

ECCLESIOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP: AN APPRAISAL OF THE PAULINE INJUNCTION IN 1CORINTHIANS 14:33B-36

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Abstract

It is understood that many of the mainline denominations in Nigeria exclude women from church leadership, judging from the Pauline doctrine in 1 Corinthians 14: 33b-36 which contains the Injunction by Paul that women should not speak in the church. The Pauline injunction as contained in the passage contains intricate doctrinal and theological message that the researchers has examined with a view to assessing its relevance for women's participation in church leadership with a focus on contemporary Nigeria. An examination of the history of the Jews reveals that women had a very small role in religious leadership. However, the earthly ministry of Jesus has depicted a woman-friendly ministry which marked a change in the male-dominated Judeo-Palestinian social structure. Built upon this, Paul having many women as co-preachers; was misinterpreted in a literal interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36. Moreover, the text would be best understood from the perspective of the Greek term “ekklesia” which its popular context refers to the assembly of a Greek city-state in which women were not permitted to speak. In similar Christian assemblies, they were permitted on the basis of the Christian brotherhood. Apparently, it seemed the Corinthian church women were abusing this privilege by disrupting church services, which may have warranted Paul's order. This being the case, the crucial issue is the disorderliness being caused by the women, and not their participation. Therefore, in this text it was not the intention of Paul to establish a doctrine disallowing women from participating in church leadership. Information, which served as data for the study were obtained from the primary, secondary and tertiary sources. The primary data are data from oral interviews of well-informed men and women of across the various churches in Nigeria. The secondary data were from relevant textbooks and journal articles. The tertiary data, on the other hand, were from internet materials. Historical method was adopted in doing a critical and rigorous analysis of the data generated. The study however, recommends that women are a formidable instrument of development in the church and should therefore be adequately included in every level of church leadership. They should be well encouraged by giving them their deserved positions in the church.

Keywords: Ecclesiological, theological, Pauline, leadership, women, injunction

INTRODUCTION

In 1Corinthians 14:33b-36 it is written thus; “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”(RSV). This biblical text has generated lots of doctrinal and theological controversies which has often resulted to the exclusion of women in the leadership structure of most mainline churches in Nigeria.

This research seeks to interpret 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 in relation to women participation in church leadership with particular reference to Nigeria. In Nigeria, there has been the contention as to whether or not women should be involved in church leadership. Majority of denominations involve women one way or the other but some, especially among the mission churches, still believe that the leadership of the church should not be made open to women, basing the doctrine on the Pauline injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36. (Njoku, 2021).

However, there are indirect reactions to the text especially by church leaders in the context of attitudes toward women participation in church leadership. According to Ademiluka (2007), the attitude of excluding women in church leadership varies according to denominations. The

earliest churches are the mission-oriented denominations which adhere strictly to the doctrines and practices introduced by their early missionaries. These ones do not include women in church leadership as a matter of denominational practice, which of course is based on the 1 Corinthians text, among others. The most pronounced churches in this regard include, the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. These denominations are particularly adamant in this regard. Nduka (2008) reported a situation in 1993, when Bishop Haruna, then head of Kwara State Diocese of Anglican Church, ordained three women, but the Anglican House of Bishops annulled the ordination. Similarly, in 1994, the synod of the Methodist Diocese of Kwara and Kogi States took the decision to start the ordination of women, but the headquarters of the church rejected it (Omotoye, 1996). Others, such as the Baptist Convention, involve women at the lower level of the hierarchy, giving a woman the title of deaconess.

The aim of this study therefore, is to examine 1Corinthians 14:33b-36 with a view to assessing its relevance for women's participation in church leadership with a focus on contemporary Nigeria. The researchers, however, examines 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 with a view to assessing its relevance for women participation in church leadership and anticipates a situation in which all the mainline churches in Nigeria would involve women in church leadership.

