

2014

**GENDER JUSTICE AND  
STRATEGIC  
LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA**

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# **GENDER JUSTICE AND STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA**

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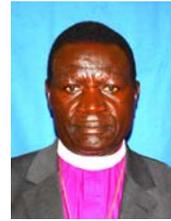
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## **Ordination of Women in the Anglican Church of Kenya Bondo Diocese**

**By**

**The Rt. Rev'd Johannes O. Angela**

**Bishop of Bondo**



Ordination of women had climaxed the long struggle for women rights in religious matters and in leadership in both the church and society. This paper seeks to explore both Theological and social imperative for an all inclusive women ministry and its significant role in shaping the history of the church. Even though the focus of the paper is on the Anglican Diocese of Bondo, much reference is equally made to the larger Western Region Dioceses which share similar cultural and social life with the Diocese of Bondo. There are key areas which are given a lot of consideration in this paper: the cultural and economic linkages; general and specific challenges to women ordination; the current role of ordained women in the Diocese of Bondo.

In large segments of the Christian Church today, there has developed the practice of ordaining women as ministers and placing them in positions to lead, teach, and preach to assembled congregations of both men and women. The ordination of women pastors has become increasingly common place. And the ordination of women as prophets and even as apostles, although not yet common, is far from being rare. In contexts ranging from local churches to large Christian conventions, ordained women ministers routinely teach and preach to mixed congregations of men and women.

The Catholic Church ordains women to the ministry not as priest but to special ministries. In this context ordination should be seen in two different contexts: a means to attain an ecclesiastical office and an authority or power to minister sacraments. The very moment we delink ordination from the actual act of celebrating the sacraments then we stand to appreciate the fact that women just like men, should equally be considered to other ministries alongside priesthood. The scripture also talks of priesthood of all believers. This inclusivity cuts across genders. There are several ordained ministries where every member has a role. What we need is to identify the specific ministries and assign the preferred ministers accordingly.

## **ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF BONDO**

The Anglican Diocese of Bondo was created in September 1999 following the sub division of the Anglican Diocese of Maseno West and its first Bishop was consecrated and enthroned in February 2000. The Diocese falls within Siaya County and has two administrative units now referred to as Sub –Counties.

The community of Bondo is predominantly made up of one ethnic group, Luo, even though there are people from other ethnic communities who reside in the area for varied reasons.

### **Economy**

The economy of Bondo is mainly supported by small scale farming, fishing, small scale and medium business enterprises, and other employment related engagements. The workforce is predominantly made up of people who are engaged in health and teaching sectors. There is no single factory in the entire Bondo. This makes unemployment the number one problem in the region. The poverty index in Bondo is much higher than the national figure. HIV/AIDS prevalence is equally much higher considering the lifestyle of communities living along the beaches.

### **Culture**

The Luos are known for their rigid cultural practices which sometimes appear outdated and repugnant to civilization. For example the practice of inheriting widows, has been responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. This practice is not only demeaning to women, but it has also created a lot of conflicts in families. Widows are at the centre of this weird culture and it is not a surprise that children born out of this practice are not fully appreciated and integrated into the family. It has also culminated in domestic violence against the vulnerable members of the family.

## **WOMEN AND CULTURE**

The Luo culture recognizes women's role in leadership. Even though this recognition is limited to specific roles none of them has religious inclination. In the history of the Anglican Church of Kenya, women had been involved in church leadership at the local congregation as lay ministers. It was not until 1983 when the first woman was ordained

in the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Reverend Lucia Okuthe, and Bishop John Henry Okullu will forever be remembered as the first Bishop to defy odds to ordain a woman in Holy Orders. Ironically, this bit of history, however important as it is, is never captured in our history books. Even a Google search only talks of the first woman being ordained in 1983 without any reference to either the person or the presiding bishop. Maseno South, forms part of the history of the Diocese of Bondo, and it is for this reason that tracing the history of women ordination of Maseno South, until 1985 when Maseno West was carved out of it. In September 1999 Maseno West also was subdivided to create a new Diocese of Bondo. There are several similarities between Bondo and these other Anglican dioceses in Nyanza: common language, liturgy, culture, economy, climatology to mention but a few. They also share entrepreneurial activities through joint initiatives, ordination training institution, and community development services. It is for this reason that the Anglican Diocese of Bondo cannot be solitarily examined without any reference to the rest of the region.

Women in Luo culture have specific roles of being mothers, and more often than not, they are the heads of their households. Luos believe that it is women who make homes, and as such, they are endowed with inherent power to shape the destiny of their respective families. Men are traditionally expected to provide security, and just to some extent acts as bread winners. Women are traditionally the bread winners amongst Luos. They would go the full length to fend for their families. In case of shortage mothers would normally forgo the little food available for the sake of their children, whereas their husbands would be busy drinking or chatting with friends.

## **WOMEN AND THE CHURCH**

It is not uncommon to have women as leaders in their respective local congregations. The role of women in most local congregations is critical for the latter's development. Women are the majority in most congregations and they have displayed immense leadership skills as lay evangelists and missionaries. Because of this important role, their ordination to priesthood is welcome. The only difference is that now they have an expanded role. Today we have a big number of women priests occupying senior positions in church leadership.

## **Ordained Women**

The Diocese of Bondo has a total of eleven ordained women clergy. This constitutes to 6% of the total clergy in the entire Diocese. Out of the eleven women only two clergy were ordained earlier in the parent diocese of Maseno South. The figure is not impressive enough considering the fact that it is women who are the backbone of the local church leadership and are also the majority. There are various reasons attributed to this:

### **Culture**

Culture is not yet very flexible enough to give women equal chance to participate in the ordained ministry.

### **Finance**

Almost all the candidates for ordination are self sponsored. The financial inhabitation is a major challenge. Men are more likely to get financial support for ordination training than women, and this is equally attributed to attitude. Bondo was created in 1999 and became operational in 2000. There was only one female clergy by then. However, fourteen years later, some more women clergy have been trained and ordained. In total there are about 60 ordained clergy in the entire Diocese. Women clergy are eleven making up a paltry 6%.

## **CHALLENGES WOMEN CLERGY ARE FACING**

Women clergy are facing numerous challenges. Culturally, there are some people who still believe that women are too inferior to be allowed to lead the church. Cultural problems women clergy are facing in the field have not dampen their spirit but instead provided a sufficient basis to address inclusivity in our theological discourses. Key areas of challenges included but not limited to sexual harassment, refusal to recognize sacramental function presided over by the women clergy, cultural sensitivity and other forms of intimidations.

## **Sexual Harassments**

Most of the women clergy are targets of sexual harassment not only by some of their male counterparts but mostly their male parishioners who see nothing more in them than sexual objects. This is a sorry state of affairs that dehumanizes the ministry of women in the church. In a patriarchal society like in Luo land, it is inconceivable to imagine a woman presiding over the establishment of traditional home. The ceremony is male oriented with women playing the least role. There are numerous cultural rites associated with making new homes which traditionally are reserved for men. Today with Christianity being a major influence in Cultural Revolution, priests have taken over the rites which were traditionally reserved for elders. There had never been any problem with male priests taking over at such functions. However, since the ordination of women was accepted and similar roles given to women vicars, tension emerged in some areas with regard to women role in such crucial traditional ceremonies. Some people are yet to come to terms with new realities that give women priests equal opportunity to serve just like their male counterparts.

## **Sacramental Role**

The role of a priest in sacramental service is very distinguishable. The Anglican Church recognizes two sacraments instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ and which must only be presided over by an ordained minister. The sacrament of the Holy Communion is strictly reserved for the ordained priest whereas the sacrament of baptism can be presided over, on special cases, by any adult Christian. However, there are some Christians who still believe that sacrament of the Holy Communion is too important a rite to be conducted by a woman. We have had some cases where some traditionalists boycott taking Holy Communion presided over by a woman Priest.

## **Competition**

Some women priests have had a very successful ministry. Their successes are based on their hard work, and their social status. Due to the excessive expectations from Christians, they have to be twice much better than men for them to survive in the ministry. People expect a lot from women clergy. They have a longer and rigid yardstick than men for performance. Because of this, women clergy have excelled in almost all the parishes they are taken.

As earlier said, today the diocese of Bondo has eleven women clergy making up 6% of the total number of ordained clergy. The number is not yet impressive considering the role women clergy, both lay and ordained, play in the ministry. There is a promising future for women ordination. Our Diocese is in the process of making affirmative action also a reality in the ministry. There are several pastoral issues which are better handled by women clergy and this calls for a new approach to ministry of women in the church. Social issues touching on families require full involvement of women ministers. Some women- only issues would require direct intervention of women clergy who understand women matters better than men. It is on this basis that the church has no alternative for women ministry.

### **Diocesan Leadership**

In terms of education, women clergy tops the percentage of clergy with university education in the Diocese of Bondo. Of the eleven ordained women six have university degrees, five diplomas. Of the five with diplomas one is already registered for a degree course.

There are a total of five archdeaconries. Out of the five serving archdeacons, two are women. Even though ordained women are the minority, their participation in leadership is based on merit rather than favor. The two women archdeacons actually excelled in interviews beating their male counterparts because of their excellent performance.

What is it in leadership that is gender?

- Do **not** have women **teach or lead men** in the churches (1Timothy 2:12)
- Women are “**not allowed to speak**” in the churches (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34). At the very least, this verse says women are not to be what we call “**the speaker**” in a church service.
- **Elders** who are spiritual leaders in the local churches, are to be the husband of but one wife- that is, elders are **men** (1Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6).
- The gospels show that **Jesus’ chosen apostles** were all men.

These biblical references have been highly elevated as the canon regulations to bar women from participating in church leadership.

I find every biblical justification in support of the traditional views of ordination a bit disturbing if it is taken out of context.

In African culture, women's roles were confined within certain boundaries and definitely not spiritual matters. Leadership and ordination must be seen as two separate dispositions.

Being ordained and being in leadership is not one and the same thing. Ordination is a heavenly endorsement bestowed upon an individual with the sole purpose to serve the church of Christ in a specific office. It is this understanding that enables us to appreciate manifold ministry of the church: evangelists, teachers, apostles, prophets, preachers, pastors, priests' e.t.c. Sacramental ministry is one of the functions of the church ministry that appears to have been at the centre of contention to the extent that it is viewed as the preserve of male gender. The four biblical references cited above, would appeal much to African culture to the extent that they relegate the role of women to a lesser status always subservient to men.

Could it be true that the God, who created both male and female, ignored the primary characteristics of equality of worth with respect to gender? What would hinder women from being worthy of His service? If He is the one who calls and ordains, what would stop Him from calling and ordaining women for these diverse ministries?

Our Diocese of Bondo believes in the supreme authority of the scripture as interpreted by her worthy servants through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in supporting the ordination of women. Sacramental function is neither the preserve of biology or physiology, but it is the function of the church, through the intervening work of ordained people of God.

# Transforming African Cultural Gender Relations through Christ

By

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Theology, it is said, arises out of the lived and shared experiences of people within their cultures. African Christian and theological thought on gender relations, as well as theology and Christian thought from all parts of the world need to seriously consider the gospel and culture interaction and engagement factors in gender relations as lived out in the cultures of the African Continent and ask the question: “What would Jesus do in *this* situation?”

This paper postulates that there is a cause for the African Church to rise and take the issue of gender inequality, abuse and discrimination seriously, to ensure that the mixed but rich cultural heritage of the African continent is brought to bear on dealing with gender relations - in a way that is both faithful to Biblical authority and witness and honours the centrality of Christ in our families and churches. Christ comes to transform cultures in a radical way, and if He is to reign in the sphere of gender relations then African cultures ought to make room for Him to effect that change.

It is suggested, that in Africa, the communal way of life and interconnectedness ensures that gender relations is not just between an individual man relating to an individual woman; gender relations transcends marital, communal and church affiliations and bonds. However, the manifestations of patriarchy in Africa resulting in powerlessness, poverty, exclusion, exploitation and oppression of all kinds makes it imperative that the African church and African Christian theologians should work to let Christ emerge in all the cultural manifestations and permutations of gender relations on the Continent - at home, in Church and society.

## Christ Jesus and His interaction with Women

Jesus was born and bred, lived, worked, died and resurrected in a largely patriarchal culture. His life, work and mission have had profound implications for the whole question of women and gender relations within Christianity and the church. While both egalitarians and hierarchic lists in Western evangelical Christian circles draw heavily on what Jesus said and did (or did not do) to support their arguments on what is deemed correct interpretation of biblical texts on gender relations, one can safely conclude that no matter one’s inclinations, the example of Jesus lifted the worth, dignity, humanity and even rights of women to a height that was both radical and counter-cultural in the era and culture in which He lived.

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus Christ appeared to have deliberately contravened long upheld social customs to reach out to women.<sup>1</sup> He did not do anything that suggested He saw women as inferior to men. In a socio-cultural milieu that did not allow women to be taught the law beyond a certain age, or be spoken to by rabbis in public; when women's testimony was of little value and they were counted with children and slaves; when women were deemed unclean when menstruating, among other customs that restricted them,<sup>2</sup> Jesus made friends with them,<sup>3</sup> many publicly became His disciples,<sup>4</sup> He spoke directly to them,<sup>5</sup> taught them the ways of God,<sup>6</sup> allowed them to touch Him,<sup>7</sup> though they were ritually unclean,<sup>8</sup> revealed His divine nature and purpose to them,<sup>9</sup> and rebuked men for their hardness of heart in how they viewed women in marriage.<sup>10</sup> Jesus Christ did not side with the powerful establishment when a woman caught in adultery was brought to Him. He protected her from the stones that would have crushed her to death and from the men who somehow missed the man with whom she was caught in the act.<sup>11</sup> He associated with women from all walks of life and of different nationalities and ethnicities.<sup>12</sup> Key theological and Christological understanding came from Jesus' conversations with women.<sup>13</sup> His entourage of disciples included many women<sup>14</sup> who

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<sup>1</sup>For a good analysis of Jesus' relationship with women in His life, teachings and work, see, for e.g., Aida Besancon Spencer, 'Jesus' Treatment of Women in the Gospels', in Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca M. Groothuis, (Eds.), *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (USA: InterVarsity Press, 2005), pp. 126-141. This article is written from the egalitarian perspective. See also, James A. Borland, 'Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus', in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, (Eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), pp. 113-123. This is written from the hierarchicalist viewpoint.

<sup>2</sup>See for e.g., Rebecca M. Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), p. 32; J. Lee Grady, *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women: How the Bible has been misused to keep Women in Spiritual Bondage* (Florida: Charisma House, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Mary and Martha – John 11:5.

<sup>4</sup>Luke 8: 1ff; Mark 15:40ff.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., The Woman at the well in Samaria – John 4:1-42.

<sup>6</sup>Mary in her home at Bethany – Luke 10:38-42. Glen Scogie creates an interesting scene of the Scripture: "A woman also was present. Sitting, as Luke puts it, "at the Lord's feet." A woman! Mary...was soaking up everything Jesus said, oblivious to the discomfort she was probably creating for some males in the room. These men saw Mary behaving like a rabbinic pupil, a student of the Law. She had overreached her proper station in life. She had no business being there...Martha was equally distraught...Mary was neglecting her share of traditional female duties in the kitchen. So Martha came in to complain directly to Jesus. Jesus...declared that Mary was doing the right thing...He confirmed her right to engage in serious study." See Glen Scogie, *The Journey Back to Eden*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 112-113.

<sup>7</sup>Anointing by Mary – John 12:1-8.

<sup>8</sup>Woman with the issue of blood (Mt. 9:20ff; Mk.5:25ff, Luke 8: 43ff).

<sup>9</sup>Martha - John 11:20-27.

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 19:3-12. Jesus here taught about God's intentions when He instituted marriage, meant to be an indissoluble, life-long covenant between a man and a woman. He taught that divorce originated with sin, the hardness of men's hearts, addressing this matter in a culture in which men initiated divorce. Here Jesus affirms the equal worth of wives, that "... in the beginning, God created them male and female..."

<sup>11</sup>The woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11).

<sup>12</sup>With the Canaanite woman (Matt 15), and the Samaritan woman (John 4).

<sup>13</sup>E.g., with Martha (John 11:25-26), and with the Samaritan woman (John 4).

<sup>14</sup>Luke 8:1-3.

remained loyal to Him through His death<sup>15</sup> and were the first to see Him after His resurrection, entrusting them with the proclamation of the news of His rising,<sup>16</sup> although very much aware of how the witness of women was viewed in His culture.<sup>17</sup> He did not denigrate domestic chores women did, but taught that following Him and learning from Him must take priority over all others.<sup>18</sup> His gentleness with women was remarkable – wherever He found them and in whatever condition. “He helped women in need and in sin without demeaning them. He treated men and women alike with regard to their failings. He encouraged both men and women in their faith. He was absolutely pure in his relations with women.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Brief historical context on the subject**

One of the major effects of the Renaissance was the awakening of the interest of Western Europe in the world beyond its borders. Many explorers undertook expeditions from Europe and “discovered” new lands in distant places.<sup>20</sup> The initial interest of explorers was trade, later turning to claiming the lands discovered as part of their home territories. Little bands of Western Christian missionaries followed the explorers from the 15th century onwards, but it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that there was a more concerted, increased effort to evangelize and Christianize non-Western lands of the world. In Africa, compensating for the evils of the four hundred year trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was also part of the Western missionary motivation for evangelizing and modernizing Africa. Even though the Slave Trade was abolished in England in 1807, its actual cessation took a while, but it was not long before Europe ‘scrambled’ for Africa, leading to its colonization – until the independence movements began with the purpose of overthrowing foreign imperial domination.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Matt 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41.

<sup>16</sup> Jesus sent Mary Magdalene to go and announce He is alive (John 20:17); the angels in the synoptic accounts told the women who were first at the tomb on that Sunday the same message (Mt 28:7, Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1-10).

<sup>17</sup> That the disciples in hiding did not believe the women should come as no surprise (Mk 16:10-11; Lk 24:10-11).

<sup>18</sup> Peter’s mother served Him and His disciples in her home, so He appreciated such service (Mt 8); however, He taught that women’s domestic roles and chores were not to take precedence over learning His Word (Luke 10).

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), p. 47. Tucker and Liefeld conclude as follows concerning Jesus’ clean break with custom in their chapter titled ‘The Gospel and the World of Jesus: Wives and Mothers’, quoted in part: “Jesus’ attitudes to women are, therefore seen only indirectly in his teaching. It is in the Gospels’ description of his positive relations with women in daily life that we learn his thoughts. Even without pronouncements on the subject, we are left in no doubt as to his position.” Tucker and Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church*, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook of the History of Christianity* (England: Lion Publishing, Mayfield House, 2006), p.274.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Exploring Africa’, <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curricula/M14/activity4.php> - 8th September 2011. During colonialism, many missionaries came from Europe, North America and the West Indies. It is clear that the colonialists facilitated the work of missionaries, but generally, missionaries did not travel to Africa at the invitation of the colonial masters; however, a symbiotic relationship existed between the two (colonialists and missionaries) through the period of what is known as the modern missionary movement.

The 1910 Report of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh<sup>22</sup> typifies the prevailing European views of the non-Western world – views that perceived non-Western peoples from the worldview of the West – as inferior, less intelligent, less civilized and living in spiritual darkness in primitive belief systems. African people fared the worst in their evaluation based on explorers’ and early missionary reports –of a continent of darkness, without religion or morals; ignorant, pitiful and in a condition made worse by the vicissitudes of the Slave Trade.<sup>23</sup> According to the report, women in non-Western lands were the most pitiable, bound by cruel customs, living in squalor and ignorance, especially in Africa. However, it has been shown by historical records that women in prominent traditional positions in Africa was not an unknown phenomenon before contact with the Western world, and the European agenda-setting of the missionary movement did much to obfuscate the status of many women in various parts of Africa.<sup>24</sup>

From the dawn of the missionary thrust into their countries and operating in largely patriarchal cultures, non-Western women in Africa and elsewhere organized lay evangelism, Bible study and prayer meetings, planted churches alongside their European partners, translated Bible stories and engaged their cultures with their new faith. Many suffered for their faith but remained steadfast, while others broke with the mission churches and started their own based on preference for indigenous interpretation of scriptures and liturgies.<sup>25</sup>

However, there is no gainsaying that despite the magnitude of work women have been involved in towards the spread of the gospel, women in Africa and other parts of the non-Western world still face challenges in relation to equal status at home and in church in relation to men, despite advances made in education and social status. Many of them however applied and continue to apply pragmatic approaches to find ways to fulfil their calling to church and society.

### *The Significance of African Christian and Theological thought for the transformation of Culture with regard to Gender Relations*

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<sup>22</sup> *The Missionary Message in Relation to non-Christian Religions: The World Missionary Conference, 1910, Report of Commission IV*, (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910).

<sup>23</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (UK: Regnum Books, 1992), p. 226.

<sup>24</sup> See, Johanna Bond, *Voices of African Women: Women’s Rights in Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), p. xv-xvi. Quoting from Sylvia Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda* (1999), p.9: “Colonialists worked hand in hand with the African patriarchs to develop inflexible customary laws, which evolved into new structures and forms of domination [of women].”

<sup>25</sup> For example, Madam Akawuru, whose story is narrated by Allison Howell in the article ‘Prisca, Maxmilla and Madam Karuwu: Insights into Women Prophets of the Second Century Church and Twentieth Century African Christianity’, *Journal of African Christianity*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (June 2010), pp. 35-44 (38-43).

It is an established fact, empirically and through statistical evidence that the heartlands of Christianity have shifted from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. This shift is also described as a “massive demographic and cultural shift.”

<sup>26</sup>Oduyoye opines concerning this deeply significant shift:

“...[I]f the axis of Christianity has shifted south and especially to Africa, then in the next decades what happens to Christian theology, culture and lifestyle will become the face of global Christianity.”<sup>27</sup>

In effect, theology, the attempt to find Christian answers to puzzling questions of life, as has been done over the centuries by the Christian Church cannot afford to ignore African thought on any theological issues. Walls expounds:

“...[T]he most significant Christian developments in theology... or ethical thinking, or the Christian impact on society, will be those that take place in the southern continents, not those that take place in the west... Similar developments in North America and Europe may be of mainly local importance... Western theological leadership of a predominantly non-western church is an incongruity... [I]t will be in the non-western world that the future of Christianity will be determined; it is there that Christian witness will be made or marred.”<sup>28</sup>

Walls emphasizes the significance of theology from the South:

“...Theology is about making Christian decisions in critical situations, and it is in the southern continents that those decisions will be the most pressing, and the key theological developments are accordingly to be looked for.”<sup>29</sup>

The impact of the Enlightenment on Western Christian thinking is cited as the bane of the “drying up” of Christianity in the West:

“There is a dawning realization of the limitations of theology as generally taught in the West... Western models of theology are too small for Africa, since they arise out of the small-scaled, pared-down view of the universe that was characteristic of the European Enlightenment, with its insistence on the autonomy of the individual self and its sharp distinctions between the empirical world and the world of spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Walls, ‘Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century’, *Journal of African Theology*, Vol. 4, No. 2, December 2001, pp. 44-52 (46).

<sup>27</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, ‘Claiming our Heritage: Africa in World Christianity’, *JACT*, Vol. 12, No. 2, December, 2009, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Walls, ‘Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century’, p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Walls, ‘Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century’, p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Walls, ‘Scholarship, Mission and Globalisation: Some Reflections on the Christian Scholarly Vocation in Africa’, *JACT*, Vol. 9, No. 2, December 2006, p. 35. Walls summarizes the impact of the Enlightenment on Christianity in Europe in this article. He explains that the Enlightenment undermined the traditional basis of

Thus, in contrast, since the African's worldview consists of an expanded and filled universe, teeming with spirits and living beings, a world in which there exists a very thin line between the physical and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred, the individual and the community, and the living and the dead, African categories of thinking and perspectives are needed to complement theology and Christian thought, ideas and practice from other parts of the world, including the West.

Men and women interacting with one another is core to the survival and sustenance of humanity. Theological thinking and resulting practice on the issue of gender relations cannot be overemphasized – it is important to discern the mind of Christ even in humankind's fallen state, because Christ comes to redeem and to restore. Thus while not fundamental to salvation from sin and death, gender relations is fundamental to human interaction in every sphere of life. In doing theology on gender relations therefore, it is not good enough to hold on to just thought and perspectives from North American and European Christians no matter how erudite; Christians need each other's perspectives to clarify what the Bible actually means to say on women and men interacting with each other within and across cultures, and to discern what God is really saying and doing in the lives of women and men, for:

“...[I]n building the new community of God's people that forms the new temple of Christ's body, the different converted lifestyles are equally necessary, as Paul teaches in his letter to the Ephesians. None on their own can reach the fullness of Christ; all are needed in order to attain it.”<sup>31</sup>

Modern African theological scholarship emanated from an era when African Christians and scholars saw the need to respond to what they recognized and named as “European value setting for the [Christian] faith.”<sup>32</sup> They saw that no matter how benign the motives of Western missionaries in Africa, how they conceptualized Africa resulted in approaches that led to Europeanized manifestations of the faith on the African continent. In addition to spreading the Gospel, they made every attempt to Westernize, Europeanize and civilize African peoples, as indicators of acceptance or otherwise of Christianity, leaving in their wake African Christians who were for a long time not sure whether they were Africans, Christians or both.<sup>33</sup> Issues of

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Christianity in Europe, eroding the European self-understanding of Christendom, seeing religion as essentially a private matter. He writes: “European Christianity coped with the cultural crises that this created by cultural adaptation. It adopted Enlightenment categories and perspectives. Western theology came to terms with the distinction between the empirical and the spiritual, by positing a frontier between the two with certain divinely sanctioned crossing places – notably those associated with the miraculous – belonged to an earlier age of the church and were not to be expected in the present dispensation. Western theology, in effect, bracketed out sections of the Bible that now appeared to belong to an earlier age of God's dealings with humanity.” See, Walls, ‘Scholarship, Mission and Globalisation’, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup>Walls, ‘Scholarship, Mission and Globalisation’, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup>Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, p. 235.

<sup>33</sup> For a full discussion of the implications of the Western missionary movement's conceptualizations of Africa and the European agenda-setting of the Christian Faith in Africa, see, for example, Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, pp. 225-266.

cultural identity at conversion and Christian living became (and still are) important for determining theological responses from African Christians, attempting to live out authentic Christian lives without abandoning their cultural past and identity.

While the Western evangelical debate on gender relations may not arouse the same suspicions about its motives and defining features that the Western missionary movement attracted regarding Christianization, some aspects of the gender debate will have resonance for evangelical Africans who care to study carefully what is being said, particularly by the Western evangelicals who claim the egalitarian and hierarchic lists/complementarian viewpoints. There is no doubt that the parties on both sides of the debate intend that Christians everywhere who uphold the authority of Scriptures know and apply what it says – there is no hint of a hidden agenda anywhere. However, just as the Western missionaries ‘innocently’ carried their Europeanizing tendencies into Africa without much of a thought of what deep ramifications this would have on Africa, so it may be that parts of the rationale given for stating why one holds a certain position on biblical gender equality needs close examination against the backdrop of gospel-culture engagement, to ensure that this is not another phase of a Euro-American agenda-setting, albeit inadvertent, of issues that deeply concern Christians of all cultures, living everywhere.

Of course, it is a legitimate exercise to analyze any issue of importance from one’s understanding, culture and context, but it is equally important that the centrality and the universality of the Bible and the Christian Faith and its applicability to all human cultures is not undermined by setting the premise for understanding the Word and the Faith on prevailing Euro-American cultural values. For example, domesticity and domestic roles as defined have been dynamically different in its manifestations in various African cultures as compared to what pertained before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in America and Europe and even what pertains currently on the African continent. Who then decides which culture’s values of motherhood and homemaking should be used to define how Christian women and men run their families in a way that is *biblical*?

To re-iterate, Africa, Asia and the rest of the non-Western world where the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted do not live in egalitarian cultures, yet the same Bible is read together with European and American Christians, and everywhere Christians wrestle with what some specific texts mean and their applicability in their peculiar circumstances or contexts. This calls for cross-cultural learning and sharing, humility and a willingness to listen to one another, though located on different continents and contexts. Exegetical and hermeneutical scholars have brought understanding that God’s Word contains timeless, trans-cultural principles, as well as principles and practices that are meant for specific contexts or periods, from which all God’s children can learn. What all Christians should avoid, it is humbly suggested, is the tendency to *set the agenda of the faith* from the lenses of our particular cultures. That is what happened with aspects of the Western missionary thrust into the non-Western world, which need not be repeated. Because God does not “leave Himself without a witness” in any culture, all

Christians can learn and share across cultures how He has revealed Himself in the workings and manifestations of such, and how the Gospel, Jesus Christ, comes to fulfil, redeem and transform our nature and cultures. In this wise, Christ is the one who sets the agenda for the Christian faith, not our cultures or particular worldviews.

Walls' classic statement in the chapter titled the Ephesian Moment<sup>34</sup> in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*<sup>35</sup> is highly instructive in the attitude to be taken with respect to this issue and worth quoting to some extent:

“But in our day the Ephesian moment has come again, and come in a richer mode than has ever happened since the first century. Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, means that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church. Like the old Jerusalem Christians, Western Christians had long grown used to the idea that they were the guardians of a “standard” Christianity; also like them, they find themselves in the presence of new expressions of Christianity, and new Christian lifestyles that have developed or are developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to display Christ under the conditions of African, Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Latin American life. And most of the world’s Christians are now Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans”<sup>36</sup>

Explaining further, Walls opines:

“There are two dangers. One lies in the instinctive desire to protect our own version of the Christian faith, or even to seek to establish it as the standard, normative one. The other, and perhaps the more seductive in the present condition of Western Christianity, is the postmodern option: to decide that each of the expressions and versions is equally valid and authentic, and that we are therefore each at liberty to enjoy our own in isolation from all the others.”<sup>37</sup>

Walls offers a solution to the present conundrum affecting the worldwide Church, which in application affects both the issue of the problematic relationships between women and men, and the current debate between hierarchic lists and egalitarians in the Church. He postulates:

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<sup>34</sup>Walls uses the Ephesian Moment as a phrase to describe the crossroads in Christian history when the original Jesus community, the earliest church, wholly Jewish in ethnic origin and way of life came to be confronted with persecution that drove them out of their Jewish locations in Greek pagan areas, the first place being Antioch. It was here that the revelation became clear to them that their familiar religious guideposts of worshipping in the Temple, observing the Sabbath, among other things, were suddenly being removed, and they had to now present their faith in categories familiar to gentiles, as well as sit at table and share meals with people once outside the covenant community! The Jewish ‘Messiah’ had to become ‘Kyrios’; still the same one Lord and Lord of all, Jews and gentiles alike. See: Andrew Walls, ‘The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History’, in Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2002), pp.72-81.

