

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

**The Significance of Women in the Gospel According to Matthew and
the Application to the Contemporary Kenyan Society**

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

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

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

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Dedication

To mum Lucy, because you bore me,
To my sister, Veronie, because you are the only one,
To my tutor, Sr. Carmel, because you are smart,
To my niece, Ka-Lucy (Tausi), because I love you and because
you call me *papa*,
And to every woman, because of your worth and dignity.

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May the Almighty God bless you abundantly.

Abbreviations

AFER.....	African Ecclesial Review
BCE.....	Before the Common Era
BTB.....	Biblical Theological Bulletin
CBQ.....	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
JB.....	Jerusalem Bible
NIB.....	New Interpreter's Bible
NJBC.....	New Jerome Biblical Commentary

*"They broke all barriers for the sake of freedom and changed the course of history."**

* From the film "Glory," Columbia Tri-Star Films (UK).

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Preamble

Much has been written about the place and role of women in the Church. Arguments have been raised for and against them in their participation in social and religious life. I join in the arguments, with a view to give my contribution to this increasingly interesting and highly debatable issue.

Reasons for Writing

As I studied the gospel according to Matthew, it struck me that although he knew the Jewish dealings with women, Matthew did not hesitate to include them in his writings. So much were women marginalized that any self-respecting Jew, because of access to the Torah, offered a three-fold thanksgiving prayer to God that he was neither created a gentile, a slave nor a woman.¹ Woman, simply put, was a non-issue. She was only a source of evil at the best. What prompted Matthew to include women? Why was he 'unfaithful' to Jewish customs? These questions, among others disturbed me so I seek their answers in this study.

It also occurred to me that women in the contemporary Kenyan society, are no better than their Jewish counterparts of old. Coming from a society where women have continued to be victims of male chauvinism, I felt the need to stand by them as my sisters in their continued struggle for recognition. I would be going against the dictates of my conscience were I to remain aloof, indifferent or silent while they continue to 'eat the scraps falling from men's table'.

¹ William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew vol. I (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), p. 17.

Method and Structure

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter describes the position and role of women in Judaism. To begin with, I will look into both their socio-cultural life and religious life. I will then examine how they appeared in the first century of Christianity, that is, in New Testament times. The findings of this chapter will provide us with the information by which we shall assess Jesus' attitude towards women as presented by Matthew.

The second chapter identifies specific passages and gives a critique of how women appeared therein and the attitude taken by Jesus as regards them. We shall see the barriers which gave way to feminine power in these sections. The resultant information will prepare the way for the third chapter which will again look at the role and position of women in the contemporary Kenyan society, albeit briefly. The conclusion will help me to lay down practical proposals which, in my opinion, can remedy the situation at hand.

Objectives

My entire study is aimed at achieving two goals, namely;

- a) To demonstrate that in the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus is clearly portrayed as having upheld the dignity of women against the traditional attitude which pushed them to the periphery. He readily incorporated them into the Kingdom of His Father as beloved daughters.
- b) I will show that by taking Jesus as our role model, it is possible to reclaim the lost worth and dignity for all women. This requires a complete overhaul of the stereotypes which exist within male-female relations. I undertake this study with a deep-seated and

strong conviction that women in Kenyan society can be great achievers if only given the chance.

Chapter One

1 Women in Judaism

Introduction

Having received the gospel message from Jewish vessels, as it were, which were lamentably male-dominated and women-segregating, Christianity has done little, if anything at all, to bring the two genders onto an equal plane. In the first part, I will locate the place and role of women in Old Testament times. I shall describe their condition in socio-cultural life as well as in the religious domain. In the second part, I will deal with the role and place of women in New Testament times, that is in the first century of Christianity. By the very nature of the gospel message, it is not easy to draw a line between the socio-cultural life and the religious life of the Christian communities. As a result, these two aspects of life will be dealt with as one inseparable way of life.

1.1 Women in Old Testament Times

If God is imaged as male, then the relationship between the human female and God is naturally different from that of the human male. In Jewish society where religion and social life were closely related, this could justify the androcentricity of the society. This would in turn cause the subordinate and secondary role of the female and therefore legitimize male dominance.² By and large, and from time immemorial, the Bible has been used by patriarchal societies to justify women's subordination as well as to define the role

² Mary J. Evans, Woman in the Bible (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1984), p. 21

of women in society. Some Biblical texts have been wrongly used to argue against women's equality with men. We shall look into a few of these.

1.1.1 Women in the Sociol-Cultural Life.

From the book of Genesis, in spite of the secondary position occupied by the woman in the order of creation, she was in fact called to live a harmonious relationship with the man but not to be subordinate to him.³ The fact that it was the woman who was first approached by the serpent has been overly blown out of proportion. This is taken as the point of departure to consider the woman as the weaker partner. Genesis 3:16 is therefore seen as the ultimate penalty imposed by God on the woman: for her failure, "...he shall rule over you". The initial equality is here replaced by inequality and the reduction of a woman's status.

A woman's principle function was performed in her role as wife and mother. In this context, she made her sexuality available to her husband, not only for reproductive purposes, but also for the husband's pleasure.⁴ As a mother, the woman would sustain her relationship with her children which involved caring for and nurturing them. In the wider relationship extending beyond the family, the woman took part in the economic and social life of the community, in the political and also in the military life. From the juridical viewpoint, the Israelite woman had not one iota of equality with the man.⁵ The husband enjoyed the exclusive rights of divorce (Deut 24:1-14).⁶ A woman did not

Elisabeth Koffman, "Women," in Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology vol. 3, ed. J.B. Bauer (London: Sheen & Ward, 1970), p. 986.

⁴ Otto J. Baab, "Woman," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible vol. 4, eds. G. A. Bittrick, E. S. Bucke F. S., Kepler, et. al. (Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 864.

⁵ The marriage laws, for instance, had very patriarchal overtones. Upon marriage, the woman crossed over from the authority of the father to that of her husband (1 Sam 18:17, 19, 27).

⁶ All quotations are taken from Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

usually choose her husband, however her desires were not completely ignored (Num 36:6).

The wife was sometimes the stronger character than the husband. Notwithstanding the woman's inferior status in patriarchal society, she was able to experience love in marriage (Gen 24:67; 29:20; 34:3ff; 1 Sam 1:8).⁸ The highest and the only happiness which the Jewish woman could attain was motherhood (Gen 24:60; 30:1; 1 Sam 1:6ff; Ps 113:9). Once the woman became a mother, she constituted the focal point of the family life. As a result, she was the subject of honour and great esteem. Hebrew women have won themselves a place in history due to their true and motherly love.⁹ "The Israel mother-love was of such great importance that it became a symbol of divine love."¹⁰ God speaks through the prophet Isaiah in such language to His people: "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you" (Isa 66:13).¹¹ The Bible demands respect towards one's mother and disrespect was duly punished (Lev 20:9; Deut 27:16). The mother's influence was very considerable. The alleged etymology of the name 'Eve' as 'mother of all living' was motivated by the prominence of the woman's role as a mother in the Bible. As a mother, the role of woman was more than merely bearing the children. It was her responsibility to care for them. She busied herself in various tasks as required by the family.¹²

⁸ This is evidenced by for example Sarah (Gen 16:2), Abigail (1 Sam 25) and the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:8-10).

⁹ Baab, op. cit., p.865.

¹⁰ Hannah (1 Sam 1:-2:21), the mother of Moses (Exod 2:2-9), Rizpah (2 Sam 3:7ff), etc.

¹¹ Koffman, op. cit., p.987.

¹² In this I see a God who assumes the feminine character and acts accordingly.

¹³ Baab, op. cit., p.865.

The work of women was long and hard.¹³ A woman's economic activities were not ignored. In Proverbs 31, for instance, her ventures were pointedly approved. However, business enterprises such as these are rare on the part of biblical women.¹⁴ In military and political life, there was a list of national heroes which was compiled in the second century BCE. It sadly contains only the names of 'distinguished men' (Eccl 44:1-50:29). In my opinion, this is clearly a patriarchal issue and a blatant injustice towards women. There are of course recorded affairs of state where women's influence is crystal clear.¹⁵ Other women who were mothers of kings are only mentioned in passing (2 Kgs 8:26; 11:1; 12:1; 14:2; 15:2,33). More women than men were involved in the arts of dancing and singing; preserving their ancient forms and exhibiting them on social and religious functions. "Cultic dancing was practiced by the prophetic band which roamed the countryside (1 Sam 10:5; 1 Kgs 18:26)."¹⁶ It was Miriam and other Hebrew women who played upon timbrels and danced to celebrate the Israelite exit from Egypt (Exod 15:1ff).

As regards men and women's legal rights, Hebrew laws treated both equally. The adulterer and the adulteress were to be put to death (Lev 20:10). Both the father and the mother had to receive reverence as parents (Lev 19:3; Deut 5:16). Taboos over foods were mandatory upon both sexes (Lev 11). In case incest was reported, both of the culprits were to die (Lev 20:11,17-18). However, the woman's inferior status is shown in laws which are discriminatory. A daughter was less desirable than a son (Lev 12:1-5). Her father could even sell her to relieve his debts (Exod 21:7; Neh 5:5). While a man

¹³ It included milling, baking spinning, among others (Gen 24:11, 13-16, 19-20; 27:9, 14).

¹⁴ This was due to the women's sexual-social function in Israelite life and also due to the undeveloped economy of their culture

¹⁵ Deborah (Judg 5), Bathseba (1 Kgs 1:11ff), and Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1ff).

could be freed at the end of six years of slavery, a woman could not (Lev 25:40). A father could turn his daughter into a prostitute if he so wanted (Judg 19:24; Lev 19:29). Due to the woman's sexual function in a patriarchal society, her violation of laws and customs was punished in a harsher way than the male who might have been involved in the same situation (Deut 22:13-21).