The status of women in Judeo-Christian traditions

To understand the Corinthians text in proper perspectives, it is necessary to trace the Judeo-Christian history as it relates to the status of women. In pre-monarchical Israel, women were household managers, as the family household was the key entity in providing for almost all needs of the members. However, a number of women also performed significant leadership roles even at the 'national' level (Masenya, 2013). In this regard, Olajubu (1991) reiterates the leadership roles of Miriam (Ex 15:1-21), Deborah (Jdg 5) and Esther (Es 4:14, 16). Similarly, Odendaal (1994) points out remarkable instances in the Old Testament where women undertook responsibility for themselves and for the nation, even though the tales were told in male contexts. Odendaal makes reference to Ruth, Esther and Deborah, among others. However, with the introduction of male-controlled institutions such as the monarchy and the Jerusalem temple, female visibility and impact receded (Masenya 2013). During the monarchy, the female activities of the patriarchal household became less and devalued as compared with the male activities of the public male-operated sphere. Women were excluded from significant temple duties, as the Israelite cult was an essentially male institution, which explains the employment of only male priests (Masenya 2013).

Burrows (1982) affirms that in the Old Testament, in relation to man and matters of the law, women seem to have been rated rather low. He states that in general the position of women in the Hebrew society was not as high as modern standards would require, or even as high as it was among other ancient people. According to him, the husband was his wife's ba'al (lord), not 'adon (master), the same term that a slave would use for his owner. In other words, the status of a wife in relation to her husband was like that of a slave. In fact, as others have shown, woman in Hebrew society were perhaps rated even lower than a slave. According to Sheila (1972), 'Women were regarded as an inferior species to be owned like cattle, incapable of participating in the mysteries of the worship of Yahweh'. Claassens (2013) employs the daughter of Jephthah narrative (Jdg 11:29-40) to illustrate the 'dehumanizing effects of patriarchy' against the womenfolk. The fact that this young woman has no name attests to how little value she and other women held in a society structured around male honour. And through patriarchy's power Jephthah's daughter loses her life (Claassens 2013).

In spite of this, as far as the young woman is concerned, in fulfilling the vow he has made to Yahweh, his father is committing a just and venerable deed (v.36), thereby embracing patriarchal ideology couched in religious terms.

In the opinion of Masenya (2013), in the post-exilic period, with the autonomy and decision-making authority flowing back to the collocation of families from the ruined central power structure, the community-wide authority of women as household managers would also increase. Based on the evidence from Jewish women's lives in the Elephantine documents, women could inherit property (Masenya 2013). Relying on the Hebrew term "sopheret" in Ezra 2:55 and Nehemiah 6:57, Masenya observes that there were female scribes among the returnees from the Babylonian exile. There were also male and female singers (Ez 2:65; Neh 6:67). She has however noted earlier that during this period women were viewed not only as secondary citizens but, in fact, as men's property (Masenya 2013). Hurley (1975) affirms that from the post-exilic period onwards the status of women was really low. The part of women in synagogue worship was strictly receptive. Even the oral reading of scripture was not for women. Women were generally assumed by the rabbis to be persons incapable of learning about religious things. Hurley quotes Eliezer (1972) as saying:

It is better that the words of the law should be burned ... than they should be given to women; ... if a man gives her daughter knowledge of the law it is as though he taught her lechery. (Hence) every day a Jewish male thanked God that he had not been created a gentile, slave or woman. (pp.63-71)

This view is in line with Baumert's (1996) assertion maintains that:

In Judaism there were firmly established customs to the effect that women by themselves could not conduct an official worship service, but could only come together for prayer ... (whereas) a service in the synagogue required the presence of at least ten men ... (p.210).

That was the status of women in the society in which Jesus lived. Hence, we can say that Jesus' attitude towards women violated the contemporary norms, for he related with men and women equally. Jesus healed women as he healed men; he even allowed a woman who had haemorrhage, and was thus ceremonially unclean, to touch his clothes (Mt 9:20–22). He protected a woman who was caught in adultery, and would have been stoned to death (Jn 8:3–11). It is important to note that Jesus continued to talk to her after the others had left, just as he conversed with the Samaritan woman when no one else was with them (Jn 4). According to Powers (1996), this was contrary to the culture of the day in which men were discouraged from talking with women; conversation with a woman in a public place was particularly scandalous even if she was a member of one's family. Jesus related very closely with the family of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus whom he later raised from death (Lk 10:38–42). A group of women accompanied him and his disciples on some of their travels and ministered to their needs (Lk 8:1–3).