<sup>35</sup>Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, pp.78-79.

<sup>36</sup>Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup>Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, pp. 78-79.

“Neither of these approaches is the Ephesian way. The Ephesian metaphors of the temple and of the body show each of the culture-specific segments as necessary to the body but as incomplete in itself. Only in Christ does completion, fullness, dwell. And Christ’s completion, as we have seen, comes from all humanity, from the translation of the life of Jesus into the life ways of all of the world’s cultures and subcultures through history. *None of us can reach Christ’s completeness on our own. We need each other’s vision to correct, enlarge, and focus on our own; only together are we complete in Christ.*”<sup>38</sup>

As an African, Christian, I ought to be actively conscious about the wisdom in what is being said above in order not to make normative the African culture and African Christianity’s manifestations as the only legitimate considerations for examining gender issues. Both the “African way” and the “woman’s way” are corrupted or in the least, tainted by subtle human biases. So are the viewpoints from the Western world, no matter how genuine the attempts to communicate such. It is only Christ who can transform all our ways, and there are things in every culture that point to Christ and those that point away from Christ. I believe it is the duty of Christians to find all the beauty in as many cultures as can be studied that manifest Christ and His values and how to make these real in the Christian’s life, relationships and community.

### **Traditional and Modern Africa: Different Manifestations of Equality, Roles, and Decision-making**

Although Africa is predominantly patriarchal, the ‘housewife’/‘homemaker’ concept is a strange one in most African societies. Indeed, it was almost completely unknown until the Western world came into contact with African people.<sup>39</sup> Western history also teaches that until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, today’s notion of the ideal family, in which fathers went out to work and mothers stayed at home to bear, raise children and do domestic chores barely existed in Europe. Both women and men worked at home, and economic work was family based, with all members of the family participating, until the Industrial Revolution dawned, taking men away into the so-called public sphere of work.<sup>40</sup> Now both middle-class Europeans and North Americans as well as middle class, educated Africans, especially Christians, somehow believe that the public-private dichotomized spheres of men and women’s lives, the former belonging to the public world of work, the latter to the private, domestic sphere of homemaking is a natural order – God created. By this standard the biblical picture of an *ideal family* is handed to African Christian men and women; but for women in particular who know what it means to depend on a one-income family in African economies and its resultant deprivation and even violence, there is the need to go back to history to separate societal formulations of family based on political and socio-economic factors from what God may see as the ideal family. Biblically, according to Genesis and re-echoed by Jesus, marriage is meant to be a monogamous, lifelong

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<sup>38</sup>Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, p.79. Emphasis mine.

<sup>39</sup>See, Mercy AmbaOduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1995), pp. 89-108.

<sup>40</sup> See, Rebecca MerrillGroothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Oregon, USA: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), pp. 1-29.

union between one man and one woman,<sup>41</sup> but in their social arrangements for living out this covenant relationship, what does God deem ideal? Is there a specific prescription in the Bible?<sup>42</sup>

African women's experience regarding equality with men is not homogenous; gender intersects with economic status, ethnicity, urban/rural divide, migration, age, lineage affiliations and education, among other considerations. The one common experience however is that women and men are not considered as *de facto* equals in almost all African societies,<sup>43</sup> although there is fluidity in perceptions depending on factors such as a woman's economic means, level of education or the degree of acceptance of policies a particular country chooses to adopt to uplift the status of women. The expectations of spheres in roles and functions of husbands and wives as found in the West by adherents of traditionalism, for example, is fluid for many African women and men in traditional forms of marriages, even though influenced by the West and modernity. For example, motherhood is supreme among the Asante of Ghana, as is the case for the majority of African cultures, but unlike Western women, "[A] good self-sacrificing Asante mother does not stay home with her children, but goes out working hard for them," says Gracia Clark,<sup>44</sup> who found in her research that because Asantes (Christian or otherwise) consider matrilineal bonds of family stronger than marital bonds, Asante women emphasize their economic obligations to their children and live a largely negotiated existence with their spouses. Clark found that "such maternal work has a positive moral imperative as gender conformity and so does not threaten dominant male positioning... Biological motherhood remains a key responsibility, but one that logically or naturally mandates income-generating work rather than personal responsibility for childcare."<sup>45</sup> While the Western traditional Christian woman places childcare as a key role of a wife, the Asante woman has many options and carers for her

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<sup>41</sup> Genesis 2:24; Matt 19:5.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Dorothy Patterson, supporting the hierarchicalist view of women's sphere in the home asserts: "When a wife goes to work outside the home, often her husband and children go through culture shock. Suddenly the husband has added to his vocational work increased family assignments. He is frustrated over the increase in his own assignments and guilty over his wife's increased fatigue and extended hours to keep up at home. God did give the husband the responsibility of providing for the family...To sabotage his meeting that responsibility is often a debilitating blow to the man personally and to the marriage. A woman's career can easily serve as a surrogate husband, as during employment hours she is ruled by her employer's preferences..." Dorothy Patterson, 'The Higher Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective', in John Piper and Wayne Grudem,(Eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), pp. 364-377 (375). This view could be representative of middle class Euro-American women, but may hardly speak to the situation of families in a large part of the non-Western world.

<sup>43</sup> This accounts for the reason why there are several international, African Regional and National instruments that have been adopted to address the issues of gender equality and non-discrimination against women as a category. These instruments in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted 1979 by the UN General Assembly; the African Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted at Maputo, Zambia in 2003; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), among several others

<sup>44</sup> Gracia Clark, "Mothering, Work, and Gender in Urban Asante Ideology and Practice, *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 101, No. 4, December 1999, pp. 717-729, (719), at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684049>, 9th June, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Clark, 'Mothering, Work, and Gender', pp. 719.

children from within her kith and kin, because despite the influence of Western style nuclear family, many children in Africa still have recourse to being “raised by the village” and not just their mothers.

Among educated, urban middle class married people in Ghana, for example, different models of gender interactions happen in the home – a varied mix of African customary and Western gender expectations – depending on several factors. Christine Oppong writes:

“...[S]ociologists of the industrialized nations are becoming more and more aware of the diversity of family forms in different and changing economic and demographic contexts. Stereotypical notions of nuclear family forms, with instrumental male breadwinners and expressive female home-makers, are seen to be increasingly irrelevant to empirical findings in a world of diversity and change and increasingly detailed knowledge of the variety of domestic behavior and relationships.”<sup>46</sup>

Gender equality in Africa therefore, at the base level of interaction – the African family – is in a state of flux; it ebbs and flows, intersecting with many other realities of African women’s lives and daily experiences as they interact with their male counterparts. However, African women still contend with harmful cultural norms and practices that undermine their dignity – being assigned the gate-keeping role of ensuring patriarchal continuity, being largely excluded from spaces of decision-making, having to confront legal pluralism’s negative impacts and having to deal with the largest portion of the continent’s burdens of poverty and disease. Within this wider context Christian women and men have to learn and practice what the Gospel demands of them, especially in relating with each other. For what is required, the Bible asks, but to “...do justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with your God?”<sup>47</sup>

### **The African Church and the Gender Question**

From the 1980s, African Christian women have shared their experiences of marginalization or inclusion in leadership and decision-making in the African church at different florals. Experiences have differed from denomination to denomination on matters of ordination, from one extreme of total exclusion<sup>48</sup> to full inclusion,<sup>49</sup> but inclusion in ordination may also mean

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<sup>46</sup>Christine Oppong, *Middle Class African Marriages* (London: George Allen and Unwin Publishers Ltd., 1981), p. xviii. Oppong reports in the 1970s concerning the urban, educated Akan marital domestic duties, including the wife’s thus: “The household chores, including the preparation of food, childcare and general maintenance of the home, are seldom carried out by the husband, wife and children alone. In fact there are many homes in which the conjugal family members play a very small part in performing these tasks. As a general rule there are others available to help, either employed maids or stewards, or relatives, or both, and these helpers do the majority of routine jobs. Her lack of total involvement in household chores and child minding, is perhaps the most salient aspect of the urban, educated, Akan wife’s domestic activities. She is not expected to spend all her time on housework and seldom does. She generally delegates tasks, so as to continue her paid employment.” See, Oppong, *Middle Class African Marriage*, p.102.

<sup>47</sup> Micah 6:8.

<sup>48</sup>For e.g., the Pentecost Church in Ghana totally excludes women from clergy/pastoral positions.

<sup>49</sup> The Presbyterian and Methodist Churches ordain women as clergy/pastors.

ordained women not being given positions or spheres of much influence, in comparison to men.<sup>50</sup> Other churches may have a policy of ordaining women as pastors, but do not undertake any significant affirmative steps to encourage women to take up such positions.<sup>51</sup>

However, the wind of change is blowing. In 1989, for example, Phiri recorded a significant change in African Christian women's self-understanding of their position in the Malawian Presbyterian Church's:

"A wind of self-awareness is blowing among Christian women in Africa. African women are becoming conscious that they have been on the periphery of church and society for too long. They have accepted their sufferings in church and society as from God. They have come to the realization that sexism in the church and society is a sin. This has made them break their silence and speak out in protest. They have also realized that their strength is in the mobilization of ecumenical sisterhood organizations....they are beginning to re-read the Bible and discover that what society and the church is today is not what is intended by the gospel."<sup>52</sup>

Curiously though it appears the women in church leadership issue – as thorny as it continues to be with some denominations – is increasingly becoming moot in the current dispensation. It is noteworthy that by practice generally, sub-Saharan African Churches of evangelical persuasion seem to be applying Paul's injunctions in an intriguing manner. African Christian women, some ordained, others not, are out there in their numbers, some initiating and heading their own churches; others preaching, teaching, praying, prophesying, and working with the vulnerable in various urban and rural ministries without much of an issue of opposition. However, despite this phenomenon, both women and men (pastors or not) generally preach and teach the position that women are to be in submission to their husbands' authority at home, which "authority" has several variations of interpretations and practical applications, interacting with status, educational level, ethnicity, denominational affiliation or personal relational values of married couples. The question is, is this partial obedience to Paul (as seemed to be the case with some of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century female and male preachers of the Western Church like Phoebe Palmer)? Are modern African Christians conflicted about the injunctions Paul wrote? Or is it a manifestation of the reality of the African primal religious experience that gives wide space for women's leadership and participation in worship but still maintains a modicum of male hegemony in the family and other social spaces? Or is it the case that African churches' exegesis and hermeneutics on what Paul said has come to different conclusions; that is, to be neither

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<sup>50</sup>For African women experiences, see, W. S. Robins, and MusimbiKanyoro, (Eds.), *Speaking for Ourselves: Bible Studies and Discussion Starters by Women* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990); Isabel Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi* (Malawi: CLAIM, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> I am a member of a Pentecostal-charismatic church in Ghana, and well acquainted with a number of the popular charismatic churches in the country. While the most of the churches I know do not preclude women from training or being ordained as pastors, I am yet to see an active affirmative stance or policy in these assemblies to draw women into clerical leadership.

<sup>52</sup>Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy*, p. 119.

hierarchic list nor egalitarian, or even being egalitarian with respect to the 1 Timothy 2 passage and hierarchic list with the Ephesians 5 passage; in effect, upholding a 'holy order' at home, and a 'holy disorder' in Church? This curious phenomenon in modern African Churches needs further serious research, because I believe the issues of gospel-culture interaction may be playing a significant role in this shift.

### **Cultural Patriarchy is part of the sin problem**

As Christians, we understand that humankind's problems originates with sin. The existence and operations of patriarchy as defined is one such manifestation of the problem of sin and rebellion against God. In Africa, patriarchy reaches into all facets of society particularly in issues of the existence of gender-based violence of all forms (physical, psychological, sexual, economic and social), human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, feminized poverty, conflict and ethnic wars in which women are seen as objects and commodities, exclusion from decision making, harmful and discriminatory traditional practices, rife corruption in public spaces depriving the poor of just economic benefits - majority of the poor being women, poor access to institutions of justice and other such issues. Going well beyond church and home, and beyond the relationship between an individual man and a woman, these issues confront the African - man, woman, child - on a daily basis - the crucibles of life from whence individuals, families and communities have to make decisions and find resolution or alternatives that give meaning to life.

### ***Jesus - Upsetting Power, Culture and Patriarchy: "Enter and Subvert"***

### **Christ as the Transformer or Converter of Culture and Humanity**

Culture is "a term which is not easily susceptible of definition."<sup>53</sup> It is described as the "patterned way in which people do things together."<sup>54</sup> The Willow bank Report offers a comprehensive definition worth quoting in part:

"Culture is an integrated system of beliefs...of values...of customs, and of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs...which bind a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity."<sup>55</sup>

Culture is closely bound up with language and is expressed in proverbs, myths, folktales and various art forms.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Willowbank Report, Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture held at Willowbank, Somerset Bridge, Bermuda, 8<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1978, p.6.

<sup>54</sup> The Willowbank Report, p.6.

<sup>55</sup> The Willowbank Report, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> The Willowbank Report, p. 7.

Our fallen human cultures depict the hopelessness of the human condition and at the same time offer the opportunity for God to demonstrate His grace and processes for redemption. Whether it is working to abolish slavery, improve working conditions or stop human trafficking, Christ is the One who transforms (or converts) culture.<sup>57</sup> Christ does not go outside of our cultures to do His transformational work – as stated above, He takes people where He finds them. As Kraft postulates, God is not to be seen either as against, merely in, or simply above culture – though God exists outside culture, while we human beings exist within culture. God still “chooses the cultural milieu in which humans are immersed as the context for his interaction with people.”<sup>58</sup> Our humanity and our cultures no doubt need transformation, which starts with individuals – irrespective of race, gender or status.<sup>59</sup>

In the engagement between gospel and culture therefore, the conversion process requires deep reflection of what in our cultural past and present must pass through the prism of the Gospel, for the light and shade of a particular value, belief, norm or practice to be discerned<sup>60</sup> and applied. As Bediako states:

“...within every religion, there are indicators which point towards Christ, and there are indicators which point away from Christ. However, our concern is not so much with those indicators themselves, as with the human responses that are made to those indicators.”<sup>61</sup>

Thus African Christian and theological thought on gender relations, as well as theology and Christian thought from all parts of the world need to seriously consider the gospel and culture interaction and engagement factors in gender relations. We too must take our cultures as we find them, as Jesus and Paul did, and bring the impact of the Gospel to bear on them. This is recognizing that people will respond to issues from the basis of where they are culturally located, where theology is based on their living and shared experiences, rather than on theoretical postulations that are most unlikely to be resolved until Christ comes. The simplest question learnt in children’s Bible classes may be applicable here: “What would Jesus do?” For the Christian who lives in a largely patriarchal world and seeks to *let Christ emerge* in gender

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<sup>57</sup> For a full discussion of God’s relationship to culture and the view that Christ transforms or converts culture, see, H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1953; Harper Torchbook Edition, 1956).

<sup>58</sup> See, Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1992)p. 114. On the same page, he opines: “Apparently no human motive is unaffected by sin. Therefore, no aspect of culture is used by human beings with pure intent...But human beings are redeemable. And redeemed human beings begin to do at least some things differently...they change their usage of the cultural forms, patterns and processes at their disposal...Redeemed persons live pretty much according to the same patterns and processes as before they became Christians, But now they use them with a new allegiance, for the sake of a new master.”

<sup>59</sup> Galatians 3:27-28.

<sup>60</sup> See Kwame Bediako, “Scripture as a hermeneutic of culture and tradition’ *JACT*, Vol. 4, No.1 (June 2001), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (UK: Regnum Africa, 2000), p.41.

relations at home, church and society, the question is, how would the Gospel, Jesus, interact with that peculiar situation arising out of that peculiar cultural milieu? How can the Christian demonstrate the character of Christ likeness in that situation? The same would apply to a Christian living in a largely egalitarian culture, or one caught in the transition between traditionalism to modernism. No doubt, it must be noted, that the oppressed would see and behave differently from the oppressor, and this is what calls for intervention from the church, and deep reflection on what patriarchy is and how it manifests in our various cultures – African or otherwise. The Church, asking itself again, “what would Christ do”, has to gird its loins and get into the ‘trenches’ to tackle cultural patriarchy in whichever way it “points away from Christ.” The Church did so with the issues of slavery and racial discrimination among others. Why not patriarchy?

Bediako teaches that:

“The Gospel, in the true sense of the word, is who Christ is, and what He means, in His person, His life on earth, His work, His death, His resurrection and its aftermath, and how all that concerning Him relates to all human beings, in all our cultural traditions, histories and environments.”<sup>62</sup>

It is thus no longer a question merely of whether we are Africans or Americans, women or men, patriarchal or egalitarian. Who we are is all of what has shaped us as individuals and as people. The question becomes, how we are truly Christ’s disciples and growing to become more like Him, and this is not a one-time event – conversion is a process.

The Bible states that as followers of Christ, we are in this world but not of it. As Andrew Walls opines, we live both the *pilgrim principle* and the *Incarnation principle* as children of God through Christ.<sup>63</sup> The Gospel becomes a lived experience in our hearts from the moment of personal awakening and belief in the salvation of Jesus Christ, and continues through the process of conversion and in the walk of faith. Andrew Walls helps us to understand the nature of conversion. It involves:

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<sup>62</sup> Kwame Bediako, ‘Gospel and Culture: Some insights for our time from the experience of the earliest Church,’ in *JACT*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1999), p. 8. Ernest Nyarko has written an insightful article on the interaction of gospel and culture in the Krobo area of Ghana worth reading. See, Earnest Nyarko, ‘Gospel and Culture in the Context of Christian Mission in Africa: The Basel Mission’s Encounter with the Dipo Custom Among the Krobo in Eastern Ghana’, *Journal of Applied Thought*, Vol.1, No. 1, May 2013, pp. 109-144.

<sup>63</sup> See Andrew Walls’ discussion of the Pilgrim Principle and the Incarnation Principle in his books *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2009), and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2002).

“...[t]he turning towards Christ of everything that is there already. So that Christ comes into the places, thoughts, relationships and world-views in which He has never lived before.”<sup>64</sup>

The same can be said of all our cultures and the need for their conversion, that the elements of our cultural identity and whatever else we define ourselves by – such as egalitarians or complementarians – are all brought under the ambit of Christ’s discipleship. If Jesus is the One who alone transforms us and our cultural identities, then there is no place for cultural or gender or ethnic pride. Christ is Lord over all.<sup>65</sup>

### Principle of Incarnation

Born male and Jewish, among a patriarchal people who practiced covenantal separation as though it meant exclusion of all others “not like them”<sup>66</sup> Jesus’ life, mission, posture, teaching, and actions proved to His disciples that the ways and thinking of the world are contrary to the mind of God. Jesus’ attitude towards women, children, outcasts; His posturing concerning the Jewish religious establishment and worldly political power; how He fulfils the Law<sup>67</sup>; and His Passion and death, seen as the final act of subversion that triumphed over principalities and powers – spiritual, worldly and structural<sup>68</sup> – all these together demonstrate the purposes and plans of the Godhead in redemption. The Word became flesh,<sup>69</sup> so He would share in our human experiences and save us.<sup>70</sup> The Word engaged His culture, and in many fundamental

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<sup>64</sup>Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, p. 117, quoting Andrew Walls’ St. Colm’s lecture titled, “The Significance of Christianity in Africa”, (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland/St. Colm’s Education Centre and College, 1989), p.20.

<sup>65</sup> See, Bediako, ‘Scripture as a hermeneutic of culture and tradition’, p. 2. See also, Galatians 3:28.

<sup>66</sup> A Jewish thanksgiving prayer which was still in circulation during the time of Jesus is quoted as follows: “Praised be to God that He has not created me a gentile; praised be God that created me not a woman; praised be God that He has not created me an ignorant man (Menahot 42b), quoted in Tucker and Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church*, p. 61.

<sup>67</sup> Jesus taught that He had come not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. His teaching and actions concerning the Law enables us understand that fulfilling the Law means (a) fulfillment of its righteous requirements and bringing to pass its promises in Himself, e.g., Moses’ prophecy of the coming Prophet and the sacrificial requirements of the law (b) clarifying the Law, e.g., the law on adultery; (c) modifying aspects of the Law; (d) abolishing aspects of the Law that were contrary to God’s self revelation in Christ, e.g., ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’; (e) transcending the law in many of its ritualistic aspects, e.g., restrictions against menstruating women, or transcending the Sabbath law requirements.

<sup>68</sup> See, Kwame Bediako, *The Disciplines of the Spiritual Life and the Dynamics of Pastoral Ministry: A Handbook for Ministers* (Akropong, Ghana: Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre, 2001), p.97, where he expatiates the subversive nature of Jesus’ mission, teachings, life and death and how that relates to the call to pastoral ministry. He writes: “Jesus’ usual form of teaching, the parable...was also subversive...through them all... he was effectively inaugurating the Kingdom of God and undercutting the Kingdom of Satan in the lives and minds and hearts of men and women...Yet his death proved the most subversive of all. It turned out to be the climactic event of divine mercy...as well as in judgement upon human sin...As he was in the world, so are we in the world...we are followers of Jesus...also called into subversive work.”

<sup>69</sup> John 1:1.

<sup>70</sup> See, for e.g., Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 5:1-4.

ways, radically subverted its dictates and norms.<sup>71</sup>As stated, it is clear that His attitude and interaction with women was radically subversive of the established order. Hull writes:

“... [W]e see that traditional viewpoints or accepted gender restrictions did not bind Jesus. In His encounters with women He taught that women as well as men have worth and value; both men and women are precious in His sight.”<sup>72</sup>

In demonstrating His own servanthood even as the Son of God, Jesus was clear about how His followers must practice what the world would not accept:

“You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great...let him be the servant.”<sup>73</sup>

He sets the tone in the rest of the New Testament on how members of His body, the Church must come to understand the new and radical implication of His work of salvation, by which the walls of partition that divide people by categories – status, gender, race, among other things – are torn down, producing one people in Christ, thus making peace.<sup>74</sup> There is a practical outflow of this new way, which should result in attitudes and practices that reflect the Spirit of Christ and what He stood for.

The significance of Jewish women being the first to witness His resurrection and become the news bearers of this most profound supernatural event is often lost on Christians. Another level of significance had been granted women by the Lord Jesus, who in His life had identified closely with them and drawn them into His circle of learners and followers; now He had made them witnesses and co-bearers of the good news – that He not only died, but truly resurrected – a fundamental tenet upon which the whole Christian faith hangs, without which we would be

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<sup>71</sup> John E. Phelan Jr., captures this point dramatically in his article: “People were ranked according to holiness. At the bottom of the heap were eunuchs...followed by illegitimate children, temple slaves, freed slaves, Gentile converts, Israelite women, Israelite men, Levites, priests. The holiest places had to be protected from the least holy people...Jesus violated all the rules about holiness of times, people and places. He ate the wrong things at the wrong times and touched the wrong people. He healed a demon-possessed man on the Sabbath. He touched a leper. He had dinner with the lowest of the low – tax collectors. According to Mark 7, he even declared “all foods clean,” in effect overthrowing the whole system of taboo that had given shape to Israel...Jesus threatened the settled views of the religious powers-that were...” John E. Phelan Jr., ‘Women and the Aims of Jesus’, in *Priscilla Papers*, Vol.18, No. 1, Winter 2004, pp.7-11 (9).

<sup>72</sup> Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel*, (Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1987, 1991), p.116.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew 20:25-26.

<sup>74</sup> Gillian Mary Bediako, ‘Changing the Centre of Gravity: Reflections on Christian mission from the vantage point of contemporary Africa’, in *Rethinking Mission*, The Methodist Church USPG Quarterly Publication, (Autumn 2004). See also Kwame Bediako, ‘From Everywhere To Everyone: The New Global Mission- Christian Mission in a New Christian World’, (Paper presented at Global Mission Conference, Peachtree Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, USA), 20-22 October 2005, p. 7.

the most miserable of human beings.<sup>75</sup> Then came Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured upon His disciples, in fulfilment of the prophecy in Joel 2<sup>76</sup> – empowering all gathered, men and women together – to proclaim His word, live lives worthy of His calling,<sup>77</sup> and occupy until He comes.<sup>78</sup> All were to fulfil the Great Commission to “go, make disciples, baptize, and teach”.<sup>79</sup>

As there are fundamentals for followers of Christ which are shared and non-negotiable,<sup>80</sup> so are there biblically sanctioned attitudes, trans-cultural and timeless, and without respect to gender. These are embedded in the fruit of the Spirit of Jesus – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.<sup>81</sup> The principle of incarnation leads to an authentic seeking of the Christian to let Christ emerge, or be incarnated, wherever one is. Christ is seen, handled and touched by the everyday attitudes and choices made by the Christian engaging with others. In this wise, an African Christian man, married or not, with a meek and gentle spirit should be no different, attitude wise, from a Western Christian man with the same spirit; likewise one living in a hierarchical culture or an egalitarian culture – the only difference may be in the specifics of practices, but the attitude would be similar if they are authentic followers of Christ, living as Philippians 2:1-8 exhorts, and are bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Whether Westerners or Africans, the question is, what will we choose to do in our relationships in any given culture? As Jesus said, the children of God are those who hear the Word of God and do it.<sup>82</sup> Although, it is admitted that “ideas have consequences”,<sup>83</sup> and therefore, one’s belief in a particular way of relating is bound to manifest itself in certain ways. However, in a practical marriage situation, the principle of incarnation can become a reality between the couple and within their family through how they individually and collectively choose to live as Christ did, albeit with humility and a sense of fallibility. Even if the husband is inclined towards patriarchy, his choice to act in ways that conform to his understanding of how Christ lays down His life for His church will make the difference in his practice of *headship*. In practical reality therefore, an authentic Christian marriage, egalitarian or hierarchical, if conforming to what egalitarians and hierarchic lists hold to be true of their positions would not look too different from each other.<sup>84</sup> This is possible in both African Christian families with all their

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<sup>75</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:19.

<sup>76</sup> Acts 2:1-4.

<sup>77</sup> Eph 4:1.

<sup>78</sup> Luke 19:13.

<sup>79</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>80</sup> These fundamentals of the Christian faith include: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (see, Eph 4:4-6); the acceptance of the death and atonement of Christ for the remission of sin and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>81</sup> Gal 5:22.

<sup>82</sup> Matt 4:4; Luke 11:28.

<sup>83</sup> Mimi Haddad, ‘Ideas Have Consequences: Power, Gender and Evangelicals’, *Mutuality*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, Spring 2012, p. 22.

<sup>84</sup> In theory however, the consistent, functional subordination of a woman in a hierarchically inclined marriage may depict, on the face of it, infantilization, dependency and fragility on the part of the woman in relation to her husband. The issue however is, if hierarchical marriages truly, practically demonstrate loving, considerate

peculiar cultural manifestations, and a Western Christian family, also with their own cultural peculiarities.

### **The Gospel and its Translatability**

If the Gospel is able to find a home in any culture because, as Andrew Walls asserts, it is infinitely translatable,<sup>85</sup> then the church in its views and practices must be first transformed by the Gospel, as it seeks to engage with the larger culture as a witness to Christ. Then, like Christ, the church must take the radical, counter-cultural approach to demonstrate the mind of Christ in helping to shape the new man and the new woman in Christ who no longer live like they used to, with the old nature of domination and inflated egos on the part of men, or the timidity or manipulative tendencies on women's part. In church practice, every effort would be made to demonstrate the inclusivity Jesus demonstrated, regarding the full humanity of both women and men. An egalitarian minded church may be seen as demonstrating this inclusiveness as women are likely to participate in all levels of ministry and activity without restriction, hopefully according to spiritual gifting. In a hierarchically minded church, men in leadership would demonstrate the sensitivity of Jesus in the attention they pay to both men and women, the gentleness with which hurting women are handled, a constant affirmation of women's worth and dignity – be they single, married, young or aged – and the active attempt to nurture and include women in every activity and ministry of the church apart from teaching men in adult congregations. Biblically advanced reasons for excluding women from pastoral office or teaching adult men would be sensitively explained to the congregation, outlining also the alternative interpretations. This is the spirit of enabling adult women and men who have individual spiritual accountability to God to understand the choices made by their particular churches so they choose which way to go according to their leaning and conscience. As Christians we must trust that Christ, the Gospel, will take women and men where He finds them, and speak to them according to the categories of their cultural understanding. Invariably, the spirit and fruit of peace will characterize the inner attitude and outward demeanour of those who are being transformed by the Gospel, no matter their culture or circumstance.

We have all been born into and socialized by our cultures; therefore acting counter-culturally as a sincere Christian will present a struggle in both physical and spiritual realms. Indeed,

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servant leadership by the husband (who has authority over his wife and family, and therefore has power on his side, though he chooses to use it differently in conformity to biblical dictates) then what would be the justification for any complaints from wives, African Christian or otherwise? Then that marriage would be no different in reality from those that practice mutual submission and equality in all aspects.

<sup>85</sup> Insightful explanations on the Gospel's translatability can be found in the following: Andrew Walls, 'Culture and Coherence in Christian History', in Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2009), pp. 16-25; Andrew F. Walls, 'New Mission, New Scholarship: Exploring the Old Faith in New Terms', *Journal of African Christian Thought (JACT)*, Vol. 9, No. 2, December 2006, pp. 23 – 29.

although we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh,<sup>86</sup> and we wrestle with principalities and powers<sup>87</sup> that have a vested interest in maintaining the systems and standards of the world which are contrary to the way of the Cross. This struggle with and within our cultures, be it the prevailing egalitarian American culture, or the largely patriarchal cultures of African people, is a reality in every facet of our lives, including relations between the sexes. That is why no matter how ideally described, there is no perfect egalitarian or hierarchical relationship, whether in or outside the home, assuming either model presents God's ideal. Christian women and men need to depend strongly on the Holy Spirit as children of God to act each day and in all situations in ways that affirm Christ's lordship and enables us to become more like Him when confronted with issues and circumstances, within our cultures. The labels will not deliver us from our penchant towards pride and sinfulness; it is submission to the Holy Spirit that makes the difference. As we work out our "salvation with fear and trembling"<sup>88</sup> within our particular cultures – which like creation, also groan,<sup>89</sup> we will walk each day towards growing into that "perfect person"<sup>90</sup> who honours God in all his/her ways. After all, we are not saved *out of* our cultures; we are saved *in* them.