The period of a woman's uncleanness after childbirth was seven days for a boy and two weeks for a girl (Lev 12:2-5). While making a special vow of persons to the Lord, there was a remarkable difference in the monetary value of a male and a female (Lev 27:1-7).¹⁷ Daughters were not to inherit their fathers' property unless in special cases. For instance, if a man had no sons but only daughters, they would inherit from him.¹⁸ The rights of sons as regards inheritance were preeminent owing to the patriarchal form of the Hebrew family. There were rights that determined the succession of the father's name and possessions. In addition, no provision was made for the security of the widow regarding her husband's property.

In Judaism, divorce, like marriage was unilateral. Only the husband had the right to terminate the relationship. The wife had no say in the matter and could be dismissed at the husband's will. The husband could write a bill of divorce, but if the woman was dismissed without it, she remained tied to a husband with whom she no longer stayed.¹⁹ Women were the managers of all domestic affairs. They were expected to hand over to their husbands all earned and unearned income. The husbands would in turn give their

Baab, op cit., p. 865.

Baab, "Sex," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible vol. 4, op. cit., p. 299.

Baab, "Inheritance," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible vol. 2, op. cit., p. 702.

Jonathan Z. Smith, William S. Green, Jorrun J. Buckley, eds. et. al., The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), p. 583.

wives a share for household uses and personal expenses. All these 'reflected their lower social standing.'²⁰

There is a strong preponderance of the masculine gender in the metaphors and other imagery describing God.²¹ Women were not considered in their own right but in relation to the men under whose authority they were placed.²² Their status in the society was based on the fact that a man's soul was stronger than that of the woman. Since the stronger comes before the weaker, chivalry on the part of women was lacking as a matter of principle (Gen 12:11-13; 19:8; Judg 19:24). The wife was usually seen as a means of obtaining children (Prov 12:4; 14:1; 19:14). The generally accepted stereotype of Old Testament womanhood was that of a bearer of, and nursemaid for man's children.²³ Though Proverbs 31 presents the wife in a seemingly positive way, it must be noted that this is only an ideal rather than the actual situation.²⁴ Women could in no way make moral decisions. Their oaths, for instance, had to be ratified by the father or the husband before they could be considered valid.

Perhaps the most ferocious opponent of women's cause in the Bible, according to me, is Jesus Ben Sirach. Writing about 180 BCE, he states, shame on him, "Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; it is (the) woman who brings shame and disgrace" (Sir.42:14). Ben Sirach devotes most of his discussion on women to the topic of the bad wife. He highlights a variety of negative domestic scenarios like drunken wives, the talkative wives and others. Though he seems to discuss the good wife, she is

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 284

²¹ God as Father (Isa 63:16), God as King (1 Sam 12: 12).

²² Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁴ This is Ben Sira's personal bias in disguise. He has a whole litany of abusive descriptions about women.

not discussed as an individual but in the light of her husband. She is seen as a property of her husband and valued as far as she serves the man's needs and meets his desires.²⁵

The woman's beauty is lauded as a stimulant of her husband's sexual desires. Her goodness is judged by the degree of her passivity and her wisdom is the eloquence of her silence.²⁶ Women were all described as gluttonous, eavesdroppers, lazy, jealousy, incapable of any intellectual capacity and only living for their self-ornamentation.²⁷ Perhaps this is why they are described as 'more bitter than death' (Eccl 7:26). Scripture lamentably reflects Israel's double standards in dealing with male and female sexuality.²⁸ The Biblical term for the family household, "the father's house" (Exod 6:14) reflects the priority of the paternal family line.²⁹ "This negative picture within Judaism was greatly shaped and influenced by Greek and Greco-Roman androcentricism and misogyny."³⁰

1.2 Women in Religious Life

In the Jewish culture, the socio-cultural life was very much tied to the religious life, such that it would be difficult to clearly separate the two. However, this part deals with those aspects of life which can be described as strictly religious. Women were excluded from participating directly in all official acts of worship. Israel, unlike her neighbours, had no priestesses.³¹ In pre-exilic Israel, women would serve as Prophets (Exod 15:20), as Judges (Judg 4:-5:) and as Queens (1 Kgs 19). During their life in exile,

²⁵ It is unfair that women's qualities were seen only negatively; that no good could come from them.

²⁶ Warren C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View on Women* (California: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 168.

²⁷ Teresa Okure, "Women in the Bible," in *With Passion and Compassion*, eds. V. Fabella & M. A. Oduyoye (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), p. 50.

²⁸ For example virginity was demanded from the bride but not the groom (Deut 22:13-21).

²⁹ Mary Joan Winn Leith, "Women," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* eds. B. M. Metzger & M. D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 808.

³⁰ David M. Scholer, "Women," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* eds. J. B. Green, S. McKnight & I. H. Marshall (Leicester: Inetrvasity Press, 1992), p. 881.

³¹ Nonetheless, women performed specific services at the tabernacle (Exod 38: 8; 1 Sam 2: 22).

the priests collected and formulated regulations with a view to ensuring ritual and social purity.

A women's court was added to the temple to separate females from males and the sacredness of the sanctuary. The women's vows were no longer as valuable as those of the males (Num 27:1-8).³² The word for 'priest' in the Hebrew Bible is *kohen* and it appears only in the masculine form. The feminine word *khnt* only occurs in the cognate languages and also in Rabbinic Hebrew. The word *khnt* does not appear anywhere in the Bible's meaning.³³ Women had no role inside the temple. However, immediately outside the temple, there were some women with certain functions related to worship. Women often assumed the role of singers, musicians and dancers. Most of these functions were cultic. In the Old Testament, there is mention of at least twenty-five different types of musical instruments, some of which were played by women as a matter of worship (Exod 15). Women were also found in temple processions leading to the sanctuary (Ps 68:25). In matters of war, it was the women who gave the good news of the enemies' defeat (Ps 68:11-13). There was also cultic weeping and mourning for women.³⁴ In the religious activities revolving around the great festivals of Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, women's participation was observable where they are included in the words, "...all the congregation of Israel" (Exod 12:3). In the prescription of how the Feast of Tabernacles was to be observed, a man's daughter, maid-servant and widows are specifically mentioned (Deut 16:14). Women attended religious gatherings and shared in the sacrificial meals. During the annual feast of the Lord at Shiloh, the daughters of that

³² Koffman op. cit., p. 988.

³³ Richard A. Henshaw, "Women in the Israelite Cult," in *Dictionary of the Bible* D. N. Freedman, A. C. Myers, A. B. Beck, eds., et. al (Michigan, Cambridge: Grand Rapids, 2000), p. 1385

neighbourhood came out to dance (Judg 21:19-21). A woman would go to the shrine and engage in the Festival of the New Moon or the Sabbaths (2Kgs 4:23). No woman could serve as a priest. She was barred from this role by two factors, namely; her marital uncleanness, and her sexual nature as a woman.³⁵

Prophetess Huldah was consulted regarding the newly found Book of the Law (2 Kgs 22:14). Miriam and Deborah were accorded the name "prophetess" (Exod 15:20 and Judg 4:4). Isaiah's wife is also called a 'prophet' (Isa 8:3). "The religious influence of women, including the unnamed multitudes of mothers of Biblical homes and those whose names have survived in the Bible, was undoubtedly great."³⁶ Women participated in the reading of the Book of the Covenant in order that they could learn to observe it to the letter (Deut 31:12; Josh 8:35). They could only have access to the covenant through their relationships with men. While men could pray three times in a day, women were exempted from these time-specific functions because "their time was not their own".³⁷ Additionally, even if a woman was able to carry out an act of piety, say, reading the Torah in public, she would not be allowed to do so. This was so because her socially inferior stance would not affront the dignity of the men who would be present.³⁸

Owing to a preponderance of male participation in worship, men played the major roles in most cultic acts.³⁹ Because of undergoing circumcision, which was the sign of the covenant, men considered themselves the rightful partakers/partners of the covenant at the expense of women. However, women too shared in the blessings which Israel

³⁴ A woman was supposed to teach her daughters and neighbors a lament over the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 9: 19-20).

³⁵ Baab, "Woman," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, op.cit., p. 866.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 866.

³⁷ Smith, op. cit., p. 584.

³⁸ Men could not stand being outdone by women in public.

³⁹ Evans, op. cit., p. 26.

received from God: they shared in the Sabbath rest (Exod 20:8) and benefited from the reading of the Law (Deut 31:9-13). The women were as responsible as the men for keeping the Law and maintaining cultural purity. The Law was read aloud to both men and women (Deut 31:12-13; Josh 8:35; Neh 28:2ff). Though the majority of sacrifices were brought by the male representatives of their households, women were also expected to take an independent role in bringing the sacrifices. The Law made specific provisions for non-contagious types of uncleanness on women (Lev 12:6). This shows that the women's personal cultic condition was a matter of concern.⁴⁰

All Israelite males were obliged by the Law to appear before the Lord three times annually at major feasts (Exod 23:17) but women were not obliged by this law. They could inquire of God through prophets directly, and independently of their husbands.⁴¹ The angel of the Lord spoke directly to others.⁴² Though both men and women were equally eligible to take vows, those of a woman could be canceled by her husband or father.⁴³ The official leadership of worship rested on priesthood. Although women from the priestly families were given certain privileges (Lev 22:13), they were nonetheless not allowed to become priests. There were those who exercised a very prophetic ministry.⁴⁴ In the temple and in the synagogue, women went to hear while men went to learn.⁴⁵ Women could enter the temple precincts only as far as the court of women. They did not count in the quorum of ten people which was necessary for a synagogue service to be held. As a result, they could neither hold any official service, nor lead in the synagogue service.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴¹ Rebecca (Gen 22:22) and Jeroboam's wife (1 Kgs 14:1).

