



# Ecclesiological Analysis of Women Leadership: A Theological Reflection

Abraham Adebajo Okunade  
Department of Religion, Bowen University Iwo, Osun State Nigeria  
and Theology and Philosophy Department  
Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria  
Pst.okunade@gmail.com  
ORCID- 0000-0001-9693-5270

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.103.2036>

## Abstract

The important of the role of women in the life of the church cannot be over-emphasized. This is because research shows that larger percentages of church attendants who are active members are women. Incidentally, directly or indirectly most women are relegated to the background in terms of leadership position in the church probably due to cultural bias or the patriarchal nature and tradition of various culture and the Holy writ. This paper adopts an analytical and theological method in presenting the ecclesiological analysis of women leadership and the reflection thereof. Research shows that the majority of women throughout the world are still suffering from systemic trends of violence, inequality, discrimination, abuse, and neglect at home, in the labour market, church, and in society at large. Also, a second century Rabbi named Judah, Ben Ilai exclaimed: "Thank God I am not a woman, a slave, or a pagan" and down the centuries, many have also exclaimed the same sigh of relief. Some, even within Evangelicalism today, consented that this is the reason why Jesus chose twelve men to be the future leaders of the church and probably why Paul told Timothy not to permit a woman to teach in the church or have authority over a man; this in a sense is a sweeping generalization. Nevertheless, women as followers in the church play a significant roles in the composition of and roles within the church. Therefore, women in one way or another participate in the leading of the church as they influence the leadership of the church in diverse ways. Consequently, this paper examines the concept of Ecclesiology and women leadership and the theological reflection thereof.

**Keywords:** Women, ecclesiology, leadership, misogynne, patriarchal stance.

## Introduction

The importance of the role of women in the life of the church cannot be over emphasized. This is because research shows that more than ever, larger percentages of church attendants who are active members are now women. Aune (2008:51) observes that women account for the majority of church-goers whether married or single, of which married women are generally believed to be more religious than the single women. Incidentally, directly or indirectly most women are relegated to the background in terms of leadership positions in the church probably due to cultural biases or the patriarchal nature and tradition of various cultures and Holy Scripture. Ruether confirms this assertion when he stresses that majority of women throughout the world are still suffering from systemic trends of violence, inequality, discrimination, abuse, and neglect in home, in the labour market, in church, and within society at large (2007:96). Additionally a second century Rabbi named Judah Ben Ilai exclaimed:



“Thank God I am not a woman, a slave, or a pagan” and down the centuries, many have also exclaimed the same sigh of relief. Some, even within Evangelicalism today, accept that this is the reason why Jesus choose only twelve men to be the future leaders of the church and probably why Paul advised Timothy not to permit a woman to teach in the church or have authority over a man; this in a sense is of course a sweeping generalization (Belleville, 2000:15).

Nevertheless, women as followers in the church play a significant role in the makeup of the church. Therefore, women in one way or another, participate in the leading of the church as they influence the leadership of the church in many ways. Consequently, this paper examines the concept of Ecclesiology and women leadership and the theological reflection therein.

### **The concept of Ecclesiology**

Etymologically, Ecclesiology simply means the doctrine of the church and the church in question has different connotations or meaning from biblical, historical, patristic, medieval, reformation, enlightenment and up to the present era. The word church like its cognate forms *kirche* comes from the Greek adjective *kuriakon* which implies the house of the Lord and the New Testament word *ekklesia* is used for a public assemblage summoned by a herald (Horton, 2006:182; Nicolaidis, 2010). The *Ekklesia* in question is from two compound Greek words “EK” (out of) and “Kaleo” meaning ‘to call’ or ‘summon’, therefore, *Ekklesia* means “to call out” or “a called out group”; this implies that the church or ecclesiology means the called out ones (irrespective of sex or gender), that is those called out of darkness and cultural bias, into the light of God (Aremu, 2016:194; Nicolaidis, 2010).

