Easter Sunday morning. On the contrary, we find that in the New Testament and Tradition of the Church, some women like Aquila, Chloe, Nympha were among the missionary women together with male

⁵⁹M. T. MARY, *Women and Christianity*, I, 1.

disciples.⁶⁰ We also acknowledge the role of female deaconate like Phoebe (Rom 16:1) that continued till sixth century in the West and eleventh century in the East.⁶¹

Now, with respect to the stand of the Church Fathers on women, one of the letters of Ignatius of Antioch written around 107AD shed some light on their general understanding of the matter. This letter gives reference to dichotomy between Eve and Mary. For Ignatius, Eve is the first woman who is responsible for sin's entrance to the world. From now on, we see that from this letter, some Church Fathers and other Christian writers of that age went ahead to conclude that it was not Adam, but Eve who was led astray by the serpent. Some of the Church Fathers, namely, Tertullian, Origen, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom and the rest believed that women are inferior to men. Furthermore, some of them even doubt whether women possess the image of God.⁶²

Ignatius, however, recognizes the continuity of revelation between the Old and the New Testament. According to him, Mary is the New Eve as Jesus is the New Adam. Mary is the woman who had a place in the restoration. Other Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus of Lyon, held that the New Eve is not only Mary but also the Church.⁶³ Therefore, we can deduce that, from the beginning, the Fathers of the Church saw a need for women to participate actively in the Church but only to a certain extent.

⁶⁰Cf. M. T. MARY, 69.

⁶¹ McB. P. RICHARD, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 397.

⁶² O'C. MICHAEL, *Theotokos*, 189.

⁶³ Cf. O'C. MICHAEL, 149.

Whether married or virgins, women played an important role in the Church during the Patristic era. For married women, we can recall the role played by Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, in the conversion of her son and even her husband. Furthermore, the mothers of St. Basil and St. Gregory gave out their whole property for the sake of monastic life. We cannot overlook the role of Clotilde (fifth century) who persuaded Clovis her husband, the King of Franks, to Christianity. After his conversion, of this King, Clovis, became a “new Constantine” in the West by building the Church and even presided at Church Councils.⁶⁴

We appreciate what virgins meant in the early Church. The effort of Jerome to encourage women to join monastic life shows his concern about women’s holiness in the Church. Jerome’s holy relationship with Marcella and, in a special way, with Paula testifies to the respect that early Christian authors had towards women.⁶⁵ In monastic life, the Desert Mothers lived in solitude with the ideal spirituality since the Roman persecution was over.

We cannot leave this period without mentioning the many women martyrs especially during the persecution of Christians. During this period we see that women understood clearly what martyrdom meant just as men did. This is very clear from Cyprian who remarked that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. A good number of women shed their blood in order to witness to Christ. In Africa we still remember Saints Felicitas and Perpetua who offered their lives for Christ. These two women are

⁶⁴Cf. M. T. MARY, 177-179.

⁶⁵Cf. M. T. MARY, 135 - 140.

remembered at Mass in the Eucharistic prayer I. Other names are Agatha, Lucia, Agnes, Cecilia and Anastasia.

2.2 Medieval Period

It is interesting to note that some exception remained when the Council of Paris in 829 AD forbade women to have any contact with any liturgical act. One of the exceptions is that from 856 AD to 858 AD, says to Mary T. Malone, the Church had a woman pope called Joan.⁶⁶ In 1049, Pope Leo IX initiated the war against marriage of clerics. To support this new idea, Pope Gregory VII suspended all married priests and their wives and children were reduced to the status of slaves. Later on, the second Lateran Council made in 1139 celibacy to the clerics a universal law.

Even after the Church officially promulgated a law prohibiting clerical marriage, women still remained very active in the Medieval Church. For example, Matilda Canossa (1046 – 1115) played a key role in supporting the papacy militarily.⁶⁷ Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1178) worked in her life tirelessly as a prolific writer, preacher and founderess of monasteries. Mary T. Malone tells us that Hildegard preached to the Second Crusade called by Pope Eugenius III.⁶⁸ Sister Hildegard made four preaching

⁶⁶ According to Mary Malone, Pope Joan is a woman who took over the pontificate from 856AD to 858AD. Her papacy comes between Pope Leo IV and Pope Benedict III. However, John Kelly who wrote, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, doesn't put this pope among the anti-popes. Though he does not deny her papacy he puts this female pope under the appendix of his book with a lot of myths. The two authors, Mary Malone and John Kelly, agree that Pope Joan gave birth to a child when mounting her horse.