⁴² Hagar (Gen 16:17) and Manoah's wife (Judg 13:3).

⁴³ Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

1.2 Women in New Testament Times

The strong patriarchal authorship of the Bible does not provide a level ground for equality. The meagre information about women therein, with its masculine overtones, is further painstakingly filtered by uncompromising male bias. The end product is a skeletal male-influenced, women-segregating material devoid of any objectivity. Some Pauline writings regarding women have been grossly misinterpreted to subordinate and silence women. This hermeneutical distortion needs to be replaced by 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in order have an unbiased interpretation of scriptures. I shall critique some of them in this section.

The role of women around this time reflects the influence of the Jewish community. In the Jewish way of life the socio-cultural aspect and the religious one were difficult to separate; these two areas are inseparable in the Christian community on account of the gospel message. As a result, I will deal with the two spheres of life as a single unity of the early Christian way of life. The earliest records about women in the Christian era are the writings of St. Paul. Some of his letters, together with the information contained in the Acts of the Apostles, give us the basic information needed to retrace women's position in the early church.

The early writings we have about women are not objective, factual accounts. They are pastorally engaged writings whose form and content were shaped and conditioned by the particular theological and sociological experiences of the early Christians.⁴⁶ The early Christian authors and communities lived in an androcentric and predominantly patriarchal

⁴⁴ For example Deborah (Judg 4) and Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14ff).

⁴⁵ Evans, op. cit., p. 34.

⁴⁶ Martin J. Clarice, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2, ed. E. Schussler Fiorenza (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), p. 772.

world. Consequently, they took as a norm the cultural assumption about gender valuation and roles. It is due to this that we have limited information about women in the traditions of early Christian writers.

"Androcentric interests and perspectives involved the selection, redaction and transmission of traditions about the Christian movement, and thus a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' should inform any reading of women's presence, participation, agency and leadership in the first-century churches".⁴⁷

The marginal interests shown by the early Christian writers in respect to women's lives does not in any way imply that women were passive observers. On the contrary, their presence, "active and durative participation, proactive agency and widespread and visible leadership"⁴⁸ were observable in many geographical and cultural contexts of the time (Rom 6:1-15; Phil.4:2-3).

The early church presents us with "silences about women's historical and theological experience and contributions arising from androcentric and patriarchal assumptions".⁴⁹ These assumptions are firstly, that these narratives and traditions were of negligible importance. Secondly, these narratives and traditions were a danger to the accepted cultural norms and conventions. They were also a threat to the "gradual patriarchalization of the Christian movement"⁵⁰ towards the end of the first century. The recorded accounts are therefore neither sufficient nor comprehensive information about women's participation in the early Christian communities. Many of the references to women as they appear in the scripture are filtered through androcentric redaction and

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp 772-773.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 773.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 773.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 773.

interpretation.⁵¹ Masculinity is depicted as the unquestioned standard of the history and development of the Church. The historical role of women is therefore seen only as a problematic appendix because, "maleness is the adequate historical norm, and the hegemony of an almost exclusively male presence, leadership, and agency in the Christian missionary movement is accepted *ipso facto*."⁵²

In the Corinthian community, the Holy Spirit worked and inspired women and men in prophesying and praying. Paul does not object to women's prophesying or praying aloud in Christian assemblies (1 Cor 11). Could Paul really allow charismatic utterances to women in so far as they are veiled (1 Cor 11:5), and later (1 Cor 14:34) forbid them natural speech in the public assembly? There is an apparent inconsistency in Pauline thought in these two verses. It is hard therefore to see how Paul can condemn to silence those he has encouraged to prophecy.⁵³

How can we explain this contradiction? Evidence suggests that these verses are an interpretation which has nothing to do with the authentic text of chapter fourteen or the true thought of Paul. These verses are given at the end of chapter fourteen after verse 40. Since verse 36 logically follows after verse 33, the verses 34-35 break continuity of the reasoning process. However this view is not readily acceptable to many scholars. Although these verses are put after verse 40 in more recent manuscripts, some scholars think that this would be a rather arbitrary postulating of a later interpolation.⁵⁴ "One might think that while affirming the fundamental equality of men and women before God, Paul and the first Christian communities maintained the patriarchal order

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 773.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp 773-774.

⁵³ Michel Gourgues, "Who is Misogynist: Paul or Certain Corinthians?," in Women also Journeyed with Him ed. G. Caron. (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 120.

predominating the society of the time"⁵⁵ which may never have been the case. The current theory says that these anti-women sentences were added to Paul's original letter and later on "inserted in different by early copyists"⁵⁶ to limit the growing influence of women in the communities.

All people had access to the gospel, regardless of their sex. Not only did women readily receive it, they also helped to promote it in the church. Both men and women were persecuted on account of their faith (Acts 8:3; 9:2). It is worth noting that in the early church, women served as deaconesses (Rom 16:1). They were also singled out as models of faith (2 Tim 1:5). In his letters, Paul in particular shows how the early Christian community interpreted Jesus' actions and words. According to him, for those who had become children of God, there is no difference between man and woman: "There is neither male nor female, you are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:27). In line with this, a woman is made equal to man in the hope of eternal life (1 Pet 3:7). Women are fully enfranchised members of the church from its very beginning (Acts 1:14; 12:12). This is clarified by Paul in the lists of those to whom he extends his greetings in his epistles. In such cases, women are addressed as sisters and fellow workers (Rom 16:1,3; 1 Cor 9:5).

Paul does not seem to hold the traditional understanding of a woman's role in the family. For him the wife is subordinate to her husband (1 Cor 11:3). He attempts to show how the basic law of dependence penetrates the entire divine order. There was the requirement that women should wear veils in the communal assemblies (1 Cor 11:5ff). In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul prohibits women from teaching or having authority over men. Behind the distorted representation of women in this passage, we can discern some

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 119. This opinion is common among modern scholars, including Fr. A. Lacomara.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 118.

communities where Christians prayed and prophesied. We can also discern that the teaching and governing authority was held by women. Hence, women's active role as leaders and teachers may have distressed the author (or the interpreter) and led to the insertion of male bias in this section.⁵⁷ The rights of women are clearly limited in comparison to those of men. It is worthy for a woman to show her piety in good works (1 Tim 2:10). If a widow remains genuinely so, she may assume a specific role in the service of the church in line with charitable works (1 Tim 5:3). In such a case, she would be enrolled on a special list and must meet three requirements, namely: She must be over sixty years, must have been married only once and must have led an authentic Christian life (1 Tim 5:9ff).⁵⁸

Women were among the first of many converts who joined the new faith (Acts 5:14; 8:3; 9:2; 17:4,12,34). Just as they had served Jesus in His life, they continued to serve Him in His Church, in His apostles and in the poorest members of the community. It is evident that the "Apostle of the Nations" benefited from the services he received from women who were his co-workers in his missionary journeys.⁵⁹ Phoebe is revered as '*diakonos*' (minister/servant), denoting a specific service, not a general service.⁶⁰ Paul also refers to Prisca and Aquila as his fellow workers in Christ Jesus (Acts 16:3). He further refers to his direct associates with this title: Timothy (Rom 16:21), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25) and Clement (Phil 4:3). Prisca is twice mentioned before her husband (Acts 18:18,26; Rom 16:3). This suggests that she must have been the dominant person in their

⁵⁶ Antoinette Wire, "1 Corinthians," in Searching the Scriptures op cit., p. 186.

⁵⁷ Linda M. Maloney, "The Pastoral Epistles," in Searching the Scriptures op. cit., p. 370.

⁵⁸ Johannes B. Bauer, "Woman," in Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology ed. J. B. Bauer, (London: Sheen & Ward, 1970), p.991.

⁵⁹ He greets a number of them in Romans 16.

⁶⁰ Roger Gryson, Ministry of Women in the Early Church (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1976), p. 3.

marriage. By this praise of women, it is proven that they were not less fervent than men in the spreading of the gospel.

The gift of prophecy was not denied to women in the New Testament times. Philip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). Women are mentioned as among those disciples who gathered in the upstairs chamber devoting themselves to prayer. With the group which awaited the descent of the Holy Spirit, they are depicted as insiders. However, only the mother of Jesus is named, while the others are simply called 'certain women'. They are made to appear like after-thoughts of the main theme. It is clear from Acts that the allusions to women are somehow sporadic and only incidental references which "provide us with a systematic portrayal of women's initial involvement in the emergence and growth of the post-resurrection church".⁶¹ Women are seen as receivers of the Spirit, missionaries and witnesses in the spreading of the Christian faith. Besides, they are active agents, leaders of churches in their homes, teachers, exemplars of good works, beneficiaries of God's healing and liberating power as well as prophets.

Women were " among the converts who knew firsthand the pangs and travails of arrest in their homes at the hands of a zealous Saul..."⁶² They were not spared imprisonment and persecution to the point of being killed (Acts 8:3 ; 22:4-5). There is a mention of prominent women converts who are depicted as intellectually engaged.⁶³ The text of 1Timothy 2:9-15 is written in overlords' bossy language where authoritarian laws are imposed on women.⁶⁴ Here are malicious polemics about and against women.

⁶¹ Clarice, op. cit., p. 771.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 777.

⁶³ The women in Berea (Acts 8:3; 22:4-5) and Prisca (Acts 18:26).

⁶⁴ Clarice, op. cit., p. 777.