After Jesus, women continued to play significant roles in evangelism. Paul preached to women who later became part of his ministry. At Philippi, Lydia and some other women were converted and her house became the home of the new church (Ac 16:13–15, 40). We also read the work of Priscilla and her husband Aquila (Ac 18:26), and the four daughters of Philip who were prophetesses (Ac 21:9). Some of Paul's letters indicate that there were women who were his fellow workers in evangelism. In Romans 16:1–2, Paul mentions

specifically ‘our sister Phoebe’, who is a deacon of the church at Cenchrea (Romans 16:1–2). The Greek word used here for deacon is “diakonos” which, according to Manson (1982), is a noun of common gender denoting the holder of some office in the local church. Moo (1994) states that in calling Phoebe a “diakonos”, especially with the official sounding addition ‘of the church of Cenchrea’, it is more likely that Paul is identifying Phoebe as holding the office of deacon (cf. Stegemann & Stegemann 1999). This is similar to Manson’s suggestion that whatever the tasks of this office they were performed by men or women (Manson, 1982). Romans 16:1–2 may therefore be a pointer to the fact that men as well as women performed the role of a deacon in the hierarchy of leadership in the early church. Romans 16:1–2 may therefore be a basis upon which some denominations in Nigeria appoint women as deaconesses, as mentioned above.

In Romans 16:7, another woman, Junia, is listed with some apostles. In the opinion of Stegemann and Stegemann (1999), the title of apostle probably characterises her as an envoy legitimated by an appearance of the resurrected Christ. Thus, she was one of ‘the earliest itinerant missionaries, even before Paul himself’.¹ In Colossians 4:15, Paul also mentions ‘Nympha and the church in her house’, while in the address of his letter to Philemon (v.2) he includes ‘Apphia our sister’. Paul calls some other women – Euodia and Syntyche – co-workers (Phlp 4:2), thereby including these individuals as commissioned of God in the common work of missionary proclamation. Also to be counted in the circle of women active in missionary preaching are Mary (Rm 16:6), Tryphyaena, and Persis (Rm 16:12), as they are also characterised by the word “kopian” (toil), which is said to belong in the context of mission (Stegemann & Stegemann 1999).

Hence, Fiorenza(1995) asserts that in Paul himself women appear not merely as rich patronesses of the Christian missionary movement but as prominent leaders and missionaries who, in their own right, toiled for the gospel. Fiorenza further summarized her submissions thus:

women were among the most prominent missionaries and leaders in the early Christian movement. They were apostles and ministers like Paul, and some were his coworkers. They were teachers, preachers, and competitors in the race for the gospel. They founded house churches and ... their authority and ministry were neither restricted to women and children, nor exercised only in specific feminine roles and functions. (p. 178)

It is important to note, however, that the same texts upon which Fiorenza based her claims are interpreted differently by Love (1995) cited by Baumert (1996). Love interprets these texts within the ‘macro-sociological perspective’ of an urban lifestyle within the framework of an agrarian culture. Similar to the view of Masenya(2013) on the role of women in the pre-monarchical and post-exilic Israel, Love (1995) affirms that in such a context the role of women is limited to the care for the household, bearing children, and meeting in private, in contrast to public, behavioural expectations. In such cultures, equality and freedom are ‘social anachronisms’. Love’s position here is buttressed by Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) when they say that:

Ancient Mediterranean societies were characterized by a rather strict differentiation of the social roles and areas of competence assigned to the sexes. The expectation of sex-conforming role behavior was extremely high, and the switching of male and female roles or competences was taboo. (p. 361)

Juxtaposing Fiorenza and Love, it is evident that the activities of women in the ministries of Jesus and Paul constitute an improvement in the status of women in Judaism, and may be seen as the beginning of the revolution which Christianity would bring upon social structures as they relate to the role of women in the church. Baumert (1996) seems to recognize this fact when he states that the Christian message has an impact on social structures, but that this impact ‘is indeed no sudden event’. Thus, Jesus in his woman-friendly posture laid the foundation for this impact, and Paul built upon it. It is important to note, however, as Baumert rightly affirms, that neither Jesus nor Paul ‘took it as their immediate goal to change social structures’, (Baumert, 1996) but ‘they did point to a new direction that was open to further developments in society and the church, developments which in our own day have yet to be fully realized’ Baumert (1996) in his assertions insists that the status of women began to witness an improvement in the ministries of Jesus and Paul. Based on that assertion, this study anticipates a proper interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 as a text most probably reflecting the emerging change in social structures in relation to the roles of women in the church.