Life is lived in the crucibles of our cultures which although dynamic, are slow to change. We have a new Master; our allegiances shift from the old to the new, to the Gospel; however, we still retain the external features and forms of who we are according to culture we were placed within. That is why Christianity is not a Western religion, an imposed faith; that is why one does not have to talk or eat like a European when one comes to Christ. One can read the word of God – the Bible – in one's own mother-tongue – Akan, Ewe, Russian or English, because God speaks all our languages, and communicates to us best in the language we understand. That is also why we can dance the *agbadza*<sup>91</sup>, *adowa*,<sup>92</sup> tap dance or waltz to Christ in Church or in our bedrooms as Christians, as we redeem these cultural forms of expression to Christ.

But the work of the Holy Spirit is in our hearts, transforming us as we daily submit to the Lordship of Christ and make daily decisions and choices that we believe should please Him, according to His revealed will primarily found in Scripture. Scripture is therefore the hermeneutic of our culture.<sup>93</sup> Our cultures must pass through the prism of the Gospel – which is anterior to our cultures – to discern what stands or falls before Christ.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> 2 Cor 10:3.

<sup>87</sup> Eph 6:12.

<sup>88</sup> Phil 2:12.

<sup>89</sup> See, Rom 8:22.

<sup>90</sup> See, Eph 4:13.

<sup>91</sup> Agbadza is a vigorous, beautiful dance from the Ewe ethnic group of the Volta Region of Ghana

<sup>92</sup> Adowa is a royal dance of graceful, fluid movements mainly found among the Akan ethnic groups of Ghana, in particular the Asantes.

<sup>93</sup> Kwame Bediako 'Scripture as a hermeneutic of culture and tradition', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 4, No.1, June 2001, pp. 2-11, (2).

<sup>94</sup> Bediako, 'Scripture as a hermeneutic of culture and tradition', *JACT*, p. 2

Africa is going through its own cultural changes and challenges; the West has been through its own cultural revolutions and upheavals – from the Dark Ages through Reformation, Enlightenment, modernism and post-modernism etc. People – individuals and communities have had to live through these cultural changes – as Christians or otherwise – making everyday living decisions for existence and survival and also for change.

Thus where we are is where Christ, who is the Gospel that is infinitely translatable, finds us. Being incarnated in our hearts His life begins to change ours, if we allow Him. This is the promise given in Romans 8... “Whom He foreknew... He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”

### **A passionate appeal from a Christian “friend” in Africa to Euodia and Syntyche: friends in the West<sup>95</sup>**

In the revised edition of his book “Paul, Women and Wives”, egalitarian Craig Keener comments:

“... {t}he debate over gender roles is probably more polarized now than it was when this book was first written. Political and rhetorical battles lines have been drawn, and many Christians have suffered wounds at the hands of fellow Christians.”<sup>96</sup>

He continues:

“...I soon found that most scholars who have written on either side of the issue have suffered the effects of their opponents’ strong feelings. Both sides believe that the message of Scripture supports their case, and the temptation in the face of harsh criticism... is to return it in kind...”<sup>97</sup>

In warning about the reality that spiritual warfare may be implicated in this debate, Beck and Blomberg write:

“Satan loves to divide believers, pitting them against one another. We must all recommit to speaking what we understand to be the truth, with all the love we can muster (Eph 4:15), and ban the rhetoric from either side that would elevate one’s position on gender

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<sup>95</sup>Paul in Philippians 4: 2-3 was urging a Christian “yokefellow” to help his co-labourers in the gospel, Euodia and Syntyche, who were obviously disagreeing with each other over an issue not made known. The significance of this is that Paul stated that these disagreeing women’s names “are in the book of life.” I find that I am compelled to speak from Africa, as an African Christian woman to my feuding sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, to halt the vitriol in the increasingly polarized debate and consider being together in a bond of peace and unity in the Spirit – for the sake of Christ and Christian witness. Satan divides; Christ heals and restores. Calling each other names and rallying campaign petitions against each other is not the Christlike way. In the midst of our diversity and diverse views, on whose side do we choose to be?

<sup>96</sup>Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1992), p. v.

<sup>97</sup>Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, p. x.

roles to a fundamental of the faith that must be fought for at all costs. The Bible simply does not speak as unambiguously to this topic as some claim, or as we might wish, and we must learn to agree to disagree in love, recognizing that each of us could be wrong.”<sup>98</sup>

Paul in his letter to the Galatians stresses the need to rid ourselves from the works of the flesh.<sup>99</sup> In this passage, dissensions and contentions are as bad as adultery and idolatry. Christians can disagree and debate on issues, but there is a thin line between debate and dissensions, and we must seek not to cross this line. The surest way this can be prevented is for Christians to constantly seek to allow the Spirit to bear His fruit within<sup>100</sup> even in such matters, against which, Paul says, there is no law. His conclusion on the contentions among the Galatians Christians is instructive for us today:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”<sup>101</sup>

We are also reminded of the encounter Joshua had with the Angel of the Lord in Joshua 5:13ff, of Whom Joshua, ready for battle, asked “are You friend or foe?”, or “...are You with us or with our adversaries?”, to which the Angel of the Lord, identified biblically as the pre-incarnated Christ Jesus, replied “Neither (or No), But I have come now as Commander of the armies of Yahweh (or the Lord of hosts)”. We are called to submit to, and serve the Lord of the battle we fight against principalities, powers and wickedness in high places, not against one another. In Him, neither egalitarianism nor hierarchicalism avails anything, but a new creation. If there is a battle out there, it must be well directed before we get out of God’s purposes and will, which purposes yield the fruit of peace between God’s children!

No doubt that the two sides of the gender equality debate in Western evangelical circles are on a search for the true interpretation of the biblical passages regarding gender relations. Like many other debates in the Christian church on issues such as Baptism, Millennialism, Sanctification, Spiritual gifts and several others, it is likely to continue for a while – if it would

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<sup>98</sup> James Beck and Craig Blomberg, (Eds.), *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), p. 319. John Piper and Wayne Grudem gladly express reasons for hope in this debate for charity to prevail between the two sides despite all their exegetical and hermeneutical disagreements. They affirm their hope on the basis that “both sides stand together on the authority of God’s Word, the Bible”; “because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit”; and “because the things that unite those of us on both sides of the issue are inexpressibly magnificent and infinitely valuable.” John Piper and Wayne Grudem, ‘Conclusion and Prospect’, in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pp. 418-421. These fundamentals include the shared belief in the omnipotent God who sent His Son Jesus Christ to save the world from sin through His mission, death and Resurrection, and that His salvation and eternal life is available to all who believe in His name; that Jesus Christ will come again to take with Him his elect, to judge the world, and to establish his Kingdom forever. Maranatha! See, Piper and Grudem, ‘Conclusion and Prospect’, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* pp. 418-422.

<sup>99</sup> Galatians 5:18

<sup>100</sup> Galatians 5:22

<sup>101</sup> Galatians 6:15

ever be resolved. This debate is also an extremely useful exercise as Christians seek to uphold the authority of Scriptures in their lives. However as Beck and Blomberg observe:

“Some naively think that a plain reading of Scripture, accompanied by a commitment to let the Bible speak for itself, will...solve all interpretive difficulties.”<sup>102</sup>

Groothuis also helps to direct Christians against judgemental literalism on the one hand, and extreme cultural relativism in such interpretive matters. She asserts:

“The place of truth and sanity is located in the middle ground between these two hermeneutical extremes...Our understanding of the Bible is always fallible; but good sense, sound knowledge and the Spirit’s leading render possible a humble and reasonable certainty concerning what the Bible truly and infallibly says.”<sup>103</sup>

Most importantly, Groothuis, like other evangelicals,<sup>104</sup> stresses the need to avoid “the common failure to make a distinction between essential doctrine and peripheral doctrine.”<sup>105</sup> She continues:

“A debate over a debatable issue... should not elicit the level of righteous indignation warranted by a disagreement with a doctrine at the creedal heart of Christian orthodoxy. Someone who accepts the core doctrines of the faith but disagrees with your particular view of gender roles should not be labelled a heretic!”<sup>106</sup>

Guarding against heresy is of vital import to the faith, but in an issue such as this neither side can claim the other to be heretical. Thus it is of the utmost importance, that however different the hermeneutical or exegetical view points, they must be seen as viewpoints within the broader quest for the search for what the Bible actually means on the particular issues. The African Christian perspective on gender relations, as presented by this work, also remains such – a humble contribution to the debate for the consideration and use of the universal Christian community – in the hope that some fresh insights and understanding will emerge to help women and men of God live out authentic Christian lives in continuing Christian witness to a faith that finds a home in all receptive hearts, homes and cultures.

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<sup>102</sup> Beck and Blomberg, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, p. 324.

<sup>103</sup> Rebecca M. Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), p. 146.

<sup>104</sup> Beck and Blomberg for example, state: “What does the Bible teach, and how can we faithfully interpret problematic texts in spite of our inclination towards or our repulsion against either patriarchy or feminism? The evangelical branch in North America has yet to reach a consensus in this debate regarding gender in ministry. Neither side has been convincingly declared heretical; we believe neither side is heretical.” Beck and Blomberg, *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, p. 325.

<sup>105</sup> Groothuis, *Good News for Women*, p. 146.

<sup>106</sup> Groothuis, *Good News for Women*, p. 146.



## **A Victim Centered Approach**

**By**

**Wangu Kanja**

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Reports of sexual violence against adults have continued to increase throughout the past decade. Despite comprehensive nationwide reporting, no one can know for certain how many actual cases that take place each year. Some victims/survivors still choose not to report the violations because of embarrassment, fear and trauma. Others lack faith in the follow-up treatment, in the investigative and prosecutorial systems.

A significant number of sex crimes are not reported to the law enforcement agencies for many survivors fear they will not be believed or lack confidence in the criminal justice system and are concerned how their family and friends might react. Many survivors feel guilty or responsible for being victimized. In many cases those who have been sexually victimized have been treated with skepticism. Additionally, many survivors of sexual violence are reluctant to report the crime if their actions involved risky or illegal behavior. Some survivors fear offender and their family retaliation, some are embarrassed and fear religious institution/media attention.

Reports of child sexual abuse have also increased dramatically in the past few years, although these remain even more difficult to document than sex crimes involving adults. Traditionally, the successful prosecution of both adult and child sexual violence cases have been difficult. Since the victim often is the only witness to the crime, the collection of physical evidence as well as the documentation of medical trauma may be crucial to substantiate an allegation and help strengthen the case.

Data collected through an informal survey indicated that women shows that among the reasons for survivors not reporting the crimes are fear of not being believed, lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, fear for their own safety, concern for their families, and concerns about privacy.

Notwithstanding cases which must be reported to the law enforcement and children department, there is no mandated reporting of sex crimes in Kenya. The purpose of this document is to assist in affecting change by creating an environment where

victims/survivors of sexual violence will choose to report their crimes to law enforcement. These changes should assure that survivors who seek help, psychological and psycho social, medical treatment and wish to report the crimes committed against them to law enforcement are treated with fairness, compassion and respect.

The systematic focus on the needs and concerns of victim/survivors of sexual violence is to ensure the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a non judgmental or discriminatory manner. All too often, in the provision of services and care victim/survivors of sexual violence focus is directed on those individuals providing support and services. Victims/survivors are required to wait for long periods of time in hospital emergency rooms while the needs of emergency department personnel take priority in caring for other individuals. Time pressures on overburdened police departments often place the investigating officer's needs over those of the victim. Heavy caseload, under staffing in prosecutor's offices, takes the focus off the victim's needs for sensitive treatment and an understanding of what occurs during the prosecution of a case. In a victim centred approach, the victim/survivor wishes, safety and well being taken priority in all matters and procedures. Sexual violence needs to be made a priority issue in the country and with the urgency it deserves.

# **Women's Role in the Church: A Berean Approach to Scripture**

By

**Wayne A. Pelly**

**Empower International Ministries**



## **A Perplexing Problem**

Today we are going to settle once and for all the issue of women's ministry and leadership roles in the church.

In 1 Tim. 2:12, the Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet" (ESV). There. God said it. I believe it. That settles it.

Or does it? The issue becomes more complex when we consider additional teachings from the Bible. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul says that the women should be silent in church - and not only this, that it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Just a few chapters earlier, however, in 11:4-5, women as well as men are praying and prophesying in the church. In both of these passages Paul is speaking by the Holy Spirit as well, isn't he?

What places the first two passages in a position to minimize or suppress the implications of the third passage? Why wouldn't the third passage, which shows women praying and prophesying, be received as a normal and universal activity, which would tell us that the first two passages restricting women are somehow reflecting a local and limited situation?

So - how do we address this apparent contradiction? How do we deal with this problem?

## **Some Important Criteria**

If there is tension or an apparent contradiction I suggest that the problem is not with the Bible, but with us and our approach to the Bible and our perspective regarding it. Do we tend to underline the verses we like and ignore others that do not suit our preferences? Our churches and our sisters - as well as our brothers - deserve a better approach and a fuller perspective. And our Lord, I think, expects it!

It should be obvious in the case of the 1 Corinthians passages that, when we consider only one of them, we see only part of the picture. We need the entire picture, not just in these passages but all relevant passages in the New Testament.<sup>i</sup>

This important concept is expressed by the Apostle Paul as he describes his former ministry in Ephesus to the elders of that church.

Acts 20:27 (ESV)

. . . I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

This expression, “the whole counsel of God” (or the entire purpose or will of God in some translations) – expresses a significant principle that all relevant biblical texts on a subject must be heard, not just one’s favourite few passages (or even just a few verses). Any understanding of “biblical authority” that falls short of this cannot in any way be considered valid.

In our study of the Bible on this topic we need to seek a fullness of understanding that leaves nothing out.<sup>ii</sup>

The next conviction is the one we bring to our study of the Bible to begin with. The following is a contrast between two groups of recipients of the gospel message preached by the Apostle Paul:

Acts 17:11

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The sharp contrast between how the Thessalonians and the Bereans received the gospel illustrates important attitudes to have when approaching any issue such as this: humility, curiosity and a lack of prejudice. The Bereans were willing to consider all biblical evidence and form their beliefs from it, rather than hold firmly to a previously formed belief and only consider evidence that supported it.

## **A Proposed/Working Framework**

We want an approach/perspective that not only considers all of the New Testament, but that enables us to hear all that Scripture has to say with openness and humility. We are calling this the Berean approach to women’s ministry and leadership roles in the church. So how do we put this into practice?

We are going to explore the process undertaken by New Testament historian and cultural specialist, S. Scott Bartchy. To really search the Scriptures on the position of women in the church, he wrote the text of each New Testament passage that addressed women in the life of the church on a separate note card. He then sorted and resorted those note cards, looking for patterns that would give insight into this important issue.<sup>iii</sup>

So here we see our criteria: The “entire counsel of God” is applied as all relevant Scripture texts from the New Testament are included, and then carefully reviewed with a “Berean spirit,” as each text is considered in its original context, and allowed to speak.

As Bartchy performed this process, the most striking thing that he encountered is the many texts that simply describe women in ministry or leadership activities, as supporters of Jesus and the apostles, and co-workers of the apostle Paul. These passages appear with no explanation or defence whatsoever, indicating that these activities were both common and accepted. When these texts are all separated from the rest of the stack, they form over half of the cards. This is quite amazing – and significant enough that he made it his primary criterion for further sorting.

Professor Bartchy called this category of New Testament texts “Descriptive.” They simply describe the things that some women were doing in the early church.

The obvious question that occurs at this point is this: How did these activities come about? So the next step was to look for texts that would have encouraged women to function in the ways that are found in the Descriptive texts – and have encouraged men to accept and even welcome such activities. This, surprisingly, is the next largest stack of cards. This category Bartchy labelled “Instructive” – they “instruct” Christians regarding the way things should be in the church (Bartchy 1996, 20).<sup>iv</sup>

These are texts that would have not only encouraged women to engage in the kind of ministry and leadership activities seen in the descriptive texts, but that also would have encouraged men to be both supportive and welcoming of such activities.

The final step in his process, in order to get a complete picture, was to look for texts that would have discouraged women from engaging in ministry and leadership activities. There were only two of these. He labelled them “Corrective” for a couple of reasons.

1. The context of each passage indicated that they appeared to be correcting problems that were occurring in those specific contexts.
2. The sharp contrast between these two texts on the one hand, with what emerged in the Descriptive and Instructive texts on the other: If these “Corrective Texts” actually express the attitude of Jesus Christ and the Apostles toward women in ministry, they cannot explain the behavior and activities that are found in the Descriptive texts and supported by the Instructive texts.

## **The Gospels – The Impact of Jesus Christ: Descriptive and Instructive**

First, we will examine the texts that occur in the Gospels –the actions and words of Jesus Christ. In the Gospels the categories of Descriptive and Instructive overlap one another enough that we will consider them together. There are no Corrective texts found in the Gospels. Later, when we review the texts in the book of Acts and the letters of Paul, we will consider the three categories separately.

What we also find is that it is helpful to group the Gospel material in a different way, looking separately at the impact of Jesus Christ on women, on men, and on their relationships with each other. So first we will review the impact of the words and actions of Jesus on women themselves.

### **The Impact of Jesus’ Teachings on Women**

When we ask men in our Empower seminars what they are buying when they pay dowry price for their wives, the answers are consistent: children, food, and sex. What we see in the gospels is that Jesus did not treat women on this basis! These roles and relationships do not define women and their value in the kingdom of God.

For example, in Luke 11:27-28, when a woman calls out, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed” (ESV), Jesus replies, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” Jesus does not allow women to be reduced to biological function, but redefines their blessedness – not from the usual praise for women only for bearing sons but in terms of their own relationship with and obedience to God. As Bartchy explains, “Motherhood is not the core definition of a ‘real woman’” (Bartchy 1993; emphasis his).

In Luke 8:1-3 we see multiple women travelling with Jesus and his male disciples, and even supporting them financially. In John 4 Jesus holds a sustained theological discussion with a Samaritan woman, who then becomes the witness through whom her entire village comes to Jesus. The terminology that John uses in 4:39, “Many Samaritans . . . believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” is very similar to John 17:20, where Jesus prays for those who believe in him through the word (or testimony) of the apostles.

In Luke 10:38-42, Mary left her traditional kitchen duties and joined the men in the sitting room at the feet of Jesus. When criticized by her sister Martha, Jesus explicitly defends her: “Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Craig Keener tells us, “Mary’s posture and eagerness to absorb Jesus’ teaching at the expense of a more traditional womanly role would have shocked most Jewish men.” He further explains, “This passage challenges the role designations for women in the first century; the role of

disciple and future agent of Jesus' message is more critical than that of homemaker and hostess, valuable as the latter may remain" (Keener 2014, 208).

The most significant reflection of this impact on women by Jesus is what we see toward the end of each of the gospels: All four of them unanimously report that women were the first witnesses to the resurrected Lord – and that the Lord then sent them to bear witness to the apostles! Mark Husbands comments, "This alone ought to leave an indelible mark on our understanding of ministry: God first appointed women to proclaim the gospel to the apostles" (Husbands 2007, 132).

Not only this, but John's gospel tells us that it was not incidental or accidental that women were the first witnesses to the risen Lord, but intentional on his part. According to John 20, Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb, then ran to tell Peter and John, who themselves then raced to the tomb. Mary arrived after them (this was her third trip, after all), and only after Peter and John had left the scene did Jesus appear – and sent a message to the men only through her!

Bartchy summarizes the impact of Jesus Christ on women as "the rejection of female gender roles" (as defining women's identity and value) and the "creation of new, public roles for women" (Bartchy 1993).

## **The Impact of Jesus' Teachings on Men**

While we usually think that improving how men view women is important to bring change, we have found in Empower International Ministries – consistent with the results of Bartchy's note card research – that changing how men view themselves is every bit as important. We see this issue raised again and again in the gospels, and it is given a prominent place in each of the four.

In order to truly see "the full counsel of God," we need to go back to our original process of recording New Testament verses on note cards in order to re-define our strategy to include this crucial issue.

In Mark 10:35-37, while travelling toward Jerusalem, James and John ask Jesus to be able to "sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." (In Matt. 20:20-21 it is their mother who brings the request on behalf of James and John.) They are certainly thinking of the Son of Man as described in Daniel 7:13-14, who appears before "the Ancient of Days" and is "... given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (NRSV). This is the Messiah, the judge of the earth; holding the positions of his chief of state and prime minister would certainly be a coveted position! But Jesus told them in Mark 10:42-45 (ESV),

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among

you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Later, in Luke 22:25, during the Last Supper, Jesus' response to his disciples and their dispute about which of them was the greatest is expressed differently: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors." Halvor Moxnes informs us that this description reflects what are called "patron-client" relations, which are "based on a very strong element of *inequality* and *difference in power*." The "patron," or what Jesus here calls the "benefactor," has resources such as land, money or influence which the client needs (Moxnes 1991, 248, emphasis his). This is the kind of greatness to which the disciples aspired.

Jesus, however, points his disciples – and us – to a different model of greatness:

But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:26-27)

Moxnes tells us how this transforms the traditional concept of the patron or benefactor. "[Jesus] identifies greatness with the act of *servicing* rather than *being served*." "The word 'to serve' was linked to food; it was the task of nurturing, associated with women and servants" (Moxnes 1991, 259, emphasis his).

Bartchy paraphrases Jesus' reply in Mark 10:45 as follows: "I who do accept the role of being the judge of the world am judging the world and the way in which the world uses power and saying that I will use my power for the sake of others" (Bartchy 1993). This is the picture of the cross: The Son of Man, as described in Dan. 7:14, but with an unexpected twist: instead of being served by others, he gave his life to serve them.

In our Empower seminars we ask, "What does it mean to be Lord?" Or, to put it another way, "What would you do if you were the one in the room with the most power?" In John 13, Jesus shows us. He takes up a basin and a towel and washes the disciples' feet and afterwards adds, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (vs. 15). As you may remember, Peter resists – even objects (vss. 6-8). Bartchy explains, Peter already understands the implications; if Jesus washes his feet, he will be expected to wash the feet of others. Peter is not ready to become this kind of man (Bartchy 1993). The question for us is, Are we?

There are important lessons here in at least four areas, all revolving around the central theme of service to others:

1. Honor and status (or, we might say, the male ego): Jesus challenges this drive for honor and status and says that leadership in his kingdom is about humility and service. Any

view of manhood or masculinity that revolves around the male ego and desire for status must be abandoned.

2. **Dominance:** This male drive for dominance and position is a significant part of what is called patriarchy. Bartchy tells us that it is incomplete to call patriarchy the rule of men over women, as it is actually the rule of a few men over everyone else, men and women (Bartchy 1993). What men do is then replicate this pattern in their own spheres, such as their homes, in which case women are subordinated. This structure – the one Jesus referred to in his words about the Gentiles, was the one that appealed to his disciples. Jesus, on the other hand, challenges this entire way of thinking and acting.
3. **Authority:** We must never forget that Jesus regarded the possession and use of authority as a danger and a temptation, due to the way in which it is used by the world all around us. Even when we create hierarchical relationships in order to establish areas of responsibility and lines of accountability, we must not forget that true authority is rooted in God’s work in our lives and our resulting character and relationships of service to others.
4. **Power:** Jesus challenges us to change our perspective from power *over* others to power *alongside* others:

“If the Lord is Jesus, legitimate power seeks not to control others and things but to empower the powerless, to lift up the fallen, to reconcile, to create healing opportunities, to encourage maturity and responsibility, and to restore community” (Bartchy 1993).<sup>v</sup>

We have looked at the impact of the teachings of Jesus on women and on men; now we look more specifically at his impact on how men and women relate to one another.

### **The Impact of Jesus’ Teachings on Relationships**

Jesus’ instructions on gender frees both women and men from the burdens imposed on them by culture. More teachings of Jesus further define the intended relationship between them, particularly regarding how men view and treat women.

Consider the sexual double-standard, the insistence that women remain faithful as the sexual property of their husbands, who are themselves free to have as many women as they want.<sup>vi</sup> Jesus challenges this sexual double-standard in John 8:1-12, when the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus for judgment. The absence of the man whom she had been with is quite obvious, although apparently not to the men who brought her. Jesus replies, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,” and the men, convicted, slink away in shame.

This challenge is reinforced in Matt. 19:3-9/Mark 10:2-12 where Jesus makes it clear that sexuality fidelity in marriage, always expected of wives, is required of husbands as well. Carrie

Miles explains, “Jesus’ definition of marriage as a ‘one flesh’ relationship . . . implicitly recast adultery not as a property crime against men but as a shattering of an essential union created by God” (Miles 2006, 59).

In Matt. 5:28 Jesus states that “. . . everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (ESV). And if this is not radical enough, he follows with, “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away” (vs. 29). Two important things follow from these verses:

1. Men are clearly responsible for their own thought life, and consequently for what they do with their eyes and hands. This is not talking about simple sexual attraction, but the desire to use someone as an object for one’s own gratification. As Sarah Sumner says, “. . . Lust is not an innate male reflex; it is a condition of the heart.” She also points out the similarity between greed and lust: The greedy person “uses people to make money for himself,” while the lustful man “uses women to make himself feel powerful and manly” (Sumner 2003, 304, 305).
2. Women are not sex objects for men, nor are they responsible for the thought life of men. (There may be important reasons for women to dress modestly, but they would be related to how they think of themselves and of their relationships with men.<sup>vii</sup>)

An additional example of Jesus’ challenge to the sexual double standard can be found in Luke 7:36-50, where Jesus is anointed by a “sinful woman” while dining in the home of Simon the Pharisee. He senses Simon’s judgment of the woman – and even more significantly of him, since he is letting her touch him—and so he says to Simon, “Do you see this woman?” He then calls attention to the ways in which she is demonstrating her love for Jesus because of the forgiveness of her sins.

The double standard in the shame-honor culture of Jesus’ world is described by New Testament cultural experts Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh. A woman’s honor is like virginity: “While male honor is flexible and can sometimes be regained, female honor is absolute and once lost is gone forever” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 372).

In the case of the woman in the home of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus explicitly challenges this sexual double standard by calling attention to the woman’s behavior in a way that ascribes honor to her, and asks Simon the Pharisee to see her through that lens, rather than through the lens of her sin.<sup>viii</sup>

There is an important point here: Men are to “see” women as Jesus sees them. In contrast to the severe warning in Matt. 5 about not looking at a woman with lustful intent, now Jesus urges Simon to see this woman for who she is as a person, a person who responds to God’s love and who loves, serves, and has value before God as a human being. It is interesting that, while men

may look at women, they tend not to see them. Jesus asks men to see women for who they are and how they serve – or can serve – Jesus Christ.

## Acts and the Letters of the Apostle Paul – the Early Church

As we review the book of Acts and the letters of the Apostle Paul, we will see whether the same emphasis we saw in Jesus Christ also appears in the early church.

### **Descriptive Texts**

We begin with the “Descriptive” passages. These passages of Scripture simply describe what women in the Christian community recorded in the Book of Acts and Paul’s letters were doing.

- Acts 18:26. Priscilla, together with her husband, Aquila, teach the learned Apollo’s “the way of God more adequately.”
- Acts 21:9. Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied.

Romans 16 is full of references to women in ministry, all of whom Paul mentions with praise, affirmation and recommendation:

- Rom. 16:1-2. Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea and a benefactor of Paul and others. Paul commends her and asks that they receive her and give her any help she may need.

Bartchy points out that both deacon and benefactor involve “leadership and initiative” (Bartchy 1978, 64). When Paul uses this word for himself, it is typically translated “minister.” When he uses it in 1 Timothy of an office for which he gives the qualifications, it is translated “deacon.” So the insistence of some translations to render the word as “servant” *only* in Phoebe’s case is quite perplexing, other than are flection of bias.

- Rom. 16:3-4. Priscilla and her husband Aquila are Paul’s co-workers in Christ Jesus, who had risked their lives for Paul.

Interestingly, in most places where Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned, Priscilla’s name is placed first. Priscilla played a significant role in the teaching of Apollo’s, and in fact, was a significant if not the most prominent partner in a ministry team with her husband.

- Rom. 16:7 – Junia is named along with Andronicus as “outstanding among the apostles.”

Both Scott Bartchy and Lynn Cohick remind us that Junia was both clearly a woman’s name in New Testament era Greek, and was understood by the church fathers in the first several centuries as both a woman and an apostle(Bartchy 1993; Cohick 2009, 215, 216). In the

thirteenth century, however, a translator apparently did not believe a woman apostle was possible, so – going against the evidence – he converted her name into a masculine form. This miraculous “sex change” was further reinforced by Martin Luther, “whose influential translation of the Bible into German included the reference to two men, Andronicus and Junias” (Cohick 2009, 215).

- Rom. 16:6, 12, 13 & 15. A number of women are mentioned: Mary, who worked very hard for them; three women who “work hard in the Lord” are named: Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis; the mother of Rufus has, in some sense, been a mother to Paul as well, and in verse 15 several women are greeted, Julia and the sister of Nereus.
- 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 – Paul refers here to both men and women praying and prophesying, apparently in the assembly. The only issue is whether women covered their heads while speaking, but Paul clearly accepts the part they are playing in the meetings.
- Philippians 4:2-3 – Paul appeals to two women, Euodia and Syntyche, whom he describes as having striven together with him for the gospel – using co-worker language.

What is interesting about these “Descriptive” texts is what is *missing*: Bartchy notes that there is no effort to justify or explain these activities of women. This indicates that “. . . such activities had become sufficiently common that no special comment was needed in these contexts” (Bartchy 1978, 62).

In these Descriptive texts, women are appreciated for their ministries and celebrated for their contributions to the ministry and mission of the church equally with men.

### **Instructive Texts**

After reviewing the activities of women in the early church, our next question is, where did these activities come from? What is it that encouraged women to function in this way in the early church? This is what we look for next: These are the “Instructive” texts – those that instruct the church in the way things should be.

- Acts 2:17-18. The apostle Peter, as part of his sermon at the founding of the church on the day of Pentecost, quotes from the prophet Joel. As a mark of the new age, sons and daughters, both men and women, will prophesy.
- Spiritual gifts are described in Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11 and 28-31; Eph. 4:11-13; and 1 Pet. 4:10-11. There is no indication at all in any of these passages that there are any gender restrictions in the way the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts for ministry.

- 1 Cor. 7:4-5. “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (ESV).

Note that here, the only place where authority is mentioned in the marriage relationship, it is reciprocal, and decision-making is mutual. The idea that a woman had authority over her husband’s body would have been as shocking in the Greco-Roman world to whom Paul wrote as it is in Africa today. Although this text is addressing marriage and not roles in the church, the change that Christ has wrought permeates all aspect of the Christian life, including giving authority to women in their relationships with their husbands.

