

**WOMEN AUTHORITY IN PUBLIC TEACHING (1TIMOTHY 2:11-15) VERSUS
FEMINIST LIBERAL THEOLOGY: AN ADVOCACY FOR A PARADIGM
SHIFT IN THE 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

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Abstract

Much confusion exists in the church today over women authority in public teaching, leadership roles and ministry. There are multitudes of viewpoint heard among those who allow women the same liberty to minister as men and those who do not allow women to teach in public or occupy leadership positions in the church. To this end, this work, “Women Authority in Public Teaching (1 Timothy 2:11-15) Versus Feminist Liberal Theology: And Advocacy for a Paradigm Shift in 21st Christian Churches” seeks to call for women’s liberty to fully participate in leadership roles and positions in religious circles. Using the qualitative descriptive method based on Feminist Liberal Theology, it is discovered that from Old Testament, New Testament, Acts and the Epistles, women were Prophets, Queens, Army Captains, Gospel Proclaimers, Apostle, Deacons, Pastor-Teacher, and held office of Ruler or President of Synagogues. It is the opinion of this work that women who are qualified should be allowed to teach publicly, occupy leadership positions in the Christian churches of 21st century as women of old so as to contribute to the growth of the body of Christ.

Introduction

Much confusion exists in the Church today over the role of women in ministry. There are multitudes of viewpoint held ranging from those who allow women the same liberty to minister as a man to those who forbid women to speak in any public setting and with every shade in between. Some allow women to fill positions of leadership, but never at the ‘top of the ladder’, while others restrict ministry to prescribed settings such as foreign mission fields, or to a particular audience such as woman and children and small groups rather than the esteemed pulpit. The most important questions at this juncture are can a

woman teach without exercising authority? Or can a woman make decisions where there are men involved? These are questions that beg for valid answers.

Perhaps more than any other, 1Timothy 2:11-15 is used by many Christian denominations to oppose or limit the participation of women in preaching, teaching or exercising authority in the Church. Therefore, good understanding of this passage is crucial since it concerns the whole Christian population and has wide-range of implications for women's ministry. It may also have implications for the marriage state and how God views the role of husband and wife. Taken at face value for instance, the passage (1 Timothy 2:11-15) bars women from any form of teaching or exercising authority. The reasoning given to support this view is based on the order of creation which accounts that Eve was created second and was therefore subordinate to man (v. 13).

However, the proper place and role of women is an on-going discussion all over the world both in the social and spiritual circles. There are lots of problems and controversial issues in the debate on women and their spiritual role in the church. Again, there is the idea that women were relegated because men wrote the largest chunk of the Scripture and are from a patriarchal society that expects women to be silent, submissive and to be willing to learn from men rather than teaching men. Responding to these restrictions, Paul's saying in Galatians 3:28 have been used as solid foundation to support women in ministry. Again, there are many women who made significant contributions in both Jesus' and Paul's ministries and the contemporary society.

Based on the above observation, the thrust of this work is to examine what informed Paul, who had enjoyed much support from women to have asked them not to exercise authority in public teachings as stated in 1Timothy 2: 11-15. There are differing positions on this passage, attempt will be made to present the different views and proffer solutions after studying the exegesis of the passage.

The Conceptual Framework

The Concept of Women

'Women', is the plural of woman. Woman is defined by Webster (1981:1144) as "the female of the human race - an adult or grown-up female, as distinguished from a man". Vine (1984:122) defines a woman as; *Gune (Yunh)* (1) A woman, married or unmarried; (2) a wife. Women, therefore, are the plural of woman and connote the females of the human race, adults, grown up females as distinguished from men. This work, explores the women – females in the perspective or their involvement in teaching and leadership roles in the Church as female ministers, pastors, preachers, teachers, and leaders. Even though we know the difference between men and women exist, being different does not mean

being inferior or superior to the other. It has nothing to do with being lesser as human. A woman is not less than a man because she is a woman and vice versa, they remain equal but different, they are different because of their difference in purposes.

Women in the Social-Cultural Contexts of the First Century A.D.

According to Green, McKnight and Marshall (1992:880-881): In very general terms Jesus lived in social-cultural contexts (the Jewish context and the larger Greco Roman society) in which the male view of women was usually negative and the place of women was understood to be limited for the most part to the domestic roles of wife and mother. Women were perceived by extant male writers to be responsible for most (all?) sin, and especially for sexual temptation and sin. There are, on the other hand, clear indications both from literary and non-literary sources that there were positive roles for women as well.