⁶⁷ Cf. M. T. MARY, 35 – 40.

⁶⁸ Cf. M. T. MARY, 189.

journeys and later on she was unfortunately excommunicated with her nuns for they allowed a christian burial to a man who did not deserve it. However, the excommunication was lifted in 178 a year later before she died.

Catherine of Siena (1347 – 1380) is another woman worthy of great honour. Her relative forced her in marriage but she refused and joined the Dominican Third Order. Becoming an anchorite, she took a vow of silence and was renowned contemplative. She was very meditative. She fasted from both food, slept only thirty minutes every two-day. Mary T. Malone calls Catherine's' experience "mystical marriage to Christ formed from the foreskin removed from circumcision of Jesus."⁶⁹

Catherine worked day and night helping the sick and needy of Siena and visited the poor and hospitals. In a special way, she cared for the victims of a certain plague called "Black Death" which killed over thirty million people. She played a key role in the Church as a mediator between Popes during the most turbulent time for the papacy, which tarnished its authority for centuries thereafter. She was even papal representative and spokesperson for the cities. Her effort was not in vain for the pope managed to move from Avignon go back to Rome.

We have said that medieval women were silenced. However, they continued to play an indispensable role in the Church. For example, though women were not allowed to attend universities as men were, women participated as visionaries such as Bridget of Sweden (1317 – 1373). They were mystics, teachers, preachers, abbesses, founderesses,

⁶⁹Cf. M. T. MARY, 189.

pilgrims and theologians. Most women were not given a chance to study Latin, which at the time was the official liturgical language of the Church, yet they could write in their own vernaculars.

There are other women of most small importance. For example, Christina of Markyate (1095 – 1160) who is another great visionary. She wrote a book with the title: *Book of God's Ways* in which she fought against corruption within the Church. Eleanor of Aquitaine was a queen and a well-known figure for her effort in funding several universities and her active participation in Crusades. Mechtild of Magdebury (1207 – 1207) is a great mystic and the author of *The Flowing Light of Godhead* that comprises six volumes. In that book, she talks of great dangers of power, freedom of women, the abuses of clerics, hunger for God, the vision of hell and other many themes.⁷⁰

2.3 Women and the Reformation

According to Gerald O'Collins, the Reformation was a political and religious event that divided the Western Church into two Catholic and Protestant in the sixteenth century.⁷¹ The reason behind this division is that the papacy was corruption and greed. In addition to this immoral Christian conduct, the great disaster of Avignon (1335 – 1378) and the great Schism (1378 – 1417) helped precipitate the events of the Protestant Reformation. The clergy were becoming more and more corrupt in their service to

⁷⁰ Cf. M. T. MARY, 167.

⁷¹ McB. P. RICHARD, 1091.

people. Furthermore, clerical immorality, greed and arrogance were growing increasingly.⁷²

Therefore, some people such as Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli, John Calvin and others fought against such practices. They came to be known as reformers or Protestants. We note that at this time women also were not passive recipients of reformation message. Some women worked for the change of behaviour of the clergy without breaking up from the Church. But others opted for a total change as some male reformers did. Those who supported Protestantism including those in the convents left the Catholic Church. Others decided to help the Church to correct her mistakes without leaving her alone.

In either case, Catholics or Protestants, women preached, prophesied, and discussed with their friends and families matters affecting the Christian faith. In addition, some women converted their husbands or left them because of religion. Some even martyred for the same cause. Those who never wanted to leave the Catholic Church fought on her side.⁷³

According to the Oxford Encyclopedia of Reformation, the ideas of reformers were not consistent. For Luther there is nothing better on earth than a woman's love. To him, on one hand women were created for no any other reason than to serve men as their helpers. On the other hand, Luther shared the same view with other reformers that women

⁷² Cf. McB. P. RICHARD, 1091.