Adetunji (2010:94) quoting Albert Tidwell defines the church as local body of baptized believers in Christ who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to his teachings, exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. This suggests that the church is united in faith, is involved in extensive teaching of the word of God and is also involved in a sacred mission to the end of the earth in which women play an invaluable role.

Mepaiyeda (2014:27) submits that Cyprian’s view on Ecclesiology is that the church may be spread abroad throughout the world, yet she remains one voice and the church is the only absolute and the only voice of God’s mercy and the grace of God is limited to her; no one can have God as his father who has not the church as his mother. This implies that the church (*Ecclesia*) is a meeting place between man and God. In other words, the church is the community of all true believers for all time and it is made up of all those who are truly saved; incidentally Jesus Christ himself builds the church by calling his people whether male or female to himself (Nicolaidis, 2022; 2016, 2005; Grudem, 1994:853).

### **The concept of Women Leadership**

Anyone who can make influence directly or otherwise irrespective of his or her sex or gender, status, race etc. is a leader. Granted that leadership positions from time immemorial have been dominated by men does not imply that leadership posts even in the church are the exclusive domain of men alone. It is plausible to note that the topic of church authority is closely related to the movement for justice for women in the model of domination and subordination that is at the heart of engendered patriarchy. This scenario expresses itself in unjust relations between males and females (Aune, 2008:51-52). Incidentally, if women are to be followers and subordinate to men, then they cannot hold leadership positions within the church or in wider society except over



other women and children (Justes, 1978:12). This presupposes the outright denial of women into leadership positions which are absolutely uncalled for.

Oke (2009:26) was right when she asserted that a capable and competent woman might feel a sense of outrage, disgust, and dismay in the way women are looked at when they dare thread the so called forbidden ground of venturing into leadership position. The harsh reality of the foregoing suggests that women and leadership roles in the church and society are two incompatible entities; this is because men-folk see leadership positions as their innate birthright to which no woman dare contest with them.

Nicolaides (2022), from an Orthodox perspective, stresses the points that: “An anthropological argument is used to justify the exclusion of women including widows, from priestly roles, and the usual stance is that men and women do enjoy equal value in the sight of God but this does not mean that they are in fact profoundly different to each other and have diverse and yet complementary roles to play in the church and society in general”. Women Leadership remains the glaring need of the contemporary church in Nigeria, granted that there is no vacuum in the hierarchy of the church across all denominations; yet, the spiritual impact of such leaders in the world of politics and other endeavours seems not effective enough to give this generation the necessary direction (Oke, 2009:26). Mepaiya (2009:26) quoting Robert Greenleaf describes leadership as the act of showing the way for others, stating the goal and thereby giving certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving an objective for themselves. This portrays leadership as a guide or roadmap to a desired destination of which women are not an exception. Adetunji (2010:2) alludes to this assertion when he describes a leader as one, whether male or female who guides a group of people or gives them advice towards a certain goal or project so that the goal or project can be accomplished, and the leader in question could thus also be a woman.

Ruether (2007:96) submits that the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been called the century of women because of the significant transformation in women’s roles and the increased visibility of women agency in all social, cultural, and political domains. This is because the leadership role of women is more pronounced in this century (20<sup>th</sup>) than any other. Ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God’s declaration to woman (Eve) is that the man will rule over her probably it was not so prior to the fall. Also, some African scholars and theologians have observed that culture has silenced many women in Africa and makes them unable to experience the liberating promises of God (James, 2003:47). This presupposes that women leadership is probably not feasible over their male counterparts. Conversely, men and women in the image of God presupposes equality of either gender in God’s image-hood as they both reflect God in some ways (Piper, 1991:225) and are created in the *imago dei* of the Triune Godhead (Nicolaides, 2022).