"Such polemics against women are often self-contradictory: women are weak by nature but uncontrollable unless restrained...Their jewelry signals sexual availability, while men are open to that signal and afraid of it at the same time".⁶⁵

That woman was created second and that she alone was seduced by Satan (1Tim 2:14) demonstrates that women's nature is constructed as seducible, seductress and unchaste. The list of misogynist imputations of 1 Timothy are climaxed in a stinging attack on women.⁶⁶ "Have nothing to do with the godless myths and old wives' tales" (1Tim. 4:7).⁶⁷ The aim here is clear and direct: to subjugate women to men once and for all: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness" (1Tim.2:11).

Conclusion

From the above analysis, we have seen that right from early Judaism down to New Testament times, women have been seen and regarded as second-class members of the society and subordinate to men. Whereas men have been at the driving seats of all the societal norms and setting the standards for women, the latter have continued to assume the secondary roles in all spheres of life. While men have placed themselves at the center of all activities, socio-cultural and religious, women have been sidelined, marginalized and denied the very right of self-recognition. It is this apparent disproportionality between male and female affairs that Matthew has Jesus so radically overturn, and which I will explore in the next chapter.

⁶⁵ Lydia Schottroff, Lydia's Impatient Sisters (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1995), p. 72.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁶⁷ This quotation is taken from the Jerusalem Bible.

Chapter Two

2 Women in the Gospel According to Matthew

Introduction

"Matthew is the gospel which was written for the Jews."⁶⁸ Matthew, himself a Jew, wrote to the Christian Jews with a view to convincing them about the person of Jesus Christ. In the previous chapter we saw how the female world was separated from the male one. We saw how women were treated as second-class members in all aspects of life. We can now ask, 'What really was Jesus' attitude towards them?' In this chapter we shall look into specific passages which portray Jesus as bridging the gap between male and female and qualifying both for the kingdom of heaven. In each of the passages we shall assess, we shall identify the age-old barriers which are broken by women, the barriers which had kept them outside the heart of community activities. By the end of this chapter, we shall be able, hopefully, to look at the gospels with unbiased, unprogrammed mindsetting and discover in them *the road less travelled*.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Barclay, op. cit., p. 5.

⁶⁹ This phrase is borrowed from Scott Peck's famous book. As he explores the human behaviours which are often ignored, so also do I invite the reader to explore the gospel passages that deal with women with a new attitude and a malleable mind.

2.1 Breaking the Barriers (Matt 1:1-11)

In Jewish genealogies, women were not mentioned, except in very rare cases (Gen 11:29; 22:20-24; 35:22-26, 1 Chr 2:18-21,24). While dealing exclusively with the five "grandmothers of God"⁷⁰ in this genealogy, it can rightly be called the beginning of the end of all barriers between men and women. To any self-respecting Jew, this passage would trigger outright discomfort. The appearance of these women here is indeed "a surprising and extraordinary phenomenon."⁷¹ They seem to invade into predominantly male, almost God-given domain.

"They are almost breaks, interruptions in the listing of men. They stand out and shout to be noticed and certainly be questioned: Why are you in there? What did you do? Who are you that you are remembered and included in an account that does not usually recognize the power and presence of women in a lineage and tradition except as connected to men, to power, to kings, or infamy and unfaithfulness?"⁷²

I will now locate these five women in the Scripture and the portrayals which came from the society.

Tamar

"And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar" (Gen 38:6).

The society of the time regarded her as an adulteress and a deliberate seducer. She was a Canaanite to whom Judah had refused the normal considerations of marriage after the death of her husband. She tricked Judah into fathering her son, who was then

⁷⁰ Megan McKenna, Not Counting Women and Children (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 98.

⁷¹ Barclay, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷² McKenna, op. cit., p. 92.

incorporated into what was to become the Messiah's family line.⁷³ She may have been widowed,

"but she's tired of waiting for a husband...tired of waiting for her rights and a chance at a life, with dignity and children of her own and a place in the community that she deserves. So she pushes events and people onto the path that they originally should have chosen to follow... the path of faithfulness to the covenant."⁷⁴

No blame should be placed on Tamar for she is eventually acquitted and put above Judah in righteousness (Gen 38: 26).

Rahab

"And they went, and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab..." (Josh 2:1). She was a prostitute from Jericho and therefore a gentile. She gave refuge to the spies sent into the land and her generosity to these strangers enabled her to be spared during the invasion and the occupation of that land by the Israelites. She who was called a harlot becomes the heroine.⁷⁵ Her former lifestyle is overshadowed by the good work she performs.

Ruth

"These (sons of Naomi) took Moabite wives;...the name of the other was Ruth" (Ruth 1:4). She was not a Jew but belonged to an alien and hated people who the Law prohibited from entering the assembly of the Lord"⁷⁶ (Deut 23:3). Her

⁷³ Eugene M. Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *NIB* vol. VIII, L. E. Keck, T. G. Long, B. C. Birch eds., et. al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 129.

⁷⁴ McKenna, op. cit., p. 95.

⁷⁵ Elaine M. Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), p. 64.

⁷⁶ Barclay, op. cit., p. 17.

"generosity...charity and mercy makes her memorable"⁷⁷ in the family line of Jesus. We cannot pick the aspect of sinfulness to accuse her, for there is no indication of any.

Bathsheba

"The daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite" (2 Sam 11:3), was an Israelite but her marriage to a Hittite would cause her to be considered a gentile by the standards of later rabbinic law.⁷⁸ She is not declared guilty of adultery but David's seduction is the sinful action (2 Sam 12: 7-13).

Mary

"...Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born..." (Matt 1:16). She was betrothed to Joseph in a legally binding relationship, only to become pregnant before her marriage.⁷⁹ This village girl from Galilee won God's favour to be the channel of our liberation. She links the Old Testament with the New and bears the Saviour of the world.

Why are these women singled out and not the more noble and famous ones in Jewish history? Why not the likes of Sarah, Rebecca, Deborah and others? Why these seemingly scandal-causing ones? These women are all "breaches in the chain, the blood lines, breaches in history - important ones to note and incorporate into memory."⁸⁰ A lot has been written in an attempt to explain their appearance here, especially the four from Old Testament. The first explanation is that each of the four can be suspected to have engaged in an illicit, scandalous love affair.⁸¹ In this case, they are seen as sinners. It would seem to some people that Matthew included them apologetically against the

⁷⁷ McKenna, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

⁷⁸ Boring, op. cit., p. 129.

⁷⁹ Amy-Jill Levine, "Matthew," in The Women's Bible Commentary C. A. Newsom & S. H. Ringe eds. (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992), p. 253.

⁸⁰ McKenna, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

⁸¹ Wim J. C. Weren, "The Five Women in Matthew's Genealogy," in CBO 59 (1997), 290.

Jewish claim that Mary conceived from a sinful relationship.⁸² However, this would not absolve Mary or make Jesus' more acceptable.

The second suggestion says that these four Old Testament women were regarded as foreigners. They are allegedly included here to show that Jesus was related to the Gentiles⁸³ and are thus seen as preparing Mary who was not a foreigner. But in my view, this is an obvious injustice and a classification with androcentric interpretation for Bathsheba was an Israelite. The third opinion and the most acceptable one is two-fold. First, the union of these women with their partners has something irregular and extraordinary.⁸⁴ This scandalous union carried on the blessed lineage of Jesus. Secondly, these women played a pivotal role in God's plan. They are hence hailed as instruments of God's providence. Only Tamar ensures that the purpose of the law will be fulfilled. She was considered as "having been led by the Spirit of God to act in accordance with God's will."⁸⁵ She acts when Judah unjustly declines. She used creatively the possibilities offered to her by the levirate law. She kept the history of Israel from its imminent end with Judah. Consequently, she is considered to have been more in the right (Gen 38:26).

Thanks to the efforts of Ruth and her mother-in law, Obed was born and later became David's progenitor. It is claimed, and rightly so, that "it is on Rahab's merits that the Canaanites have been able to retain their place in a country dominated by Israel."⁸⁶ She realized the power of the Hebrew God and acted to protect the scouts. On account of her faith and action, she was spared during the destruction of Jericho (Josh 6:24, Heb

⁸² Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 72.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁸⁵ Adrian Leske, "Matthew," in The International Bible Commentary W. R. Farmer, S. McEvenue, A. J. Levoratti, eds. et. al. (Collegetown, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), p. 1259.

⁸⁶ Weren, *op. cit.*, p.299.

11:31 Jas 2:25).⁸⁷ It was partly due to Bathsheba that David's kingship is eventually handed on to Solomon. These extraordinary unions and initiatives were regarded as the working of the Holy Spirit. These women show us "how God uses the unexpected to triumph over human obstacles and intervenes on behalf of His planned Messiah."⁸⁸ While the usual form for genealogies had a common pattern from the paternal line, the inclusion of these women breaks this trend. This sets the reader in a state of preparedness: to expect the unexpected. It also sets the reader in "an androcentric worldview of the narrator."⁸⁹ The pattern provides us with a theme which runs down the entire text. This theme is the tension between tradition and newness.⁹⁰

These five women bring God's plan to fulfillment through a 'holy irregularity'.⁹¹ Their action portrays God's power and grace. God's purposes for the Davidic dynasty are fulfilled regardless of the human sin and failure involved. This genealogy offers what has been called 'higher righteousness'.⁹² The four Old Testament women move into action after the failure of men. These men who had the power to act "are all taught the lesson of higher righteousness...".⁹³ The women are seen as instruments through which the divine plan, "imaged as absolutely male-centered, reaches its completion or fulfillment."⁹⁴ The patriarchal lineage used to see women only as vehicles of reproduction and as

⁸⁷ In view of the Jewish tradition, she was considered a heroine through whom God's plan was fulfilled.

⁸⁸ Brown, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

⁸⁹ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in Searching the Scriptures op. cit., p. 641.