⁷³ H. J. HANS, ed., *OER*, IV, 291

are spiritually equal to men. Luther said that since God created women they too can be saved through faith alone. However, this does not take away women's submission to their husbands because a female is an inferior sex.⁷⁴ This submission, some reformers say, is due to Eve's responsibility for the Fall. Some of the reformers held that women in general are destroyers of spiritual well being. The reformers were also against the idea of virginity. "A woman who pledges herself to a life of virginity blasphemes and despises God by her vows."⁷⁵ This is because woman's vocation was solely understood in the context of bearing of children. For Luther even celibacy was against God's ordinances. Priests, monks and nuns were to be told that they are bound to produce seed and to multiply.⁷⁶

As for the Catholic Counter – Reformation, both men and women still supported virginity who defended its value as Tertullian and Jerome did in the early Church. Some Catholic women fought against the Reformation more than others during the medieval Crusades. These women felt that God had called them to oppose the Reformation. Therefore, they carried out the missionary works in the services of the world like managing schools for girls, hospitals, charitable activities and the like. It is in the same line that Angela Merici founded the Community of Saint Ursula which the pope approved it in 1535.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ H. ADRIAN, ed., *OCCT*, 756.

⁷⁵ R. PATRICIA, *Women of Spiritual Equality*, 266.

⁷⁶ Cf. R. PATRICIA, 215.

⁷⁷ Cf. H. J. HANS, 295

Nevertheless, later on, the Council of Trent put an end to the uncloistered communities though some survived. Ursuline sisters were encouraged to take solemn vows under the authority of their local Bishops. Regarding the cloister nuns, Saint Teresa, with the assistance of John of the Cross managed to reform the Order of the Carmelite as an answer to the Protestant reform.⁷⁸ When she showed her book on *Song of Songs* to her confessor, the latter was terrified. He added that the book would be burnt because a woman could not comprehend such literature.

3. Women in Today's Church

3.1 The Challenges of Vatican II

In this part we will not only analyze the years of the Vatican II Council (1962 – 1965) but also will include the immediately preceding it, up to the present day. That means that our study covers more than a forty year period. The aim is to bring out the changes Vatican II precipitated concerning women.

It is true that the Second Vatican Council gives no particular constitution to women. We can even notice that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy) accepts that the tradition of the Church prohibits women, that is, young girls, married and religious women, to serve the priest at the altar.⁷⁹ However, there is a tremendous amendment within this forty years concerning women's participation in the Church.

⁷⁸ Cf. H. ADRIAN, 689.

⁷⁹ F. AUSTIN, ed., *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

According to Mary Collins, Vatican II considered at great length the question of relations within the community of the Baptized persons.⁸⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* dealing the active participation of all the people, it suggests that the Church should authorize the lay ministers as lectors. Later on, during the time of the implication of this decisions (1970 -- 1975) some bishops wished that women could be instituted as lectors. The implication of this was not without problem. Some of the bishops suggested that women should not have a designated place for them within the sanctuary.⁸¹ A number of bishops applied that, others did not do any thing at all while the United States of America, after consulting the Holy See, authorized that women could read from the sanctuary.⁸²

With the 1983 Code of Canon Law, more room was given to women in active participation in the Church. Canon 230 paragraph 2 states:

“Lay people can receive a temporary assignment to the role of lector in liturgical actions, likewise, all people can receive the role of commentator, cantor or other such in accordance with the law.”⁸³

The comment that clarifies this canon precisely shows that both men and women may be so assigned. On the same note, the Congregation for Divine Worship in March 15, 1994 interpreted the text and confirmed it to the Episcopal Conferences; the text was also ordered by Pope John Paul II to be promulgated. This gives full authority to the local ordinary in collaboration with the Episcopal Conference to make a prudential judgment on what is to be done.

⁸⁰ M. GLAZIER -H. K. MONIK, ed., *MCE*, 913.

⁸¹ Cf. M. GLAZIER -H. K. MONIK, ed., 913.

⁸² Cf. M. GLAZIER -H.K. MONIK, ed., 915.

⁸³ S. GERALD, ed., *The Canon Law*, Canon 230 paragraph 2.