Allison opines that since the advent of the feminist movement, Paul’s view of women’s’ roles in the church has become a heated issue and some of the sources of the ‘heat’ are the obvious threat to a traditional, exclusively male priesthood and predominantly male church leadership; this is probably due to prejudices or bias against women when it comes to leadership positions (Allison, 1988:27). Nevertheless, women assume leadership position directly or indirectly, and this was corroborated by Oke (2009:26-38) who asserts that women assuming leadership positions have been a subject of debate and controversies from since time immemorial. According to Loades (1990:99) and others, a paradigm shift in the feminist movement especially in church leadership have made attractive a search for models of wholeness and empowerment for women in the vast storehouse of traditional spirituality. This is in consonance with Kim (2007:103-105) when he submits that the early church valued the ministry of women



in multiple roles and in most cases ordained them to their ministry for effectiveness in the leadership of the church. Nicolaidis posits that many women were in fact deaconesses in the early Church (Nicolaidis, 2022).

From the historical perspective, it can be deduced that medieval women exercised power out of blood rights of family, clan or queenship which in their premodern familial and hierarchical contexts, are interesting and admirable but hardly relevant to a post-industrial democracy (Kim, 2007:103-105). Inferentially, feminine genders have been exposed to leadership positions prior to the contemporary society.

### **Ecclesiological analysis of women leadership**

There is a need to examine and objectively explicate women and their position or status in the leading and administration of the church. It is imperative to be cognizant of what it really entails for women to lead in the church from various perspectives and opinions, including some early Church Fathers inclusive. The notion of some of the early Church Fathers about women and leadership roles are briefly discussed below.

Clement of Alexandria's (150-215 CE) sexism was carried over in his writings and he contended that the only strong person was a man. He writes on virtue stating that:

It belongs to the male alone to be virtuous, and to the woman to be licentious and unjust. Accordingly, woman is to practice self-restraint and righteousness, and every other virtue. We do not say that woman's nature is the same as man's, as she is woman. Pregnancy and parturition, accordingly, we say belong to woman, as she is woman, and not as she is a human being." (Clement of Alexandria in Ide, 1984:66).

The central themes of Clement of Alexandria's anthropology are based on human nature against that of sexually determined nature, as well as on the salvation of believers and their journey to salvation (Vogt, 2003:49). Women are inferior to men and he believed that his contempt for women was a universal point of view (Ranke-Heinemann, 1995: 127,130). As cited in Ranke-Heinemann (1990:130) he maintained in *The Stromata*, that a woman could only achieve perfection in this life if she freed herself from the cravings of the flesh. Since virtue only belongs to the male, and since women are "licentious and unjust" they have to "practice self-restraint and righteousness" and only then can they become more male-like by renouncing cravings of the flesh.

Origen (185-254 CE) was a Christian scholar, theologian and student of Clement of Alexandria. He hated both the sexual act and women and at the age of eighteen he castrated himself in his quest to achieve what he believed to be the highest Christian perfection. Origen disapproved of the sexual act even within marriage (Phelips, 1931:203; Ranke-Heinemann,1990:51-52). Origen's anthropology distinguished between male and female as so created by God. God created male and God created female, and he maintained that there is a sharply defined contrast between male and female roles (Vogt 2003:52) Origen, however, does not connect the female with the image of God. For Origen, human beings were created of spirit and soul and the spirit is described as masculine while the soul is deemed to be feminine, therefore, the masculine is higher and in quality better than the feminine (Vogt, 2003:53). When God created man in his image, as male and female, Origen postulates that the female is connected with "fecundity" and not directly with the *imageo Dei* whilst for males, being in the image of God is "constitutive" (Vogt, 2003:52).