The extant male literary sources of ancient Judaism, which reflect both a class and gender perspective, present a fairly consistent pattern of a negative view toward women (Swidler, 1976:880). For example, Josephus, the first-century A.D. Jewish historian, states that the Law holds woman to be inferior in all matters and that, therefore, women should be submissive (Ag. AP.2.25&201). Philo, the first century A.D. Alexandrian Jewish Philosopher and biblical commentator, refers throughout his writings to women and female traits as examples of weakness (e.g. 'Op. Mund. 151-52; Quaest. In Gen.1.33). Philo argues that women ought to stay at home, desiring a life of seclusion (Spec. Leg. 3.169-77; Flacc.89). Sirach, a proto-Pharisaic work from about 180 B.C., presents women either as good wives or as problems. It even states that "better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does well; it is woman who brings shame and disgrace"(Sir 42:14 NRSV).

This negative picture within Judaism was greatly shaped and influenced by Greek and Greco- Roman androcentrism and misogyny. However, as some have argued (e.g. Meyers, 1998), women's place in Israel began to decline with the emergence of a bureaucratic monarchy, prior to Greek influence. However, there are, in spite of the lack of literary evidence from women, substantial indications that positive roles did exist for women within Judaism, even if limited. Especially important is the evidence that some women held the office of ruler or president of synagogues in ancient Judaism (Kraemer 1988:880).

Significant religious roles for women are also indicated by the portrayal of Job's three daughters as those who speak the language of angels in the Testament of Job and in the traditions about Beruriah, a second century A.D. rabbi (Swidler, 1976:881). Women as

strong leaders are portrayed in the Hellenistic Jewish story of Judith and in the rule of Salome Alexandra as Queen in Judea (approximately 76-67 B.C.). There is also substantial non-literary evidence which shows that Jewish women often took initiative for their lives and activities in spite of the male orientation and domination prevalent in the culture (Kraemer, 1988:886). These positive roles and opportunities constitute Jewish evidence for the significance of women in ancient Judaism.

David A. Fiensy (2004:46-48) in his work, "The Roman Empire and Asia Minor," in *The Face of New Testament Studies* gives the following narrative: At least two New Testament epistles associated with Asia Minor reveal important attitudes about women's roles in the early church. Paul wrote in 1Cor. 14:34-35 (written at Ephesus) that women should be silent in the assembly. The Pauline or deutro-Pauline letter sent to Timothy in epistle (1 Tim. 1:3) requires women to receive instruction quietly and forbids women to teach men (1 Tim. 2:11-12). One could conclude from these texts that women in Asia Minor generally were denied leadership roles and that Judaism maintained this practice in the synagogue -a practice that Christianity imitated.

But work based on the inscriptions in the last thirty years leads to other conclusions. The Book of Acts and the Gospel refers to men who were called "leaders of the synagogue" (*ἀρχισυναγωγοί*, *archisynagōgos*) (Fiensy 2004:46). Inscriptions from the Greco-Roman world also refer to the archisynagōgos. These men had responsibilities, evidently, for managing the synagogue worship, education, and finances.

The surprise is that two inscriptions from Asia Minor and one from Crete name women as archisynagogoi (Kraabel 1981; Brooten 1981, 1982; Horbury 1999). Rufina of Smyrna, who is called both a Jewess and archisynagōgos, is named in an inscription from the second century C.E., and Theopemptre of Myndos of Caria is also so named in an inscription from the fourth or fifth century (Fiensy 2004:46). These two inscriptions are interesting for two reasons: (1) there are seven references to archisynagōgoi from Asia Minor, five to men and two to women; (2) the only other place where a woman was called an archisynagōgos was Crete. Thus, as Trebilco and Kraabel (see, Fiensy 2004:47) suggested, it seems plausible that women were allowed a greater role in some synagogues in Asia Minor.

Added to the above inscriptions are three others that interest us. From Phocaea comes mention of one Tation, who was given the chief seat in the synagogue because of a donation she made. Julia Severa, a Gentile sympathizer to Judaism (or a God-fearer), built the synagogue at Acmonia and was given honors. Finally, the Aphrodisias inscription described above mentions someone named Jael as the "president" or "patron" of the synagogue (Fiensy 2004:47). Was Jael a woman, named after the famous person of Judg.

4:17-22, or a man? Opinions vary, but if this person was a woman, she functioned as an important synagogue leader (Fiensy, 2004: 47).