The socio-historical context of 1 Corinthians

As we read in Acts 18:1–7, Paul founded the church at Corinth after his visit to Athens around 50 CE (Winter, 1994). Supporting himself with his trade as a tentmaker or leatherworker, he lived with Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently moved to Corinth from Rome (Ac 18:1–3). However, because of opposition Paul was forced to move his ministry to the house of Titus Justus. His evangelism was so fruitful that many converts were made, notable among them being Crispus, the synagogue ruler and his entire family (Ac 18:7–8). After 18 months’ work Paul left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla for Jerusalem while the work was continued by Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew (Williams, 1982; Winter, 1994 cf. 1 Cor 3:6–11). He did not remain long in Jerusalem but soon returned to his home church in Antioch and shortly after returned to Ephesus. There he began another ministry of 2 and a half years, probably the autumn of 52 to the spring of 55, during which period he wrote 1 Corinthians (Carson et al. 1992).

1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 in relation to the role of women in the church

So far, we have seen that in Jewish traditions women were rated very low in status compared to men. However, the level of activities of women in the ministries of Jesus and Paul marked the beginning of an emerging change in the hitherto male-dominated social structures in the Judeo-Christian world. In this section, we shall be examining 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 in relation to the role of women in the church.

Many commentators recognize 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 as a literary unit in which the author gives injunction on conducting services in a fitting and orderly manner. Most interpreters also agree that verses 33b–36 are ‘extremely controversial’ (Stegemann & Stegemann 1999). As Carter and Levine (2018) noted that as with all of Paul’s letters, in this text we lack certainty in reconstructing the particular concerns of the recipients. We do not know what exactly was reported to Paul, or whether the information was accurate or complete; neither do we know the extent to which Paul reinterpreted the information he received. Hence, there are various approaches to the interpretation of the order that women should keep silence in the church. Some attempt to get round the problem by stating that this section is a later addition, not written by Paul. For example, Murphy-O’Connor (1982) in his commentary on 1

Corinthians 14:26–40, leaves out verses 34 and 35 because he believes these verses were not written by Paul. He observes that ‘If these verses are removed no violence is done to his (Paul’s) argument. In fact, it gains in clarity’. The author seems to be correct here, for if the reader skips these two verses the instruction calling for orderly church service is not interrupted. Perhaps for this reason some manuscripts place the two verses at the end of the chapter (Carson et al. 1992). It is noteworthy, however, that while there is no absolute agreement on whether or not the two verses are rightly placed, every manuscript includes the injunction (Carson et al. 1992& Winter, 1994). And, as a matter of fact, that verses 34–35 appear in different locations in some early manuscripts may not necessarily prove that they are interpolations. It may simply indicate that ‘the scribes felt that the verses were better placed elsewhere’ (Carter & Levine 2018).

Some scholars assert that the injunction in verses 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 could not have been written by Paul in view of its apparent contradiction with 1 Corinthians 11:5, 13 where Paul allows women to pray and prophesy in church provided they are veiled (Murphy-O’Connor, 1982; Williams, 1982). Others seek to abrogate 1 Corinthians 11:5, 13 to allow 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 to stand. According to Kugelman (1968), for example, Paul wants the church in Corinth to observe the prohibition of women from speaking publicly in the church, the prohibition which obtained in the Palestinian churches. Kugelman is of the view that by this injunction Paul abrogates the Corinthian practice of permitting women to prophesy in the church. But there are others who hold that Paul was the author of the two passages, and that they do not contradict each other. Williams (1982) interprets 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 as forbidding women from speaking publicly in the church. Paul thought that women should in their subservience to men remain in a public service both covered and silent. Paul never contemplated women becoming priests or overseers, or even public preachers. Hodge (1974) also does not see the two texts as contradictory. In his own opinion 1 Corinthians 11:5 shows that Paul seems to take for granted that women might receive and exercise the gift of prophecy. The evangelist must have been aware of the prediction in the Old Testament that ‘your sons and daughters shall prophesy’ (Jl 2:28–32); the prediction which Peter quotes as fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2:14–17). Similarly, Hillyer (1970) opines that in view of 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul could not have condemned women to complete silence in the church. The injunction may have arisen from the fact that women, who sat apart from men in the church, were probably commenting freely and calling out questions in a disorderly manner .