Tertullian (155-255 CE) was from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. It is often alleged that he was the most hostile of the Church Fathers towards women and had little regard for the gender at all (Ide 1984:76). On the ordination of women and women being prophetesses Tertullian acknowledges that although women were active in the Church, it was at the cost of men's dignity. Women performed exorcisms, were physicians, performed sacraments and were ministers of faith – tasks he believed were reserved for men only (McGuire, 1999, 264). Tertullian claimed that Eve was the originator of sin and therefore all women carried the 'curse of Eve'. He argues:

If there dwelt upon earth a faith as great as is the reward of faith which is expected in the heavens, no one of you at all, best beloved sisters, from the time that she had first known the Lord, and learned(the truth) concerning her own (that is, woman's) condition, would have desired too gladsome (not to say too ostentatious) a style of dress; so as not rather to go about in humble garb, and rather to affect meanness of appearance, walking about as Eve mourning and repentant, in order that by every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve, the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin, and the odium (attaching to her as the cause) of human perdition. In pains and in anxieties do you bear (children), woman; and toward your husband (is) your inclination, and he lords it over you. And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the un-sealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert— that is, death— even the Son of God had to die (Tertullian in Lerner, 1993:141)

Tertullian as cited in Ide (1984:75-78) stated that only men are created in the image of God and that they were innocent victims of the “wiles and evils of women”. He forbade women to teach, to baptize, to be priests or to speak in church and he demanded that women's heads be covered. For Tertullian, women were the source of all evil and he believed that there was nothing good about women in general or any woman in particular. In his view, women were responsible for pain, suffering, sin and corruption in both the private and public spheres (Tavard,1973, 59).

Jerome (340-420 CE) born in Strido in Dalmatia (previously Yugoslavia), studied in Rome, and became an ordained presbyter in Antioch (Ide, 1984:83). Jerome claimed that although marriage is good, virginity is better because men are corrupted through sexual intercourse. It is thus better for men not to get married and to therefore escape the burden of having a wife (Ide, 1984:72). Jerome viewed women as the root of all evil and said: “Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression: but she shall be saved through the child-bearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety” (Phelips, 1931:203).

In his *Letter*, to Marcella, he writes:

The women who ought to scandalize Christians are those who paint their eyes and lips with rouge and cosmetics; whose chalked faces, unnaturally white, are like those of idols; upon whose cheeks every chance tear leaves a furrow; who fail to realize that years make the mold ... A Christian woman should blush to do violence to nature, or to stimulate desire by bestowing care upon



the flesh. "They that are in the flesh," the apostle tells us, "cannot please God" (Jerome cited in Phelips 1931:203).

Jerome held Eve to be guilty, and as a consequence every woman responsible for all heresy. He claimed that men such as Nicholas of Antioch, the seducer of all impurity, was followed by crowds of women; Simon Magnus founded his sect with the help of Helene the prostitute; Marcion used women to prepare the minds of men to join his sect (Keane, 1987: 3).

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) was born in Tagaste, in North Africa, and after his conversion to Christianity became a renowned and influential philosopher and theologian (MacKendrick, 1980:326). Augustine had much to say about women, sin and sex. His works were greatly influenced by his mother and his views on what a proper wife were mirrored on his mother's life. His mother was always servile, humble and subordinate to her husband. He blamed women for the fall and for the eviction of Adam and Eve from Paradise (Ranke-Heinemann 1995:185). Augustine, as cited in Børresen (1995:170), explains the nature of woman in the image of God as:

The wife with her husband is the image of God, so that the totality of this human substance forms a single image; but when woman is considered as man's helpmate, a state which belongs to her alone, is not the image of God. By contrast, man is the image of God by being solely what he is, an image so perfect, so whole, that when woman is joined with him it makes only one image.

Augustine, in his views on natural order, states, that women were created lesser than man and therefore, they have to serve men as being the greater. Men are superior to women because women were created with a weaker brain. Therefore, the weaker has to serve the stronger. In his *Concupiscence*, Augustine wrote:

Nor can it be doubted, that it is more consonant with the order of nature that men should bear rule over women, than women over men. It is with this principle in view that the apostle says, "The head of the woman is the man;" and, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands" (Augustine in Ide 1984:97).