The main debate is whether these titles and others were given to women because: (1) their husbands or sons held the office, or (2) they were simply honorific, given because of a donation but not carrying an actual leadership function. B. Brooten (1981:48), has argued that the inscriptions do not usually mention a husband or son, and thus we cannot be sure that the women were married at the time. Second, even if the title was in some sense honorific, that does not exclude a leadership role of some kind. Brooten appears to have convinced the most scholars writing on the subject.

Thus, if Jewish women in Asia Minor were being granted greater authority than generally allowed them elsewhere, what do we make of the text from 1 Corinthians, and especially that from 1 Timothy, which was directed to churches in Ephesus? Did the author (s) intentionally oppose a trend in the synagogues in Asia Minor? Or do we perhaps need to reflect anew on what the texts were saying? At any rate, the inscriptions should serve as the background out of which we understand early Christian teaching on the role of women in the church and by extension apply to Christian Churches in the 21st Century.

The Concept of Authority

'Authority', is the right to effect control over objects, individuals or events. While human authority may be delegated, God's authority arises from himself alone. In New Testament the usual term for "authority" is *exousia* (Matthew 10x, Mark 10x, Luke 16x, John 8x) (Green, McKnight and Marshal, 1992:50-51). Webster defines authority as, power or right to command or act; dominion; control; a person or person exercising power and command (1981:67). However, in our text *αὐθεντεῖν*, to exercise authority over, occurs only here in the New Testament. Scanzoni and Hardesty give this background material on its meaning:

Possible translations are "interrupt" (Dibelius), "dictate to" (Moffatt) or "domineer over" (NEB). In noun form, as used by the great Greek dramatists, it meant a "suicide" or a "family murderer". Later the noun came to mean "lord" or "autocrat". In the first century it was rather a slang word...Because suicide involves deciding for oneself, taking one's life into one's own hands, to do so for others meant to become a "dictator." Thus, the word came to mean "self-willed" or "arbitrary," interfering in what was not properly one's own domain, trespassing the socially proper limits (1975:71).

Scanzoni and Hardesty conclude that the women addressed in 1 Timothy 2:11ff, were doing something wrong - trying to teach without the necessary gifts, acting bossy or putting their husbands down in public. And therefore, the statement in 1 Timothy 2:11

does not apply to us in its absolute sense. However, the translation of *αὐθεντεῖν*, does not allow for such relativization. The self-will and interference in what is not one's own proper domain connoted by *αὐθεντεῖν*, suits and supports the unconditional prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:11. A woman who teaches and exercises authority over men in the church is by definition a usurper, interfering in an area forbidden to her. The writer (Paul?) does not say that a woman who usurps authority should not teach or exercise authority over men; he says that a woman should not teach or exercise (usurp) authority over men.

What the author (Paul?) of 1Timothy 2:11 insinuate calls for explanation. For women authority to teach, who is to give them the authority? Man or God? In the Old Testament in Psalm 68:11, "The Lord gives the command; great is the host of those who bore the tidings." In the Gospel of Mathew 28:18-20, what is known as the Great Commission both men and women are mandated to go and teach all nations by Jesus Christ. Olusakin (2014: 245) argues that despite the recognition accorded women evangelists in Christ Apostolic Church (in Port Harcourt), they still suffer some level of discrimination. The first issue has to do with the final benediction in the Church. Women are not allowed to say the final benediction, it must be men.

The researcher opines that since God has given the word, and Jesus mandates disciples to go and teach all nations, the dichotomy between men and women should be removed. Men in Churches' hierarchy and leadership should give women who are saved, redeemed, justified and Spirit filled just as they (the men) are, the "authority" to say the benediction, teach, preach and occupy leadership roles in Christian Churches in the whole world and in 21st Century. Furthermore, Peter H. Davids (2001:3) explains authority in two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic authority is that which something or someone possesses due to what they are. While, extrinsic authority, on the other hand, is the authority that someone or something possesses because people ascribe such authority to them. Our plea here is that if women do not have intrinsic authority because of what (who) they are - females, let them be given extrinsic authority ascribed to them by males, for them (females) to exercise public teaching, preaching and pastoring for the general growth of the body of Christ in 21st Century.