Moreover, the Congregation for Divine Worship adds, if the bishop permits, that women may serve at the altar if the bishop permits. It also states that women, not only can serve as lectors in the liturgy, but also can be called upon for the distribution of the Holy Communion as extraordinary ministers of the Church.⁸⁴ Paragraph 3 of the Canon in question reads as follows:

“Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, lay people, even though they are not lectors or acolyte can supply certain of their functions, that is, exercise the ministry of the word, preside over liturgical prayers, confer baptism and distribution of Holy Communion, in accordance with the provision of the law”.⁸⁵

Coming back to Vatican II, a year after its beginning, in 1963, Pope John XXIII promulgated his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) whereby the pontiff observed that there was a need to pay a special attention to the “signs of times.” In as much as women are concerned, the Pope encouraged them to refuse to be treated as objects of less than human persons.⁸⁶ About social justice, John XXIII affirms that women have a right to working conditions in accordance with their requirements and their duties as wives and mothers.⁸⁷

In the same line, Vatican II condemns any kind of discrimination whether social or culturally based on sex, race, social condition and language for these are contrary to

⁸⁴[http://www.saint-mike.org/Library/Curia/Congregations/Worship/Female_Alter Server...](http://www.saint-mike.org/Library/Curia/Congregations/Worship/Female_Alter_Server...)
2002/04/17.

⁸⁵ Paragraph 3 of Vatican Communication on Female Alter servers of March 15, 1994 authorizes that both laymen and laywomen are to carry out other functions according to the same Canon 230 paragraph 3.

⁸⁶ JOHN XXIII, “*Pacem in Terris*”, 28 (Peace on Earth).

⁸⁷ F. AUSTIN, 63.

God's intention. As practical example, we can mention a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life she wishes or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized by human persons.⁸⁸ In addition, the Fathers of the Council insisted that equal dignity of person's demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. The Council supported that men and women are called to perform their activities in a way that benefits the society. In this new social teaching, women are called to provide sustenance of their families instead of depending on their husbands always.⁸⁹

As an answer to the above observations, during the decades of 1960s and 1970s, women started to claim openly their dignity and to declare their aspirations. Later on women's voices reached Church authorities. It is during this period that United Nations dedicated a decade for women. In 1975, the International Assembly took place in Mexico City. This Assembly, which was followed by other local ones, was interested in political, social, educational and economic situation from women's perspectives.⁹⁰

Because of the efforts deployed by both men and the Church authority, women are no longer considered as subjects of men. In current practice, women not only do participate, but even provide creative pastoral and institutional settings whenever official Church ministry is being done. Here we can think of an example of the parish women in

⁸⁸ F. AUSTIN, ed., *Gaudium et Spes*, 29.

⁸⁹ F. AUSTIN, ed., 63.

⁹⁰ Cf. M. GLAZIER · H.K MONIK, ed., 913.

mission administration whose ministry corresponds to that of an ordained minister even in some sacramental matters⁹¹ like marriage and baptism.

When we compare the function of woman in the Church as given by the Second Vatican Council and the New Code of Canon Law, we find that there is a huge development. For example, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) states that women should be entrusted with some liturgical activities such as receiving the faithful at the doors (ushers), directing them to their proper places, guiding them during the procession or collecting the offerings.⁹² With the New Code of Canon Law (1983) women may serve as advisory judges in the tribunals (1421 par. 2. Females may be authorized to preach in the Church [Can. 766]): they may also be entrusted with the pastoral care of the local committee [Can 511 par. 2].

It is important to consider two papal documents on this topic. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Apostolic Letter on Dignity and Vocation of Women [1988], John Paul II shows that the dignity of women as equal to that of men. He reiterates that both men and women are created in the image and likeness of God.⁹³ Therefore, men and women deserve equal dignity. In *Christifidelis Laici* (On Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful [1988]), the Holy Father calls to people's attention that by virtue of their baptism

⁹¹ Cf. M. GLAZIER –H.K. MONIK, ed., 915.

⁹² Cf. F. AUSTIN, ed., 7.