⁹⁰ Daniel J. Harrington, ed., The Gospel of Matthew, Sacra Pagina Series vol. 1, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 32.

⁹¹ W. D. Davies & Dale C. Allison Jr., "The Gospel According to Saint Matthew," in The International Critical Commentary vol. I, J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, & G. N. Stanton eds, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), p. 170.

⁹² Levine op. cit., p. 253.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 253.

⁹⁴ Elaine Wainwright, Shall We Look for Another? (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), p. 56.

insignificant historical subjects. As a result, the foremothers of Jesus are concealed in this male-dominated construction of Jesus' descendency.⁹⁵

This genealogy is however, good news in a special way: what was considered misplaced in the Jewish tradition has now been remarkably recognized. It shows that "God works through the nitty gritty of ordinary human beings to bring the divine purpose to fulfillment."⁹⁶ The things we abhor, the experiences and events which we would despise can be of service to God in His plan of salvation. It is an inclusive genealogy which extends to men and women of all nations. There is a New Creation in which God reunites the divided and scattered humanity into one family of God.⁹⁷ It is clear that these women acted within their rights. In their so-called irregular adventures,⁹⁸ a supernatural power is revealed, one which neither men nor women are able to manifest by themselves.

But

"to single out such women for inclusion, however, or to explain their situation as 'extraordinary or irregular' can support a form of gender politics in which women are regarded only when they are problems...to claim that such 'problems' are important within 'God's plan' especially when that God is identified with the patriarchy of genealogy, is to support the androcentric perspective of the biblical stories in which the four women's dangerous situation is brought back under patriarchal control."⁹⁹

There is not a single piece of textual evidence to accuse these women as sinners. The negative attitude taken against them, baseless as it is, can only be a by-product of male bias. When all is said and done, the history of Israel is accomplished through the efforts of women. Their heroic roles have put them in the annals of history and in the

⁹⁵ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in Searching the Scriptures, op cit., p.641.

⁹⁶ Boring, op. cit., p. 132.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 132.

⁹⁸ These women are seen outside the patriarchal household structures.

genealogy of the Son of God. The inclusion of these women "brings new blood, new understanding and consequently breaks the barriers of traditional Jewish conception of women."¹⁰⁰ The old contempt is gone; and men and women stand equally dear to God and equally important to His purposes.¹⁰¹

2.2 Women as Persons of Dignity and Worth (Matt 9:20-22)

"Take heart, daughter" (v.22). This passage shows clearly one of the many instances when Jesus regarded women with their proper dignity and worth. He was ready to accept those whom the society regarded as undesirable and ritually unclean. In so doing, He implicitly challenged the males, together with their sexual devaluation of women.¹⁰² The faith of this woman brought her great deliverance. She was emancipated not only at the physical but more so at the socio-religious level under whose heavy yoke she had so painfully lived.¹⁰³ According to the Torah, anything she touched was considered ritually unclean (Lev 15). Such a woman was seen as a perpetual menstruant and therefore permanently unclean, hence, was socially marginalized as an outcast.¹⁰⁴ She is not identified in the passage by her role in the society but by her physical disability as a pollutant. She seems to have internalized this marginalization by avoiding an approach to Jesus face to face. However she is aware that Jesus is able to set her free from her infirmity.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Harrington, op. cit., p. 642.

¹⁰⁰ McKenna, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁰¹ Barclay, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁰² Scholer, op. cit., p. 881.

¹⁰³ Sherman E. Johnson & George A. Buttrick, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in The Interpreter's Bible vol. 7, G. A. Buttrick, W. R. Bowie, N. B. Harmon, eds. et. al. (Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), p. 358.

¹⁰⁴ Benedict T. Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in NJBC eds. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, & R. E. Murphy (Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), p. 650.

¹⁰⁵ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in Searching the Scriptures, op. cit., p. 649.

Her muted thoughts are therefore "a statement of belief, a power that enables her to reach out beyond herself, beyond socio-religious restrictions..."¹⁰⁶ She had already made up her mind to touch Jesus regardless of the situation surrounding Him. She was deeply convinced that the touch itself was enough to do what had been impossible for twelve years. By touching Jesus, she risked transmitting her ritual uncleanness to Him. Jesus reads her internal monologue and declares that her action was an expression of faith. It was neither a belief of magic nor superstition as it would have seemed to some.¹⁰⁷ It was not a display of simple-mindedness but a matter of faith. Her action can be well explained in the following syllogism.

"Major premise: an act of faith is able to make a person well.

Minor premise: touching Jesus' garment is an act of faith.

Conclusion: therefore the woman is made well"¹⁰⁸

For this woman, a mere touch on Jesus' fringe would suffice. Jesus does not ask the woman any question. He does not wait for her to explain what has happened to her. He instead commends her faith immediately. Instead of the state of uncleanness passing from the unclean to the clean, the healing power issues from the clean to the unclean.¹⁰⁹

The term 'daughter' which Jesus uses is a sign of endearment (Ruth 2:8; 3:10; Ps 45:10) and an inclusion into Jesus' new family, that is the kingdom. Jesus referred to her as such to show that she also counted as a worthy child. He incorporated her not only into the Kingdom, but also into the *kindom* of God which is unconditionally open to all. Jesus led her faith from desire for healing to a deep yearning for purity of heart; "from the tassel of His robe to the claims and joys of His eternal kingdom."¹¹⁰ Her resolution to

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 649.

¹⁰⁷ Boring *op. cit.*, p. 238.

¹⁰⁸ Davies & Allison, vol. II, (1991) *op. cit.*, 128.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 130

¹¹⁰ Johnson & Buttrick *op. cit.*, p. 358.

'steal' blessings from Jesus raised her from the lowly state she was in. The ever-compassionate Lord was not too busy for her despite the pressing multitude. She who was regarded as a Nobody became Somebody. Through the gentleness of Jesus she ended up as dignified as Everybody.¹¹¹

In the Jewish religion, the fringes attached at the corner of the garment symbolized the covenant relationship which Israel had with God (Num 15:38-39; Deut 22:12; Zech 8:23). By her action, she showed her dependence on that relationship.¹¹² She came from behind, "out of bashfulness and humility"¹¹³, with a steadfast belief that touching the powerful man could cure her, and her belief is authenticated by Jesus. It was not, however, the action of touching the garment that cured her but her strong faith in Jesus' ability to cure.¹¹⁴ The faith of this 'daughter of Jesus'¹¹⁵ enabled her to crush the barriers existing between the 'dignified, worthy men and the undignified, unworthy women'. She pioneered the entrance into men's self-acclaimed, jealously guarded realm of male superiority. Both men and women have an equal share in the kingdom of God, not on account of their gender but on account of individual faith in Jesus. Gender apartheid crumbles at a poor woman's humility and her unparalleled act of faith.

2.3 Women as Models of Faith (Matt 15:21-28)

"O woman, great is your faith" (v.28). This monumental exaltation of a woman is uniquely remarkable, as it is the only instance in all the four gospels that a woman is given so lofty a recognition. This would have baffled all the listeners, especially the male

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 358.

¹¹² Leske, *op. cit.*, p. 1287.

¹¹³ John Wesley, "Matthew," in The Definitive Bible Commentary ed., Owen Collins, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), p. 928.

¹¹⁴ Harrington *op. cit.*, p. 131.

¹¹⁵ Megan McKenna, Leave Her Alone (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2000), p. 92.

disciples because Jesus' acclamation comes out of a sustained request from the woman and a spirited give-and-take between the two. Her action serves as a perfect paradigm of faith, not only to the disciples then, but also to all God-seekers now.

The term 'Caananite' places this woman in front of ethnic and religious barriers. Her christological address to Jesus is the first attempt to break the gender, ethnic and religious barrier standing strong and tall ahead of her. Her language is clearly not of the outsider she is alleged to be, but of an insider she rightly deserves to be.¹¹⁶ The exchange between the two reverses a common pattern in the gospels. Curiously unique in this drama, it is a woman's voice that sets off the debate. Usually there is a situation that provokes a hostile question from a bystander to Jesus. In such a case, Jesus responds with a correcting or reproofing question and proceeds to settle the issue at hand. In this passage we realize that in the three speeches made by the woman, two of them are directly addressed to Jesus. Her first plea is shouted through the crowd. Jesus' hearing of the woman's demand and His initial reply are mediated by the disciples.¹¹⁷

Jesus' silence at the woman's request at first is a test to her faith. Embarrassed by her persistence, the disciples plead with Jesus to dismiss her (v. 23). This advice is ambiguous. On the one hand, it could mean that they wanted Jesus to grant her request and thereby get rid of her bothersome presence. On the other hand, it could as well mean that they sought Jesus to get rid of her and avoid further trouble.¹¹⁸ There was an apparent obstacle here for the woman to overcome before her request was granted. The disciples would not want the barrier to be approached, let alone be removed.

¹¹⁶ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *Searching the Scriptures* op cit., p. 653.

¹¹⁷ Heather A. McKay, "She Said to Him, He Said To Her: Power Talk in the Bible or Foucault at the Keyhole," in *BTB* vol. 28 (1998), p. 49.

¹¹⁸ Harrington op. cit., p. 235.