The Concept of Public Teaching

"I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent" (1 Timothy 2:12). The verse is one of the most controversial texts in all of the New Testament mainly because there is such a difference of opinion, understanding, and interpretation given to it over what the author (Paul?) is disallowing. One stream of interpretation posits that the writer is prohibiting one thing -a certain kind of teaching. On this view, such interpreters translate the statement as, "I do not allow a woman to teach

with authority,” or perhaps, “I do not allow a woman to teach with intent to dominate.” In either case, it is only a certain kind of teaching that the writer (Paul?) prohibits. As long as women do not teach with authority-teaching with pastoral authority - then it is permissible for women to teach men in the gathered assembly of the Church. Or, as long as female teachers do not seek to dominate, they are allowed to teach the gathered Assembly of God's people. The writer (Paul?) rules out for women not Church-wide teaching per se but only a certain kind of teaching -the kind that wrongly assumes authority or exercises authority in a harsh or sinful way.

But neither of those interpretations makes sense of the actual wording of the text. Thus, another stream of interpretation holds that the author (Paul?) is prohibiting two things not one (Köstenberger, 2016:448). On this view, the writer is saying that women should not teach or exercise authority within the gathered assembly of the Church. The writer is disallowing both activities. The author is not prohibiting all teaching by women – as if a woman must refrain from teaching subjects like geometry or science. According to Wolters (2016:24) the word translated “teach” refers specifically to teaching Christian Doctrine. Thus, the prohibition applies narrowly to those who teach or preach the Bible, he asserts.

Burk (2019: N.P.) neither argues that, nor is the writer (Paul?) saying that women are incapable of being gifted Bible teachers. There are many women who are very gifted teachers. He is simply saying that the exercise of their teaching gifts must be kept within certain parameters. They are not allowed to teach men. Nor are they allowed to “exercise authority” which means that women are not to be pastors. According to Burk, as the following chapter of 1 Timothy makes clear, the pastorate is reserved only for qualified men – not all men, but only those who meet certain qualifications, with the result that they are recognized as elders by the rest of the Church.

The average person with modern sensibilities begins to feel and objections welling up: “why should the writer (Paul?) Put gender parameters on who can teach and be an elder? This sounds sexist. If women can teach men geometry and science, why can't they teach or preach the Bible? Anytime a woman teaches whether in a gathered assembly of the Church or home Church is it not teaching with pastoral authority as given by God and Jesus Christ? Why do we have women who we claim are gifted teachers and do not allow them to teach in public? If the pastorate is reserved for qualified men: what make such men qualified; can't women also be qualified to occupy the pastorate being saved, redeemed, justified, and filled with the Holy Spirit just as their male counterparts? The researcher is of the opinion that women, who are gifted teachers, saved, redeemed, justified, and filled with the Holy Spirit be allowed to teach and preach the Bible publicly in all Churches and denominations.

Webster (1981:772) defines public as, “Not private, pertaining to the whole people, relating to, regarding or affecting a state, nation or community; the general body of mankind or of nation, state or community; the whole people, indefinitely”. Webster (1981:1007) also defines teaching as, “The act or business of instructing”. The public teaching in the modern sense should incorporate Crusades whereby thousands of both men and women in a public and open space are ministered to. Public teaching should include the use of modern public apparatus as radio, television, social media platforms where thousands and even millions (both men and women) are taught and preached to by women or female pastors

Theoretical Framework

This work applies the Liberal Feminist Theory, which is a set of ideas originating with the belief that women are not subordinate to men or only valuable in relation to men (servants, caretakers, mothers or prostitutes), and that the disciplines, systems and structures in place in our world today may be changed for the better if infused with a feminist point of view (Tong, 2001:1). Major proponents of Liberal Feminist Theory are Mary Astel (1666-1731), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1799), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), and Virginia Wolf (1882-1941). In essence, the Liberal Feminist Theory encompasses a range of ideas reflecting the diversity of women worldwide. Feminism counters traditional philosophy with new ways of addressing practices affecting humanity, calling for the replacement of the presiding patriarchal order with a system that emphasizes equal rights, justice and fairness. Liberal Feminists cite women’s oppression as rooted in social, political and legal constraints.

However, nowadays the Liberal Feminist Theory has impacted virtually all structures, systems and disciplines, challenging traditional ontological and epistemological thoughts about human nature as well as “maleness” and “femaleness”. Modern feminism which began 200 years ago has evolved in three waves; the first wave, dealt with suffrage; the second centered on equal access; and the current wave is focusing on global equality (Tong, 2023:2). Twenty-first Century feminist theory narrowly understood, in that it is not only about “women” (those assigned female at self-identifying as women). It is a mature field that addresses structural injustice, social injustice, and the future of the planet (Goulinaric, 2020:7). This is known nowadays as Ecofeminism.