- 1 Cor. 7:7. “I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.” In this case Paul is discussing his singleness as a gift from God. He is saying that “neither men nor women *have* to marry . . . in order to be fully human and acceptable to God” (Bartchy 1978, 60 [emphasis his]).
- 1 Cor. 11:11-12. “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is an independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”
- Gal. 3:28. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Given Paul’s appeal to this very concept in the previous chapter as the basis for his rebuke of Peter, his counter-cultural advice to Philemon regarding his slave Onesimus, and the presence of all the “Descriptive” texts already discussed, Paul was definitely talking about equality in this life, not the next!
- Eph. 5:21-6:9. The husband no longer rules his wife but loves her as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; the father brings his children up not for his own benefit but in the training and instruction of the Lord; and the master’s power over his slave is relativized by the reminder that he and his slave have the same master in heaven, who will not favor the master.
- Paul’s designation of the husband as the “head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” in Eph. 5:23 is consistent with all we have been saying. The thousands of pages of debate over the meaning of “head” can be resolved by simply observing that Paul himself defines his own use of the term: In Eph. 4:15, Christ as the head of the church provides for its maturity and growth. When we help men in our Empower seminars to understand this (along with what Jesus said to men about authority, power and service) they – who previously might have told their wives, “You speak once, I speak twice,” now begin to share decision-making with them.<sup>ix</sup>

- Consider also what some call Paul’s “pursuit of radical self-humiliation,” expressed throughout his letters (Bartchy 2003, 144). For example, while the false apostles lord it over the Corinthians, Paul calls attention to his suffering and weakness (for example, 1 Cor. 4:8-13; 2 Cor. 11:22-12:10). His authority from the Lord is to “build up” the Corinthians and not “tear them down” (2 Cor. 10:8 & 13:10), in contrast to the false apostles who, by their dominance, were benefiting themselves at the expense of the Corinthians.

## Corrective Texts

We now are left with only the two passages that Bartchy calls “Corrective.” These texts are those in which Paul is clearly addressing a problem situation in order to correct it.

Unfortunately, both of these texts have been used extensively as “proof-texts” – texts taken out of context to shore up otherwise unsupportable arguments – in clear violation of the “whole counsel of God” admonition.

As we approach these texts, remember that we have only one-half of a two-way conversation. Paul is addressing issues raised by those to whom the letters are addressed, whose letters to Paul were lost. We need to look at the context carefully and ask what is going on in the other half of the conversation which we are otherwise unable to hear.

### 1 Corinthians 14:34-35(ESV)

. . . The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

The first thing to notice about the context of this passage, according to Bartchy, is that the women are the *third* group Paul asks to be silent, in a context in which Paul is addressing disruptions in the church service (Bartchy 1978, 68). Both tongue-speakers and prophets have already been asked to be silent under certain conditions.

This text, and its classification as “Corrective,” is further elaborated by quickly examining the multiple ways in which it can be understood. Each of these options identifies significant problems with simply taking this text at its face value as a universal restriction on women.

- A. Philip Payne, in *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, reports both internal and external evidence that these verses are an insertion by later manuscript copyists. In this case, they are not the words of the Apostle Paul at all (Payne 2009, 225-267).
- B. Kenneth Bailey, in *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, explains that this refers to chatting by the women. They start chatting among themselves in an effort to understand what is going on. He explains that, in a city as diverse as Corinth, “Multiple factors must be considered.

Attention-span problems, limited knowledge of Greek, accent issues, . . . lack of amplification for the speakers, along with chatting as a methodology for learning are all involved” (Bailey 2011, 414, 416).

- C. James S. Jeffers sees evidence in the culture that this is referring to “. . . the inappropriate interruption of speakers. . . . In some contexts, including the Jewish religious context, it was considered inappropriate for women to interrupt a speaker with questions” (Jeffers, 1999, 252).
- D. The view of my own pastor, Ralph Kieneker of West Side Church in Richland, Washington State, is that the wives, by arguing with their husbands in the process of evaluating the prophecies that have been shared (discussed in the immediately preceding verses), are shaming their husbands in a culture very sensitive to honor and shame, so Paul simply asks them to wait and discuss it with their husbands when they get home.
- E. Carrie A. Miles, Director of Empower International Ministries, sees evidence that Paul is quoting the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians, Paul often responds to questions asked by the Corinthian church. For example, in 1:11 he refers to information he has received from some in Chloe’s household. In 7:1 he refers to a letter they wrote to him, “Now for the matters you wrote about.” Sometimes he tells us when he is referring to their letter, as in 8:1, “Now about food sacrificed to idols. . . .” Sometimes we have to discern his reference to information he has about them by the context, such as in 6:12, “All things are lawful for me, “which is a slogan among the Corinthians, to which Paul replies, “. . .but not everything is helpful” (ESV).

Miles argues that the Corinthians have written to Paul about problems they were having with disorderly gatherings, especially regarding speaking in tongues (the immediate context that the passage about women interrupts). The Corinthians proposed solving the problem by suggesting they tell the women to be quiet. Paul quotes their statement back to them, then protests it, “What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?” (vs. 36, RSV)(Miles 2013, 94-98). This is comparable to what we often do in American English today: A statement can be dismissed as not even worth considering with the words, “Are you serious?”

So - study the options and take your pick! But the key thing is that this text cannot in any way be viewed as instructive; it cannot be used to negate the positive statement about women praying and prophesying in the assembly that occurs just a few chapters earlier: there are too many significant indications that this is dealing with a local and culturally-specific problem. It does not represent Paul’s instructions to all women in all churches. As Bartchy puts it, “Is it plausible that Paul would have exhorted such potent and fruitful leaders as Phoebe, Prisca and Junia to keep quiet in the Christian assemblies? I don’t think so” (Bartchy 1992, 12).

## **1 Timothy 2:11-15 (ESV)**

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

This is the text that is usually appealed to as a restriction on women holding positions of leadership and authority within the church, often, in my experience, the only one. Yet we are classifying it as “Corrective” for two reasons: (1) it is contrary to so much of the rest of the teaching of the New Testament as seen in the Descriptive and Instructive texts; and (2) the immediate context of this passage is a long one in which Paul addressed the specific and unusual situation of the Ephesian church, thus making it difficult to apply his teaching in this passage as a universal directive to all churches everywhere.

Here are some of the indications that Paul, in writing this passage, was attempting to correct problems in the church Timothy was serving, rather than giving universal directions.

First, the broader context of 1 Timothy tells us about some of the problems that the church in Ephesus was experiencing. Right at the beginning of the letter, in 1 Tim. 1:3-4, Paul reminds Timothy of why he left him in Ephesus: “so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines . . . or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.” Throughout the letter he continues to provide specifics on teachings and practices to correct. The false teachings included, at a minimum:

- A. Continuing influence of the worship of the goddess Artemis, which we learn in Acts 19:23-40 was very important in Ephesus. Ephesus held her temple and was a major location for the worship of this goddess of childbirth. As in Africa, it may have been difficult to keep even believers from making offerings to the local gods during pregnancy and childbirth. This would help to explain Paul’s brief (and otherwise inexplicable from a Christian context) comment in v. 15.
  
- B. There is also some indication that the church in Ephesus was being influenced by an early form of an ancient Christian heresy called Gnosticism. For example, in 1 Tim. 4:3 Paul states that “. . . some will forbid people to marry.” Why would anyone forbid marriage? Because in Gnostic thinking sexual activity in marriage becomes a hindrance to spiritual perfection, which may be an important key to understanding verse 15, regarding a woman being saved through (i.e., passing safely through) childbirth with their salvation intact (Krueger & Krueger 1992, 161-177; Bartchy 1978, 74).

Paul’s statement, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” may have related to either Artemis worship or Gnosticism (or both). This false teaching was probably an argument that woman should dominate man because she was created first or was involved in the creation of man. The

goddess Artemis, for example, was not only born before her twin brother, Apollo's, she helped her mother deliver him. We also learn from Richard and Catherine Krueger that the form of proto-Gnosticism in Ephesus may have included the belief that not only was Eve created before Adam, she created him and brought him enlightenment. Paul refuted both arguments by pointing out that in Hebrew scripture, Adam was created before Eve and Eve, rather than bringing enlightenment, was deceived (Krueger & Krueger 1992, 103-104, 113).

Second, the usual word for "authority" in the Greek New Testament is *exousia*. In this one instance, however, Paul uses *authentain* – a word that is used nowhere else in Scripture – which accounts for confusion over just what Paul is denying women in 1 Tim 2. There is ample evidence, however, that its meaning carries the sense of "domineer," or even, "hold oneself to be the author or origin of something else" (Krueger and Krueger), which is consistent with elements of the context noted above. This is seen in the lexicons of both Thayer (Thayer, 84) and Bauer (Bauer 1979, 121), as well as Louw and Nida's lexicon. *Authentain* cannot be translated as "authority" in the usual sense.

Finally, in the verses immediately preceding 2:12, we learn that men have been expressing anger and disputing with one another (2:8), and that women have been trying to outdo one another in elaborate hairstyles, jewels and expensive clothes (2:9). Both of these are expressions of efforts to create or maintain a status hierarchy, which would be consistent with the understanding of "authentain" as meaning to domineer. Both men and women are attempting to dominate members of their own sex. Paul may have been trying to keep women from using false teachings as a tool to dominate the men as well. (Miles 2013, 101-102).

By telling women they should not dominate men, however, Paul is not thereby telling men they should dominate women! Taking 1 Tim 2:11-15 as Instructive also reinforces the cultural belief that while women can't hold authority, men are *supposed* to dominate, especially women. This misinterpretation completely negates Jesus' many teachings to the contrary, including his sacrifice of his own life as an example of a different way of leadership (see Mark 10:35-45).

These all point to the text addressing and correcting a problem specific to the situation where Timothy was serving as the Apostle Paul's trouble-shooter.

### **The Value of the Berean Approach**

In our "whole-council-of-God"-honouring Berean framework we find clear, uncontested meaning in the Descriptive and Instructive texts. The Descriptive texts typically are found in contexts where there is no problem that is being addressed, so it is natural and appropriate to take them at face value.

Moreover, when we look at the texts in the Descriptive and Instructive categories, we find substantial agreement in passages from the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the letters of the Apostle Paul.

On the other hand, we have already identified significant issues with the interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 14:34-35 that make them very difficult to interpret with confidence. Texts with very obscure levels of clarity thus form the centre of the patriarch lists' framework of understanding, raising serious concerns regarding their claim to biblical authority in the confident application of these verses.

The Berean Framework we have described, however, allows all Scripture texts to be heard, each in a way that is consistent with its context, and each category in a way that supports and explains the others.

- The Descriptive texts are key: they show the Instructive texts were taken seriously and literally, and reflected in the life of the early church.
- The Instructive texts help us to understand the values held by both Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul that influenced the behavior of women – and men – in the early church.
- The Corrective texts actually reinforce the Descriptive ones, in that the Descriptive texts tell us why problems arose in specific situations where local cultural issues caused an inappropriate distortion of women's activities – resulting in the Corrective texts.

The distinction between these categories is very important. When the Corrective texts are viewed as Instructive, only a few passages are allowed to speak. Other important passages of Scripture – including most of Jesus' teachings on the proper treatment of both women and men – are ignored. When taken as Instructive, these two texts minimize or even negate the plain meaning of and the positive attitude toward women and their ministry expressed by the other texts listed under Instructive and Descriptive. With 1 Tim. 2:11-15 and 1 Cor. 14:34-35 at the core, there is no meaningful framework that allows the entire body of Scripture to be heard in a historical and cultural context. Indeed, the problem is not that women are required to be silent but that so many other biblical passages that we need to hear are also silenced.

Perhaps a practical illustration will help bring this issue home to our hearts. A woman today could have the best of a Christian upbringing, a Christian college and even seminary education, demonstrated godly character and serve as a powerful example of the women Jesus encouraged in ministry and the women Paul named as his co-workers, but she can never fully escape the restrictions on women that result from the misinterpretation of Paul's words in 1 Tim. 2:11-15 – nor, we might add, the suspicion toward women that often results from some of the misunderstandings of this passage.

On the other hand, giving priority to the Descriptive and Instructive texts encourages and empowers such a woman to take her rightful place alongside the Marys, Phoebes, Priscilla's and

Junias of the New Testament in providing effective and strategic leadership to the church of today – a leadership that is so desperately needed!

Thus, it is not a choice between reading Gal. 3:28 through the lens of 1 Tim. 2:12, or of reading 1 Tim. 2:12 through the lens of Gal. 3:28, as the contrast between Patriarchalism and Egalitarianism is often portrayed.<sup>xi</sup> It is the issue of setting up a process that allows us to hear all Scripture on the topic, and then developing a framework for all those Scripture passages to be heard with equal voice in their historical and cultural context. In this case, we might select Gal.3:28 as best summarizing our result, but it is not our lens.

Our “lens”, the “full counsel of God” approached with a “Berean spirit”, yields a compassionate understanding of the full purpose of women and men in God’s sight – one of balance, mutual respect, and mutual service.

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# **Understanding Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in East Africa and the how the Church can help end FGM and support those affected**

**By**

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## **Abstract:**

Female genital mutilation (FGM) has existed for over two thousand years, affecting 140 million women across 40 countries. Over 125m girls and women alive today have been cut in the 28 countries in Africa where FGM is concentrated (UNICEF, 2013)

28 Too Many is committed to the eradication of FGM in 28 African countries where it is practised, and the global diaspora, using a model of change encompassing research, networking and advocacy.

Five comprehensive Country Profiles of FGM in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone were produced in 2013/14. These incorporated primary research with communities where FGM is practised and with anti-FGM organisations.

This is supplemented by research using literature review including anthropology, sociology, religion, education, law and health. Finally, quantitative research is reviewed for each country, enabling analysis of common themes within and across country borders.

This paper reviews the role of faith leaders and the Church in identifying actions Church leaders and members can take to help end FGM. Conclusions and recommendations are drawn for future work in the stand against FGM.

## **Keywords:**

Female Genital Mutilation; education; faith leaders; health; law; The Church; Kenya; Uganda; Tanzania; Ethiopia.

## Introduction

### Background & Types

Female genital mutilation (sometimes called female genital cutting and female genital mutilation/cutting) is defined by the WHO as referring to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM is a form of gender-based violence and has been recognised as a harmful practice and a violation of the human rights of girls and women. Between 100 and 140 million girls and women in the world are estimated to have undergone such procedures, and 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk of undergoing the procedures every year. More than 125m girls and women alive today have been cut in the 28 countries in Africa where FGM is concentrated. (UNICEF, 2013)

FGM has been reported in 28 countries in Africa and occurs mainly in countries along a belt stretching from Senegal in West Africa, to Egypt in North Africa, to Somalia in East Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in Central Africa. It also occurs in countries in Asia and the Middle East and among certain diaspora communities in North America, Australasia and Europe. As with many ancient practices, FGM is carried out by communities as a heritage of the past and is often associated with ethnic identity. Communities may not even question the practice or may have long forgotten the reasons for it.

*'Even though cultural practices may appear senseless or destructive from the standpoint of others, they have meaning and fulfil a function for those who practise them. However, culture is not static; it is in constant flux, adapting and reforming. People will change their behaviour when they understand the hazards and indignity of harmful practices and when they realise that it is possible to give up harmful practices without giving up meaningful aspects of their culture'* (WHO, 1997)

The WHO classifies FGM into four types: Type I is partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce (clitoridectomy). Type II is partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (excision). Type III is narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and a positioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation). Type IV is all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for

non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization. (WHO, 2008)

FGM is often motivated by beliefs about what is considered appropriate sexual behaviour, with some communities considering that it ensures and preserves virginity, marital faithfulness and prevents promiscuity/prostitution. There is a strong link between FGM and marriageability with FGM often being a prerequisite to marriage. FGM is sometimes a rite of passage into womanhood, and necessary for a girl to go through in order to become a responsible adult member of society. FGM is also considered to make girls 'clean' and aesthetically beautiful. Although no religious scripts require the practice, practitioners often believe the practice has religious support. Girls and women will often be under strong social pressure, including pressure from their peers and risk victimisation and stigma if they refuse to be cut.

FGM is always traumatic (UNICEF, 2005). Immediate complications can include severe pain, shock, haemorrhage (bleeding), tetanus or sepsis (bacterial infection), urine retention, open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue. Long-term consequences can include recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections; cysts; infertility; an increased risk of childbirth complications and newborn deaths; the need for later surgeries. For example, Type III infibulation needs to be cut open later to allow for sexual intercourse and childbirth. (WHO, 2013)

### **Historical Presence**

FGM has been practiced for over 2000 years (Slack, 1988). Although it has obscure origins, there has been anthropological and historical research on how the practice came about. It is found in traditional group or community cultures that have patriarchal structures. Although FGM is practised in some communities in the belief that it is a religious requirement, research shows that FGM pre-dates Islam and Christianity. Some anthropologists trace the practice to 5th century BC Egypt, with infibulations being referred to as 'Pharaonic circumcision' (Slack, 1988).

Other anthropologists believe that it existed among Equatorial African herders as a protection against rape for young female herders; as a custom amongst stone-age people in Equatorial Africa; or as 'an outgrowth of human sacrificial practices, or some early attempt at population control' (Lightfoot-Klein, 1983).

There were also reports in the early 1600s of the practice in Somalia as a means of extracting higher prices for female slaves, and in the late 1700s in Egypt to prevent pregnancy in women and slaves. FGM is practiced across a wide range of cultures and it is likely that the practice arose independently amongst different peoples (Lightfoot-Klein, 1983), aided by Egyptian slave raids from Sudan for concubines and maids, and traded through the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf (Mackie, 1996). (Sources referred to by Wilson, 2012)

## **Research Methodology**

28 Too Many aims to provide research on FGM across the 28 countries in Africa in which it is practised, by providing a strategic framework, knowledge and tools to enable in-country anti-FGM campaign and organisations to be successful and make a sustainable change to end FGM.

Our work is initially focussed on research and analysis as we believe it is essential to build up knowledge of the current situation and an evidence base that will make a difference. We aim to update these over time so progress can be made.

We strive to remain objective in providing this information, while maintaining the position that FGM is an inherent violation of human rights and needs to be ended. Our intent is to avoid victimising language and passing judgement on cultural practices, while focusing on the statistics behind FGM and the progress of anti-FGM programmes. We generally use the term FGM, as opposed to alternatives such as female circumcision or female genital cutting (FGC), to emphasise the gravity of the practice, following the approach of the WHO. The information in this document comes from reports available online, as well as scholarly articles and general literature on FGM. We provide a comprehensive overview of each country's current socio-economic, cultural, religious, and political conditions and the current state of FGM. Moreover, we focus on the rights, education, health and safety of girls and women. Our reports summarise past and current work on the elimination of FGM in Africa and document progress already made to end FGM.

Since the early 1990s, data on FGM have been collected through a separate module of the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) implemented by Macro International. The FGM module has yielded a rich base of data. Data have also been collected through the Multiple Cluster Indicator Surveys (MICS) using a module similar to that of DHS. The

MICS FGM module has been adjusted to the DHS module and was implemented during the third round of surveys (MICS-3) in 2005-6.

To compliment this research and research from other sources, we provide first-hand accounts of FGM practices and programmes aimed to eradicate FGM within each country at a community level. We aim to achieve this by questionnaires for NGOs and community mapping. This information enables us to understand the challenges and successful strategies associated with ending FGM at a grass-roots level. Additionally, in-country research provides new information which has not yet been published and gives us valuable insight for recommending future action plans. Finally, we set out our conclusions, based on the evidence gathered, on how to accelerate progress to eradicate FGM.

### **Purpose**

The objective of our work is to provide a concise report for each country to be freely available for use by governments, NGOs, charities, media, academics and other groups so that we can work collaboratively on ending FGM.

The prime purpose of this research is to provide improved understanding of the issues relating to FGM in the wider framework of gender equality and social change. By providing country profiles, collating the research to date, this report can act as a benchmark to profile the current situation. As organisations send us their findings, reports, tools and models of change, we can update these reports and show where progress is being made. Whilst there are many challenges to overcome before FGM is eradicated, many programmes are making positive active change and government legislation offers a useful base platform for deterring FGM practice.

### **Use**

Extracts from 28 Too Many reports may be freely reproduced, provided the due acknowledgement is given to the source and 28 Too Many. 28 Too Many invites comments on the content, suggestions on how it could be improved as an information tool, and seeks updates on the data and contacts details.

### **Outputs**

The outputs delivered in this research are the production of comprehensive country profiles of FGM for the 28 countries where FGM is practised. These incorporate:

primary research with communities where FGM is practised and with anti-FGM organisations; secondary research using literature review including anthropology, sociology, religion, education, law and health; and reviewing quantitative research on FGM in each country.

There follows an analysis of the common themes within countries and across borders, and cross cutting thematic research on specialist topics (28 Too Many, 2014). The final output is the review of the role of faith leaders and the Church and identifying actions church leaders and members can take to help end FGM.

## **Results**

### **Kenya Prevalence**

In Kenya, an estimated 27.1% of girls and women aged 15-49 years have undergone FGM (DHS 2008-09), a figure that has decreased from 37.6% in 1998, and 32.2% in 2003. There are significant regional variations, with prevalence ranges from 0.8% in the west to over 97% in the north-east (DHS 2008-09). The practice is particularly among the Somalis in the North Eastern province practice (97.7%), with 75% having undergone Type III infibulation. The prevalence is also highest among the Kisii (96.1%) and the Maasai (73.2%).

FGM is a deeply rooted cultural practice, although the reasons vary between ethnic groups. For some, it is an important rite of passage, for others it is closely tied to marriageability or the concepts of family honour and the need to preserve sexual purity. Among some communities, there has been a trend towards the medicalisation of FGM with the procedure being carried out by medical professionals. At the end of 2011, the government passed the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011 to replace the existing law. There are many local NGOs, CBOs, faith-based organisations, international organisations and multilateral agencies working in Kenya to eradicate FGM using a broad range of approaches.

Kenya is classed by UNICEF as a Group 2 Country, where FGM prevalence is intermediate and only certain ethnic groups practise FGM, at varying rates (UNICEF, 2005). Kenya has significant regional variations in FGM, with prevalence ranges from 0.8% in the west to over 97% in the north-east of Kenya. These regional differences are reflective of the diverse ethnic communities; prevalence of FGM within individual

communities is discussed below in section on FGM in Kenya by Ethnicity (28 Too Many, Kenya, 2013).

## **Uganda Prevalence**

The estimated prevalence of FGM in girls and women (15-49 years) is 1.4% (DHS, 2011). This has increased since it was first reported at 0.6% in 2006 (DHS, 2006 and WHO, 2008). While this data appears to show that FGM is increasing overall in Uganda, there is reportedly a decline in the Eastern region. It is hard to assess the definitive numbers and statistics relating to FGM in Uganda. This is partly due to the fact that the practise is now often carried out secretly or even over the Kenyan border for fear of prosecution, and the regions where FGM is practised are remote making data collection challenging.

Uganda is a Group 3 country, according to the UNICEF classification, where only some ethnic groups practise FGM and the country overall has a low prevalence rate of between 1% and 24% (UNICEF, 2005). FGM is not widely practised in Uganda and has comparatively low rates to other African countries, however, the practice is highest in eastern regions of the country (DHS, 2011).

In the Eastern Districts of Kapchorwa, Kween and Bukwa, FGM is practised by the Sabiny (Sebei) ethnic group. The Sabiny people are the most studied in terms of FGM in Uganda.

According to the DHS statistics, there appears to be decline in the rate of FGM in the areas inhabited by the Sabiny (Eastern District) from 2.4% in 2006 to 2.3% in 2011. Statistics by the NGO REACH also support this. There is, however, anecdotal evidence of an increase in prevalence as a result of defiance by the community to the new law.

FGM is also practised by the Pokot ethnic group living in the districts of Amudat and Nakapiripirit, and the Tepeth (also called the So) in the Moroto district of the Karamoja region. The Kadama ethnic group, who live on Mount Kadam in Nakapiripirit district, also practise FGM although there is very little data available on this group. The DHS figures show that FGM has increased in Karamoja from 1.8% in 2006 to 4.8% in 2011. Although the reasons for the increase are not completely clear, anecdotal evidence suggests that this may be attributable to the coming into force of the law against FGM.

The rate of FGM is also increasing in all other regions of Uganda. FGM is also believed to be practised by the Somalis who are located in the Kisenyi zone in Kampala, and the Nubi ethnic group who reside in Bombo, north of Kampala, Arua and elsewhere (in the Western Nile region). Additionally, FGM has been reported in the districts of Isingiro, Kamuli, Kamwenge and Bugiri (UNFPA, 2011). Genital elongation - classed in the Type IV category - is practised mainly by the Baganda people in the Wakiso district (Pérez and Namulondo, 2011). (28 Too Many, Uganda, 2013).

## **Ethiopia Prevalence**

The principal statistics relating to FGM in Ethiopia came from two surveys. The first is a country-wide baseline survey on harmful traditional practices (HTP) carried out by the National Committee for Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE) in 1997, and a follow-up survey by the same organisation (now called the Ethiopian Association to Eliminate Harmful Traditional Practices, or EGLDAM) in 2007. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data from more than 65,000 people.

The second is the Ethiopian DHS of 2000 and 2005 and the Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) of 2011, conducted by the Central Statistics Agency. The 2011 DHS did not cover FGM. These surveys have different methodological approaches and therefore comparisons between them should be treated with some caution, particularly comparing data on the status of daughters with the prevalence of FGM in girls under the age of 15.

Ethiopia is classified as a Group 2 country, according to the UNICEF classification, with a moderately high FGM prevalence. Group 2 countries have a prevalence of between 51% and 80% (UNICEF, 2013). The estimated prevalence of FGM in girls and women (15-49 years) is 74.3% (DHS, 2005). This has decreased from 79.9% in 2000 (DHS, 2000), therefore showing a 5.6% decrease over 5 years.

The NCTPE/EGLDAM data show a decrease from 73% in 1997 to 57% in 2007, showing a 16% decrease over 10 years. UNICEF calculates that 23.8 million women and girls in Ethiopia have undergone FGM. In terms of numbers, this is one of the highest numbers of girls and women who have undergone FGM in Africa, second only to Egypt (UNICEF, 2013).

The DHS data does not directly measure the FGM status of girls aged 0-14 years, however, pre-2010, the DHS surveys asked women whether they had a least one daughter with FGM. This data cannot be used to accurately estimate the prevalence of girls under the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2013). From 2010, the DHS methodology changed so that women are asked the FGM status of all their daughters under 15 years.

The WMS data records the FGM status of girls aged 0-14 years. Measuring the FGM status of this age group who have most recently undergone FGM or are at most imminent risk of undergoing FGM gives an indicator of the impact of recent efforts to end FGM. These figures (unless they are adjusted) do not take into account the fact that these girls may still be vulnerable to FGM after the age of 14 years.

With this caution regarding the problems with drawing conclusions from this data and comparing the different data sets, it is nevertheless noteworthy that whereas the proportion of women with one or more daughters under the age of 15 with FGM in 2000 and 2005 were, respectively, 51.9% and 37.7% (DHS, 2000 and 2005), the proportion of girls under the age of 15 with FGM in 2011 is estimated to be 23% (WMS, 2011). (28 Too Many, Ethiopia, 2013).

### **Tanzania Prevalence**

Statistics on the prevalence of FGM in Tanzania were compiled from the Tanzanian DHS of 2010, 2004-05 and 1996. UNICEF calculates that 7.9 million women and girls in Tanzania have undergone FGM (UNICEF, 2013). Tanzania is classified as a Group 4 country, according to the UNICEF classification, with a low prevalence. Group 4 countries have a prevalence of between 10% and 25% (UNICEF, 2013).

The DHS have consistently shown that prevalence rates among women residing in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas. While both rural and urban areas have seen a reduction in prevalence rates since 1996, the percentage of women who have undergone FGM in rural areas has continued to be at least twice that of urban women. These findings correspond to the fact that FGM is most commonly practised by pastoralist and agrarian groups.

The estimated prevalence of FGM in girls and women (15-49 years) is 14.6% (DHS, 2010). The overall rate has not changed from the 2004-05 DHS which recorded the same rate, but has decreased by 3.3% from 17.9% in 1996 (DHS, 1996).

The estimated prevalence of FGM in girls and women by age shows that the older a woman is, the more likely she is to have undergone FGM and, comparing the data for 1996, 2004-05 and 2010, there has been a decline in the rate of FGM.

The prevalence of FGM decreases in accordance with the level of education. In 2010, prevalence rates for those with no education was 20.3%, primary education incomplete was 12.9%, primary complete was 16.6%, and secondary & higher was 3.1%. (DHS, 2010).

FGM is most prevalent in the Northern and Central zones of Tanzania. Women in these areas are more likely to already have at least one circumcised daughters and would also consider having other daughter circumcised (DHS, 2010).

According to some reports, FGM is more widely practiced in approximately seven of the regions of mainland Tanzania (Mella, 2002; Ali and Strøm, 2012). According to the DHS, 2010 the percentages of cut women from the Manyara, Dodoma, Arusha, Singida, Mara and Kilimanjaro regions with range between 20-70%.

According to the DHS, of the nine regions with the highest prevalence, five have seen a decrease, and the remaining four an increase between 2004-05 and 2010. Percentages of cut women have increased in Arusha and Mara regions, with the largest increase occurring in Singida from 43.2% in 2004-5 to 51% in 2010. The prevalence rates may vary widely between different ethnic groups within the same region. This is not reflected in the DHS, which does not collect data by ethnicity in Tanzania.

This is exemplified by evidence from studies in various districts in Mara by the Christian Council of Tanzania, in which respondents were asked to estimate the prevalence of FGM, which show the prevalence rates below. The rates are high in those districts where the Kuria and Simbiti ethnic groups are located, namely Mara (Tarime) 75%, and (Serengeti) <75%; but lower in the region where the non-practising Luo ethnic groups reside, of Singida 10% and Mara (Rorya) <10%. (28 Too Many, Tanzania, 2013).

## **FGM in East Africa**

### **Pan East Africa Results**

During 2013, 28 Too Many published country profiles of FGM for Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania. Key findings are:

- FGM remains a significant practice across East Africa but has reduced in Ethiopia and Kenya with 16 (NCTPE/EGLDAM, 2007) and 10 (DHS, 1998 & 2008-9) percentage point decreases respectively over 10 years in the prevalence rate of FGM in 15-49 year olds
- FGM prevalence varies by region and incidence is mostly restricted to specific ethnic groups. Furthermore prevalence among ethnic groups can be consistent regardless of national context, e.g. the prevalence among ethnic Somalis in Ethiopia and Kenya Somalis is c.97% (DHS, 2008-9) which is similar to that of Somalia rather than national rates
- Successful interventions to end FGM tend to be community based, cooperative and inclusive (28 Too Many, Kenya & Ethiopia, 2013). Where programmes and laws are felt to be imposed on a community there is evidence of the practice going underground (28 Too Many, Uganda & Tanzania, 2013)
- Community members practising FGM are found in both church congregations and the wider community
- Community leaders including church leaders play a critical role in influencing attitudes to FGM and encouraging its abandonment
- Local churches and pastors can experience hostility and resistance when they are publicly opposed to FGM. (Tearfund, 2013).