The woman addresses Jesus three times as 'Lord'.¹¹⁹ She addresses Jesus with what would later become the Christian language of worship and faith, "Have mercy on me, O Lord" (v. 22). Undeterred by the seemingly unwelcome situation, she "knelt before Him", which is now the posture of worship. The woman repeats her petition in a psalm-like fashion. Jesus addresses her directly with the crudeness of an analogy which compares Jews to children and gentiles to housedogs (puppies).¹²⁰ Since the Jews did not keep dogs as pets, it has been suggested that this metaphor has a gentile setting.¹²¹ These gentile dogs were household pets as opposed to the semi-wild stray dogs in the Jewish culture. The woman turns the analogy to her favor thereby overcoming the reluctance of Jesus.¹²² She does not take offence at Jesus' identification of her with dogs. On the contrary, she redirects this comment and once again addresses Him as Lord. Her argument is superb and commendable. She asserts her claim and proves her steadfast faith. She does not do this by protesting but by arguing and 'convincing' Jesus, as it were, that both Jews and gentiles fall under the same authority. For her, the dogs can pick the crumbs *as* the children are being fed and not later. Consequently, the Jews and the gentiles can be satisfied by God simultaneously as the children and the dogs beneath the table.¹²³

The woman proves that her faith was authentically rooted within her and that it was not a question of self-seeking hope.¹²⁴ She accepts the secondary status among the house dogs and offers the possibility of sharing in the fruits of the kingdom with the chosen people of God. In her spirited exchange, she confesses Jesus as Lord and in turn

¹¹⁹ In the gospel, Matthew attributes this title to Jesus' disciples only.

¹²⁰ Boring, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.336.

¹²² Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

Jesus grants her request while at the same time praising her faith. "The reason is not her wit, which has entangled Jesus in His own words, but rather her great faith."¹²⁵

The woman overcomes a three-fold opposition to her faith. Her unwavering stance outsmarts Peter's shaky faith and his triple denial. "The female power has once again endured against all the barriers the patriarchal culture had erected against it, and the words of Jesus recognize and celebrate it."¹²⁶ This unperturbed and persistent struggle in prayer is portrayed as great faith by Jesus. The societal norms and gender differences need not impede divine compassion or human faith.¹²⁷ The struggle with God as presented by the woman's action, is not an act of unbelief. It is lauded by Jesus as 'great faith' and not 'great unbelief'. It is a remarkable contrast to Peter's little faith (Matt 14:31). The woman would have been on an equal footing with Peter if she had told the Lord, "Command my daughter to be healed, if you are the Son of David."¹²⁸ Her indomitable persistence was clearly undiscourageable.¹²⁹

Propelled by the love of her daughter, the woman suffered rebuffs from the disciples. She had a fire of worshipping faith which no amount of hostility could put out. "She began by following; she ended upon her knees, She began with a request; she ended in prayer."¹³⁰ She succeeds to ignore the stigma which was put on her and manages to claim a place in the household of God. It was her counter-challenge, rooted in fidelity to the desire of having her daughter cured that was recognized by Jesus. "...No longer has the woman gained her benison from Jesus as a result of besting Him in a verbal

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 259.

¹²⁴ Davies & Allison, vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 550.

¹²⁶ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in Searching the Scriptures *op. cit.*, 653.

¹²⁷ Boring, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 337.

¹²⁹ Barclay, vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

encounter. It is the impressive quality of her faith that has moved Him to perform a healing action."¹³¹ The love of her child is hailed as being in line with God's desire for humanity.¹³² "One woman with a mother's love for her child and one prophet with God's love for all God's children"¹³³ meet, and all existing barriers between Jews and gentiles, between men and women give way. This woman stands as the foremother of all women who are "freed from all restrictive and oppressive socio-religious bondage."¹³⁴

This so victorious a faith stands out as a beacon to believers in an amazing way because it came from a *woman*, an unwelcome outsider! The narrative challenges sexism and racism, not only of the ancient times but also of the modern times.¹³⁵ Challenged are those members of a different gender or ethnicity from the 'insignificant others' who are deemed to be distanced from God on account of their sex, race, religion or their role in the society. There is no gender, no race and no religion which can boast of exclusive rights in the heavenly citizenship at the expense of others. The story invites us to struggle with our biases, perceptions and prejudices of others. This enduring struggle can only be termed as great faith.

2.4 Women as Good Workers (Matt 26:6-13)

The anointing of an honored person was a common trend in Jewish festive occasions. This unnamed woman had expensive and highly perfumed oil to anoint Jesus. This is a clear act of love and generosity. She has her own way of hailing Jesus as the Son of David by anointing Him. The disciples were evidently displeased by this 'holy waste',

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 123.

¹³¹ McKay, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹³² Wainwright, *Shall we Look for Another?* *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹³³ McKenna, *Not Counting Women and Children* *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹³⁴ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *Searching the Scripture* *op. cit.*, p. 654.

¹³⁵ Boring, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

but Jesus is quick to defend the woman. He criticizes them for their hostility to her¹³⁶ and declares that, "...she has done a beautiful thing to me" (Matt 26: 10). The woman fulfilled the Mosaic command (Deut 15:11). She recognizes that "Jesus is the poor man *par excellence* as Servant Israel going the way of one stricken, smitten by God and afflicted."¹³⁷ Jesus interprets her action as a preparation for His burial. Again a woman portrays her great faith which will go down in the annals of the history of Christianity. Her "act of true righteousness will be remembered throughout the world because she has acted out of her sincere faith."¹³⁸

The action has a two-fold meaning. On the one hand, Jesus equates it with His burial and thereby acknowledges the traditional role of women, that of anointing the body of a dead person. On the other hand, anointing the head was a sign of royal commission. The woman here is put in the masculine position of a priest and a prophet.¹³⁹ The economic and financial notice of the costliness of her ointment is on a par with the identification of Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:57). She uses her financial gains appropriately. While the disciples focus their attention towards earthly matters, this woman understands what matters most at the moment. The disciples publicly profess their lack of understanding while a woman shines out as a true model of prophecy.

Her action is "the confessional language of worship and devotion, in which there can be no higher priority than loving devotion to the deity."¹⁴⁰ The story gives a christological affirmation about Jesus as the woman's action itself. The woman knows that He who is worshipped as Lord is the one who is crucified. While the male disciples

¹³⁶ Stuart L. Love, "The Place of Women in the Public Settings in Matthew's Gospel: A Sociological Inquiry," in *BTB* 58 (1994), p. 58.

¹³⁷ Leske, *op cit.*, p. 1321.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 1322.

are blind to this fact, the woman's action is a perfect model of insight and extravagant love.¹⁴¹ She is praised as having done a 'good work' (Matt 26: 10).¹⁴² The goodness or beauty of her action is found in its timeliness. "It is to the woman's credit that she recognizes the moment of Jesus, whereas the disciples do not."¹⁴³ Her deed was not only good, it was also symbolic. It pointed to the imminent death of Jesus. Her action was not only symbolic, it was also sacramental. It was indeed "the outward visible sign of an inward and visible truth."¹⁴⁴ This unnamed woman with unknown motives, "impulsively performs an extravagant act which inevitably suggests Jesus' messianic status."¹⁴⁵ Her positive act, together with the protests from the disciples, foreshadow the oncoming events.¹⁴⁶ This passage draws women closer to the Lord whom they had faithfully followed in His journeys (Matt 27:55).

The further away the male disciples move from Jesus, the closer the women move to Jesus up to the end, and even 'beyond the end', to the tomb. The superfluous cost of the woman's ointment is in contrast with the low price which Judas offers to betray Jesus (Matt 26:15). The disciples' negative attitude distances them from Jesus and sets the stage for the isolation of Jesus. The action of this woman is more exalted by the disciples' criticism and their preference of earthly affairs. Her choice is indeed the better option at

¹³⁹ Levine, op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁴⁰ Boring, op. cit., p. 446.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 446.

¹⁴² Cited from the JB. This is the same term which is used to describe the deeds of the disciples (Matt 5:16).

¹⁴³ Harrington, op. cit., p. 362.

¹⁴⁴ Johnson & Buttrick, op. cit., p. 570.

¹⁴⁵ Davies & Allison, vol. II, op. cit., p. 444.

¹⁴⁶ These are the events in which the disciples will increasingly distance themselves from Jesus, deny Him and eventually abandon Him.

the moment, a choice which will make her forever remembered. Jesus commended the same action which "the men of His own household condemned with such bitterness."¹⁴⁷

The eloquence of her silent action speaks volumes about the person of Jesus. He solemnly declares that, "wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Matt 26:13). It will be said of her, 'Behold, this is the woman, the faithful disciple who did what the male disciples would not do'. This passage stands out as another barrier which is undone by a silent action of an unknown woman. If this narrative "is not told of her memory, then the gospel is not being truly preached in the whole world."¹⁴⁸ The memory of her action is apparently linked to the memory of Jesus and His ministry. Here we see the female power "that recognizes suffering and reaches out courageously to bring the touch of mercy and compassion to the one suffering."¹⁴⁹ A woman, by the sole weapon of her silent action, done in extraordinary love, breaks the barriers between the passionate, compassionate women and men, in whose domain was the role of anointing. "Jesus Himself points out the significance of her action and defends her against the complaints of others. Furthermore He directs that this story be told wherever the good news is preached."¹⁵⁰ Her gesture of love and festivity is misunderstood by the disciples. Jesus silences them and declares that, "the utilitarian and everyday are not to have exclusive sway."¹⁵¹ While in the Jewish tradition the actions of women went unrecorded and unrecognized, Jesus acts clearly against this injustice.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 447.

¹⁴⁸ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in Searching the Scriptures *op. cit.*, p. 663.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 663.

¹⁵⁰ Mary T. Malone, Women and Christianity (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 2000), p. 49.

¹⁵¹ Viviano, *op. cit.*, p. 669.