Prominent Groups of Liberal Feminism

According to Tong (2023:1) the prominent groups of Liberal Feminism include the following:

- ❖ Radical Libertarian Feminists, who hold that the patriarchal system that oppresses women must be completely eliminated and that women should be free to exercise total sexual and reproductive freedom.
- ❖ Radical Cultural Feminists urge women to extricate themselves from the institution of compulsory heterosexuality.
- ❖ Marxist Socialist Feminists claim it is impossible for anyone, especially women to achieve true freedom in a class- based society.
- ❖ Multicultural Feminists explain how the idea of “sameness” could counter intuitively be used as instrument of oppression rather than liberation.
- ❖ Postmodern Feminists challenge western dualistic thinking.
- ❖ Global Feminists stress the universal interest of women worldwide.
- ❖ Eco-feminists focus on the connection among humans to the non-human world.

It is interesting to note that all the prominent groups or trends of liberal feminism pointed above all agitate and advocate for one and the same thing, that is liberation, freedom, equality and justice for humanity both men and women and their relationship with the ecosystem or the world.

Three Tenets of Liberal Feminism Theory

Liberal feminism is different from other feminist ideas and activism. Mukul (2022:16) gives us the following tenets of Liberal Feminist Theory:

1. **Individualism** – Liberal feminism focuses on individual freedom and autonomy. They are rooted in liberal feminism. Individualist feminists took a more legitimate approach to equality, invoking natural law theory. They want to fully recognize women’s individual rights through laws that protect the persons and private property of men and women equally. When people think of feminism these days, individual feminism often comes to mind, precisely because it has become so mainstream.
2. **Legal and Political Reforms** – Liberal feminists tend to focus on using existing systems of power, such as courts and government, to secure rights, and improve women’s lives. Women have historically fought for equal access to public institutions and the workplace and representation in cutting-edge industries as a sign of progress.

3. **Pragmatism-** Many Liberal feminists take a pragmatic approach to reform. They look for political struggles that seem to be won and gains they can make in the current political and economic structures of society.

Characteristics of Present-Day Liberal Feminism Theory

Present day liberal feminist theory is made up of several parts. These are: Women should have equal access to opportunities in education and employment. Women should have equal wages. Men and women should not suffer from sex- based discrimination in any form. Women and men should be free from threat of workplace sexual harassment (Serva, 2022: n.p.). Belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes; commitment to achieving goals through legal reform, commitment to the democratic system access to the same resources and opportunities in order to be able to fully express themselves.

The researcher uses the Liberal Feminist Theory because it has a direct connection with the Christian Feminist Liberal Theology called “Christian Feminism”- a movement that has had profound impact on all aspects of life, challenging some traditional basic Christian interpretations of the Scripture with respect to the status and roles of women. To this end, some 19th century Christian authors began codifying challenges to the centuries old traditional views toward women both in Church and in society. Hernandez and Seckle, in Otonko (2018:102) for instance, believe that the inferior status endured by women under Judaism and later under Christianity is a logical result of the Bible sexist attitude towards women. Throughout the Bible there is a clear-cut inequality between men and women. Men are considered more important, more useful, more valuable, and wiser than women. The woman’s role is to remain silent, obey her husband, and to bear and bring up children. She is to support her husband in all of his decisions. Women are not permitted to have any authority over men. The biblical ideal is always the submissive woman. These biblical attitudes reflect the primitive culture in which the Bible was written. According to them, the need to justify these unbalanced attitudes towards women undoubtedly led to the invention of the Eve myth that in her “weakness” ate the forbidden fruit and consequently ruined humanity for all time. This single story has given a rationale for the hatred of women.

It is against this backdrop that Feminist Liberation Theologians rise to contend for equality between men and women. They also advocate for women to be given free hand in teaching, preaching and leadership roles in the Church. Feminist Liberation Theology promotes an inclusive liberation message of the Scriptures. It does this, also in the light of the fact that more than half of the oppressed poor and hungry in the world are women, and children who depend on them. Feminist Liberation theologians, therefore, practice

liberation theology, based on the acknowledgement and analysis of their own experience of oppression as women in sexist, cultural and theological contexts.