## **Role of Leaders & Faith Leaders - International Aid Attempts**

### **Kenya**

Looking at the international picture, there were early attempts to persuade communities to abandon FGM, first by Christian missionaries and colonial authorities in the early 20th century and later by Western feminists in the 1960s and 1970s. These attempts were largely considered to be western imperialism and something imposed on communities by outsiders. The International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 marked a turning point. FGM was now being discussed in terms of health and human rights and it was acknowledged that efforts to eradicate FGM needed to be locally-led initiative with the communities, health professionals and policy makers involved (Feed the Minds, 2010)

Efforts to stop FGM began in Kenya in the early 20th century, with Christian missionaries denouncing FGM as 'barbaric' and it was banned. However nationalist and cultural support for FGM dampened these initiatives and FGM became a symbol of

African tradition, with Kenya's first President, Kenyatta, a strong proponent of the practice. During the UN Decade for Women in 1976 - 1985, the Kenyan government participated in a series of conferences and efforts to eradicate FGM were renewed. The movement to eradicate FGM continued with local partner, government ministries, national and international NGOs and the UN all involved. (UNICEF, 2010).

A National Action Plan for Accelerating the Abandonment of FGM/C in Kenya (2008-2012) was launched by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development. The National Policy calls on the government to take concrete steps to promote the abandonment of FGM through legislation, public education and outreach programmes, advocacy, media coverage, the empowerment of women and access to reproductive health and other support services (UNFPA/UNICEF, 2011). The Ministry of Health has also published a Reference Manual for Health Service Providers on the management of complications of FGM (Ministry of Health, undated).

A religious oriented approach refers to approaches which demonstrate that FGM is not compatible with the religion of a community and thereby lead to a change of attitude and behaviour. This has been used among both Muslim and Christian communities.

The Population Council has been developing a religious-oriented approach to work with the predominantly Muslim Somalis in the North Eastern Province (as part of the Frontiers in Reproductive Health Project). The purpose of this approach is to educate the community on the harm of FGM from a religious and medical perspective, to generate discussion in relation to the correct position of Islam on FGM and build consensus amongst religious scholars. The Population Council found that religious scholars are instrumental as they command respect and are opinion leaders. They are crucial in correcting misconceptions surrounding the Islamic position on FGM and can then educate the community. Community members expressed a willingness to listen to religious scholars who prescribed to a different view of FGM than what was commonly believed. Some religious leaders, scholars and community members openly declared their opposition to FGM and many more opposed FGM in private although they were unwilling to speak about the issue publicly. It is thought this technique will be far more successful than other interventions (such as Alternative Rites of Passage (ARPs)). The Population Council recommends continuing with religious clarifications, mainstreaming FGM in other development programmes, strengthening partnerships especially with Islamic Faith-based Organisations, targeting the whole community, especially youths and use of mass media. (Population Council, 2009).

A religious oriented approach has also been used within the Christian community, with the Seventh Day Adventist church run sensitisation programmes as to the health risks

to churchgoers in Kisii, accompanied by the message that FGM is against the Bible (28 Too Many, in-country research 2012).

The UNFPA/UNICEF report that in Kenya, 23 Muslim scholars and two Christian leaders made public declarations delinking FGM from religion (UNFPA/UNICEF, 2011), (28 Too Many, Kenya, 2013).

## **Uganda**

Looking at the international picture, there were early attempts to persuade communities to abandon FGM, first by missionaries and British authorities in the early 20th century, and later by Western feminists in the 1960s and 1970s. These attempts were largely considered to be Western imperialism and something imposed on communities by outsiders. The International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 marked a turning point. FGM was now being discussed in terms of health and human rights and it was acknowledged that efforts to eradicate FGM needed to be locally-led initiative with communities, health professionals and policy makers involved (Feed the Minds, 2010).

In Uganda, historical initiatives to end FGM have mainly started at a grassroots level, but also include NGO and government efforts (see further National Laws > Historic Position above). The Sabinu Elders Association (SEA) was founded in 1992 to promote peaceful development and preserve culture, but also to eliminate harmful traditions such as FGM (see section on Local Organisations below). The SEA was started after some members of the Sabinu community became concerned that their culture was being eroded. The SEA eventually sought support from President Museveni and the President contacted UNFPA. In 1996, UNFPA, in collaboration with SEA launched the Reproductive, Educative and Community Health Project (REACH) and established the first Sabinu Culture Day, which has been in existence ever since.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development is active in fighting FGM directly and indirectly in Kapchorwa. REACH receives partial funding from the Ministry to help carry out sensitisation programmes in the communities as well as involvement of officials from the Ministry in undertaking sensitisation in the community.

In partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF and the French Embassy in Uganda, the government (Social Development Fund) created a programme in 2011 to accelerate FGM abandonment initiatives in Uganda. The French Embassy invested 200,000 Euros (700,000,000 shillings) to be used on FGM projects in Amudat, Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Kween, Bukwo, and Kapchorwa. This issue will also address the cross-border issue with Kenya. In 2012, the French Embassy met with Ugandan MPs in effort to strengthen the commitment of MPs to ending FGM in the Karamoja region. The partnership programme with the French Embassy continues and uses a community and education

based approach that is culturally sensitive. They also call for a multi-sectored response to ending FGM and emphasise the need for girl's education and health staff involvement (Ugandan French Embassy website).

A religious orientated approach refers to approaches which demonstrate that FGM is not compatible with the religion of a community, thereby leading to a change of attitude and behaviour. The 'saved' or born again churches, notably the Pentecostal and Body of Christ Churches have taken action to combat FGM. Strategies have included open air crusades, preaching, seminars, excluding members if they participate in FGM, as well as supporting girls who have refused to be cut and have been rejected by their families.

One report on the Pokot (in Kenya) found that the Church is seen by the community as a 'unique platform in influencing at stopping this practice', as well as recognising the importance of education. They found that: 'The most significant decrease in the practice of female circumcision is observed in areas that have had schools for a long time and where the church is well established compared to marginalised sections of the larger Pokot district where communities are yet to embrace girl child education and Christianity' (Kristensen and Nairesiae, 2009). Despite reporting on Kenya this study is nevertheless instructive as the Pokot lives on both sides of the border. (28 Too Many, Uganda, 2013).

## **Ethiopia**

Ethiopia has a long tradition of internal informal community-based organisations like the 'idir' and 'iqub' - self-help associations that operate at the local level and offer mutual socio-economic support to their members. Formal civil society - that is, organisations with legal personality - is a recent development. Civil society was slow to take root under the Ethiopian Empire regime (1137-1974). It was also severely restricted under the rule of the Derg (a military junta) (1974-91) (International Centre for Not-for Profit Law, 2009). Modern civil society organisations were first established as FBOs in the 1930s, and beginning in the 1950s, welfare organisations like the Red Cross started to operate in Ethiopia. As a result of the 1973-74 and 1984-1985 famines, many more NGOs emerged with a focus on relief and humanitarian services. It was after the downfall of the Derg regime in 1991 that saw NGO numbers substantially increase.

There have been a large number of powerful campaigns and activities to prevent harmful traditional practices (HTPs) in Ethiopia in the last two decades, including FGM. Initially, the interventions were carried out by a small number of organisations, mainly the Ministry of Health through the Family Health Department.

In the 1990s, interest grew and over 80 different organisations participated in activities against HTPs, with the main focus on FGM, uvula cutting, milk teeth extraction, early

marriage and abduction (EGDLAM, 2007). There is now a large number of government and non-governmental organisations working on women's health issues.

Focus groups in the EGLDAM follow-up study highlighted that the public felt there are strong social and political movements for the abolition of FGM (EGLDAM, 2007), although campaigns have been strongest in urban areas, where The Ethiopian government has ensured that 'a solid policy and a programmatic basis ha[s] been laid', with HTPs being included in all the major policy and legal plans across the country, including policies on women, on health, on education and on social policy (EGDLAM, 2007). Other measures include the establishment of a Women's Affairs Office in 2005, an inter-ministerial body set up to combat violence against women, including HTPs, and the identification of FGM by the Women's Affairs Office as one of its major goals in its five year plan. In 2011 the ambitious Growth and Transformation Plan set progressive ambitious five year targets to almost eliminate FGM to 0.7% by 2014/15 (Boyden, Pankhurst and Taere, 2013). There has also been good collaboration between regional government and NGOs, e.g. between Women's Affairs Bureau and NGOs in Afar (Berggav, Talle and Tefferi, 2009).

A religious oriented approach refers to approaches which demonstrate that FGM is not compatible with the religion of a community, thereby leading to a change of attitude and behaviour. This approach has been used with both Christian and Muslim communities. Both the Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia have published declarations declaring in support of abandoning FGM (see further FGM and Religion above) and UNFPA/UNICEF report 207 religious leaders have been sensitised about FGM and have expressed their commitment to work for the total abandonment of the practice. In addition, 150 leading clerics representing five FBOs - the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Islamic Supreme Council, the Ethiopian Catholic Church, the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Seventh Day Adventist Church - agreed to admonish anyone who carried out the procedure (UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme, Annual Report 2011).

There have been some significant initiatives by religious groups, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and local and international NGOs and religious leaders are frequently important agents of change. For example, Ogaden Welfare and Development Association (OWDA) working in the Somali region has sensitising religious and held Model Family Award Ceremonies for girls and their families who have abandoned FGM, attended by influential religious leaders who publicly declare that FGM is contrary to Islam. Religious leaders have become the key to the project, and regularly sensitise the community on the negative effect of FGM and the fact that it has no roots in Islam (see National Organisations below for full profile).

Given the similarities with the practice of ethnic Somalis across the region, see commentary on the Population Council's religious-oriented approach in 28 Too Many's Kenya Report. (28 Too Many, Ethiopia, 2013).

## Tanzania

Whereas in both Kenya and Sudan, where the issue of FGM became politicised as part of the independence movement, no such high profile measures against those practising FGM was recorded in colonial Tanganyika (Winterbottom et al, 2009). There were, however, attempts by the British colonial authorities and Christian missionaries to abolish FGM (Mwaipopo, 2004). In relation to the Maasai, anti-FGM efforts should be seen within the broader context of the historical background, both colonial and post-colonial, of perceived threats to Maasai culture (see inset box 'The Maasai, the history of development and anti-FGM campaigns' in FGM by Ethnicity above). As discussed above (see FGM and 'lawalawa' in Reasons section above), following the Arusha Declaration of 1968, there were heavy-handed tactics involved in an attempt to stop FGM in Singida and Dodoma. This led to a backlash among the local Nyaturu ethnic group, who started to practise FGM on infants in secret, under the pretext of preventing lawalawa. Lawalawa is, in fact, an easily treatable vaginal or urinary tract infection but which many Nyaturu believe is a curse from the ancestors, which could only be cured by FGM – this belief has spread to neighbouring Gogo, Maasai and Chagga ethnic groups.

Since the 1980s, under Tanzania's second president, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, there was a move away from unjamaa towards economic liberalization and reduced state bureaucracy, a 'plethora of development organizations emerged, many offering services or education in areas such as literacy, hygiene, sexual health and agriculture' (Winterbottom et al, 2009).

The Government has adopted a National Plan of Action on the Eradication of FGM/C (2001-2015). In 2008, however, the government had 'only implemented several activities, including awareness raising and participation in training, all sponsored by donors' (USAID, 2008). It also has a National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children (2003). Gender equality and women's empowerment also forms a major component of the National Poverty Reduction Strategies under the goals on governance, education and health.

The Deputy Minister for Community Development and Children visited Tarime in December 2012 and commented, 'after visiting various villages of Tarime I have to admit that FGM is a big problem and it has deep roots based on the traditions. We must develop strategies to end the practice. The Ministry will now put in place an effective strategy to fight FGM in Tarime district with education on the effects of the malpractice targeting young girls, traditional elders, parents as well as FGM conductors getting top priority' (Tanzania Daily News, 2012). The LHRC reports that there is collaboration between the government and CSOs on the issue of FGM and GBV (LHRC Report, 2010). One study, however, previously commented that the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children has a wide-reaching mandate resulting in a lack of capacity and resources to advance issues effectively (Norad, 2007).

approaches which demonstrate that FGM is not compatible with the religion of a community, thereby leading to a change of attitude and behaviour. Religious organisations, such as the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) and the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA), are involved in efforts to combat FGM, using various strategies or combinations of strategies.

The National Muslim Council of Tanzania BAKWATA has issued statements condemning FGM on Islamic grounds. In Mara region, which is predominantly Christian, religious leaders have been the most frequent source of information on FGM, with a study by CCT finding that the people receive education from the following sources: 54% from religious leaders, 30% from the media, 8% by NGOs/CBOs and 6% from government officials/political leaders. The percentage of education carried out by religious leaders highlights the importance of engaging with FBOs and churches to sensitise and advocate against FGM. CCT's Women's Development, Children and Gender Programme, through Sunday school programmes in local churches, has sensitised over 700 children on FGM in rural Tarime district in Mara. Churches in Dodoma and Singida have also raised awareness of FGM, sometimes in collaboration with the Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Network (AFNET). Although the church has been raising awareness of FGM, in general, this appears to be in an uncoordinated manner and not as part of a broader programme.

In addition to providing education, in Mara, several different denominations of the church have provided shelter and refuge to girls fleeing FGM and, in some communities, have been a lone voice speaking out against FGM, sometimes in the face of violent opposition. Girls from these religious groups are still able to marry despite not being mutilated; they do not seem to face the same discrimination as their peers. This indicates the potential for the community to accept a different view of FGM (Forward, 2010).

In 2013, there was a meeting of bishops from Singida, Dodoma and Mara, in which there was enthusiasm for developing a church response to the issue. Tearfund partners (CCT and the African Inland Church of Tanzania (AICT)) are developing pilots in Mara utilising the Tearfund CCMP (Church and Community Mobilisation Process), integrating FGM through community conversations, which is a human rights-based approach.

All references are to Waritay and Wilson, 2012 unless otherwise indicated.

(28 Too Many, Ethiopia, 2013).

## **Role of Faith Leaders**

Community Leaders including Church Leaders play a critical part in influencing attitudes to FGM and encouraging its abandonment. As 80% of Africans attend a faith building weekly, there is great potential for education, discipleship, mentoring and role modelling. (Africa – UK, 2012)

### **Case Study in Tanzania**

Tearfund, a Christian international NGO, commissioned research in 22 rural communities across three districts of Tanzania: Mara, Dodoma and Singida. The prevalence of FGM in these three districts was found to be significantly higher than the national average, which is 14.6 per cent of women aged 15-49. In Mara, 39.9 per cent of women had undergone FGM/C, while the figure was 51 per cent in Singida and Dodoma. (DHS, 2010)

The aims of the research were to: understand the current extent of FGM and the key drivers behind the practice; explore the current responses of local churches to FGM, and document any expectations communities and FGM survivors had about church participation in this issue.

The key points of the findings were that: a legal framework opposed to FGM is in existence in Tanzania, providing opportunity for prosecution and reduction in practice; Prosecution of FGM is minimal, and government intervention has been limited since the laws<sup>6</sup> were passed the practice is being conducted increasingly on younger girls (sometimes infants) and in secret, for fear of prosecution; Community members practising FGM are found in both church congregations and the wider community; Traditional leaders play a critical role in perpetuating FGM – acting as ‘gatekeepers of the cultural practice’; and social pressure to undergo FGM is high, linked with marriage opportunities, peer pressure and the economic benefits for practitioners of the cutting ceremonies.

The drivers of FGM/C varied between communities, but key themes emerged in discussions with community members. These drivers were seen to be a critical part of any response to FGM in Tanzania.

- Preparation for marriage and/or childbirth: ‘Uncut’ women have to be cut ‘to become a proper woman’; and FGM marks the transition from childhood to adulthood.
- Prevention of promiscuity/ prostitution: Controlling sexual desire to prevent prostitution/promiscuity.
- Traditional beliefs and practices: FGM as a blood offering to appease ancestors (mizimu); and ‘uncut’ women are seen as a ‘curse’ and are segregated and stigmatised as a result.

- Social norms and social pressures: Pressure to undergo FGM brought to bear by traditional leaders, parents, wider community and even peers; and some girls resort to cutting themselves in response to peer pressure, if their parents oppose the practice.
- Source of income: 'business issue' for ngaribas (circumcisers) – traditional elders and community members who participate in FGM ceremonies benefit financially from FGM; and the cost of cutting (paid to ngaribas, with a share for traditional elders) ranges from 5,000 Tsh (Tanzanian shillings – approximately £2 or \$3) to 10,000 Tsh (approximately £4 or \$6).
- Link with male circumcision: Girls seek similar social acceptance and transition into adulthood as boys.
- Lawalawa: Communities in Singida and Dodoma reported that FGM/C is believed to cure a disease (lawalawa) of the female (and male) genitalia, which is thought to be a punishment from the local gods. This has, however, been found to be vaginal and urinary tract infections that can be cured with conventional medicine.

### **Recommendation from Churches in responding to FGM**

The following recommendations are made to help build a broader church-based response, ending FGM in Tanzania:

- Raise awareness and provide information by facilitating community-driven discussion sessions on harmful consequences of FGM and health issues related to FGM (including dispelling myths such as lawalawa), as well as Tanzanian anti-FGM laws (including knowledge and reporting).
- Discussions should be organised to include a variety of community members, including: schools, church congregations, Sunday School, youth groups, and community meetings.
- Create alternative rites of passage and facilitate the development of alternative rites of passage for girls through community participation. The community needs to break the link between FGM and male circumcision by encouraging male circumcision to take place in hospitals, and provide incentives and alternative ceremonies for girls refusing FGM.
- Become a 'safe' space by the Church facilitating 'safe' discussion spaces for community members to discuss openly issues relating to FGM in a non-judgemental way. It should provide places of refuge for young women who are facing pressure to be cut in their community.

- Support the development of alternative sources of income for ngaribas (traditional circumcisers) by facilitating entrepreneurial activities and support business development of ngaribas willing to discontinue the practice of FGM.
- Challenge harmful effects of cultural traditions.
- Ensure key local stakeholders are all engaged fully in discussion groups of men, women, boys and girls from the community, traditional leaders and community and religious leaders (including teachers, doctors, youth leaders)
- Promote changed views among young men, and other community members, on what constitutes an 'acceptable wife'.
- Facilitate broader partnerships and collaboration.
- Engage and coordinate partnerships both nationally and locally to achieve a nationally coordinated church response, interfaith collaboration between Christians and Muslims and a community response (engaging schools, churches, mosques and community leaders).
- Enable advocacy and promote effective lobbying to amend the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act 1998 to ban FGM on women over 18 years and to increase fines for violations. The needs to be adequate law enforcement and prosecution of cases, and the need to show that gender equality and the illegality of FGM are adequately enshrined in any new constitution (under the current constitutional reform process). Lobbying needs to strengthen national capacity for improving the quality of health delivery systems and the level of education for women and girls (UNFPA, 2007) and to strengthen the National Plan of Action on the Eradication of FGM.

## **Overall Lessons Learnt & Proposals for Action**

From 28 Too Many's research over the last nine years into FGM in East Africa, we summarise overall lessons learnt and a call for action.

### **Kenya**

- Sustainable funding.
- Considering FGM within the framework of the millennium development goals.
- Facilitating education on health and FGM.

- Improvements in managing health complications of FGM, tackling the medicalisation of FGM, more resources for sexual and reproductive health education, as well as research and funding on the psychological consequences of FGM.
- Increased advocacy and lobbying.
- Increased law enforcement and equipping of law enforcement agencies.
- Increased use of media.
- Recognising role of faith-based organisations.
- Greater use of partnerships and collaborative research.

(28 Too Many, Kenya, 2013)

## **Uganda**

- Recognising cultural significance of FGM
- Incorporating other ethnic groups and internal migrants within FGM strategies
- Sustainable funding
- Considering FGM within the Millennium Development Goals and post-MDG framework
- Facilitating education on health and FGM and advocating for girls' education
- Improvements in managing health complications of FGM, and more resources for sexual and reproductive health education
- Increased advocacy and lobbying
- Increased law enforcement
- Maintain effective media campaigns
- Encouraging faith-based organisations to act as agents of change and be proactive in ending FGM
- Increased collaborative projects and networking

(28 Too Many, Uganda, 2013)

## **Tanzania**

- Adopting culturally relevant programmes
- Sustainable funding
- Considering FGM within the Millennium Development Goals and post-MDG framework
- Facilitating education
- Improvements in access to health facilities and in managing health complications of FGM and lawalawa
- Increased advocacy and lobbying
- Increased law enforcement
- Maintain effective media campaigns
- Encouraging FBOs to act as agents of change and be proactive in ending FGM
- Increased collaborative projects and networking
- Further research

(28 Too Many, Tanzania, 2013)

## **Ethiopia**

- Adopting culturally relevant programmes
- Sustainable funding
- Considering FGM within the Millennium Development Goals and post-MDG framework
- Facilitating access to education particularly for girls
- Improvements in access to health facilities and in managing health complications of FGM
- Dealing with the transition from Type III infibulation to Type I 'sunna' to ensure total abandonment
- Increased advocacy and lobbying

- Increased law enforcement
- Maintain effective media campaigns
- Encouraging FBOs to act as agents of change and be proactive on women's health issues.
- Increased networking and information sharing.

(28 Too Many, Ethiopia, 2013)

## **Conclusion**

The findings of these four Country Reports show that despite strong social resistance, progress towards FGM abandonment can be achieved through well focussed, funded, incremental programmes.

Many initiatives seen by the author in her thirteen years working in Africa including rescue centres, Christian alternative rites of passage (Feed the Minds, 2011) and confirmation class work (Sister Ephigenia W. Gachiri, IBVM, 2006).

There is great potential to work together as a faith movement across East Africa and see FGM ended in a generation.

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## **Bride Price and Gender Based Violence. A Case study of South Sudan**

By

**Andrew Apiny**



### **Introduction**

This case study was carried out in Western Bahr el Ghazal State among the Luo and Dinka ethnic groups the two communities have different culture and Socio-economic and social Characteristics. Dinka their main economic activities is keeping livestock everything whether marriage, ceremonies, fine and among others is animals is not an option animals play big role, during the marriage ceremony bull is slaughter, in big occasion, and murder someone animals are to be pay as fines for the bloodshed nothing valuable than animals.

While Luo are agriculturalists, crop farming is their economic activity, the communities also own some livestock, of which most of the cattle are kept with neighbouring Dinka tribes.

This case study therefore is intended to shed light on some of the problems happen to women due to culture practice basically the bridge price and gender Based Violence. In this case study I have chosen Dinka ethnic group as the main subject of my discussion because it is where the cases of gender violent are more frequently occur due to bride price paid. Again, it's where a lot of information on the subject under discussion are available.

However, the study is not limited to that but will further include Luo of Wau South Sudan because they have some similarity culture practice and the fact that I have personal experience and by the virtue of being Luo myself together with knowledge I have learned for long period I will use that to support my argument.

### **Cattle on women: it worse to be woman in South Sudan**

The question arise between cattle and man who married women? Among the Dinka communities, culturally cattle hold marriage tightly up to the end, no animals no

marriage. Animals is the binding factor that retain matrimonial from falling apart if you confiscate dowry away from marriage you have issue certificate of divorce in Dinka Culture. Cattle and women are inseparable when it comes to issue of marriage in the mention tribe. This kind of traditional detrimental practice against women has killed the womanhood in the society today. Girls when getting marriage she is advice by the parents to be submissive to her husband and keep quiet whenever man speak or abuse her never to say anything bad to man; she should also give all respect to her man and expected nothing in return. In any event she misbehave toward her husband or immediate family it will result into withdrawal of one of the best animals from the in-law and the girl's parents have no objection in such as this case.

On the other hand, when woman become infertile due to unknown causes the dowry are imperilled to be withdrawn; reason as mention earlier on bride price paid are the attachment between husband and wife meant specifically for children in event of such incident where there is no child girl parents are not surprise about the complication. In some scenario where woman has children with man she is fatigue with relationship and decide to break up marriage man will normal remain with children and he will not claim any single animal from in-law because of the present of the children but in some situation where there is no children all the animals will be return.

In some other clans within Dinka ethnics the withdraw dowry are determine by the cause by marital infertile cause should it happen to be man who is dysfunction then the dowry will not be withdraw instead the one of the family member will substitute who usually cousin. However, the cousin who bear children with woman doesn't has legal right to claim children to be his children why because he didn't pay any price. Beside woman she aware of the subject matter she cannot called the man whom she slept with and had children as her husband not even her friend the same dismal point to man who was contract to do the multiplication he is aware about his terms and condition apply.

This woman who slept with two men will not be accuse of any adultery act either by husband or relative same to the man who was contracted he is not guilt either. But this culture is contrary to Bible teaching Galatian 5:19:21 said,

*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Women in South Sudan suffered injustice in the name of dowry it become headache to South Sudanese women are force to marriage unwillingly in earlier age and suffer

domestic violence which has been perpetrated against women as such they are able to convince themselves that they can do anything to stop this impunity. Girls are vulnerable to gender-based violence because the age factor such have made them helplessness and hopelessness of the experience of being a girl.

One woman shared tearing feeling Abuok Akol said interview, "Being women in this nation it's better not to be born on this world; because you are enforce to married anyone man not of your age, your choice at the wrong time, in the wrong way, for the wrong purpose, and you enter in relationship crying live complaining and die unsatisfied' women in this nation are very unfortunate to be born human being, I because I don't see any sense of humanity in me both to my parents and to my husband my parents don't see me as human being but as source of their family income that is why when I was with my parents the care given to me doesn't indicate that ampart of the family members; but as someone who will be sold some time to come which is the reality of this life; the same thing to my husband he don't see my as wife or human but look at me as property he bought from the market he can do anything with me anytime not question from my parents, I really find so difficult to be women in this country". The behaviour is contrary bible teaching.

Abuok represent hundreds of women undergoing such abuse of human right; women have suffer dearly even the increase in cattle raids is partially a result of young men needing cows to pay for their wives and in course of fighting its same women who suffer in the end.

The meaning of marriage in South Sudanese context is based on dowry, even if one has wife but don't pay anything one cannot boast he is married even though one has children with lady, the children are not his; the parent of the girl will come anytime to take the children because they have the right to take the children include the mother and there is nowhere one can go make any appeal since this is the custom. It is difficult for women to escape from such abusive marriages because animals implication though woman doesn't like relationship she force to stay in such horrible marital. It's worse to be woman in South Sudan you face a vicious cycle of violence and abuse in all aspect of life because of cattle.

Frustrated by the prohibitive cost of getting married, some aspiring grooms go into debt such condition force young people to raid cattle from another communities to clear the debt. Restive Jonglei from the Conflict's Roots, to Reconciliation. 2013, p7.Elizabeth Lacey noted that.

Disentangle the roots of the conflict is linked to social value of the cattle which are being raided. Cattle are viewed as a measure of wealth by the majority of people in South Sudan. The value of cattle lies not only in the important utilitarian aspects of milk and meat provided by the cattle, but also in the role of cattle in bride-price practices. When South Sudanese youth talk about girls “they cannot keep off the subject of cattle, for flirting leads to marriage and this involves the transference of cattle,” and old men spend many hours sitting under trees discussing past and present bride-price payments.

Dowry didn't only abuse women but robbed their rights as human being. The bride price paid silence women and subjected them to subjugation.

### **Culture on woman: the implication of being women in the context South Sudanese Culture.**

To understand the complexity surrounding women injustice in south Sudan is to know the belief and meaning of women in the context of south Sudanese. Its then one will able to comprehensively the subject matter. Most of South Sudanese cultures favor men than women in all aspect, socially, economically, physiologically and psychological women are less concern when it comes to family economic polarization within the society men often play a principle role in determining the physiology need of women as well as the health need Since men are decision makers and in control of all the resources.

Culturally women don't have right to own any property in the house even when husband die they don't have that right. The question is why, man believe that they are the breadwinner but this argument is not universally acceptable fact in all families; in some homes it's actually women who are the wage-earner some men are just there to be seen the fact that they have paid dowry doesn't mean that they are responsible their affordability to pay dowry it ends there. In such homes its women who actually provide food and general households' needs. Men had become big baby these days they are depending on their wives for clothes, feeding as far as in decision making. Christian men with many wives didn't only violate Bible teaching but failed to be responsible people to provide something to their families therefore they find it very rough these days to earn respect from children and wives; they are now struggle to maintain their manhood and dignity but they cannot since they don't make decision over what they don't provide and to discipline children they don't support. Despite that bible tell women and children show respect to each other. Colossians 3:18-21

*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

The prevalence of women human rights violation and discrimination against women in South Sudan is rooted deeply in the culture this is visible in the family structure or ranking. In both Luo and Dinka culture man is the head of the household and children become the second, placing women in the third in paterfamilias, this arrangement deny women power to have saying in family affairs yet the bible is very clear on this matter of justice for all in Micah 6:8 we read

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

The God's focus is that justice should be done for all but the concept in these communities women are seen as just passing by or by the way people they are not permanent either in their father homes or so-called married home. Bride price deny them ownership of property not only that it also deny them women human right and tie them to unbearable marital affair.

Akello is daughter to Okello Uyu. Okello has four boys and two girls he had eight plots in Wau he decided to distributed them to his four sons and deny his two daughters. When the two daughters heard about it, they came to him and asked, "Dad what about us don't we have right to have plots in this family?" The father responded, "Of course you don't have a right to inheritance or own any property because you are not permanent in this house. Very soon you will get marriage to someone where you will stay but my sons will not only remain in this family forever but will bring women who will bring children, grandchildren who will carry on our family genealogy forever and ever."

The daughters then asked "What about our mother? Where is her plot?"

"Your mother doesn't have a plot also because these properties are belong to me and my sons. But for your mother, she cannot own or inheritance any property; because I married her with my property. How come that someone you married with your dowry come and own your things? The only privileges she has she can choose to live in any of her sons house, but own plot, that is not possible."

Women are more marginalized in South Sudan. women position in their parent home and presumable home of their own are completely extermination; all the rights and decisions are tie in the hand of man; the bride price paying had empowered man to have power over the bride forever and subjected women to be person of yes and Amen all the time without objection. As such husband from the genesis to the ultimate he has

all the right to discipline the children and the wife which usually involve domestic violent and this behavior are no taken as an abuse and because of the culture the victim (women) don't see this kind of discipline as an abuse as they are cultural subjected to believe that the man has all the mandate to discipline his women and women have no saying.