Could it be about her that the psalmist so vividly describes, "No utterance at all, no speech, not a sound to be heard, but from the entire earth the design stands out, this message reaches the whole world" (Ps 19:3-4)?¹⁵² The economics of common sense which the disciple applied and the economics of love displayed by this woman differ considerably. While the former hinges on prudence, the latter is rooted in the heart.¹⁵³ Following the praise of Jesus on the action of this woman, the disciples are taught that never should they despise any of the little ones of the Lord.¹⁵⁴

2.5 Women as Disciples (Matt 27:55-56)

"The misunderstanding and incomprehension of suffering discipleship exemplified by the twelve turns into betrayal and denial in the passion narrative. Judas betrays Jesus, Peter denies Him, and all the male disciples abandon Him and flee into hiding."¹⁵⁵ Against this sad fact, the women disciples however, show the true kind of discipleship. They risk their lives and safety and dare to go where their male counterparts would not go. They are thus the true relatives of Jesus "who have left everything and have followed Him on the way, even to His bitter end on the cross."¹⁵⁶ The presence of these women, courageous and faithful as they are, shows the power of their love and contrasts the lamentable absence of the Twelve.¹⁵⁷ These women had nothing to fear. The public had such a low attitude towards them that they would have gone unnoticed.

As Jesus had come into the world to serve, the women served Him as His disciples to the very end. The mention of these women sets the male disciple in a

¹⁵² Cited from the JB.

¹⁵³ Barclay, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 330.

¹⁵⁴ Love, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁵⁵ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 319.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 320.

¹⁵⁷ Viviano, op. cit., p. 672.

cowardly point of view. Propelled by love, courage and gratitude to their Lord and Teacher, they followed Him in the way of the cross. Their love for Him was the foundation of their courage and this portrayed a true and unwavering devotion. "They could do little other than watch, but their seeming helplessness proved to be their power."¹⁵⁸ Their helpless watching was not helpless in actual fact. On the contrary, it was indeed the very transmission of faith. They would, on account of their presence in the scene, "validate the death and burial"¹⁵⁹ of the Lord and stand as witnesses to His resurrection. They now act as substitutes of the absent male disciples.¹⁶⁰

After all the male disciples have fearfully fled, these strong women stood by their master, against all odds.¹⁶¹ The male disciples portray a model of discipleship very opposite to the one showed by the women. While the former would have us remain on Mount Tabor, savoring the sweetness of Christ's glory, these women would lead us to accompany the Redeemer to Mount Calvary. The former group prefer a pleasant life without bitterness and pain; the latter group is well aware of both realities in life. The Risen Lord is also the Crucified One.

These women do not fit in the stereotypical gender role which belonged to women.¹⁶² They neither mourn nor lament as it would have been expected of them. However, they assume the silent role which was taken by the male mourners. Their mere presence here points far beyond the visible presence; it points to their understanding of discipleship. They honor Jesus by what the circumstances and the moment would allow;

¹⁵⁸ Johnson & Buttrick, *op. cit.*, p. 611.

¹⁵⁹ Boring, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

¹⁶⁰ Matthew uses the title 'disciples' exclusively for the male followers (Matt 28:7-8).

¹⁶¹ They could not keep watch with the Lord but slept and had their rest (Matt 26: 40, 43 & 45).

¹⁶² Wainwright, Shall We Look for Another?, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

"being present at His death".¹⁶³ At the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the disciples and the rejoicing crowds accompanied Jesus. While the crowds later became hostile, the disciples fled from their Lord. At the end of it all, there remained only the women from Galilee who had followed Jesus in His ministry.¹⁶⁴ "The disciples, not the women, stop short of following Jesus to the cross."¹⁶⁵ Their intrepid, tearless presence shatters the barriers which had women on the emotional side: to weep and lament. Here they stand, inviting a positive recognition as faithful disciples. They seem to say, 'Look at us standing by our Master, and here we shall remain, to show all those who despise and marginalize us that we too are bold enough to accompany our Teacher.' The bold are no longer bold, but those who did not count are now the only ones who count. There, at the foot of the cross, these true disciples remained, intrepidly faithful to their Lord.

2.6 Women as Witnesses and Proclaimers (Matt 28:1-10)

The women who had loved Jesus to the end receive love's reward. They get the joyous experience of being the first to see the Risen Lord.¹⁶⁶ The two mandatory witnesses required for the credibility of any mediated knowledge are provided (Deut 19:15; Matt 18:16; 26:60). The angel orders them to convey the message of Christ's resurrection to the disciples. This makes them the pioneer witnesses of the empty tomb. They are also the first bearers of the Good News. They become positive and trustworthy channels who obediently hurry to carry out the divine order.¹⁶⁷ They provide us with a paradigm of "greatness, faith, and faithfulness in the kingdom of heaven."¹⁶⁸ Besides

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁶⁴ Davies & Allison, vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 637.

¹⁶⁵ Love, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁶ Barclay, vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

¹⁶⁷ Boring, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

¹⁶⁸ Love, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

being the first witnesses of the empty tomb, these women receive the first appearance of the Risen Christ. Jesus meets them, joins them and accompanies them. They are already on their mission when they meet with Christ. Jesus repeats the angel's commission and brings the disciples into the scene. He refers to them as 'brothers'. The alienation between Jesus and the brothers is now healed from the divine side. The disciples are assured, courtesy of these women, that they are again within, and still belong to the family of believers. "The women become not only missionaries of the resurrection message, but also of reconciliation."¹⁶⁹ The angel invites the women to see the place where Jesus had been laid in order to situate the truthfulness of their witness.

On account of the mission given to them by the angel, they are rightly referred to as the 'apostles to the apostles'.¹⁷⁰ The angel's words to them and their meeting with Jesus "indicate their substantive role in the Easter mission"¹⁷¹. Jesus meets them first and they are in turn the first to worship Him. While among the male disciples 'some doubted' (Matt 28:17), only the women's legitimate fear and joy are recorded, neither their doubt nor unbelief. "These independent, motivated women are both the first witnesses to the resurrection and the first missionaries of the church."¹⁷² Their joy led them to proclaim to the disciples what they had witnessed. Indeed the witnesses to the death and burial of Jesus are fittingly the witnesses to His resurrection. They had come to the tomb sad but left as joyful witnesses. They feared because they had experienced a tremendous mystery

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁷⁰ Leske, *op. cit.*, p. 1328.

¹⁷¹ Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p.262.

of the death of Jesus. They rejoiced at having the solemn message given to them, prior to the male disciples.¹⁷³

These women act as intermediaries. They reconcile the male disciples with the Risen Lord. The women's fidelity to the angelic commission is unwavering and steadfast. Their positive response is done with immediate haste. They are the foremothers of the preaching mission of the church.¹⁷⁴ "At the close of the gospel story, as in its opening, female power and female presence function to subvert the patriarchal constructs and androcentric worldviews that both frame the narrative and find expressive thought."¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

It has clearly emerged from the above analysis that Jesus incorporated women in His ministry. He upheld their dignity and by His words and works put them at the same level with their male counterparts. Women stood up for themselves by their good works and by their strong faith. A woman's participation in the birth of Jesus outside the patriarchal structure comes under the salvific plan of God. A woman whom the society saw as an outsider, and a religious as well as gender outcast, claims her rightful place in the society, thereby receiving wholeness and acceptance. An extraordinary show of belief, insight and courage by an 'outsider' ends in a divine exaltation. The disciples' little and lukewarm faith is overcast by a woman's great faith. A prophetic action of a woman wins her an indelible place in 'gospeldom'.¹⁷⁶ Passionate love and fidelity of female power is displayed on the way of the cross up to Calvary. Women stand by their Lord until the last minute of His earthly presence. These women eventually become the perfect

¹⁷³ Davies & Allison, vol. III (1997), p. 668.

¹⁷⁴ Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *Searching the Scriptures* op. cit., p. 665.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 665-666.

¹⁷⁶ The entire place where the gospel will be preached.

models of the missionary aspect of the church; they are faithful proclaimers, instruments of reconciliation, evangelizers and indeed fast-moving missionaries.

CHAPTER THREE

3 APPLICATION TO THE CONTEMPORARY KENYAN SOCIETY

Introduction

This chapter briefly describes the situation of women in the contemporary Kenyan society vis-à-vis the women as they appeared in the above two chapters. It identifies the areas where women are still discriminated against, abused and denied their basic rights. From the analysis of the previous chapter, it gives practical suggestions which, hopefully, will halt the current trends against women. These suggestions call for action to be taken by both men and women in collaborative ministry, where no one will be judged by his/her gender.

3.1 Women in Social-Cultural Life

The Kenyan society has for a long time maintained firm boundaries, clearly demarcating areas and roles which are supposedly for men alone and those for women alone. The greatest damage in this society, in my opinion, has been done by the heavy yoke of patriarchy which has weighed down on women from time immemorial. All the abuses which are meted out against women, any form of marginalization and segregation has patriarchy as the one monster root cause. Everything is done the 'male way' and according to what men think should be done.

Virtually all the tribes had male leadership as the unquestionable, undisputed form of government. Women were relegated to the domestic role of bearing and bringing up

children.¹⁷⁷ There were powerful kings or Councils of Elders who governed, none of which had anything to do with women. This mentality, sadly enough, still lingers in many people's minds such that it has become deeply rooted in them. No wonder only seven out of a possible two hundred and twenty-two places in the parliament are occupied by women. Worse still, shame on us that there is no woman in the cabinet!

Women have ceaselessly called for equal opportunities in the public arena. The more they insist on it, the more the male population in the corridors of power erect stronger barriers to shun them. A notable figure in barring women from being on a par with men is none other than the head of state himself. He is on record as having publicly declared that he does not condone the Affirmative Action Bill tabled in parliament calling for equal representation between men and women: butterflies under the wheels of power!¹⁷⁸

Another thorny issue deeply rooted in patriarchy is the inheritance laws. They have never favored women. The girl child has always been taken as having no claim to her father's property. Many tribes do not educate the girls simply because they are seen as 'the raw materials out of which a dowry will come', or that in educating a girl one is educating her for another family. They are therefore seen as assets of the father. For the Agikuyu people. *Mwana wa kahii ni mutuga kwao na wa kairitu ni mutuga kwene.*¹⁷⁹

The naming of a new-born child in many societies is done by the male relatives. It has almost become an 'eleventh commandment' for women to call themselves after their fathers. While this may have been imposed by different tribes, women also find it

¹⁷⁷ Similar to the Jewish culture.