Furthermore, feminist liberation theologians maintain that the Bible and traditional Christian theology through the ages are inherently sexist, and as such, are not helpful to women's consciousness. It is only when one comprehends how the Bible and traditional Christian Theology have been used in the oppression of women that one can prevent the misuse of the Bible for further oppression. In practicing biblical liberation theology, feminists insist that oppressive and destructive biblical traditions are not authoritative. They seek, rather, to rediscover and use those positive biblical traditions and interpretations that have transcended their oppressive cultural and patriarchal contexts. Moreso, Biblical texts that have been traditionally misinterpreted with a deliberate bias towards fostering the oppression of women are reinterpreted to show instead the truth of their liberating power (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006:26-27).

It was in the 19th century that the feminist Elizabeth Cady Lanton (1895-1898) gathered a group of educated women as part of the Women's Revising Committee, charged with the responsibility of doing a systematic critique of patriarchy or the belief that maleness is the norm for humanity in the Bible. This resulted in the publication of the Women's Bible in 1896-1898.

Liberal Feminist Approaches an Advocacy for a Paradigm Shift on Women Authority in Public Teaching in Christian Churches in 21st Century

Liberal Feminists use various approaches and advocate for women authority in public teaching and leadership roles in Christian churches in 21st century as follows:

i. Modern Feminism Approach

The conceptual character of "women's experience" can be explored further by reviewing the origins and development of *modern* feminist movement both more generally and also more specifically as feminist theology in dialogue with biblical texts. Recently Ruth Page (1976) has evaluated her work in an essay reprinted in Ann Leade's *Feminist Theology* (1990). Another landmark was the appearance of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949 (English 1953), in which she raised questions concerning the relation between *symbolic conceptual* perception and women's *social roles*. She writes, "Humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him... He is the subject ... she is the other" (1981:44).

Modern feminism for a time, perhaps especially in the 1960s, took either two forms. One form advocated equality and liberation on the grounds of *similarities* between women and men; the other form argued for the same goals on the basis of

differences between women and men, which demanded female self-expression and recognition as persons. Kate Millet (1969) argues that position on the ladder of social power structures were determined by sexual identity rather than by merit. The repressive structure of the patriarchal family unit was held responsible, and psychoanalysis and sociology put forward as critical unmasking principles, which therefore facilitated liberation. Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) argues that the social roles imposed on women by the constraints of the family, education, work, and capitalist market forces simply had the effect of reducing ("castrating") women as persons.

Mary Daly's book *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968) took up Simone de Beauvoir's title in response to some of their documents of the Second Vatican Council. In spite of their fundamentally progress character some document seemed to address women only as wives, mothers, widows, daughters, or "religious women", in other words, in terms of roles defined by their relation to men, rather than persons in their own right. In *Beyond God the Father* (1973) she moves to a post Christian "radical" feminism. She attacks what she perceives as the maleness of the God of the Bible and of the Hebrew –Christian tradition. She also advocates a post- Christian separation of "anti-Church" and "sisterhood".

Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Reuther effectively formed the women's caucus within the American Academy of Religion in 1971, from which a series of papers emerged. Phyllis Trible's paper "*Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Tradition*" appeared in 1973; and Letty Russell edited what she has modestly called a "premature" guide to feminist interpretation of the Bible in 1976 under the title *The Liberating Word*. Here Letty Russell argues that God transcends all categories of male, female and warned against sexual stereotyping; thereby calling for women's liberty to fully participate in leadership roles in circular and religious circles.

ii. *Evangelical Feminism Approach*

We may note, for example the work of two British Feminist Studies which come from within a more conservative or evangelical framework: Mary Evan's *Women in The Bible* (1983) and Elaine Storkey's *What's Right with Feminism Today* (1985). Evangelical Feminist embodies, "a commitment to other..." Christian feminists look beyond their rights. Like Phyllis Trible, she (Storkey) sees "humanity" in Gen. 1:26-27, as

"Together created in the image of God... Together they are told to have dominion ... and to exercise stewardship" (1985:153). The word "helper" (Gen. 2:18) is used for God's role in relation to humankind, so in no way implies a secondary role.

Jesus does not uphold a male establishment, and offers “no male- dominion model” (Storkey 1985:154,158).

Elaine Storkey recognizes that feminism rightly addresses *structural* rather than only individual issues; but she also perceives the potential danger of an incipient “self-righteousness” as feminists accuse and blame external systems (patriarchy, capitalism, and class-structure) rather than our common participation as men and women in corporate human fallenness. Christian feminists do not seek “a power struggle.” But on the other side they do not wish to be assigned “a slot marked ‘woman’, and live their lives according to a set of prescribed cultural and essentially non-biblical values” (1985:164). In this respect, Elaine Storkey concludes, liberation “is for men also”. Grace delivers both women and men from outworn stereotypes.