### **Illiteracy on women:**

The vast majority illiteracy people in South Sudan are women. Women are being marginalized educational because of the cultural practices; as matter of fact most communities don't allow their daughters to go to school. But Ephesians 5:29 talk of caring for our communities

*"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church"*

Christ devoted himself to teach his disciples for three same principles Christians today should do to nourish and cherishes women to have better society. But disbelieving in women had made most of women to be disbelief in their abilities and became conversant to it to the extent they consider themselves they are nobody but men are the one to go to school. What is worse mention here they don't know it's their legal right to learn as human being because of this mindset they are not bother about being an illiteracy people. One young lady told me on interviewed that they don't believe in themselves that they can also succeed and become like men in life academically. Looking at this kind of mentality; most women are halt on the idea that only men can climb up the ladder of success, this believe is rooted in culture practice on women.

Culture practice on women has weakened their capabilities and attitudes to face the reality of life; the worse side of it; it has laid down a very appalling foundation in women culture of self-inferior complexity.

Combine to lack of properly polices put in place to safeguard women rights to go to school had even make it worse than ever before. Women are being mistreat right from their youngest age to when they got marriage they still face the same treatment. Even if they have genius issue to protest, however, given the policies and custom on the ground there is no proper way to handle cases of gender-based violence and in most cases women have little knowledge of the concept of their 's rights. The very few who

know their rights lack competence and trustworthy institutions where they can take their issues to.

There is an inequity in education system in South Sudan mostly female. According to General Education Strategy Plan, Promoting Learning for all identified that cultural practice" of early marriage and early pregnancy has the major factor that diminishing girl's education in addition to social feminist's exploitation and oppression are rooted in the structure of patriarchical capitalism. Women in south Sudan face a vicious cycle of violence and abuse in all spheres of life.

Most parents believe about girls it is advantageous they believe that educating girls is wasting of resources and times because girls are seen as an asset mainly for somebody 'husbands'. So educating girls is wasting of resources on girls who will be marriage to someone. This resulting into girl's denial of equal right to learn due to cultural practices.

Beside, is the economically complexity on women, it had contributed badly it drag girls to pursue their studies , lack of sanitary facilities, affecting girls disproportionately combine to most of schools in South Sudan are not accessible due to long distances. Girls need to gain confidence in themselves as well as knowledge on the gender and human rights dimensions it's only then the mentality of seeing girl as currency will diminish.

### **Community on women:**

Culture practices and bridge price had destroy women dignity in South Sudan. In Dinka culture like any other culture in South Sudan women belong to the community. She is community wife, asset, if anyone mess up with her it duty of the elder of that particular clan to handle the case in accordance to their custom. The community say She is our wife not your wife, she our daughter. Luo community culture of South Sudan had some similarities with that Dinka culture particular in area of right over women. The two ethnics view women as community asset no one single person can mess up with women not even husband when there is serious marital problem between husband and wife, the couple has no right to divorce each other like that the elders must be inform first and come to sort out the issue in accordance to their custom and whatever they say is the final word. Even if the couple don't agree with their suggestion they will be force to accept the elder's suggestion. However in most cases women are

the one who suffer mostly than men, particular in scenarios where husband is very brutally and harsh women suffer a lot and she doesn't has right to divorce.

What give power to the community to control husband and wife to stay together or divorce because of the community to understand this logic behind this it go back to the binding factor.

Marriage in Dinka community it's not one man business it collectively responsibility of the community right from searching the lady all the way to marriage. During the marriage preparation the close relatives such as uncles, brothers, cousins, maternal uncles and friends contribute animals toward young boy marriage with all these contribution came power to the community to control not only women but even man. When man had issue with women the first thing come to mind is uncles contribution beside that woman is expected to give ultimate respect to the husbands relatives an misbehaviour toward elders will result to withdrawn of one animal respect and feeding community is highly demand from the woman.

Generally speaking marriage in most south Sudanese culture bride price is seen as bonding factors between the two couple and the pride of husband and weapon to use to intimidate women and take away their powers, rights and turning them into community's commodities to be own and passed from family to family.

It's through this channel bride price brought in the issue of wife inheritability, bride price give community an extreme power to inherit wife when husband die. The community elders sit and decide who should take over the late (deceased) such meeting are held in absence of women and later she will be called and told what the elder had agreed upon and who should take over.

Woman has no objection on elders ruling she accept although she doesn't like the man had been agreed upon by the elders she has to accept it anyway. On the other hand, the parents of the girls have no business in this matter, they are just watching and later encourage their girl to respect and accept the decision made by the deceased's parents why because the animals paid. No matter how worse is the situation it is none of their business they have gotten what they want therefore, taking care of woman is no longer their responsibility it's absolutely deceased's parent's task.

Woman have no place to run to, the kind of institution we have doesn't favor women right in anyway and if she attempt to do so the elders will shift in immediately and

block the woman and withdraw the case saying that the case is to be handle in accordance to customary laws. This is where women are left with no word to say because every marital affairs are handle in accordance with tradition practices where the right of women were violent and buried alive.

### **Rape and sexual violence**

To understand the sexual violent among South Sudanese communities one must begin to understand the value of animals. Cattle is social economic of Dinka ethnic group; they value cattle than anything in life. Cattle are not only viewed as a measure of wealth and the important serviceable aspects of pride of manhood but in the role of cattle in bride-price practices. Man abuse their wives sexual in the name of bridge price, I married her with a lot of cattle I can play sex with her as much as I want and anytime I need it.

The bride price paid to their parents make women voiceless despite the sexual abuse they are going through.

Sexual violent is mostly practice among differences communities of South Sudan it cut across both married and unmarried are all victim of sexual violent. By the nature women don't asked for sex men took advantage of that to abuse women sexually, although it connect to bridge price paid, because in most cases nothing is done to women without quoted the dowry. Its dowry which rape women and contribute to sexual violent for many years in this nation. There is power in bride price paid most women revealed that they suffered a lot sexual violent because of dowry. The dowry had gave husband ultimate right over women to play sex with women at any time and in the way men like. One young newly married from Luo tribe shared her sex affairs with me she said,

"My husband he has never ask me not even prepare me for sex whenever he want sex he just jump on and by force. Since I married this man I have not enjoy or play sex with him personal, although he enjoy it and play it with me almost every day I have never felt sex and enjoy myself because the way he play sex with me; it since I got marriage to him all the sex he played I have never got prepared psychological and physical. As result of this kind of sex I have undergone personal I loss the appetite for the sex completely. What is worse mention when I asked him why he always jump on me whenever he want to play sex he said to me how can I ask sex from you and you are

mine and I married you for this very purpose, of course you are right its part of the married but it shouldn't be done by force but in love."

The cases related to domestic violence among South Sudanese women are extremely high and tremendous but they are kept secretly. Most of women fear to reveal this top secret to anyone except among themselves there is because they find it meaningless to bring it to light since there was no one has been punished in the communities because of sexual abuse such would have given them courage to rise such matter to institution concern.

The customary law are in favour of men's interests and more horrified to women as matter of fact they customary laws allows husband to 'discipline' his wife.

Therefore women appeal to customary courts its exaggerate the matter and the fact that men are the decision maker and implementers have even make it more worse some women who tried to sue their husbands to customary court end up being sentenced prisons by the courts.

Remember nothing is done here outside culture practice everything done in the context of that culture and anything that touch culture in most cases its women suffer women who suffered in the end. Women are continue suffering silently without being heard even though they are heard there is no appropriate environment provide for women to take care for women's challenges.

### **The way forward**

The called in which churches is called to do is very challenges, churches have no excuses no matter challenge it may be. Churches to fight for this cultural injunction the bride price and gender based violent by rising up and bring this kind of culture practice to end.

Churches to initiative that speaking out against violence and the stigma associated with it and advocacy on behalf of victims and survivors of violence.

NGOs, churches and government to create awareness among the communities the challenges associate with bride price and come up mechanism to assist the victim and survivors of violent and making their voices heard.

Create conducive environment in the churches that support survivors of sexual violent and fight against stigma and discrimination by advocating for the law to be enforced in customary laws and ensure that perpetrators of such violence are brought to the book.

1. Elizabeth Lacey: Restive Jonglei from the Conflict's Roots, to Reconciliation. Institute for Justice and Reconciliation Working Paper December 2013. 2013,
2. General Education Strategy Plan, Promoting Learning for all. Juba, Republic of South Sudan, and January 2012-2017

## **In search of youth relation in a gender insensitive culture: Biblical assumptions**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The most challenging moment for any parent is how to manage teenagers. This is a moment of either make or break the young generation depending on how they are handled. The youth makes up a sizable population in our society and their interest must be taken into account. The paper will try to address the general and specific characteristics of youth; their world view, challenges and potential for the growth of the church and society. More specifically, the paper will address the issue of gender amongst the youth with clear reference to their sexuality, sociology, spirituality, and leadership potential. Biblical reference for case studies will be provided to enrich our understanding of youth and gender studies. In many parts of the world young people have been used by political activists to bring change. Most street demonstrations are majorly made up of young people. The problem is that majority of them are vulnerable and may be easily manipulated to indulge in chaotic demonstrations for a course they may not be directly concerned. The unemployment among the youth is a big challenge as it leads most of them to get involved in criminal activities to make ends meet.

Gender disparity in most of our societies have not been so kind to the girl child and this has also contributed to low morale among them thus reducing their bargaining power in the job market as well as in other opportunities. As I am going to address this topic, it is my concern that the church has not done much to reduce the gap of opportunities available for youth of both genders. The leadership of the church is composed of elderly folk who would still use the old standard age of 45 for youth to cling on power.

### **WHO IS YOUTH?**

In view of this the first question we must ask is who is youth? Being youth and being young are two different things. A person of 45-50 years would still regard himself as

young. And indeed young is he. However, a person of 50-60 years, would also see himself as young. The argument here is that age is a mere number. But numbers are important to the extent that they may be used to define our limitations. An office may require that its holder must be of a certain age and retirement also of a certain age. A landmark case was witnessed in Kenya during the election of a diocesan bishop. Some voters protested the election of a bishop on the ground that he was not yet forty years at least by some months as required by the church constitution. They argued that the bishop in question had tampered with his age and technically was older than his actual age. They therefore presented a case that he was still young to be elected a bishop according to the constitution. The case dragged for more than one year. The presiding judge asked the complainant "is there any other reason why you protest the election of this clergy as your bishop other than on the ground of age?" they agreed in unison that there is no any other ground. Then the judge made the shocking ruling: "that be the case then, this clergy today is older than the time you petitioned his election. Today he is two years older, thus meeting your legal requirement for a bishop. You can now behold your bishop!"

In this brief, we define youth as the people between ages 10 and 24. This covers a wide range of experiences and transitions that includes an early phase (between ages 10 and 14), a middle phase (between 15 and 20), and a later phase (between 21 and 24). Young people in all three age groups face major events that affect their future well-being. At the younger end of the age spectrum, youth are still children in many respects. By the time they reach the middle phase, youth are transitioning from puberty to maturity. This group can be considered adolescents. By the time a person finishes this stage of life, they have set in motion many of the events that will determine their life path. Finally, youth ages 21 through 24 are also young adults. They are still discovering their interests and talents and making commitments—to work, to a spouse, and often to becoming a parent. All of these phases form the experience of being a youth. This brief addresses youth as a whole group in some sections, but specifies where the youth experience varies significantly by age group<sup>1</sup>

Number is very important, at the same time it must be supported by mental maturity. More often than not some people who are older in age are less mature in reasoning compared to their younger counterparts. Being young and youth are potential characteristics that must inform how much service we are likely to render as we are aided by mental resourcefulness. According to the United Nations report on Global Situation of Youth, there is today one person in five who is between the ages of 15 and

24 years. Altogether there are over one billion youth and they constitute a formidable force.<sup>1</sup>

As adults we know that gender and sexuality are far from one size fits all. Some girls prefer to play the roles of boys and vice versa. Some children may feel more comfortable playing with peers of the opposite sex, or may frequently cross-dress. Others may be exploring their sexual orientation, or seeking to understand the sexual or gender identity of their parents or siblings. While exploring gender identity and sexual orientation are a normal part of kids' development, there is no user's manual for talking to your kids about these issues.

One of the tasks of growing up is discovering who you are and what that means about what you like and who you like. Most young people -- about 85 per cent -- live in developing countries with 60 per cent in Asia. The annual growth rates of youth population have slowed down in every region during the 1990s, according to United Nations statistics. Developed regions, and Eastern Asia -- comprising China, Japan and others -- suffered a negative growth rate. As a proportion of total population between 1980 and 1995, the number of young people has dropped everywhere except Africa due to the culture of preferring bigger families. Despite intense lobbying for birth control, there is still fear among many families that the bigger the size of a family the better for ones future security. Again the culture of preferring male child to girl child has also affected many people who are often tempted to go on until a male child is born! Ironically, despite the fact that many Africans are now getting good exposure due to education, some of them are still captives to such cultures which give male child profound imminence.

In industrialized countries and East Asia, declining fertility rates have created aging populations, and social and economic policies are sometimes tilted in their favour. At the same time, middle-aged people still consider themselves young -- an occurrence known as the "prolongation of youth" -- which is now considered a global phenomenon. In Kenya there is a very unpopular saying that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow. I call it unpopular because the older politicians who are moneyed never allow the youth to challenge them during the elections. They use the phrase "leaders of tomorrow" to block their effort to leadership. The role of the youth during the elections is limited to two major assignments: acting as agents for the politicians even to a point of causing violence against the opponents; and also participating as faithful voters. Due to their needs for money and by extension employment, the youth are vulnerable are often used as hirelings for violent activities.

There are over 1.8 billion young people in the world today, 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries, where they tend to make up a large proportion of the population. There are more than 235 million youth in India and 225 million in China alone.

The number of adolescents and youth today is at an all-time high, but that number might not increase considerably in coming decades if global fertility continues to decline. The proportion of young people is actually set to decline from 17.6 per cent in 2010 to 13.5 per cent in 2050.<sup>1</sup>

Twelve percent of young people live in countries with high per capita incomes (more than \$10,000 per year), whereas two thirds of the world's youth are growing up in countries with extremely low per capita annual incomes below \$1,000.

However, growing up in a developed or advanced nation today does not mean that youth problems are minimized. Despite relatively high living standards, rates for psychological disorders, social problems and physical illnesses among youth in these countries are equally on the rise. Alcohol and drug abuse, violent crime (even by students against their colleagues) smoking, eating disorders, lack of exercise, and suicide are all prevalent problems among youth in the developed world.<sup>1</sup>

## YOUTH CULTURE

Culture is among the most complicated words in the English language. It refers to the processes by which the symbolic systems (e.g. common sense, "usually way of doing things"; traditions and rituals, framework for understanding experience, etc.) characteristically shared by a group of people are maintained and transformed across time. Despite the appearances of stability, culture is dynamic, historical process. However, when we talk about youth culture, we refer to those processes and symbolic systems young people share that are, to some degree, distinctive from those of their parents and other adults in their community.<sup>1</sup> There is debate about whether or not youth culture exists. Some researchers argue that youth's values and morals are not distinct from those of their parents, which means that youth culture is not a separate culture. Just because we see the presence of what seems to be a youth culture today does not mean that this phenomenon extends to all generations of young people. Additionally, peer influence varies greatly between contexts and by sex, age, and social status, making a single "youth culture" difficult, if not impossible, to define.<sup>1</sup>

Others argue that there are definite elements of youth society that constitute culture, and that these elements differ from those of their parents' culture. Janssen et al. have used the terror management theory (TMT) to argue for the existence of youth culture. TMT is a psychological concept that hypothesizes that culture originates from an attempt to cope with the knowledge of mortality.<sup>1</sup>

Youth are not people whom one would wish to take for granted just because of their vulnerability. Majority of them have been to school, but currently jobless, thus idling around social centres. The most important person in the life of youth is the parent followed by their peers. Parent's role in building a culture of responsibility in the growing adult is so critical to the latter's future that if it is not well done then there will be inevitable consequences.

Today, two thirds of the world's children who never go to school or who drop out before completion are girls. As a result, adult women make up two thirds of the one billion people who are illiterate. In Kenya there are some communities which still practice Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the practice has had adverse effects on the education and development of the girl child. Despite the government ban on the practice, several cases are frequently reported with some cases leading to deaths of innocent girls. The worst part of it is that some local leaders also incite their own people to continue with the FGM in case they want their girls to grow up responsible adults.

The other problem facing the girl child is forced early marriage. Pre-arranged marriages and in most cases without the knowledge and consent of the girl child has been rampant among some communities in Kenya especially the Samburus and Maasais. A small girl becomes a mother at a tender age, and will be forced to take responsibility that is the preserve of the adults.

The other problem is early pregnancies which are prevalent in many communities. The rise in cases of young girls dropping out of schools because of pregnancies is not surprising especially in a country where the level of poverty is on the increase. Young girls, apart from being seen as sources of revenues for their poor parents, are also the target of assaults from the boys and sometimes from their own teachers! Just a little gift is enough to ruin the life of a girl child completely. Most of the teen pregnancies are actually by the young boys who are equally too young and poor to take any personal responsibility.

It is therefore for this reason, that many births are still experienced in Africa, thus leading to an increase in youth population. Safe sex is rarely considered by majority from the low income sector.

## **SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS**

Peer pressure is one of the worst nightmares affecting the youth today. The critical issue here is the inability of the young generation to deal with limitations associated with generational pressure. Modernity has put a premium on the youth in such a manner that one would consider himself a failure if he/she cannot live up to the expectation of their peers. In a culture where competition is almost everywhere: for job opportunity; for attention before others; to appear better looking than others; attention for love; resources and above all, who is who before others.

Failure to cope with such pressure has had a devastating effect on the youth. This has led to numerous cases of depressions and cases of suicides in colleges and even at homes. In all regions, depression is an emerging problem for young people. Adolescents undergo a very rapid process of physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual development, more than in any other phase in life.

## **YOUTH AND HEALTH**

Studies have found that while young women from western nations have special problems such as eating disorders, young women from developing countries are at higher risk for suicide. A 49-nation study -- based on data from the World Health Organization -- found that in developing countries, the female suicide rate is 75 per cent greater than the male rate for ages 5 to 24 years. Nordic countries have had suicide prevention and education programmes for years, and initiatives are being considered in conjunction with the World Health Organization to explore the global implications of these projects. <sup>1</sup>

Historically, adolescence and youth have been considered the healthiest periods of a person's life due to low mortality rates, and research has consequently been limited. However, young people have specific needs and concerns that deserve attention.

- Over one third of the estimated 333 million new cases of sexually-transmitted diseases each year occur in young people under 25.
- In 1997, more than half of all new HIV infections, some 7,000 each day or 2.6 million, were among youth.
- One third of all births each year are among young women, many of which are unplanned or unwanted.
- In developing countries, maternal mortality is young men under 18 are 2 to 5 times higher than in women aged 18-25 years.
- Adolescents undergo between 1 and 4.4 million abortions each year, most of which are unsafe.
- Half of regular smokers who start in adolescence and smoke all their lives will eventually be killed by tobacco (300 million youth currently smoke).
- In the USA, the most common substance related to the deaths of young people is alcohol.
- Unintentional injury is the leading cause of death among young people, especially road traffic accidents among boys.
- Youth suicide is increasing and is responsible for at least 100,000 deaths each year.
- The five leading causes of death, illness and disability among young men are depression, traffic accidents, alcohol use, war and schizophrenia.
- The five leading causes of death, illness and disability among young women are depression, obstructed labour, suicide, chlamydia and iron-deficiency anemia.
- Most youth are sexually active and always fall victims of sexual exploitations including contraction of HIV/AIDS

Four major United Nations agencies -- the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and UNAIDS -- have reached consensus on five major interventions to promote youth health:

- Create a safe and supportive environment
- Provide information
- Build skills
- Provide counseling
- Improve health services

The UN agencies have found from experience that the active involvement of young people is one of the most important principles of successful programming. The challenge for programme designers will be to improve young people's participation and skills rather than merely targeting specific problems. <sup>1</sup>

## **CROSS-GENERATIONAL SEX**

A school boy was standing by the roadside waiting for a bus to take him to school. He was fully dressed in his school uniform as the rule requires and there was no doubt that even his school's logo was spotted on his shirt. As time passed by and no bus was on site, the young boy could not resist the offer of a lift from a female motorist who happened to be heading towards the same direction. The elderly lady, about fifty years appeared as a god send and there was no doubt that the boy was just overjoyed. For ones he was going to school in style, a very expensive private saloon car announced it all. Secondly, he was no longer going to be afraid of pickpockets who are notorious in public service vehicles.

As the car moved to a high speed, the lady engaged the boy in unusually friendly conversation. She started asking the boy about his family, needs, school work etc. And realizing that the boy was from a low income background and therefore very needy, the lady offered him a gesture of hope for a brighter future but on condition that he accepts a one week treat at a private lodge in Naivasha Kenya. Immediately they checked in the lodge, the two left for a super market where the lady bought for the boy new clothing and asked him not to use his uniform while they were still at the lodge. The management of the lodge became suspicious when they discovered that the two were not actually a mother and a son as they were made to believe initially. They quietly reported the matter to the police and they were arrested. This was a case of sexual slavery committed by a woman of means against a vulnerable boy.

Cases of cross-generational sex are commonly prevalent. Old men marrying young girls are common. This is also causing unfair competitions between young men and old men. The latter use their wealth to trap the young girls of their daughter's age, thus spoiling their opportunity to marry those who belong to their age group. Because of these cross-generational marriages many young women are left widows without adequate social support, thus becoming targets of other sexual predators.

## YOUTH SEXUALITY

As adults we know that gender and sexuality are far from one size fits all. Some girls prefer to play the roles of boys and vice versa. Some children may feel more comfortable playing with peers of the opposite sex, or may frequently cross-dress. Others may be exploring their sexual orientation, or seeking to understand the sexual or gender identity of their parents or siblings. While exploring gender identity and sexual orientation are a normal part of kids' development, there is no user's manual for talking to your kids about these issues.<sup>1</sup> As a teacher of moral theology, I always find my students being fully awake whenever there is a discussion touching on sex issues. Every student, even the ones I consider to be weak would make some contribution. Even though sex topic ignites excitement from even adults, the interest shown by the young people especially the youth is overwhelming. It is a subject that no one would like to miss! What is in this sexuality that makes all the difference?

In many cultures, topics on sex are not just sacred but a taboo that remains the preserve of the married adults. Even among the adults, it is a topic that people would find uncomfortable to address. The negative tag that is given sex makes it difficult for the young people to ask questions regarding even their own sexuality. Amongst my Luo community, it is almost anathema even to mention human anatomy by name. Genitals both for male and female have been thus given polite stage name, *duong'*, literary meaning *honour*. One would therefore talk of *my honour* to refer to his or her genitalia. For the English speaking people, there is no big deal calling penis by its name. It would not make sense for someone to refer to his penis as my honour, however, for a Luo, the terminology represents civility in language spoken as well as the respect according human sexuality, other than deliberate misuse of term.

Everything from the name to the act, sex remains not just sacred and private but also a taboo topic. However, the problem we are facing is that whether we are ready to talk about the topic or not especially to the young ones, the education has provided them with relative exposure and knowledge about human sexuality. One of the tasks of growing up is discovering who you are and what that means about what you like and who you like. Every person goes through this process of exploration, but what happens when it leads to feeling different, confused or even alone? The youth are in the age of exploration and would do everything possible to discover the mystery hidden on the other side of life. It is the responsibility of the adult to walk along with them during this moment. There will be puzzling questions which need answers, there will be obstacles which need to be removed, and there will be feelings which need to be expressed. When

there is no guided exploration, the youth will definitely draw his/her own conclusion or worse still get guided by his/peer.

It is almost unimaginable to isolate sexual issues from youth agenda. Adolescence state is the most troublesome stage in the life of the youth. It is during this state that the young ones are struggling to transit into adulthood. In most cases, they genuinely think that they are already adults and should be handled a such. It is also during this stage that the ones, who are more exposed into behaviours like premarital sex, would influence their colleagues to join in the exploration. The story shared across would be that love without sex is like tea without sugar. Sex in this context is viewed as the epitome of love. The urge for it is seriously considered as an affirmation of a relationship.

There are several factors which affect young people during this stage and all of which would be a display of their sexuality in many respects:

1. The dressing code
2. Independence
3. Social clubs
4. Preference for opposite sexes
5. Gender consciousness

### **Dressing code**

The youth are easily identified with their preferred dressing code. Their style of dressing is always at odds with adult's expectation. This manner of dressing, which in some cases exposes them so much, is a signal that they yearn for independence and availability for social interaction. They need to be positively and carefully guided on civil manner of dressing instead of being condemned. This manner of dressing also shows that they belong to their world and any attempt to remove them from it would be counterproductive. Their friend and potential friends expect them to be like that and anything short of it is all backwardness.

### **Social clubs**

Youth will always identify with specific social group of peers. It is these groups that actually influence their manner of behaviours. They learn a lot from each other, both

right and wrong things. It is again wrong to deny them this freedom of association. It is part of their world to engage each other, talk about their sexual life with peers, agree and disagree among themselves, until they discover that all that they had been chasing is mere wind and go back to their family. Being associated with a social group is very important to the youth to the extent that it informs them of their maturity and independence.

## **Independence**

A daughter one time called her father to inform him that she has a boy friend who she intends to marry. Judging from the tone of her father on the other side, she quickly told him that “Dad don’t say that I am still young. I am now a mature girl and I can make the right decision!” Young people feel like they are under some sort of captivity and would do everything possible to show that they are mature. They are quick to declare themselves small republics even before the instruments of authority are handed over to them. In situations like this, the adults need not to be hard on them, but to walk along with them until they realize true independence. We must appreciate that this is a stage of growth that every human being must pass through. When this process of independence is not properly handled then the impending consequence could be counterproductive. We must understand what it is that they want of their own and help them accordingly.

## **Gender consciousness**

During the adolescence, the youth is caught up in a thorny social web. The young person is seeking her/his gender identity and to protect it through the display of certain characteristics. This is the time that a male youth would want to show that he is actually a man to watch, and the young girl would equally want to prove her maturity as a girl or a lady. The young man would struggle to embrace all the characteristics of a man he has learnt over the years, from peers, from father, from books or from movies. Man is identified with toughness, ability to conquer, own and subdue if possible. The girl would also tend to display all the characteristics of a lady she has learnt also from peers, books, mothers, and movies. Ladies are identified with beauty, softness, sensitivity, and some bit of pride (to mean that they are not meant to be cheaply available). Girls also develop consciousness for beauty which is to be determined by among other things the

body size, make-ups, facial expressions including the way they laugh. We used to be told when we were young that beautiful girls don't laugh with their mouth open lest they expose their teeth! It is the consciousness of the gender related issues which characterizes the youth world. It is the principal duty of the adult to guide to guide them properly or else they plunge into a ditch of confusion.

### **Preference for opposite sex**

Human beings are special creatures. They are created with the desire for sexual attraction. There is always some mystery to be explored in the opposite sexes. It is this natural inclination to explore relationship with the opposite sexes which normally land the young people into conflict with their parents. Piety is a foreign element when it comes to sexual attraction. Even holy men who are assumed to hold the heavenly keys will confess that this natural inclination is inevitable. That does not mean that some restraints cannot be exercised. The female youth will look at her male counterpart as a symbol of security for her future, a partner with whom she can share with her innermost emotional feelings. With him she wants always to discover her true womanhood and maturity. This level of maturity can only be appreciated by another person who also desires to discover his own manhood. The male counterpart also needs a woman with whom he can share his emotional feelings and prove his capability to love and be loved. He needs someone who can equally appreciate his gesture of feelings and unconditional love. There is some inner feelings that a person of the opposite sex alone can be able to appreciate. It is for this reason that majority of people (the heterosexuals) find it difficult to understand the magic behind same sex attraction. This is not my area of concentration in this paper. However, it must be repeated here that same sex relations among the youth is rapidly growing. Even though the church, especially in Africa had buried its head in the sand for a very long time and always accusing the West of authoring same sex ideology and practice, the underlying truth is that same sex relations had been there for a long time. Most boarding schools, prisons and hostels, young girls and boys are practicing it. Sexuality among the youth sometimes could take a wrong dimension and become disgraceful act. This is when the young people in search of lovebirds fail to control their desires and venture into protected territory. The story of Amnon falling in love with his beautiful sister Tamar is another case of gender violence against girl child. <sup>1</sup> It is upon us to take the challenge and provide a workable framework that can solidify our quest for a theology of purpose, as opposed to theology of preservation.

### **YOUTH AND LEADERSHIP**

The scripture gives several cases of youthful people anointed to positions of leadership. Samuel was called when he was still very young and could not discern the voice of God.<sup>1</sup> Samuel grew up a person full of God's favour and his word came to all Israel. David was also called when he was still a young boy, who probably may not have reached his adolescence.<sup>1</sup> David became a strong King whose kingdom heralded the coming of the Messiah. As young as he was, David had a talent for Music and used it effectively to cool the anger of King Saul. Young people should be allowed to use their talents for a common good. As a young man, David exhibited the spirit of patience and tolerance even to those who wanted to kill him.<sup>1</sup> Leadership that is characterized with tolerance, patience and fear of the Lord, is all that we could say of King David the young man. His friendship with Jonathan has been mistaken by some pro same sex theologians to suggest that the two had a similar relationship. In as much as there is no evidence to prove this, there is all the reason to castigate such a theory. The Bible is one of the books that never shy away from calling spade a spade. When King David whom God spoke of as closer to his heart desired someone's wife, it became a public condemnation for which he had to repent. There are filthy incidences which are reported in the Bible that our modern writers may not find comfortable even to gossip about. The same courage and exemplifications that the scripture has, is a testimony of a book that is incredibly generous with truth.

Today the young people marshal a sizable population that is capable of shaking the entire socio political systems in the world. They are creative and have revolutionized the entire music industry. We all know the power of music in shaping our culture apart from being a medium for entertainment. Every church and every community, and governments, must invest in programs that would promote this Cultural Revolution and appreciate the immense talents inherent among the youth.