⁹³ Cf. J. PAUL, *MD*, 16 (On Dignity and Vocation of Women).

and confirmation, men and women have a share in the mission of Christ who is priest, prophet and king.⁹⁴

The implications behind this are to be appreciated. This is because of the active participation of the lay faithful including women in the Church and in the society. Unlike before Vatican II whereby a woman was not allowed to teach theology, today we have a good number of them who have doctoral degrees in all theological disciplines: Scripture, Systematic, Dogmatic, Moral and so on. Currently, women are not only teaching in minor seminaries but are also lecturing in major seminaries, theological colleges and universities. In the parishes, women's role is indispensable especially in small Christian Communities. We find them as chairpersons of various Church/parish committees, choral directors, members of those choir, readers and extraordinary eucharistic ministers.

In today's world, Christian women serve in different capacities and various organizations. They serve the people of God in organizations as well as cooperatives in order to improve women's economic situations. They promote justice and peace in different human right organizations. In politics, women are no longer left behind. We can note this in different countries, more recently in Kenya where a considerable number of women have been voted in various political positions including cabinet ministers, permanent secretaries, members of parliament and so forth.

⁹⁴ J. PAUL, *Christifideles Laici*, 51.

3.2 The Role of Virgin Mary as a Woman in the Church

In chapter one we talked of Mary as one of the five women that appear in Jesus' genealogy. However her role in the Church does not end with the life and death of the Historical Jesus here on earth. On the contrary, the Scriptures continue to show us Mary in the company of the Apostles in the Upper Room, "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer together with certain women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" (Acts 1:14).

The early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, Ireneaeus, Tertullian and others call Mary the New Eve, title that befits her role in the Church today. Saint Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century, with the Council of Ephesus named Mary "*Theotokos*" literally meaning, *Gods Bearer; Mother of God* in the actual sense. Throughout the centuries different popes have given her various titles to crown her role in the Church. For example, Pope Pius IX in 1854 gave her the title of Immaculate Conception. Pius XII proclaimed in 1950, Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven.⁹⁵

Through out the history of the Church, Mary has been appearing to both men and women with different important messages. Many people have experienced visions in which they report seeing, hearing, even touching the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁹⁶

However, Mary does not appear for the sake of appearing, but rather she comes on earth with a message to deliver for the sake of her Son's Church. For example, Mary's apparitions in Guadalupe in the fourteenth century made her become the Patron of

⁹⁵ O'C. MICHAEL, *Theotokos*, 55.

⁹⁶ H. ADRIAN, al., 406.

Central and South America.⁹⁷ When she appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes, France, 1858, Mary asked for repentance of sins and building of a chapel that was to be dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

Over the last three centuries, a great number of visions have taken place. Some of them were approved by the Church officials as genuine while others were not. In these apparitions, Our Lady always puts emphasis on prayer, building of shrines or chapels and the like. In other apparition, Mary has given to people a message of hope, physical healing, deliverance from famine and wars, reassuring salvation, renewed pilgrimage, religious conversion⁹⁸ etc.

For example, on 13 October 1917, at Fatima (Portugal) the Virgin Mary appeared to three children: Lucia des Santos, Fransisco and Jacenta while they were looking after sheep. Her message stressed the need of praying the rosary for the conversion of Russia. According to Michael Walsh, this resulted into the collapse of communism in 1991. Those interpreting these apparitions hold that the original message for that apparition was connected to the end of the First World War.⁹⁹

In her apparitions, Our Lady is not only active in Europe and America. She also visits other parts of the world since she is not bound by time and space. She comes to visit the continent on which she brought the infant Jesus seeking for refuge (Mtt. 2: 13 – 18; 2: 14 – 21). In fact one of the different titles that have been given to Mary is known as “Our Lady Queen of Africa”. For example, fro 1981, the Virgin Mary has been

⁹⁷ W. MICHAEL, *A Dictionary of Devotions*, 114 – 116.

⁹⁸ Cf. H. ADRIAN, al., 406.

⁹⁹Cf. H. ADRIAN, al., 406.

appearing to schoolchildren in Kibeho (Rwanda). There she appears as a Rwandan woman. Her message was repentance from sins if not a lot of blood was to be shed. Though people ignored it in 1994, thirteen years after the first apparition the message became true. Because of subsequent genocide many Rwandans have come to the realization that the apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho were truly genuine.