In which ever context, approach or perspective one looks at Liberal Feminist Theory as narrated above, in common with most strands of Liberation Hermeneutics, Katherine Doob Sokenfeld urges that the “beginning point, shared with all feminists studying the Bible is appropriately a stance of *radical suspicion* (1985:55); while Fiorenza believes that “all theology, willing or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed; (1983:6). For Elisabeth Fiorenza, feminist interpretation involves working from the perspective of the oppressed who may also find strength in addressing their oppression and resisting it.

In, *In Memory of Her* (1983), Fiorenza insists that the gospel cannot be proclaimed if the women disciples and what they have done are not remembered. Early Christian history needs thorough reconstruction as women’s history, and the biblical texts is by no means coterminous with human reality and history. She rejects, therefore, not just patriarchal violence against and subordination of women but the near eradication of women from historical and theological consciousness. This is the advocacy which the researchers herewith apparently concur.

iii. *African Women Liberation Theology (African Feminist Hermeneutics) Approach*

The last twenty-one years have witnessed more progress towards developing African Christian Theology with particular reference to women liberation theology. Feminism is basically an emerging understanding of life in the light of the experiences and plight of women. Those who consider themselves feminists today are women (and men) who belong to the feminist movement and are motivated by an ideology termed “Feminist Consciousness” which was coined about the middle of 20th century AD in the United States of America. By feminist consciousness, it is meant to create awareness that the oppression of women is systemic and structural

in nature. Feminists identify the oppressive systems as patriarchal (Bergmann, 2021:9). Thus, feminists look for positive biblical texts about women in order to counteract famous texts “against” women. They interpret famous texts against women from the perspective of women's experiences, and they look at biblical texts about women, to learn from the intersection of the stories of ancient and modern women living in patriarchal culture and they look at texts that promote liberation. Feminist consciousness which started in United States of America has by now spread to all nooks and crannies of the globe including Africa. Women in Africa today are equally and seriously agitating for the liberation of the womenfolk from male dominance both economically, politically, socially and religiously (Eyoh & Eton (2021:5).

African women theologians, while identifying with the African reality and the overall liberation theological concerns canvassed mostly by their male counterparts, note that sadly, it is African women that ultimately bear the brunt of the exploitation of African by outsiders although oppression of women also has roots in Africa's patriarchal cultural structures. The major theological task for African women lies in reclaiming their theological heritage which has been overtaken by men, given the fact that in traditional Africa, women were theologians in their own right, and were deeply involved in traditional spirituality and religious rites.

African women's liberation theology has many frontline proponents who include: Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1988, 1995), Terasa Okure (1990,1993), Rose Uchem (2001,2005), Rosemary Edet (1988,1992), Chris E. Manus (2010), Caroline Mbonu (2010), Susan T. Foh (1979), Musa Dube (2007), and Ekeya (1988) to mention but a few. To these theologians, the African women are in many ways struggling in the soil of the African society against the situation because African women are often treated as less than human. Their role is dominantly that of mother and wife. They are regarded as the property of men, and kept out of important decision-making. Women are exploited economically even though they generate and save a lot of family income. They are marginalized in some Christian assemblies and schemed out of political relevance. They are victims of gender stereotyping, such that women are always expected to perform tasks that are reserved for women, such as cooking and other household chores. They are often blamed for the evils in the society and particularly of the family, even when they are innocent. With impunity, many African women are denied certain fundamental human rights, such as the right to education, freedom of movement, freedom of association, choice of life partner, inheritance, and ownerships of some properties (Ekeya, 1988:141).

African women liberation theologians, point at patriarchy as the most oppressive structure being used against the full realization of womanhood in Africa. Moreover, centuries of negative biblical interpretation against women, especially in the story of creation and fall (as in 1 Tim. 2:11-15), have created a socio-religious bias against women today, and have been used to justify an inferior role and status assigned to women. African women liberation theologians seek out and amplify liberative elements in the scriptures while discounting the humanly oppressive elements in it (Eyoh and Eton, 2021:5).