## CONCLUSION

Our clarion call is to capture the spirit of reasoning and allow the young talents to showcase their prowess at every level. Youth culture is not alien. It is equally our societal culture and what we need to do is to embrace it, allow internal transformation to take place at its own speed. Our understanding of youth must be embedded on the premise that they constitute an important block in our human sociological underpinnings. We also must appreciate the fact that not all problems associated with young people are beyond transforming power of the Gospel. At every stage in our human endeavour, we come across major obstacles that would require some sort of radical approaches. But every approach that we adopt must take into cognizance the

natural and sequential order that would give adequate space for human dignity to be respected. Issues of gender, is critical in every program of action we are charged with. Educational opportunities must be made available to all without any discrimination. Girl child had been vulnerable for a very long time especially in Africa where the male child is given the top priority. We cannot relent in our struggle to enforce policies and actions that would empower the vulnerable in our society so that everyone would have a dignified living. There is some disquiet in some circles that there is now more attention given to the girl child to the extent that we forget the plight of the boy child. Be it true or not, our approach to gender must be holistic, all inclusive. But as we embrace this kind of inclusivity, we cannot pretend, that the girl child especially in Africa and other developing world, still needs more grace than ever before. The entire adult population must be educated on this and their attitude changed for the sake of the common good and for God's glory.

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## **Marriage in cultural context as a mutual partnership**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of marriage has never been easy to handle. From time immemorial marriage has witnessed challenges of various magnitudes so much so that it is linked to the first major division of the church. ( Read history of the church of England) Marital issue is also linked to the weakening of relations between the church in the west and the south ( read human sexuality and gay marriage). The paper seeks to show that the immense theological and sociological references to marriage have not helped much in healing the wounds of suspicion between the two cultures representing two brands of Christianity. The paper will also address marriage from various levels, with much emphasis on its mutuality and cognitive nature as a divine purpose for humanity.

Marriage is both a social and a religious institution that defines everything we stand for as human beings. It is through marriage that there is procreation, family, and a nation. Marriage is the fulcrum of our very being. Socially, marriage gives us an identity as parents, wives, husbands and children. In marriage we find a social satisfaction as we establish both social institutions in the name of a family as well as a new organic unit for our posterity. This understanding gives marriage a priority edge over other social institutions. In this paper, our main focus is how to embrace a new understanding of marriage as the epicenter of all social transactions, as the pillar of society, and as the fruit of partnership between different people, individuals and communities in establishing a new community and nation. We also take cognizance of the very many challenges rocking marriages today. In marriage, we see how diversity of cultures, traditions, and social orientations can be merged to create one whole unit, where a new sense of unity is created and wholly embraced.

It is not in our opinion to give any judgment on the efficacy of marriage as an institution today. However, fundamental lines of engagement with social and economic realities tend to pull us together into some sort of mutual partnership in tackling issues affecting our society today.

Marriage has history that when well followed and appreciated can as well inform the manner in which we should address many issues affecting our families as the fabric of our nationhood. It is becoming obvious that marriage is under attack from all fronts. Domestic violence is becoming the order of the day and there is no society, either in the West, East, or Africa that appears to have managed the causes of domestic violence. Gender issues affecting our society mostly revolve around family values. For us to appreciate gender diversity and its richness, our concept of a family must display what we stand for. The premium we placed on gender at the family level is essential to underscore our concept of marriage as an essential pillar in our society. But this is a pillar that has suffered various setbacks. Divorce cases are on the rise; single parenting is on the increase; marital violence taking toll of so many including innocent children. Mutual partnership and accord has become mutual consent for discord! It is for this reason that we must appreciate every debate that gives us the opportunity to address marital issues and how they affect our families, society and the church. The current divisions affecting the church in the west and the south are primarily of marital nature. The emergence of different world views and practices has created confusion in the global church and society to the extent that our judgmental views have been canonized to say the least. We therefore expect to admonish whoever expresses contrary view.

## **BIBLICAL HISTORY OF MARRIAGE**

The term marriage does not exist in the books of the Old Testament. Even the relationship between Adam and Eve, which is described as the first marriage, does not employ the terminology rather than implied. However, the subsequent cases have direct references to marriage. In ancient Israel, marriage was described as a covenant (b'rith) and was thus part of the civil law with legal papers drafted to define the role of the husband and wife. <sup>1</sup> In the ancient Near East betrothal took place before the actual marriage and it was considered as binding as marriage. In ancient Israel a woman who was betrothed was considered the "wife" of the man she was betrothed to, and she was bound to be faithful. The betrothal (kiddushin) period lasted usually 6 months and sometimes 1 year, and it was a binding promise between the bridegroom and bride to marry. Deuteronomy 20:7 mentions the betrothal, stating that a man is exempt from military duty if he is betrothed. Once a woman was betrothed she was considered already married, and if she had sexual intercourse during this period she was considered an adulterer and was to be stoned to death. If she was not caught in the actual act and was found not to be a virgin, the husband could dissolve the marriage

quietly and sign a bill of divorce. According to the civil law the virgin was purchased for a certain sum of money, this was paid to the bride's father. Later in Israel's history she was given a gold ring, or some other valuable thing, and the bridegroom would declare, "See by this ring (or token) thou art set apart unto me, according to the law of Moses and of Israel." Many times the betrothed woman would not see her betrothed husband until the marriage ceremony began.

The institution of marriage dates from the time of man's original creation. Ge 2:18-25 From Ge 2:24 we may evolve the following principles: (1) The unity of man and wife, as implied in her being formed out of man. (2) The indissolubleness of the marriage bond, except on; the strongest grounds, Comp. Mt 19:9 (3) Monogamy, as the original law of marriage (4) The social equality of man and wife. (5) The subordination of the wife to the husband. 1Co 11:8,9; 1Ti 2:13 (6) The respective duties of man and wife. In the patriarchal age polygamy prevailed, Ge 16:4; 25:1,8; 28:9; 29:23,26; 1Ch 7:14 but to a great extent divested of the degradation which in modern times attaches to that practice. Divorce also prevailed in the patriarchal age, though but one instance of it is recorded. Ge 21:14 The Mosaic law discouraged polygamy, restricted divorce, and aimed to enforce purity of life. It was the best civil law possible at the time, and sought to bring the people up to the pure standard of the moral law. In the Post-Babylonian period monogamy appears to have become more prevalent than at any previous time. The practice of polygamy nevertheless still existed; Herod the Great had no less than nine wives at one time. The abuse of divorce continued unabated. Our Lord and his apostles re-established the integrity and sanctity of the marriage bond by the following measures: (a) By the confirmation of the original charter of marriage as the basis on which all regulations were to be framed. Mt 19:4,5 (b) By the restriction of divorce to the case of fornication, and the prohibition of remarriage in all persons divorced on improper grounds. Mt 5:32; 19:9; Ro 7:3; 1Co 7:10,11 (c) By the enforcement of moral purity generally Heb 13:4 etc., and especial formal condemnation of fornication. Ac 15:20

Polygamy was acknowledged in the Mosaic Law and made the basis of legislation, and continued to be practiced all down through the period of Jewish history to the Captivity, after which there is no instance of it on record. Genesis gives an account of the first union between man and a woman (read Adam and Eve) as the basis for the monogamous status of marriage. However, we also come across the first case of polygamy ever recorded in human history also in the same book! Lamech the great grandson of Cain is said to be the first Polygamist to be recorded in the scripture. <sup>1</sup> So far we had no case of rivalry between the first women in polygamous marriage. It

seems to have been the practice from the beginning for fathers to select wives for their sons (Gen. 24:3; 38:6). Sometimes also proposals were initiated by the father of the maiden (Ex. 2:21). The brothers of the maiden were also sometimes consulted (Gen. 24:51; 34:11), but her own consent was not required.<sup>1</sup>

The institution of marriage, though troubled by our hardened hearts, was originally designed by God to manifest his image and to provide stability for society and safe handling for each generation to arrive and thrive on earth. It was held in the highest esteem by Jesus Christ, who sanctified it with His first miracle, turning water into wine, and is the ultimate symbol of His relationship to the church who is called "The Bride of Christ". Any tampering with this institution is ill-advised. It is clear that the institution of marriage does not belong to us even though it is for us. It belongs to God. Everything that belongs to God is holy, sacred and must be seriously taken as a gift to us. We all value gifts especially which are given from those we love, adore or senior to us in one way or the other. One thing which is clear about marriage as a gift is that God deemed it necessary to give it to us. Adam did not ask for a wife, and thus it came out strongly that he appreciated Eve as a gift whose worth was remained immeasurable. "A bone of my bone and a flesh of my flesh" could not just be rhetorical statements of faith. They were serious confessions made by a person who was more than marveled to recognize the miraculous presence of someone who was created after his own flesh. The two became one in every respect. The subsequent understanding is that marriage is a gift of God and a means of grace. God himself ordained it when, in the Garden of Eden he created our first parents, Adam and Eve, and joined them for a life-long companionship. It is God's intention in marriage that husband and wife to commit themselves to each other in love and in so doing reflect Christ's relationship with his church.<sup>1</sup>

## **HISTORY OF MARRIAGE CONTROVERSY (READ CHURCH OF ENGLAND)**

The first major controversy that affected the church is linked to the reign of King Henry VIII of England. Desperate for a male heir to the throne, the king wanted to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon to enable him marry another wife. The law then required that the Pope had to annul the marriage first before he could marry again. Pope Clement VII refused. Following numerous pressure on Rome and consequent refusal to grant the annulment, King Henry VIII put a convincing argument by compiling ancient manuscript that supports the spiritual supremacy of the monarch and also against the

legality of Papal authority. In 1531 the king became the supreme head of the Church of England and the following year agreed to surrender its legislative independence and canon law to the authority of the monarch. Even though the Pope excommunicated the King the latter went ahead and married Anne Boleyn following the annulment of the marriage by Thomas Cranmer, the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

This part of history reminds us of the place of marriage in both the church and politics and the extent to which the church can still be divided because of diverse interests. There are various lessons we can learn from this history:

1. Marriage is not a personal affair. It is neither the state nor the church that has the last word on marital issues. It is not a personal affair whereby a person would just walk in and out at will.
2. Marriage is so much important an institution that even the king could not make a unilateral decision. The king had to recognize the institutions of the church and seek for its approval in matters of divorce.
3. The church has an influential and legitimate authority to give directions on matters of marriage.

## **CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE**

Whereas the scripture and the church tradition describes marriage as a gift of God to humanity, where two consenting adults come together in a mutual union to live as husband and wife, many cultures see marriage as something more than a union of two persons. Many communities in Africa are yet to appreciate the new civilization that accords marriage a legislative status. It is not the two consenting adults that are in the picture. There are parents from both sides, and their respective communities.

Culture gives marriage a special status as one of the most important social institutions that defines our shared common values, our cultural identity, our spirituality, and our politics. From this perspective, it is not our interpretation of the scripture that solely counts when addressing marital issues but the entire socio-political enterprise. In as much as our world views are transformed by numerous agencies including global awareness and interactions, there is little impact that one aspect of the above categories singly can make in matters of marriage unless other categories are equally given due consideration. Every culture, and by extension every country has its own laws regarding marriage. I am yet to establish which country has the best laws that can

address all marital issues. The institution of marriage has passed through many stages of revolution and it would be wrong to suggest one standard norm. In Africa and other parts of the world, including Islamic religion, polygamy is still much embraced and even the national constitution directly and indirectly condones it. However, it is not the preserve of religion to assume absolute authority in all matters pertaining to marriage. As a social institution, the culture of the people, their politics and to some extent their religion are some of the key factors that shape the character and nature of marriage.

Sociological and economic factors are the other major shakers of all social institutions in our society. In a money preferred economy, most marriages are affected by economic drives and whichever way one would look at it; this has become a major factor contributing to many divorce cases in Africa. Marriage that is anchored of materialism cannot stand economic pressure deviling our society. Most cases of infidelity are majorly linked to materialism. It is a big challenge to enforce religious teachings about marriage without addressing some of these factors. It is for this reason that we have to beg certain questions: do we have ideal marriage today; is there a common or uniform Christian marriage today? What constitutes to a Christian marriage by the way?

Christianity cannot stand on its own as credible or worthy religion, pure from any form of impurity. However, it is a Christ-centered faith that is emblazoned with numerous cultural beliefs and practices. Based on this understanding, it is my honest opinion that there cannot and will never be uniformity of views regarding what constitutes a Christian marriage other than its Christ-centeredness. Everything else is theatric.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC LINK TO MARRIAGE IN AFRICA**

Many cultures in Africa still find it difficult to let go of their educated daughters without putting high premium on them in a form of a dowry.

When an educated girl gets married, some parents think of the grooms family and relatives who are going to enjoy the fruit of many years of sweat and money used to educate her. They see this as a loss, whereby the girl takes the money and education to another family. As a result an exorbitant amount of money is asked for as a dowry to compensate for this loss.<sup>1</sup> The material tag attached to African traditional marriage gives the impression of a commercial transaction to a modern man especially the one who has either been brought up in the west or urbanized and has nothing to do with the traditional culture. Bride price is taken seriously not because of its material value,

but as a token of appreciation to the parents of the girl. The more the groom gives the more he is perceived to appreciate the bride's family.

Despite the concept behind dowry, material expectation has become a major problem for many marriages. In as much as the married couples are believed to be partners, male dominance in the family is still real. All cultures seem to have accorded the husband the role of head of the family. However, this role has been abused to the extent that women are viewed in several cultures as junior partners whose views may not count much in decision making. Recently there had been a problem with women motorists in Saudi Arabia. The law in Saudi Arabia bars women from driving. The underlying assumption for this is based on nothing else other than cultural prejudice. Women are said to be having low IQ and are bound to cause numerous accidents when allowed to be on road. But observable reports indicate that women drivers are more cautious on roads than their male counterparts and their vehicles are likely to last longer than men's. It is such kind of cultural prejudice that negates the principle of equality in marriages. Men must be heard. Women must seat and listen!

It is also becoming an alarming thing that some women are also driven into marriages not because of love for their partners, but because of their financial stability. Marriages anchored on financial considerations are likely to collapse once the base is shattered. This trend is affecting mostly single women who are attracted to wealthy married men. They are seen as marital predators ready to snatch every opportunity to ruin other people's marriages. In a society that embraces polygamy; multiple marriages have become zones of conflicts that even modern legislations would find it difficult to deal with. In Kenya for example, there is a new act of marriage that recognizes different kinds of marriages apart from same sex marriage. However, this legislation falls short of how it can be implemented. There is no framework for monitoring its offenders taking into account that most marital issues especially among the ordinary people are sorted out in closed doors meetings by village elders.

## **EXTENDED FAMILY**

Africa is known for its rich cultural heritage that embraces all and sundry. Family units are incomplete without extended family. Africa is the only part of the world that one person can boast of several mothers and fathers, several sisters and brothers, and relatives as numerous as the sand on the sea shore or stars in the skies. Yes, this is

possible only in African traditional society which is determined by social network of relations. Through marriage, one will have to contend with more relatives from both sides. In Africa we don't have cousins, but we have brothers and sisters. Relations are not determined by how close we are biologically, but how close we are socially. It is this social connectivity blended by biological considerations that gives meaning to a relationship. It is these cultural understanding of relations that defines our social standing in society. The more wives a man has the more relatives one would expect. To this extent, marriage is viewed as a partnership with many stakeholders. A man and a woman only happen to be the principal partners.

What is the viability of the extended family? New economic realities and modernity has become a major threat to the survival of extended family. There is just a little of it left to take care of the nucleus family and extended family members find themselves locked out of this network. Apart from economic and social factors, extended family is also losing its centrality in Africa because of various reasons. Some members of extended family have been known to be the major cause of rift between married people.

Sometimes the members of the extended family put pressure on the new smaller family's resources. A young couple may not always be able to cope with the demands and expectations of financial help. This stretches the smaller family unit pressuring its members to choose between loyalty to the smaller family unit and loyalty to the extended family.<sup>1</sup> The other major factor is the urban based search for job opportunity. The need for employments has created a great lapse in relationship so much so that members of the extended family rarely come together save for family celebrations of weddings or funerals. Incompatible priority needs and engagements have equally disrupted family ties. It has become everyone for himself and the clan for all of us!

## **WHAT CONSTITUTES MARRIAGE IN MODERN SOCIETY?**

As I had pointed out earlier, marriage is a gift from God to humanity. It is only human beings who enter into a mutual partnership in marriage where a life-long institution is established by mutual consent. Marriage in all cultures as well as in the holy books, involve a union of a man and a woman, as the case of monogamous relationship, or a man and more women, as the case of polygamous relationship. No history ancient or medieval, has ever recorded same sex marriages. It has been and continued to be the practice that marriage between same sex partners is either abnormal, or just

abominable. Same sex marriage has caused untold division in the church to the extent that the primary focus of the church has become more of a self preservation than evangelical and kerygmatic. The once a vibrant partnership between the churches in the south and the north has virtually been reduced to a mere co-existence. This shows how the two strands of cultures represent diverse worldviews which in one way or the other has degenerated into ecclesiastical sibling rivalry. In so far as the church in the north, officially asserts its doctrinal and theological approval for same-sex relation, it begs the question of where our unity in diversity lies. At what point does our moral judgment become essential? We may establish theological as well as cultural premises for supporting or opposing same-sex marriages, but one factor remains so distinct that it cannot be overshadowed at all by these positions: the centrality of the truth of God in marriage as a gift. God cannot give us snake as a gift if he knows so well that we need fish, neither can he give us stone if he knows so well that our metabolism would not tolerate it.

The Bible's consistent teaching on human sexuality, in the Old and New Testaments, boils down to this: The only sexually intimate behaviour approved by God exists between a man and a woman within marriage. Even those who call for the social and moral acceptance of homosexuality admit that the Bible's teaching is clear and consistent. No exegetical gymnastics or desperate excursions into possible alternate readings of the biblical passages can make the text say something it does not, or diminish the force of what it does say.<sup>1</sup>

Partnership between the church in the north and the church in the south is under threat. The threat however is not based on divergent views regarding same-sex marriages, but on the conditionality that is linked to this partnership. The church in the north is materially wealthy compared to their counterpart in the South. At the same time the church in the South is materially inadequate but both numerically and spiritually stronger. Even though it is difficult to gauge spirituality when observed from the perspective of holiness, the vibrancy and numerical growth could testify to this. There had been several partnership programs funded by the church in the North, however, these projects are now pegged on the readiness of the church in the South to be more tolerant to same sex relations. Such conditionality do not attest to the biblical concept of the catholicity, oneness, and holiness of the church. The catholicity of the church would require genuine partnership that would enable the two church orientations to support the growth of each other. It is through this partnership based on mutual appreciation of each other that would help to eliminate any possible suspicion. Marriage takes the same dimension. No marriage can stand the test of time unless the parties involved are ready

to understand and appreciate each other's strengths and weaknesses. Same-sex marriage should, in my view be addressed from the perspective of modernity, a calamity that has bedeviled the Christian faith, and above all, from excessive contextualizing of our theology and biblical studies. At the "Call to Renewal" conference, Mr. Obama said:

Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is ok and that eating shellfish is abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount - a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application? So before we get carried away, let's read our Bibles. Folks haven't been reading their Bibles.

This statement trivializes serious biblical interpretation. The Bible, according to Mr. Obama, becomes a Rorschach blot to which we each bring our own meaning. This is particularly troubling in a President who, like many of his predecessors, frequently invokes the Bible in his speeches to justify his political stances. The result, as *Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson wryly observed, is that "even when Obama changes his political views, Jesus somehow comes around to agreeing with him."<sup>1</sup>

As we advance in knowledge, we realize how remote some of the truths we once held have become. We tend to explore new ideas, new concepts and understandings which we end up dogmatizing every moment we cherish them. It is on the same basis that marriage became a sacrament to the Roman Catholics, and how same sex-union became acceptable in some western churches. The major threat to Christianity is not actually the rapid spread of Islam the way some people think, or secularization. The biggest threat to Christianity is the advancement in knowledge. As new knowledge emerges, we retreat to counter-review our traditional positions. There is that itchy temptation to shed off all the values that we previously held as we usher in new ideas and allowing knowledge to control our destiny. The challenge facing the church is in the bland, unconverted, ignorant lives of its members. Until adults in the church are knowledgeable in their faith, have experiencing the transforming power of the Gospel, live radical lives characteristic of the disciples of Jesus Christ, no new insights on learning, no new teacher-training programs, and no new educational technology will save us.<sup>1</sup> Doctrinal issues cannot be resolved on the seat of self righteousness or assumed advancement of knowledge. St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians (5:13-26), involves a fundamental change at the core of our being, a change brought about by the

nature of our relationship to Christ and by the inner presence of the Holy Spirit. Nobody can rejoice in Christ and then go and do just as they please.<sup>1</sup>

## **MARRIAGE: A PARTNERSHIP OF EQUALS**

It is all that simple. Two people coming together to become one must accept the importance and dispensability of the other. Allow me to sound vulgar a bit. Human anatomies, for both sexes are made in a bolt and nut format to allow for unity to be realized when they come together. Bolts and bolts or nuts and nuts cannot be joined together to become one. The concept behind human anatomy is the work of a wonderful designer that has to be appreciated. There is no time a bolt can boast that it is superior. Equality in this sense must be understood from the perspective of worth and dependence. It is neither the pedigree of the physique nor materialism. It has the moral, spiritual and social characteristics necessary to hold two separate individuals together as they bond to become one whole. A very mysterious and complex mathematics that can only be understood by people of faith.

When partners in a marriage value equality, they see each other as equals, treat each other with respect, consider each other's needs, and support one another. Equal partners agree on goals together and work as a team to achieve these goals. They show equal commitment to the relationship and provide mutual support and nurturing. Each values the other's work life as highly as his or her own, even if that work life doesn't include employment outside the home.

Most couples say they prefer an equal partnership, but studies show that few couples live up to their rhetoric. In most marriages, women do an unfair share of household tasks and the majority of child care, regardless of whether they work outside the home or not. Specifically, women do two or three times as much housework as men. Mothers spend 3 to 5 hours actively involved with their children for every hour that fathers spend. Men, on the other hand, have traditionally had more power in decision making.

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Jesus, wrote the great Dutch theologian Geerhardus Vos in his book *Biblical Theology*, is "the confirmation and consummation of the Old Testament in his own person." Jesus affirmed the Law, and fulfilled its demands perfectly. If we now think we selectively can accept and reject its moral teachings based on faulty interpretative templates, His example reproves us.<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSION

There is no time in history when absolute resilience of theological as well as social views will be reflective of the entire human race. It is for this reason that we must go back to the very root of our faith to rediscover the potential character of our Christian beliefs in shaping our world views. There is confusion and almost a near collapse of moral values. Marriage is seen as any other social institution whose existence depends on the circumstance of the moment. This cannot be true. Biblically, the place of marriage is integral in our relationship with God by whose command it was instituted. We need the spirit of faith to understand how precious and central marriage is for the peace of our families, our societies and our nations. Fragile marriage is a reflection of a fragile society. A society whose people enjoy their marriages is high likely to experience peace and stability. Above all, it is critical that we observe gender sensitivity as a blend to a healthy marriage. Being sensitive to the rights and potentials inherent in a marriage partner is critical for the stability of the institution.

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# Male and Female: One Image, One Purpose

By

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## Introduction

Christian faith teaches that women and men were created in God's image for a shared purpose—to serve as God's representative in caring for the world. In order to complete their divine commission, God gave both man and woman equal authority as God's agents in Eden. Adam and Eve not only enjoyed shared rule in Eden, their relationships was also characterized by mutuality, oneness and a harmony in their one-flesh relationship. This then was the experience of God's agents in a world without sin, before their intimacy with God, self and other was ruptured through disobedience.

Despite the glories and consolations of Eden, Adam and Eve turned away from God through sin. Among the pitiful consequences of their rebellion humanity encounters toil in their work and childbirth is fraught with pain. For both, life would end tragically in death. Though they once shared authority as overseers of Eden, sin gave rise to the domination of man over woman. Life in a world of sin plunged humanity into desperation, a plight that garnered God's mercy since it is the nature of God to be merciful. To rescue humankind God sent a redeemer, born of a woman—Jesus Christ. Through Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, man and woman were offered forgiveness and reconciliation with God and each other. In Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, man and woman were given spiritual power and dominion to serve, once again, as God's agent. The two creation accounts—in Eden and in Christ—follow the similar pattern—created in God's image and recreated in Christ leads to a shared authority for God's agents, both male and female.

While patriarchy—male rule continues to distort God's ideal for human relationships, under the renewing presence of God's Spirit Christians receive power to oppose sin, prejudice and oppression based on gender. In what follows, this essay will consider both the impact of patriarchy as well as the biblical texts that reveal God's destiny for man and woman for shared leadership in serving God in a fallen world.

Turning for to the impact of patriarchy – one of the first results of sin – it is arguably the cause of enormous human suffering. Its influence touches nearly every culture and has throughout history. But, what do we mean by patriarchy?

According Merriam Webster:

Patriarchy is defined as: “a family, group, or government controlled by a man or a group of men. These are societies or institutions [denominations, churches, colleges] organized according to the principles or practices of patriarchy,”<sup>107</sup> or male-rule.

Patriarchy, in a culture, church, family or organization, is often sustained through longstanding traditions, through coercion, undergirded by philosophical or religious teachings. Too often, select passages in Scripture have been used as a rationale to support male-rule. To exclude women from tables of decision-making in their family, church, or society not only impoverishes these communities, it also marginalizes women making them vulnerable to abuse. As Mirslow Wolf has so ably shows in his able book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, it is also a small step from marginalization to abuse.

Under global scrutiny by economists, humanitarians, social and medical researchers – the scope and impact of patriarchy is believed to be one of the most malicious and debilitating forces in history. A consortium of global experts working to reverse poverty, hunger and disease argue that the empowerment of females is seen as “one of the strongest drivers of social [well-being]... and is acknowledged as essential for addressing the global challenges facing humanity.”<sup>108</sup>

According to the data from the Millennium Project:

- Women account for less than 20% of all national legislative bodies worldwide. 14.3% of the total 273 presiding officers in parliaments are women. As of 2012, only 20 women were heads of state or government.
- Globally, women comprise only approximately 9% of corporate board membership. Companies with 3 or more women on the boards outperform their competitors up to 52%.

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<sup>107</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy> accessed Feb 15, 2014.

<sup>108</sup> [http://www.millennium-project.org/millennium/Global\\_Challenges/chall-11.html](http://www.millennium-project.org/millennium/Global_Challenges/chall-11.html) See also [http://www.worldof7billion.org/uploads/research\\_resources/Global\\_Status\\_of\\_Women\\_Children.pdf](http://www.worldof7billion.org/uploads/research_resources/Global_Status_of_Women_Children.pdf)

- In the best cases women are paid 30% less than men for similar work. Yet, women do most of the unpaid work and represent 50.5% of the 1.52 billion workers in vulnerable employment, often lacking legal and economic protection. In most cases women's economic roles are added to her traditional housework.
- About 70% of people living in poverty are women. While representing the largest number of agricultural workers globally, women receive only 5% of agricultural services. Repeatedly, the Food and Agricultural Organization observe that placing women as heads of farming ventures would reduce the number of starving people by 100–150 million annually.
- Women represent about 64% of the 775 million adult illiterates.
- Maternal mortality has decreased in the past two decades. Even so, the global maternal mortality remains a pressing health concern especially in Africa and Asia.
- FGM traumatizes about 3 million girls each year, in addition to the estimated 140 million women and girls already affected.
- Violence against women is the largest ongoing war in all of history. 70% of women continue to be targeted for physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is *not* a legal offense. These are the most underreported crimes worldwide.
- Of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked annually, 80% are female, 79% are trafficked for sexual exploitation, many of them are children.
- It is feared that over 200 million girls are missing, constituting the largest holocaust in all of history.
- The best indicator of a happy and enduring marriage, or those that become violent or abusive center on patriarchy, or partner dominance coupled with partner avoidance and submission.<sup>109</sup>

The positive consequences of gender equality can be noted through research often referred to as the “Girl Effect.”<sup>110</sup> In study after study, researchers have found that when females are valued equally with males, and when income is invested in their education, health and businesses, these are communities that are more likely to thrive economically and where girls and women are less likely to encounter abuse, illiteracy, poverty and disease. Investors and philanthropists now realize that

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<sup>109</sup>Gottman's research supports egalitarian principles in couple's that were together 30+ years. See also Smart Marriages.com and Prepare and Enrich.

<sup>110</sup>Kristoff and WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. (New York, New York: Knopf Publishing group, 2009), p. xiv-xx.

undermining patriarchy not only makes enormous social sense. It is also good economics.

According research published by Goldman Sachs, investing in females drives economic growth while at the same time promoting humanitarian objectives. We call this the “Virtuous Cycle,<sup>111112</sup> because women more often spend their income not in prostitutes, drugs or gambling but in promoting the future of their family and community... it’s a virtuous cycle because it reduces inequalities and drives economic growth. According to the World Bank, undermining patriarchy is smart economics, and it’s good for families, communities and countries.

Social scientists, NGOs, humanitarians, economists and philanthropists recognize the crushing need to dismantle patriarchy. What about the church? Over 100 years ago Christians battling sex-slavery recognized how patriarchy—endorsed by religion, including Christian faith, rendered the church complicit in the destruction of girls and women. In response, Christians, mostly women, searched Scripture for insights and discovered the foundations of gender equality—biblical principles that fueled their social and gospel work. Here are a few examples:

Catherine Booth(1829–1890), cofounder of the Salvation Army, was devoted to serving the poor and destitute in London’s East End. Booth realized the suffering of East Londoners would continue until the equal value and authority of girls and women was recognized as a biblical ideal. Gender equality was central to her evangelism. To end forced prostitution of children in London’s East, Booth championed the shared leadership of men and women in her book *Female Ministry, or Women’s Right to Preach the Gospel*. Booth was joined by Pandita Ramabia (1858-1922) working in Calcutta. Ramabai also recognized that elevating the status of women was not only integral to advancing the gospel, but was indivisible from bringing God’s witness to the world. In her book, the *High Caste Hindu*, Ramabai exposed the devastating religious and social consequences of patriarchy. Likewise, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)—a prominent American suffragist, abolitionists and evangelist—believed that gospel elevates the value and status of women and slaves because, as she asked at an Ohio suffragist meeting: “Where did your Christ come from? He came from God and a woman, and man ain’t had nothing to do with it.” Throughout history theologians have made the same point: there is a subtle condemnation of men in the birth of Christ who was born

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<sup>111</sup> bit.ly/1oJi6m8 Feb 15, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/focus-on/investing-in-women/bios-pdfs/power-of-purse.pdf> accessed Feb 15, 2014.

without their involvement. For Truth, gender equality was a biblical principle, and no one could preach it more powerfully than Sojourner.