The view that the injunction must have arisen because of the fact that the women were probably causing disruption of church services seems plausible, and not a few other scholars share it. According to Keener (1993), in antiquity women were far less trained in the scriptures and public reasoning than men; at Corinth probably the women, in their bid to learn, were interrupting during the teaching period of the church service. Paul wanted this to stop, hence his order that they should learn at home under their husbands. Gutzke (1978) also believes that Paul’s injunction may have been precipitated by the unruly behaviour of the female congregants, which would liken the Christian assembly to the pagan temples in Corinth where the notorious activity of women was a scandal. Paul probably thought that public decorum on the part of Christian women would improve the testimony of the gospel in the city. Gutzke however adds, ‘that Paul did not forbid women to share in public worship services seems to be revealed in his writings elsewhere (Phil. 4:3)’. Carter and Levine (2018) are of the view that verses 34–35 are original to Paul but intended to stop women’s speech. Paul had been discussing glossolalia. Perhaps women in Corinth had been among those exhibiting the gifts of tongue and prophecy. However, they do not see the injunction as applying to churches outside Corinth. ‘Taking the verses as addressed specifically to the

Corinthian church, perhaps only to wives and only concerning glossolalia, suggests that the verses do not apply in other contexts and churches’.

The intent of the order that women should keep silent *en tais ekklesiais* (v.34) seems clearer if the argument is approached from the perspective of the Greek term *ekklesia*. According to Baumert (1996), the term *ekklesia* (assembly, church) emanated from the secular realm, that is, the ‘parliament’ of a Greek city-state (cf. Ac 19:39). It is the political assembly of all (male) voting citizens in a city (Stegemann & Stegemann 1999). As Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) affirm, *ekklesia* denotes the popular assembly of all voting free men, the full citizens of a polis. Women, children, slaves and foreigners were in any case excluded. Such assemblies took place regularly or extraordinarily. In its New Testament usage *ekklesia* refers to the Christ-confessing communities; it is applied to individual house members, to the area churches that perhaps consist of several house churches, and to all believers in Christ. This Jewish-Christian model, ‘which most certainly did not admit women’, was the decisive authority for the Christian community assembly (Baumert 1996). Similarly, the Hellenistic mystery cults distinguished between so-called executive meetings and the regular cultic assemblies, and probably maintained a similar distinction concerning the participation of women according to the type of meeting it was (Baumert 1996). Thus, given the Hellenistic environment, it would have been a progressive step in the Christian *ekklesia* to allow women to be present during discussions. Baumert attributes this to the new brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ, and also the greater independence of the Hellenistic woman. The form of Christian assembly in 1 Corinthians 14, therefore, constitutes the first step to allowing women’s participation in ‘council deliberations’. However, even on such occasions, the idea of a woman asking questions *en ekklesia* (i.e. in public, v.35), ‘is (still) frowned upon, not only in Jewish circles but also in the Greek sphere’ (Baumert, 1996).

Thus, when Paul says in verse 35, ‘For it is shameful for a woman to speak *en ekklesia*’, he simply reminds the Corinthian Christian women of what applies in the contemporary society; there is no indication that he intends to cancel the privilege of speaking in church already being enjoyed by women. Therefore, the view that Paul’s injunction is precipitated by the unruly behaviour of the female congregants is plausible to the present writer. In other words, the essence of the command is the disturbance being caused by the women, and not really the participation by them. This interpretation is supported by other facts already established. Firstly, most interpreters agree that 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 instructs on orderly service, which provides the relevant context for the suggestion of disorderly behaviour. We have also seen that Paul worked side by side with women in his ministry, in which they actually played leadership roles (cf. Carter & Levine 2018). It is unlikely that the same Paul would condemn women to silence in the church except for the reason of disorderliness.