On 29th June 2001, Bishop Augustine Misago, the local ordinary of the Diocese of Gikangoro with the approval of the Holy See declared officially that Our Lady has been appearing at Kibeho. As Our Lady had commanded during her apparitions, the local church has started to build the shrine for Our Lady of Sorrows there in Kibeho.¹⁰⁰

We have so many other tangible experiences by which Mary has shown her active participation in the Church. One of such experiences is the Marian Orders and Congregations that are found in the Church. For so many years both men and women dedicate themselves to Mary and work for the Church and bear testimony to Mary's role. Moreover, majority of lay people both men and women are members in a number of Marian movements like the Legion of Mary or Priestly Marian Movement. I hardly understand how we can talk of self-reliance in our local Churches without these people. My experience is based on what happens in Diocese of Kakamega where the majority of women who really active in the Church are members of the Legion of Mary. We can conclude with Saint Ambrose who sees Mary as the type of the Church. This does not mean that Mary's activity is limited on what we have said. We have just mentioned a few.

¹⁰⁰ M. IGNACE, "Dialogue", 79 – 84.

4. Conclusion

We have gone through the history of Christianity. We have noticed that women played a meaningful role in all the ages. In early Church, women served as virgins, widows, deaconesses, foundresses of monasteries, martyrs even as writers. In medieval period women were challenged by the scholastics but they continued the monastic life as spiritual writers, mystics, foundresses of universities. Even Joan according to legend became a pontiff. Some women also played some key roles in the Crusades. Catherine of Sienna helped the papacy to put an end to the schism.

During the reformation, some women left the convents willingly or not and other abandoned the Catholic faith while others decided by all means to remain in the Church and reform from within. Among these women we remember Teresa of Avila, Angela Merici, MaryWard and others.

For the last forty years, Vatican II and its outcome have created more room for women's full participation in the Church since they share in Christ's threefold ministries. This is because of their Baptism and Confirmation. The Virgin Mary on the other hand, from the time of Incarnation of the Word till now has been active in the Church. Apart from praying for the Church, she appears here on earth for the sake of her Son's Church.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

To conclude, since the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament it is good to remember their interdependence: we cannot fully understand one without the other. This is to say that we did not waste our time by starting our work by looking at women in Hebrew Scriptures. It has been an invaluable tool in helping us to compare Jesus with other rabbis of his time.

In chapter two we saw that Jesus shared in his own ministry a great personal openness to women. He brought about social change without causing immediate social revolution. This is evidenced when we examine how Jesus dealt with female disciples, how the woman with hemorrhage could not hesitate to touch him in order to be cured (Matt 9:20 – 22) and also the faith of the Canaanite female whose daughter was healed (Matt 15:21 – 28).

With the above ideas in mind, on one hand we can compare the Old Testament period with the practice of the Church towards women before the Second Vatican Council. On the other, regarding, the Matthean Jesus can be compared with the Church's change towards women after the Council with its developments. Like Jesus, Vatican II brings a change without breaking the tradition of the Church.

In our study we can say that the period before Vatican II has its climax in the Middle Ages. This is because, perhaps, of the influence of the Aristotelian philosophy

which the Scholastic theologians had christianized. It is also at the Medieval Period that women were removed from various Church functions such as, deaconate, the order of widows, teaching and the like. It is during this time that women were forbidden to approach the sanctuary, to distribute communion, to touch or wear sacred vestments. In addition they were forbidden to receive Holy Communion during their menstrual periods and obliged to put veils when receiving Holy Communion. Moreover, it is during that period that clergy: deacons, priests and bishops were told to have no physical contact with women by remaining celibate for life.¹⁰¹

Let us note that at the beginning the Second Vatican Council had no room enough for change because the Code of Canon Law (1917 – 1982) was not quite different from the previous one as long as women were concerned. It is only after the New Code of Canon law (1983) that there is more room for the Church to put into practice the Matthean Jesus' teaching about women. That is to say that we have now many improvements in the church concerning the status of women.