Consider also the legacy of Katharine Bushnell (1856-1946) a medical doctor, missionary and humanitarian. Bushnell was also the first to document the painful truth that you can empty brothels every day for the rest of your life—as she nearly did. That is the easy part compared to the arduous task of reading the Bible without a patriarchal lens. Yet, for Bushnell, the hard-work of social justice will always include an arduous theological effort because, religion and even Christian faith has lent its enormous influence to miss-interpreting the teachings of Scripture in promoting male-rule—a tradition with debilitating consequences globally.

In her autobiography, she states the challenge in the following way:

...until [we]—come to understand that a woman is of as much value as a man; and [we] will not believe this until they see it plainly taught in the Bible.<sup>113</sup> Just so long as men imagine that a system of caste is taught in the Word of God, and that they belong to the upper caste while women are of the lower caste; and just so long as [we] believe that mere FLESH—fate—determines the caste to which one belongs ... the destruction of young women into a prostitute class will continue.<sup>114</sup>

Though male dominance has received an enduring endorsement from the Church, the early evangelicals were a prophetic voice pointing to a more consistent reading of Scripture. If the fruit of patriarchy is bad—as all the research suggests—there would be evidence of its moral bankruptcy within Scripture despite what the church has taught, and continues to teach.

Turning to Scripture, we discover that leadership and authority is not allocated to individuals because of their gender, ethnicity or class. Rather, Scripture illustrates how the most unlikely people held the most extraordinary positions of leadership. This is so much the case for women that it is nearly impossible to find a single female in Scripture who did what was right in God's sight, and who was consistently submissive to males. What matters is not male-rule but responsiveness to God. Unless we are acquainted with the cultural expectations of the ancient world, it is easy to overlook Scripture's

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<sup>113</sup> Katharine Bushnell, *Dr. Katharine C. Bushnell: A Brief Sketch of her Life and Work*, (Hertford, England: Rose and Sons Salisbury Square, 1930), p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> Katharine Bushnell, *Dr. Katharine C. Bushnell: A Brief Sketch of her Life and Work*, (Hertford, England: Rose and Sons Salisbury Square, 1930), p. 13.

consistent challenge to patriarchy. Yet, in the early chapters of Genesis, Scripture teaches that women and men are both created in God's image—a spiritual status with a functional purpose—to care for Eden with equal authority.

The stewardship of Eden requires both male and female. For this reason, Adam's aloneness is the only "not good" in a perfect world. For this reason God creates a "strong helper," or *ezer* in Hebrew, a Hebrew word comprised of two root words, "to be strong" and "to rescue." Used twenty-one times, *ezer* most often refers to God's rescue of Israel as in Psalm 121:1-2, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help, my *ezer*, comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." Those who read Scripture through a patriarchal lens perceive Eve's help as subordinate or inferior, but this is not the teaching of Scripture. Taken from his side, Adam recognizes Eve immediately shouting: "At last!" "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). Adam declares their shared origins in these words, "I will call you woman because you come from my body." Scripture emphasizes not the *differences* between Adam and Eve as so many writers today do. Rather, Scripture points to their unity and oneness. Man and woman share a physical body, because Eve comes from Adam's body. Most significantly, they share the same spiritual or metaphysical substance since both are created in God's image. The only authority Adam and Eve exercise is over the animals and the earth, not each other. This is the reason Scripture repeats this point for emphasis. In Genesis 1 we read:

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."  
Genesis 1:26

Bearing God's image constitutes an identity that is associated with *a* purpose—to care for the world as male and female with equal authority. Theologians call this the divine mandate. The following text repeats this vital concept:

So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them 'Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in

the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that move on the ground – everything that has breath of life in it.’ Genesis 1:27-28

The second creation account enlarges on Adam and Eve’s shared substance and common purpose. In Genesis 2:7-18 we learn that “God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils. God also planted a garden in Eden ...and put him in the garden of Eden to work it... God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make a helper fit for him.’” So, what happens next? Does God create Eve? That it was one might expect. However, what follows next is that God creates the animals, as if to stress Adam’s aloneness, as if to press the point that despite the glories of Eden there is an obvious and painful omission. The animals, who are not created in God’s image, cannot provide the strong rescue and shared dominion needed to care for the world. Among the animals no suitable helper was found for Adam (verse 21). Adam’s partner, his strong help, comes only with the creation of Eve—*who is* created in God’s image.

### **The Oneness of Marriage**

In a patriarchal world, women were expected to leave their families and were joined to their husband’s clan where they are often without support and easily devalued or abused. Yet in Genesis 2:25 the oneness and mutuality of man and woman is further emphasized in these words: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.” Notice the first couple is not identified with the husband’s household or *pater-familias*. Rather, the husband leaves *his* family to unite with his wife, and together they constitute a new family.

### **Human Rebellion and Sin**

Sadly, the oneness and mutuality of marriage between Adam and Eve is short-lived. Despite the beauty and comfort of Eden, Adam and Eve rebel against God and their disobedience results in death, separation from God, painful labor and childbirth, and male-dominance. Through sin their shared authority deteriorates into male dominion, which was *not* God’s original design. Sin ushers in patriarchy and blurs women’s identity and purpose as bearing God’s image for shared authority with men in caring for the world.

Despite human disobedience, in Genesis 3 we also learn that a redeemer will be born of a woman—Mary. While Eve was created out of Adam’s body, Christ—the second Adam—was born of a woman through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>115</sup> Though sin obscures women’s identity and purpose, Scripture continually points to woman’s strong rescue throughout Scripture.

Consider women’s leadership in the Old Testament, noted significantly in women’s leadership as prophets. Priests spoke to God on behalf of the people, but the prophets spoke on behalf of God to the people, especially to Israel’s leaders. Prophets were leaders of leaders, and female prophets led Israel with enormous moral and spiritual authority. Here are a few examples.

Huldah was a prophet during the reign of King Josiah. When the book of the Law was discovered, (2 Kings 22:14 &ff) King Josiah (622 B.C.) consults Huldah, rather than Zephaniah or Jeremiah, both male prophets at the time (2 Chronicles 34:14 – 33, 2 Kings 22). Huldah’s spiritual authority led to the greatest revival in all of Israel’s history: one that endured for many generations. Miriam and Deborah (Ex 15:20, Gen 35:8) also exercised the highest spiritual leadership as prophets. Miriam’s status as a leader and prophet is recognized in that Israel refused to travel without her (Numbers 12:2-16). Miriam, in fact, was the first person in all of Scripture to be called a prophet or *nabi*. Like Miriam, the armies of Israel would not go into battle without Deborah’s leading them. A prophet (Judges 4:4-5, 5:7), and a judge, Deborah was also called the mother of Israel. Deborah was the highest ranking leader in Israel in her day. Noadiah, Esther and Abigail were also considered prophets.

Like the prophets, women also exercised political leadership in Israel. Consider Jael who kills the leader of an army at war with Israel.<sup>116</sup> Sisera – the army general, becomes a guest in Jael’s tent. Normally only males received other male leaders as guests. The irony is, Sisera most certainly expected to carry home Jewish women as part of the trophies of war. He did not expect to become a trophy of war himself, under a woman’s dominion. Yet through this means God uses Jael to rescue Israel through the demise of Sisera, whom she lulls to sleep in her tent in order to drive a tent peg through his skull (Judges 4:18-21).

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<sup>115</sup> Mary is the means of the second Adam—Christ through whom we are redeemed. Paul tells us in 1 Cor 15:45, the second Adam became a life-giving Spirit, bringing us to new life, because the gift is not like the curse, Paul says in Romans 5:15. The trespasses of Eden are overcome through one *anthropos*, human being, Christ Jesus—crucified for our sins.

<sup>116</sup> Her name appears between Deborah and Shamgar, both judges of Israel, Judges 5:6-7.

Like Jael, Sarah also took matters into her own hands after God promised that she and Abraham many children. She gives Hagar to Abraham and he obeys her (Gen 16:2). In fact, God tells Abraham to listen to Sarah (Gen 21:12).

Like Sarah, Rebekah orchestrates an inheritance for her younger son Jacob rather than Esau (Gen 24, 25:27-28). Similarly Rachel gives Bilhah and Leah to her husband Jacob. Though Jacob is called the father of Israel, Rachel makes key decisions. Using what influence they had in a patriarchal culture, women demonstrate, through their leadership, their identity and purpose. Ruth initiated marital overtures, rather than Boaz, just as the women in the *Song of Songs* pursued their romantic interests. Strikingly, Zipporah—the wife of Moses pleases God by circumcising their son. In doing so she performed a priestly rite (Exodus 3-4) thus revealing her purpose and identity.

Consider, Tamar who through cunning, deceived her father in law, the male head of their tribe—Judah. Her objective was to preserve their blood line. Despite her trickery, Judah admits she is more righteous than he, (Genesis 38:26). Her leadership reveals her identity as a strong helper.

Likewise, five sisters demanded that Moses revised inheritance laws and Moses respects and complies with their leadership (Numbers 27:1-11). Their initiative has helped women ever since. Their initiative exposes their identity.

Scripture likewise acknowledges the rescue of women outside Israel, like the Egyptian midwives—Shiphrah and Puah—who obey God by disobeying their king to save Hebrew babies (Exodus 1:8-22). Their leadership is enshrined in Scripture just as Rahab the Amorite sent Israel's spies to safety, only after negotiating for her family's safety. Rahab was incorporated into the people of Israel. Mentioned in the New Testament, Rahab is included among the faithful in the book of Hebrews.

Significantly, Esther and Ruth—two Old Testament books are named after women. While this may seem unremarkable today, women's names were rarely celebrated publically apart from their *pater* (or male family or tribal leader). And, when women accomplished great deeds, these were usually attributed to the male head of their clan. To oppose these and other gender traditions brought shame to the male-head and the tribe he represented. Despite the honor-shame culture of Semitic tribes, Scripture praises Queen Esther even as she publically approached her king and husband in public uninvited, thus shaming her husband among his invited dignitaries. In disgracing her husband, Esther obeys God. Consistently, woman eclipse their husbands as business leaders, like the woman praised in Proverbs 31, or in political maneuvering, like

Abigail. Women who honor and obey God, rather than male-rule are not condemned but exonerated in Scripture revealing their identity and purpose as strong help.

## **The New Testament**

Throughout the New Testament and particularly in the person of Jesus Christ women's identity and purpose moves to the foreground. Christ welcomes women's spiritual authority as integral to his new creation project. In Christ women lead with equal authority. Just as Eve shared authority with Adam so too Jesus—the second Adam also welcomed the spiritual authority of women. Unlike the rabbis of his day, women sat at his feet. They studied his teachings (Luke 10:38-42), preparing them as disciples, evangelists, and teachers. In all ways, the spiritual authority of women is self-evident, implicit and consistently part of Christ's teachings and practices. Christ continually opposes patriarchy, cultural and religiously.

When a woman called out to Jesus saying, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus responded, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" Luke 11:27-28. For Christ, a woman's value and identity resides not in her cultural role as mother, but in her response to God's revelation and this becomes the standard for all members of Christ's New Covenant—both male and female. Women are now daughters of Abraham (Luke 13:16), a phrase first used by Jesus to welcome women's authority as full members his new creation. And their faith often exceeds that of the 12 male disciples.

Consider that Jesus holds the longest conversation recorded in Scripture with a woman, at the well of Sychar. Jesus discloses his mission as the Messiah not to his disciples first, but to a woman who was also a Samaritan, whom the Jews despised. To an outcast woman and not the disciples, Jesus reveals his identity, angering his disciples. Perhaps they were aware of the content of their conversation? Clearly they were disturbed that Jesus so readily breaks customs in speaking with her. What is worse, by revealing his identity as Messiah, Christ enlists her as an evangelist to a despised people, knowing that she would do what any Jew or Samaritan might with his revelation. She dashes, leaving her jar at the well, to tell her community that she met a man who knew all about her. Could he be the Messiah, the chosen one sent to save us? She becomes the first evangelist, spreading the good news that God has sent a redeemer and that, lowly and outcast as she is, he seeks her out specifically. Several verses later we learn that many Samaritans come in her community. She too shares in the spiritual dominion in Christ's

work, despite her gender and ethnicity, and this is profoundly disturbing to the disciples. But there is more.

At the last supper, we meet another woman whom the disciples disparage because she anoints Jesus with expensive oil – an anointing that the disciples view as a waste, again displaying their faithlessness. What the disciples do not realize which this woman did was that the oil prepared Christ for his greatest work of all, his death on the Cross, a death that would bring reconciliation between God and humanity. By pouring oil on Christ's head, this woman anointed the Lord of Lords, and King of kings, just as the priests of Israel anointed kings for their leadership.

Jesus, aware of the significant task she performed, welcomes her spiritual leadership in preparing him for the grave. Thus Christ corrects the disciples for their ignorance and faithlessness saying, “Why are you bothering her. She has done a beautiful thing to me... When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I tell you wherever this gospel is preached ... what she has done for me will also be told, in memory of her” (Matthew 26:7-13).

She prepared the greatest king in all of history, for a death that constitutes the crowning achievement of all kings. Hers was the greatest priestly anointing in all of Israel's history, a task undertaken by not by a Levite priest, properly circumcised, but by woman whose example reveals the spiritual authority of women in the New Covenant. Her leadership is exonerated, for in Christ women hold equal spiritual dominion.

Remember also the faith of the Syrophonecian woman who realized that a few crumbs from Christ is enough – a “dog’s faith” that exceeds that of the disciples who question how Christ will feed 5,000 with just a few fish and loaves.

Interestingly, it was to a woman that Christ first appeared after his death and burial, while the 12 disciples hide behind locked doors. Remaining vigilant at the tomb, it was Mary who first meets the risen Lord. He sends her as an evangelist to tell the disciples he has risen. For this reason, Mary is called the apostles to the apostles because in Christ women have spiritual authority, just as they shared dominion in Eden. Mary’s culture did not consider women reliable witnesses, yet repeatedly women are present in each miracle revealing Christ as Messiah, equipping them as evangelists, teachers and apostles.

## **Paul & Women**

Like Jesus, the apostle Paul and author of most of the New Testament, builds the church beside the spiritual authority of women teachers, evangelists, prophets and the apostle Junia. In Paul we receive a theological rationale for women's spiritual authority, which he explains throughout his epistles but summarizes in Galatians 3:27-29, where Paul writes:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring heirs according to the promise.

In a profound way, Galatians 3: 27-29 was one of the most radical theological and social statements ever made about human equality given in the first century identity and purpose were determined by ethnicity, gender and class. To which Paul says no! It is not our natural birth but our spiritual rebirth in Christ that determines destiny! For this reason baptism replaces circumcision as the symbol of our covenant with God. For this reason, Galatians 3:28 was inscribed on many ancient baptismal fonts making Paul's point clear. Reborn in Christ, we all become agents of God, gifted with spiritual authority, just as our parents were in the garden.<sup>117</sup>

Like Christ, Paul continually places the purposes of God's kingdom above the gender and cultural norms of his day. Hence, Paul tells Philemon to receive Onesimus—his slave—as a brother (Philem.1:16) a command that constitutes a complete reframing Philemon's identity and destiny. Despite the cultural expectations for slaves (1 Cor. 2:6, 1 Cor. 7:31), Onesimus becomes Bishop of Ephesus.

## Marriage

In the same way Paul tells husbands and wives to share authority in marriage. In fact, all Christians are to submit to one another. Paul calls husbands to love their wives just as they love their own bodies—an astonishing request for first-century men. Paul tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, denying their own life if needed. Despite their privilege as males, Paul asks husbands to give *their* own lives as sacrifice for their wives—a complete reframing of gender and authority made possible

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<sup>117</sup>Romans chapters 5, 8, and in 1 Corinthians 15 (Galatians and Colossians)

through the newness of life Christians receive in Christ. Paul continually requires those with cultural privilege to be the first to live out kingdom values (1 Cor. 2:6, 1 Cor. 7:31).

Paul's closest coworkers were women. Therefore Paul honors Junia the apostle (Romans 16: 7). He requires respect for Phoebe a deacon and a leader in the church of Cenchrea (Romans 16:3). Paul celebrates teachers like Priscilla (Acts 18:26), and house church leaders like Lydia, Chloe, Nympha, and Apphia. Significantly, Paul describes the spiritual gifts that equip the church for supernatural service and these are never given because of gender, ethnicity, or birth-order because the spiritual gifts are given for service. Therefore, leadership is inseparable not only from service. It is also dependent on one's character and moral choices.

Scripture makes clear that leader is not the prerogative of privilege relative to gender or ethnicity. Notice that in 1Timothy 2:11-12 Paul forbids women at Ephesus from teaching, not because of their gender, but because of the *type* of authority they exercised. While this passage is frequently used to limit women's authority, yet the focus of this passage concerns the moral character of leaders. Thus, Paul selects an unusual Greek word for authority in 1 Timothy 2:12—*authentein* which to first century readers was associated with authority that was domineering, misappropriated, or usurped. *Authentein* can also mean to behave in violent ways. It can even imply murder! *Authentein* appears only once in Scripture (1 Timothy 2:12) to connote authority that was destructive. For this reason, various translations of Scripture rendered the special sense of this word as follows: |

### 1 Timothy 2: 12

- Vulgate (4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century AD) as, "I permit not a woman to teach, neither to **domineer** over a man"
- The Geneva Bible (1560 edition) as, "I permit not a woman to teach, neither to **usurp authority** over the man."
- King James Version (1611) as, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor **usurp authority** over a man."
- The New English Bible (1961) "I do not permit a woman to be a teacher, nor must woman **domineer over** man." <sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Linda Belleville, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Edited by Groothuis, Pierce and Fee. (Downer Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005)

This specific Greek verb *authentain* makes it clear that what Paul is objecting to in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is an ungodly, domineering use of authority. Because leadership concerns character, in selecting leaders it is not gender, ethnicity, education, wealth, age, experience or a person’s capacity to influence others that Scripture celebrates but one’s character.

The table below illustrated the character qualities required in elders, overseers, deacons, and widows—who also served as leaders. What marks leadership is not gender, but one’s capacity to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit. By contrast, those who display the fruit of the flesh<sup>119</sup> have disqualified themselves from leadership.

Elders/Overseers: (1 Tim. 3:2-3)	Temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money...
Deacons: (1 Tim. 3:8)	Serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money...
Widows:(1 Tim. 3:11)	Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things...
Fruit of the Spirit: (Gal. 5:22-26)	Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...



<sup>119</sup>Gal 5:19-21 fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing...

## Conclusion

In image above is an *Anastasias* mosaic from the Chora Church in Istanbul. Called “Hallowing the Gates of Hell,” the Anastasia place the victories of Jesus at the center of the biblical drama. Here Christ enters hell and crushes its gates underfoot setting free, those who have been sin’s hostages, beginning with Adam and Eve. For these early Christians, Calvary reaches back to the creation account to set right what had gone so terribly wrong.

Notice how Christ grasps the wrists of Adam and Eve to illustrate how sin had so enslaved the human family that our liberation comes only through God’s initiative. In Christ we are made new, which like the first creation required divine intervention. The events of Easter are strikingly similar to the creation account in Genesis. After his resurrection, Jesus appears to Mary and the other disciples whom he breaths on and commissions with spiritual authority to forgive and confront sin. <sup>120</sup>Just as God breathed life into Adam and Eve and gave them authority to care for the world.

In Christ we are made strong where the old creation had become weak, because the gift is not like the curse. And, in Christ we travel the greatest distance possible, from spiritual death to life—exercising authority again, as male and female like our parents in Eden. As agents of the gospel can we possibly hope to reconcile the world to Jesus by promoting male rule as God’s ideal? God forbid.

Through our rebirth in Christ, Greeks, slaves and women inherit a new identity not of shame and subjugation but of liberation, dignity and equality. If our truest liberation comes through Christ, and if our love of Jesus compels to celebrate our liberation in word and deed, how can we condemn patriarchy abroad and tolerate at home, in churches and organizations who routinely export it uncritically, damaging global communities? Unless we address this problem we are working at cross purposes with commitment to Gospel and God’s justice.

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<sup>120</sup>The events of Pentecost follow this same pattern: In Acts chapter 2 there was a rush of a wind, and it filled the house...and “they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. Peter explains that the birth of the church, was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophesy that in the last days God’s Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, gifting each with spiritual authority, not according to gender, ethnicity or class, but according to God’s favor. Spiritual authority is not limited by gender.

# **Empowering women for strategic Leadership and Economic Sustainability in Kenya**

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## **Introduction**

Women play a major socio-economic role in the family and the nation as a whole yet they are more affected by poverty than men. They constitute 50% of population but their contribution to GDP is not fully recognized. There is global acknowledgement of the effects of gender inequality and the need to empower women<sup>121</sup> hence MDG 3, seeks to “achieve equality and empower women”.

## **Women Needs**

- Access to decent work
- Gender sensitive social protections
- Access to capital
- Access to markets
- Education skills development and upward mobility
- Access to technology and infrastructure
- Access to savings and financial literacy
- Business opportunities

## **Challenges**

Despite their critical societal role and growing evidence of their economic power, women continue to face greater risks and lack access to equal opportunities compared to men. Women also remain poorer and less educated, are paid less at work, and are more likely to suffer from physical, emotional, and sexual violence.

This situation is further asserted by the Ubuntu Institute gender equality and women empowerment programme which seeks to address the vulnerability of young girls and women to HIV/AIDS, poverty, gender based violence, etc. The focus of the programme

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<sup>121</sup>See UN Millennium Development Goal website

is on the intersection of culture and the empowerment of women. According to the Institute:

“Men and women have deeply unequal roles in Sub-Saharan Africa, deeply entrenched in language and in the way men and women are moulded within our society. Our African culture has to be preserved but cannot be left unquestioned especially in areas where it threatens life. We have to continue to be Africans but our children must be born to live, they cannot be born to die” (Graça Machel).

“In many rural societies of developing countries, women carry the burden of farm labor and on-farm transport; they arrange for household energy (mostly firewood) and water... Furthermore, women, as mothers, grandmothers, wives, sisters, or daughters, often represent the first line of health care, prepare meals for the family, convey values, and provide the first role models for behavior” (Dr Mamphela Ramphele, 2004).

Women spend at least twice as much time as men on unpaid domestic work, making their average paid and unpaid work hours longer than men’s in every region. Women also lack access to and control over financial resources, which reduces their autonomy and increases their vulnerability. Even when they are earning an independent cash income, significant percentages of married women, especially poor married women, have no say in spending decisions.

Currently, the majority of women’s economic activity occurs beyond the formal sector – women do not (or cannot) own the land they farm, they sell products at market without establishing a formal business, they work domestically in their home or someone else’s home. The vast majority of poor women are engaged in subsistence agriculture – in sub-Saharan Africa, women represent 70 percent of agricultural labor and are responsible for producing 90 percent of food.

Women in formal employment often lack awareness of their rights and are unable to protect themselves against employment violations.

There is need to think about women empowerment for them to be able to make independent decisions in life. This can only be possible if they start to think of their leadership positions strategically and making strategic decisions, so as to be authentic Christian leaders. Authentic Christian Leadership is a gift given from God (Acts 1:8) with a purpose to equip individuals to focus on fulfilling the will of God and carrying out His vision (Matthew 28:16-20). In Acts 2, an account is given of the actions of Peter

and the Apostles on the day of Pentecost who were bestowed with divine empowerment by God. As a result they were able to use inductive (Acts 2:16-21) and deductive (Acts 2:29-33) reasoning based on wisdom and knowledge given to them through the Holy Spirit. As the crowd became convicted (Acts 2:41), the reason for Christ's death and resurrection began taking root. The Apostles began to develop followers (Acts 2:42-47) in a similar manner as Christ developed them through transformational leadership.

Divine empowerment and transformational leadership can have a significant impact on follower development in a number of ways: vision (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:14-47), motivation (Acts 7:1-52), empowerment (Acts 2:14-47; 7:1-52; 9:20-31), performance (Acts 2:14-40), and morality and ethics (Acts 2:41-47). When individuals are equipped through divine empowerment (Acts 1:8) and begin to transform the lives of others (Acts 1:8; 2:14-47; 3:1-9; 4:23-36; 7:1-59; 8:26-40; 9:20-31), there is an opportunity to have a kingdom impact that will last for generations to come. But not many of our African women have reached this level of authentic leadership. There is need for interventions for this to be achieved.

## **Interventions**

### **1. Investment Opportunities**

Simple interventions and innovations can begin to address these challenges and elevate women, communities, and businesses. Employing a woman can give her independence and can give her family stability.

### **2. Formal Employment and Benefits**

Women working in both formal and informal employment require assistance and opportunities in four key areas to excel and increase their income and re-investment potential.

### **3. Access to employment**

Women often lack access to decent and stable work due to low education and greater needs for benefits, such as maternity leave, family obligations, and poor health. Companies can contribute to improving working conditions in direct operations and supply chains, and can make efforts to attract, retain, and advance female employees.

#### **4. Education, skills development, upward mobility**

Girls often complete less school than boys in the developing world, which may prevent women from securing higher-skilled jobs and limit their professional advancement. Employee diversity policies and skills development programs will be highly beneficial to female employees and will reward companies with increased productivity, innovation, and employee retention.

#### **5. Gender-sensitive social protections**

Companies can reduce absenteeism and increase productivity, or reduce risk to employees or operations, by providing such services. Companies need to have policies on sexual harassment and improved worksite facilities such as breastfeeding areas for nursing mother.

#### **6. Access to savings and financial literacy**

Many low-income women lack access to bank accounts, creating risks associated with cash savings or lack of savings. Women also often lack financial independence, with obligations to share or forfeit their income to family members. Lastly, women stand to benefit from financial literacy training to help them manage household income and spending, as well as to increase understanding of and trust in formal banking systems.

#### **7. Entrepreneurship**

Women seeking to grow existing businesses or start new ones will often require assistance in the four main areas described below. Supporting female entrepreneurship can help stimulate the economy, increase the consumer base, and provide new or innovative product inputs or services.

*a) Access to capital*

In many parts of the world, women are legally prohibited from owning land or inheriting property, and securing loans can be difficult. Assistance with securing capital in a safe and culturally appropriate way will help women start and expand their businesses. The government of Kenya is doing this through the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF).

*b) Business and Leadership training and networks*

Many women lack the basic business training and the logistical knowledge to run a small business. They also lack networks of mentors and potential business partners. Training and networking programs and/or physical centers can help address this need.

c) *Access to markets*

Women farmers or business owners struggle to get their products to market, causing many to rely on costly and often corrupt middlemen. Educational programs, assisted networking and trade shows, and innovations such as the use of the Internet or the mobile phone can help shrink the gap between female small-business owners and the market.

d) *Access to technology and infrastructure*

Women's productivity and/or access to markets can be hindered by poor infrastructure and lack of information. Good roads and water can help improve women's productivity, as well as their mobility to reach physical marketplaces or trade shows. Internet connectivity and mobile phones can help women access data to inform their prices and marketing strategies, and can allow them to sell or market products online.

## **Our Experience**

St. Paul's University has been training women on Leadership and Management, Business Management as well as loaning women with capital. Women are empowered with skills in Leadership and Governance, Financial and Human Resources management. This course helps them improve their leadership style in the community and it builds their confidence; that women can also make good leaders. One of the training beneficiaries had this to say:

*"The training was of great benefit to me, I always thought of mobilizing women in my church to form a savings group but I feared to fail, with what I learnt from the training; I have succeeded to form Faith Sisters and we are already saving and lending to each other" (A participant from a Women's Training, Course).*

Business management training targets women with small businesses and those starting business. The women are trained on how to start-up businesses, manage the business,

finances, customer relations and mapping opportunities. There has been a great impact in the community; women are earning a living for their families and their businesses have grown very fast. One of the women had this to say:

*“The money I get from this business enables me to meet my children’s needs and still support my parents back at home” (A participant from a Community Transformation Through Microfinance, Course).*

## **Conclusion**

Women play a major role in economic development of the nation but they lack access to resources, lack the required skills for employment among many other hindrances. There is need for stakeholders to put effort and invest in women to reduce poverty and sustain development in Kenya. Hence, the old saying that; *“when you empower a woman, you empower the nation”*.

If this results to divine empowerment, then we can say that strategic authentic leadership has been achieved. The result is a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. This is what we need for leadership to be considered as strategic and empowered for future economic sustainability.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Due to space limitations this paper will be limited to the New Testament. Many good works are available for studying the relevant Old Testament passages; Miles 2006 and Miles 2008 are good starting points to examine the creation and fall narratives, which are critical.

<sup>ii</sup> The concept of a “fullness that leaves nothing out” (in contrast to a “balance”) was first suggested by Christian ethicist John Howard Yoder during a lecture in the late 70’s.

<sup>iii</sup> In preparation for this paper I repeated the process, scanning through the New Testament and recording any text that mentioned women (or even broader gender-related issues) on note cards. I ended up with about one dozen from the book of Acts and about two dozen each from the gospels and the letters of Paul. My findings confirm Bartchy’s approach and conclusions.

<sup>iv</sup> These findings were originally published in Bartchy 1978, where the three categories were identified as Descriptive, Normative and Problematic. He explains in Bartchy 1996 how feedback from readers convinced him of the need for less confusing titles for the latter two categories, resulting in those presented here.

<sup>v</sup> For further study of this concept of power, see Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL USA, 2013), MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL USA, 2008), and Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women’s Stories of Survival and Resistance*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY USA and London, England 2001), particularly chapter 5, “Resistance Transforming Power.”

<sup>vi</sup> The qualification for elder/overseer in 1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:6 as literally, “a man of one woman” should be seen in this cultural context as intended to exclude men with multiple sexual partners, not to exclude women.

<sup>vii</sup> Jesus does not address the issue of women’s lust for men; as we often point out in our Empower seminars, “Women are almost never in a position where they can use men as sexual objects against their will” (Miles 2013, 63 [Debrief for Study 9, “Women as Sexual Property”]).

<sup>viii</sup> This, along with the expansion of women’s value beyond what they do for their husbands, has important implications for cultures where “honor killings” of women and girls is practiced.

<sup>ix</sup> This is further reinforced in vs. 23, where Christ’s “headship” is associated with his function as savior – not as lord; in Eph. 1:9-10, where God “unites” (Greek: “heads up”) all things in Christ; and in Eph. 1:22, where God subjects all things to Christ and places them under his feet, not under his head (reflecting that Christ raises his body, the church, to reign together with him). See Miles 2006, 96-97 and Miles 2008, study 12, “The Apostle Paul and Headship.”

<sup>8</sup> Referenced by Belleville, Linda, “Teaching & Usurping Authority: 1 Tim.2:11-15,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, Ronald Pierce & Rebecca Groothuis, eds., InterVarsity Press, 2005, pp. 205-223.

<sup>xi</sup> For example, Sarah Sumner takes this approach in Sumner 2003, 128, where she calls this a “guiding hermeneutic.”