¹⁷⁸ Emman Omari & Owino Opondo, "Moi Orders Cabinet to Shut out Women," in Daily Nation, (November 27, 2001).

¹⁷⁹ A son takes care of his father's house, while the daughter takes care of another.

pleasurable to do so. Many women voluntarily drop their real names and keep only their baptismal and father's names while upon marriage they take up their husbands' names. As a result, such names are common; Mrs. Margaret Kenyatta, Ms Eva Njoroge, Sr. Mary Manthe, and many more. Other names become ambiguous as a result of this, like Mama Chege.¹⁸⁰ It is the pride of many men when they are called by their son's names, even if the son has nine daughters elder to him.

Above all else, the situation of the family cannot go unmentioned. The rights and role of women in the family and in the society need special attention. Despite the fact that "equal dignity and responsibility of women with men"¹⁸¹ should prevail, this fundamental aspect of the family is often lamentably disregarded. The root cause of many a family breakdown is the abuse of this divinely-given principle of equality and complementarity. The regrettable situation for survival weighs down heavily on women where they struggle to manage and provide for their families.¹⁸² The males demand uncompromising love and respect from their wives while they give very little, if anything at all. This is evidenced by the number of cases of domestic violence against women where such barbaric actions have no place in any self-respecting, civilized society. Many husbands are lords in their homes, the undisputed 'know-it-all, decide-it-all commanders'. A man can majestically walk away from his responsibility of fathering a child, leaving the mother as the sole bread-winner of the family.¹⁸³ While I condemn this attitude and other abuses in the strongest terms possible, it is paramount to note that "what human reason intuitively perceives and acknowledges...is a continuous and luminous testimony to the dignity of

¹⁸⁰ This can either mean Chege's wife or Chege's mother.

¹⁸¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 1981.

¹⁸² Mary Getui, "African Women: When the Enterprise is Female," in *New People* 71 (March-April 2001): p. 12.

women."¹⁸⁴ The lenient laws governing domestic violence continue to incubate this calamitous situation, in a country which calls itself a Christian nation.

3.2 Women in Religious Life

Women have come a long way in defining their roles in the Church. There have been remarkable changes from the traditional and popular belief that women should do the listening while men do all the teaching. Nowadays women have gradually become beacons of hope towards a more mature collaboration with men in spreading the gospel message. Women scholars and thinkers have contributed greatly to the society with the power of their minds and pens. They have written books of great spiritual help to millions of readers. Some are powerful preachers and evangelizers while others are professional teachers.

However, much still needs to be done right from the grassroots, to empower women in their endeavor to contribute more to the society. Few women assume leadership roles, primarily due to lack of opportunities of which the male population has monopolized their distribution. In many cases, women's activities are monitored and censored by men as if the former have no capability of direction. Many women have what it takes to be administrators: knowledge, experience, and will power, but they are denied the chance to work. For instance, in many parishes such positions can be filled by newly-ordained and inexperienced priests. The reason for this is all but obvious.

The Catholic Church has no clear-cut role for women in her hierarchy. Given that the majority of her faithful are women, her outlook in the mission is indeed wanting. I am

¹⁸³ Mary Getui, "African Women: Family Planning or Planning a Family?," in New People 74 (Sept.-Oct. 2001): p. 8.

¹⁸⁴ John Paul II, op. cit.

deeply convinced that given the chance, women will and can do wonders and fit into any sphere of life. The institutions of learning have quality women staff and produce quality female personnel as good as, and sometimes even better than many others in the world.¹⁸⁵

To avoid a dichotomous, fragmented and sometimes disfunctioning society, there is a dire need to create a clean balance sheet of equal rights, equal dignity and equal opportunities between men and women. Among the challenges facing the Church in this millennium are her attitudes towards the contributions made by women in the ministry. "It would...be ironical if the Church remains rigid or even retrogresses in its position on women, in spite of the encouraging words it sometimes utters."¹⁸⁶ Women continue to suffer many injustices in full view of men, especially those in leadership roles. There is a trend to treat women as objects¹⁸⁷, not as persons, a trend which ought to be eliminated by the combined effort of both men and women. It is in support of this cause that I raise my voice, with a view to helping my sisters to 'roll away the stone'¹⁸⁸ which closes the doors of opportunities in their faces. All humanity needs to champion the inclusive attitude of seeing women as first among the equals in all spheres of life.¹⁸⁹

From the above analysis, the following are some suggestions whose feasibility is practical and workable, on condition that both men and women are ready 'to put new

¹⁸⁵ The Precious Blood School here in Nairobi is a girls's school run by Precious Blood Sisters and it has topped the national secondary exams for a record three years in a row.

¹⁸⁶ Laurenti Magesa, "Involving All in Ministry: A Challenge to the Church of the 3rd Millennium," in AFFR 42, (2000): p. 12.

¹⁸⁷ Bernadette Mbuy-Beya, "Women From Whom More Will Be Expected," in Catholic International 6, (1995): p. 147.

¹⁸⁸ This idea is borrowed from Mark 16:3 and I find it very relevant in supporting my viewpoint.

¹⁸⁹ Teresia M. Hinga, "Women Liberation in and through the Bible," in African Christian Studies 6, (1990): p. 43.

wine into new wineskins', cleave the webs of biases and prejudices against each other and work in associate partnership and complimentarity for the kingdom.

a) Letting the Bible be a Liberating Force for Women.

The Bible has often been used as the weapon to discriminate against women. On account of its patriarchal overtones, women have been seen and taken as 'side plates'. However, on the threshold of the new millennium there is a need to revisit the entire outlook and interpretation of the Bible. We need to discover and admit its human limitations and build anew the men-women relationships so badly presented therein. The current trend (already strong) of re-interpretation of the Bible in hermeneutics free from any form of bias requires the support of all who believe in equal dignity of all people.

b) Demolish All Patriarchal Towers Which Crush Women's Affairs.

Patriarchy harbors the majority of injustices against women. Gone are the times when the world was seen through masculine glasses. A time has come when both men and women must stand on an equal footing in the society. Patriarchy must no longer reign in a world keeping on a par with modernity and indeed post-modernity.

c) Build Mutual Respect and Understanding of Each Person's Vocation.

Everyone has a right to pursue his/her vocation without intimidation. In this way, everyone will feel appreciated as a person. No one has the monopoly of the Holy Spirit and no one should decide how women, or men are to answer their calling.

d) The Role of Women as Partners Should Be Upheld.

The book of Genesis places women as equal in dignity with men. This divine intention, willed and commanded by the Creator should not be substituted by a

creature.¹⁹⁰ This partnership has its cradle in the family. The rights and responsibilities proper to each one have the family as their seed-bed. It is only when the complementarity of men and women is cultivated that God's will is realized.

e) Equal Rights for All.

Those in power, ecclesial or secular, have the obligation to ensure that no one's rights are abused on account of one's gender. They should exercise their power justly and impartially and ensure that the victims of this abuse have had enough, more than enough and they will not tire in raising their voices against any sort of political, social or religious discrimination.

f) Sisters-in-Christ

Those in Holy Orders must see all women as their sisters. For a fruitful ministry they cannot help but realize that any woman is a divine gift to humanity and should be appreciated with the respect worthy of the Giver.

g) De-westernize the Christian Message.

Christianity needs to be clothed with an African gown, as it were, in order to be more fitting to its recipients. That which is received should be in line with the receiver, and the bringers of the Christian message should not continue to impose ways of receiving it. This is because westernization has many accidentals which are not necessary in the reception of the gospel message. Such include patriarchal structures and cultural domination. The structural and ministerial male dominance in the church needs to be

¹⁹⁰ Humans should not find fault at what God has seen as faultless.

reviewed. There is a need to have a correct understanding of Scripture and its liberating truth for both men and women.¹⁹¹

h) Cultural Emancipation

There is a dire need to rid our society from all the cultural practices which are dehumanizing, especially to women. It is upon all the members of the society to help one another in identifying those outdated and misplaced practices and inculturate those which are favorable.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above analysis that the situation of the Kenyan Church needs to be addressed. Although there is no 'super society', ours stands in the doldrums if attention is not paid to the issues affecting women who are the majority in the population. Much needs to be done in alleviating the conditions of women and bringing them on the same level as with that of men. The suggestions outlined above can assist to narrow the gap between these two genders for a better society. Commitment to reverse this situation is a joint effort of both genders.

¹⁹¹ Teresa Okure, "Feminine Interpretations in Africa," in Searching the Scriptures vol. 1, (1993), op. cit., p. 83.

General Conclusion

According to the evidence gathered, women in Judaism were marginalized by the Jewish patriarchal structures. They were seen mainly as domestic workers whose activities were restricted by men. Thanks to the new teaching of Christianity, women in the New Testament times started to gradually overcome some popular Jewish beliefs which oppressed them. Jesus' attitude towards women was radically redemptive. He showed that even women were rightful heirs of the Kingdom of God. He overturned what had been deeply entrenched in the Jewish society and taught a new lesson. It was this new lesson that brought down the barriers which separated men and women. Women in the contemporary Kenyan society, like their Jewish counterparts of old, are marginalized by the simple fact that they are women. A balance sheet of male-female relations is achievable if both men and women work in partnership to build a society where no one will any longer be judged by his/her gender. This can be realized if only we make a complete reversal of our attitudes towards each other, giving every person the dignity worth a child of God.

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