According to Phelips (1931:203), Augustine believed that it was an incontestable social and religious truth that women were subordinate to men. He was of the opinion that it is according to natural order for men to rule over women and for women to both serve and be subservient to their husbands. To Augustine, nothing was worse than a house where the woman commands and the man obeys; therefore, the husband must always rule over his wife. Women have contributed much to the ministry of the church throughout its history, however, their role in this area has never been free from controversy (Women in Ministry <http://www.fuller.edu.womeninministry>). Liefeld (1978:291) was right when he submitted that from its earliest days, Christianity has been characterized by active female involvement in ministry and there is scarcely any ecclesiastical body which has not discussed the place and services of women within its group today, Miller (2016:52-76) alludes to this when he argues that women were highly active participants, in, and often leaders of early, Pentecostal churches; this often attract women in large numbers but the rates of women leadership have declined tremendously.

Remarkably, Belleville (2000:15) stressed that the debate on the role of women in the church rages fast and furiously in the contemporary era leading to some division or splits in some churches. She further argues that it is so serious that one must choose either for or against women leadership in the church and the two contested passages



are (1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15). Ember (2013: xiv) opines that relative status of the church is not an exception, as well as differential authority, rights, and privileges. In the same vein, the lesson of history and the teaching of the Bible are two main guidelines for understanding the status of women in the church (Ryrie, 1970: i).

From antiquity, the status of women and the religious involvement of a Jewish woman is limited partly because the formal education of Jewish girls stopped at the marriageable age of twelve, the same age at which Jewish boys began to pursue serious theological training and education (Belleville, 2000:20). The status of women in Judaism is that women are inferior to men and their supreme sphere of service is in the home, nevertheless, there are some religious activities that are open to them (Jewish women) despite the fact that they do not take a place of leadership as a general rule, they carry out the privileges of motherhood (Ryrie, 1970: 12-13).

The status of women in ancient Greece is that women were placed almost on the same level as their slaves and they were under the authority and control of their husbands, thus, in the Greek world, the status of women was decidedly inferior to that of men as wives led a life of seclusion and practical slavery (Ryrie, 1970:4). In ancient Rome, women enjoyed greater and practical freedom which aided the spread of Christianity as they participated more freely in religious activities (Ryrie, 1970:8). Thus, it is evident that women in the Graeco-Roman world were religiously involved at home and in public as a result of the freedom that the Roman society afforded them and they had the opportunity to participate in leadership roles or positions. (Belleville, 2000:31).

From the biblical perspective, it is evident that some women attained leadership positions in their community or society numerous among which are inter alia: Deborah who served as a Judge, poet, and prophetess during her time, she gave out orders as God's representative at that particular time in the history of God's chosen people; Abigail took charge from her husband Nabal (folly) to protect her household from imminent destruction through her husband's callousness; Esther as a Persian queen stoop to conquer where her predecessor (Vashti) failed, she took her identity in her hand to save her people (the Jews) from total annihilation; also, Jesus accepted women in his ministry with the likes of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susana who were all women of substance (Oke, 2009:31-32).

All these and many more, are background to the status of women cum leadership positions, and some pertinent rhetorical questions about women in leadership position in the church are: Are women vying for leadership position in the church overstepping their bounds? Are they trespassing into unholy grounds? Does God will that women should not aspire to greater heights? These are plausible questions that demand answers for critical analysis of the leadership of women in the church (Oke, 2009:27).

The scenario and reflection of Thandi on women and church leadership is plausible and calls for sober reflection which goes thus:

I grew up in the church from childhood and my experience has been that fathers and young men have an upper seat in the church. Men were handling the affairs of the church. They were the ones taking decisions on everything taking place, on behalf of everybody. This was like a norm for the church; no one would dare to question anything. They would preach, collect offerings, read announcements and give directions to people where to sit. I used to wish I was one of them. Women sat on one side and men on the other side. All this made me feel like the pulpit was for men only. I could not bear it any longer. I decided to leave that church as I felt



there was no space for women. Now I am in a different church. I see many women in leadership positions. I feel like I have arrived where I longed to be and I feel counted in God's kingdom." (Tool 9: *Women in church leadership: co-option or transformation?* A Gender Transformation Toolkit for Women and Men in churches. Created in God's image. (<http://www.kirkensnodhjelp.nca-createdingodsimage-tool09-june2015>. Accessed, 21/10/2020).