We have seen in the third chapter that, with Vatican II, women are allowed to be readers of the Sacred Scripture during liturgical functions, not only from their designated place but also from the sanctuary. We have also said that the development of the Second Vatican Council allows women to serve the priest at mass and to comment during the Eucharistic celebration. In addition, women now are allowed to preach not only after communion, but also immediately after the Gospel. Women are no longer refused to sing in choirs. Rather they can now be cantors and singers, either alone or as members of a choir. They do no longer need a special permission from the Ordinary in order to join

¹⁰¹ So the statement of Sister Christine Vladimiroff <french. page@wanadoo.fr> giving reference from the Code of Canon Law (*Corpus Iuris Canonici*, 1234 – 1916 A.D).

men singers as it used to be. We have also seen that women can lead liturgical ministries such as baptism and marriage. They can teach, not only in secular schools but also in seminaries, theological institutes and universities.

Before ending this work, we need to appreciate all women of all the ages, who played great roles in history of the Church despite many obstacles they encountered for; they tried to be active in the Church in different capacities. Our recommendation is that the improvement of Vatican II should be encouraged. We are glad that, at least from 1970 till now, the Church has got three women Doctors of the Church: Saints Catherine of Siena (1970), St. Teresa of Avila (1970) and Thérèse of Lisieux (1997).

There is however, still a gap when you compare the number of Doctors of the Church who are men with these three women. We need to thank Pope John Paul II for working tirelessly in canonizing so many saints from all the corners of the world. However, according to Anne M. Clifford, 75 per cent of the canonized saints are men while 25 per cent are women.¹⁰² Does that mean that men are holier than women before God? Some people may think that it is only the responsibility of the hierarchy to improve the status of women in the Church, that is, the work of Bishops, priests and deacons. How many faithful, even the educated, never feel comfortable to receive Holy Communion from the hands of a woman? That implies that more effort is needed from both sides of clergy and the laity.

Having examined all this, it is high time to answer our question whether Matthean teaching is put into practice in today's Church. The answer is positive. Because the Second Vatican Council has tried to remove some obstacles that hinder women to

¹⁰² Cf. C. M. ANNE, 226.

participate fully in the Church. The major question that is remaining is ignorance of that improvement. Both clergy and laity need clarification of roles in the Church from the Episcopal conferences to the small Christian communities. In this case, seminars should be organized which will emphasize on the role of every baptized member. It is therefore good at the same time to explain the role of the ordained minister among the people so that the laity can understand why in the Church this is only preserved for men.

BIBLICAL ABBREVIATIONS (From the New Revised Standard Version)

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
1 Sam	1 Samuel
2 Sam	2 Samuel
1 Kgs	1 Kings
2 Kgs	2 Kings
Isa	Isaiah
Mal	Malachi
Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Rom	Romans
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
1 Tim	1 Timothy
2 Tim	2 Timothy

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABC	Anchor Bible Commentary
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AD	Anno Domini, Common era
al.	alii, other persons;
A-JFRW	K. KALLENBACH, <i>Anti -- Judaism Feminist Religious Writing</i> , Atlanta 1994.
AWB	L. HERBERT, <i>All the Women in the Bible</i> , Grand Rapids 1995.
BM	B. E. RAYMOND, <i>The Birth of the Messiah</i> , I,II, New York 1994.
CBC	Collegeville Bible Commentary
CBQ	Catholic Bible Quarterly
Cf.	Confer, compare
CST	Catholic Study Bible
CUEA	Catholic University of Eastern Africa
DNT	C. F. RAYMOND, <i>Divorce in the New Testament</i> , Minnesota 192.
ed.	Edited by
IFT	C. M. ANNE, <i>Introducing Feminist Theology</i> , New Jersey 2001.
MCE	Modern Catholic Encyclopedia
NCE	New Catholic Encyclopedia
NJBC	New Jerome Biblical Commentary
NTINWD	H. B. WES – S. H. RINGE, <i>New Testament Introducing the New Way of Discipleship</i> , New York 2001.
OCCT	Oxford Companion of Christian Thought
OER	Oxford Encyclopedia of Reformation
p.pp	page/pages

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Statement of Sister Christine Vladimiroff, Monday 17, 2001.

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