According to Okure (1988:47,59), the liberative elements emphasize the woman's equality with the man, her being made conjointly with him in the image and likeness of God, of equal dignity and honor, and her being given the special privilege, akin to God's, or bearing, mothering and fostering life. Moreover, the African women, finding themselves hemmed in from all sides, find liberation hope in the practices, teaching and suffering of Jesus Christ. In this condition, he bears the condition of the weak and oppressed, hence that of women. He shows a great interest in the condition of women, and therefore, African women are very interested in Jesus as a personal friend, a companion, the voice of the voiceless, the power of the powerless, and a critic of the status quo. African feminist liberation theology shares the basic view that in the Bible, God abhors any form of oppression, and God seeks to liberate the oppressed, an act that God carries out definitively through Jesus Christ. It is in the same spirit that this work supports women authority in public teaching, preaching, and leadership roles in Christian Churches in 21st Century, without any form of oppression, domination, subordination, and silencing by men.

Conclusion

There are various passages in the Bible of legitimacy of women in ministry. However, passages such as 1 Cor. 14:32-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 ended up providing "ammunitions for doctrinal barriers". It is because of these passages that many denominations claim that there are theological reasons for excluding women in ministry-authority in public teaching in the Church. The intention of this work is not to accept these passages or to prove whether they are correct or not, but to acknowledge that such barriers existed and have been infiltrated by an indebt hermeneutical analyses of those passages based on the cultural background of authors and the reasons behind such command.

In the Old Testament, women were Prophets (e.g. Huldah) Queens, and Army Captains (e.g. Deborah and Judith). In the Gospels, women were fellow workers with Christ, gospel proclaimers and Disciples of Christ (e.g. Mary and Martha, woman of Samaria, Mary

Magdalene). The most interesting is the revelation that in the first to fourth century AD, women were archisynagogoi -leaders of Synagogue - “president” or “patron” of the Synagogues - who manage the synagogue worship, education and finances. In the Epistles, women were Apostle, Deacon, and Pastor-teacher (Junia, Phoebe, Priscila). In one way or the other such women engaged in public teaching and leadership roles.

That is why the work uses Liberal Feminist Theory to advocate for women's liberation and support for their public ministry in the body of Christ. From the prominent groups of feminism and the three tenets of Liberal Feminist Theory - Individualism, Legal and Political Reforms, and Pragmatism-to different perspectives and approaches of Feminism - Philosophical, Socio-critical, Neo-Marxism, Modern, and Evangelical-all point to the call for women liberation to exercise teaching and leadership roles in social, economic, cultural, political, and religious circles.

We also dealt with the works of some famous African Feminist Theologians with “feminist consciousness”, which is to create awareness that the oppression of women is systemic and structural. Thus, such theologians look for positive biblical texts about women, in order to counteract famous texts “against” women. They interpret famous texts against women from the perspective of women's experiences, and they look at biblical texts about women, to learn from the intersection of the stories of ancient and modern women living in patriarchal culture, and they look at texts that promote liberation for women in the Church, the body of Christ. Feminist interpretation here recognizes authority only in that which summons women to become most fully themselves (Barton, 1998:90), thereby creating a conducive ambiance for women to thrive most especially in the Christian Churches in the 21st Century.

Recommendations

The Churches in 21st Century should appreciate the services of women by preferring an order of special honor to pastors’ wives for their contribution to the growth of the Church and welfare of human race.

Women leaders in the ministry should be appreciated by providing them with monetary reward as stipends and allowances by all Christian Churches in 21st Century. This would go a long way to encourage them toward improving on what they are doing already.

Considering the hazards that surround the women and their services, this work recommends that “free medical services” should be provided for the women leaders by the Church, Government and Non-Governmental Organizations. This program may start with ante-natal and Post-natal services and this would serve as a very good incentive and encouragement to them.

Parents and Churches should provide our young girls with opportunities of training them on biblical knowledge early so as to encourage them for a higher theological learning in the future. Adequate training of our young girls would help them to respond effectively to the challenges of the 21st century ministry.

Women teachers can learn better by taking classes in teaching methods. Speakers can learn to speak more effectively by taking courses in communication. Leaders can become more capable by attending seminars on management, administration and leadership skills. Christian and secular books should be provided to women in ministry by the Church, Government and the Non-Governmental Organizations as resources and tools for their spiritual nourishment and growth.

Finally, the Church in Akwa Ibom State should have a rethink concerning the ordination of women into priesthood. Women who are gifted, qualified and called by God into the pastoral ministry should not be discouraged.

The researchers believe that if these suggestions and recommendations are considered, approved and implemented, they would go a long way to clear fears and boost the morale of women in their services to the Church and society in general.

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