Some commentators like Winter (1994) believe that the law referred to in verse 34 is Genesis 2:20–24 or 3:16. However, many are of the view that it does not refer to any specific commandment in the scriptures. It is most likely an invocation of a universal consensus, ‘an unwritten law, so to speak’, of Jewish custom (Baumert, 1996; Carter & Levine 2018). Hence, as Baumert explains, Paul is here ‘not referring to a revealed truth concerning the nature of men and women, but only a human code of conduct that is based on tradition and is thus naturally conditioned by the times’ (Baumert, 1996). In line with this reconstruction, Baumert paraphrases 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 as follows:

33bAs in all the communities of the saints, 34women should keep silent in the community assemblies; indeed, they are not permitted (by the existing code) to speak. They should rather submit themselves as the Jewish tradition decrees. 35However, should they wish to inform themselves about something, they should inquire of their men at home, for it is offensive to have a woman speak her mind in public. 36Has the word of God gone out from you, or have only you received it? (p.197)

Thus, in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 Paul is saying that according to the universally known convention women are not permitted to voice their opinions in council, that is, publicly. He would rather have them silent than allow them to disrupt church services. It is important to note that Paul did not fundamentally question the entire code; neither did he ‘think through our equality in Christ to its logical conclusion’ (Baumert 1996). Paul did not do either of these because, like Jesus, his interest was not to change the social structure. Paul has understood correctly that God’s work of salvation is ‘historical,’ which means that it leaves a person in their situation, so as to allow them to make progress from the interior of their nature outward step by step. (Baumert, 1996)

Paul may have wanted to make sure that the women do not do something that will generally be perceived as offensive. ... And because it is improper and goes against the community order, people who engage in such activity are spiritually immature. Behind all this stands a fundamental principle: if the situation should change, you should do whatever will be perceived as appropriate! Thus, following this same principle, today not only would Paul not be against such ‘participation’ by women in discussions, he would rather insist upon it. (Baumert, 1996)

Apparently, the literal interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36, fails to consider a number of facts. The first one is that it contradicts the fact that women played significant public roles in Paul’s ministry. More importantly, a study of the term *ekklesia* reveals that the text originated from a society in which ordinarily women were not allowed to participate in public discussions. This implies that in the Christian assemblies they were permitted on the basis of the brotherhood associated with the new religion. However, in the Corinthian church, women were abusing this privilege by disrupting church services, hence Paul’s injunction. Therefore, the essence of the injunction is not the participation by women but the disorderliness being caused by them. In other words, in this text Paul does not intend to establish a doctrine disallowing women from participating in church affairs publicly, or in church leadership as some would think; only he would rather have them silent in the church than allow them disrupt its proceedings.

Implication for the Nigerian context

The implication of this study for Nigeria is very clear. Denominations that still exclude women from leadership and participation in other spheres as a doctrine based on the 1 Corinthians 14 text need to have a rethink. In Nigeria, women constitute a very high percentage of church membership and are usually more active and regular in church activities than their male counterparts. It is they who dominate the choir, vigils, crusades, mid-week and other programmes. Aluko (1993) is therefore correct when he says that ‘women are in the majority in most churches. It is therefore a disservice to the church if they are not given prominent leadership roles to play’. Awolalu (1976) also says that men should be more accommodating and less selfish in church affairs but encourage women to participate more in church leadership, as this will make the church richer and more edifying than they are at present. In line with this suggestion, every congregation should, in fact, identify talented

young ladies to lead church programmes rather than leaving them passive. As Olajubu (1991) rightly observes, the few women preachers we have today have demonstrated that women, too, can do the work of evangelism as efficiently as men. They should, therefore, not be restricted any longer from occupying the pulpit. She admonishes that anywhere such a restriction still subsists it should be removed because sex should not be a barrier in the propagation of the gospel. Similarly, Odendaal (1994) is of the view that even though the Bible is exclusive in language and thought it should be made relevant to both sexes just as it has been made relevant to other times and societies. This can be done by engaging women actively in church activities.