The above scenario reveals that rate and extent to which women have been relegated to the background in the leadership affairs of the church which ought not to be the case. Any church that denies women leadership positions is chasing a treasure out of where it ought to boom and be even more relevant.

The role of women in the church is beyond being auxiliary to men but rather, their work in the ministry of the church is in their own right as a person, responding to the salvific work of Jesus as one who is saved and sent. In the third century, women played a vital role in the ministry of the church, a development that parallels that of other orders or offices in the church held by men; this portrays the ecclesiastical role of women in the third century which can be applicable to the contemporary church as well (Tarasar, n.d: 195). Thus, women's ecclesiological roles are officially and specifically recognized by Christ not until the stamp of approval has been put on it by the church councils that have a tendency to be males as evident among the Disciples of Christ (Odooye, Nd.:70).

On the contrary, during the Apostolic Age, women had an important part in founding the church. It is worthy of note that immediately after Christ's ascension women gathered with the disciples and Apostles in the upper room in Jerusalem to pray with them. This suggests that women were significant in the founding of the church as Mary the mother of John Mark donated her house as a meeting place for part of the church in that city (Ryrie, 1970:53-54). Jesus Christ who is the head of the church was conceived through a virgin woman, Mary; and the first person to see Christ after his resurrection from the dead was a woman, Mary Magdalene. This presupposes that women have been part and parcel of the church from time immemorial as a result of their pious lifestyle. This is corroborated by Henahan (2000:75) who asserts that spiritual exercises for women can reclaim the place women have in the world of spirituality, and the exercise in question is always occurring in the church (Henahan, 2000:75). Cleary (Nd.:82) alludes to this fact when he stressed that Christianity acknowledges no inherently inferior groups, whether based on race, social status, or sex, besides, the Apostle Paul championed in proclaiming full equality of the sexes in marriage and in the church. This implies that there is no need for discrimination towards the feminine gender in the Church of Christ.

Feminist theology proceeds from a methodological focus on the experience of women, and feminist ethics begins with a central concern for the wellbeing of women even in church leadership (Loades, 1990:239). Women are to a great extent influential in church leadership because they in one way or the other determine the leadership capacity of each church as wives and mothers to the masculine gender of the church. The women too beside the men, are the church for an all-inclusive church, this is because the male-dominated church is also a church but it is not inclusive, it has been mutilated and lacks experience of a half of humanity. In the original Jesus movement, women were naturally equal persons, called and baptized members of the congregation with equal rights (Buhrig, 1993:105-106).

James (2003:43) was right when he asserted the equality of women in the ministry of the church; and the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making in the church. The ordination of women in churches that do not ordain women is a sign of





hope for the church. Buhrig (1993:110) affirms this proposition by submitting that women should share in shaping the structures, and the decision-making, in which women do not simply conform to the existing situation; in this church, others will no longer take action and make decisions for women. This buttresses the ecclesiological analysis of women leadership in the church and the holistic partnership in church leadership as a sign of hope and there is the need for an all-inclusive partnership of women and men in theology and in the church (Buhrig,1993:110). Suffice it to say here that women in leadership positions, their talents and potentials. would be explored and used in the church to enrich its mission on earth and a balance would thus be created in the churches whereby both male and female voices and perspectives are put into use with equal gender representation (Buhrig,1993:48). This is to avoid masculine domination in the church in spite of the patriarchic milieu of the Holy Bible and various cultures. Incidentally, the feminine gender forms the background and the backbone of the church and if they assume a leadership role, the church would be concretized and consolidated (James, 2003:43). This is because women in church leadership think differently as they see events in terms of relationships that men do not necessarily see as logical. Also, women are closer to life as a consequence of their socialization in the ecclesiastical sphere by making the congregation more colourful, down-to-earth and lively (Buhrig, 1993:113).