It is interesting to note that even in Judaism from which Christianity inherited the male-domination practice, for some time, now it (Reformed Judaism) has allowed women to participate on equal terms in synagogues and, in many instances, to hold high office within the community. For example, in September 1972, Sally J. Preisand became the first female rabbi in the history of Judaism; and others such as Pauline Bebe have emerged after her (Van Der Stockt 2008). There is therefore no more basis for Nigerian churches to continue to exclude women from participating in church leadership.

Learning from the Pace-setters to Women Inclusion in Church Leadership in Nigeria

The inclusion of women started with the Pentecostal churches, and it was natural in some cases. This is true particularly of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S) and the Christ Apostolic Church (C. A. C.). In fact, it was the former that laid the foundation for the practice in Nigeria of a woman, AbiodunAkinsowon, being a co-founder of the church, and it has since involved women in its leadership. Today, women are given the title of Mother in Israel in local branches of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, which is high up in the leadership hierarchy (Ademiluka, 2007). Apart from this, there are numerous C&S churches founded by women all over Nigeria. At the inception of Christ Apostolic Church (C. A. C.), women were not given place in its leadership, but with time, as female members began to exhibit the gift of prophecy, they began to be involved. Today, they are not only appointed as deaconesses; women have actually founded many C. A. C. branches (Olajubu, 1991).

In the same vein, most of the neo-Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria today include women in all levels of leadership. In some of them women are even given the highest leadership title of the church. This is the case in Living Faith Church, Christ Embassy, Foursquare Gospel Church, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Rhema Chapel, Mountain of Fire and Miracles, among others (Ademiluka 2007). It is important to note, however, that their reason for including women is simply an adaptation to the practice of their foreign founders, as in the case of the mission-oriented denominations. That is not to say, however, that there are no exceptions in the neo-Pentecostal fold. There are those of them who exclude women from leadership on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14. For example, New Testament Christian Mission, Deeper Life Bible Church and End-Time Message Believers' Fellowship (EMBF) still practice male domination. In fact, the EMBF is not only opposed to the inclusion of women in church leadership but vehemently criticizes churches that do. Hence, as far as one of its pastors, Pastor Ojo, is concerned such churches are not of God, for they contradict the word of God (Ademiluka 2007).

Thus, in Nigeria the denominations are still divided on the issue of the inclusion of women in church leadership. Whereas those who exclude women base their non-inclusion practice on

the 1 Corinthians text, those who practice women inclusion believe that this text needs not be an impediment to women playing leadership roles in the church.

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 contains the injunction by the apostle Paul that women should keep silence in the church. This text has given rise to the controversy as to whether or not women should participate in church public activities or in its leadership. In the contemporary church, attitude to this rule varies from one denomination to another. In Nigeria, while in the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal folds women are generally included in the hierarchy of church leadership, many of the mainline churches still practice male domination, basing the doctrine on the Pauline injunction. An examination of the history of the Jews reveals that women had a very low status compared to men. They had very little or no chance to participate in religious leadership. However, the ministry of Jesus marked a change in the male-dominated social structure in that he related freely with women, treating them on equal basis with men. Paul built on this foundation, having many women as co-preachers and leaders of the house churches; which would contradict a literal interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36.

However, the text is best understood from the perspective of the Greek term *ekklesia* in its popular context where it refers to the assembly of a Greek city-state. In such assembly women were not permitted at all to speak. In other words, the text originated from a society in which ordinarily women were not allowed to participate in public discussions, but in the Christian similar assemblies they were permitted on the basis of the brotherhood associated with the new religion. However, in the Corinthian church women may have been abusing this privilege by disrupting church services, which warranted the order by Paul. This means that the crucial issue in it is the disorderliness being caused by the women, and not the participation by them. Therefore, it was not the intention of the author to establish a doctrine disallowing women from participating in church public worship, or in church leadership. Paul would rather have the women silent in the church than allow them disrupt its proceedings. The implication of this study for current practices in Nigeria is very clear. It is a doctrinal error to exclude women from church leadership and participation in other spheres based on 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36. Arising from this study, women participation should actually go beyond giving those titles and making them leaders of women guilds and mothers union in the church. Moreso, being that women constitute the greater percentage of the congregation population; giving them the opportunity to participate in church leadership would provide the church with more hands in evangelism and expansion.

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