### **Theological reflection**

From the foregoing ecclesiological analysis of women leadership, there is need for a theological reflection or response to it. The two groups in evangelicals on the place of women in the church and society are the Traditionalists (Complementarians) and the Egalitarians. The former advocates for male headship and female submissions while the latter believe men and women were created for full and equal partnership (Belleville, 2000:72).

This is a dilemma. Granted that the men-folk see leadership positions in the church as their birthright under the guise of "... He shall rule over you..." (Genesis 3:16), this injunction prides the men to seem to lord themselves over the women because of their erroneous impression that God designed it that way. But the church is in no way different as a critical look at the church too reveals that it is only in the Baptist, Methodist, Neo-Pentecostal and some African Instituted churches that women are permitted to assume leadership roles at the helms of affairs. Women are not allowed to lead in the Anglican, Orthodox and Catholic denominations except in their fellowship, consequently, the 'best brains' among the womenfolk are underutilized, thereby making leadership to be accepted 'hook, line, and sinker' as the prerogative of men alone (2009:27). This is uncalled for as the God of the men is also the God of women, and he is fair and just without discrimination; deductively, women are thus required to take their rightful place in ecclesiological position to the glory of God.

Some critical questions that demand a response on women leadership in the church are as follows: In which ministry can women be involved? What roles can women assume in the family and in society? What, if any, positions of authority can woman hold in the church? (Belleville, 2000:16). Adequate and objective response to these questions will settle the Ecclesiological analysis of women leadership and bring the timeless debates on women and church leadership to an end. Also, in the thought of Patrick, women's decisions about church membership and involvement are profoundly affecting the religious institution in her leadership capacity, and thus, the women are clamoring for their rightful vocation in the body of Christ (Patrick, 2013:53).

Remarkably, Christ (as a liberator) has set women free to pursue their God-given gifts in whatever capacity they desire and the theological declaration in Galatians 3:27-28 that all natural distinctions, including sex, are transcended by the unity of the baptized



in Christ, gives credence to the role of women in the church and serves as the *magna carta* of women everywhere (Schneider, Nd.:35). Ampofo (Nd: 23) was right when she argued that the majority of the adherents or congregants of the African churches have been women who incidentally act as agents of change in the church. This supports the argument that women are the church as they either make or mar the church by the role they play therein. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians asserts oneness in the body of Christ even between male and female as long as they have been baptized into Christ. This implies that in Christ there is neither male nor female, this includes nothing that is inconsistent with the idea of a different position and function of men and women (Ryrie, 1970:71-72).

In John chapter four, Liefel (1978:292) says the woman at the well, a Samaritan, remind us of the importance of a woman's witness to Christ; it is noteworthy that in the discourse of Jesus with the Samaritan woman it connotes a very rich theological pericope that portray the role of women in the church inferentially: the self-revelation of Jesus to the woman and the woman's role as a witness. Jesus having revealed himself, as the head of the church, to the Samaritan woman, the woman in her own right serves a situational leader-preacher and witnessed Christ to the Samaritans and many souls were saved (Schneider, Nd.:39).

Women unlike their men counterparts, ministered to Jesus on several occasions during his earthly ministry. In the gospels, a very unique place is accorded to women as ministers to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was ministered to by Angels and women in the Gospels. For example, Martha waited on the table, the band of women provided money, Peter's mother-in-law evidently provided food for Jesus and his disciples (Ryrie, 1970:341). Women also gave the first testimony to the resurrection of Christ and several women accompanied Jesus on his missionary travels and supported him financially (Luke 8:1-3). In the same vein, women today also represent the church on inter-church and ecumenical bodies and their increasing presence among the laity serves the church well on its boards and committees and this is significant (Ampofo, Nd.:238).

Suffice it to say here that in re-reading 1 Timothy 2:11-12, it is suggested that the status of women in the church must be understood in the light of the practices of that time in which a Jewish woman was forbidden to learn the law and took no public part in a synagogue's services. This does not mean that women should not, or cannot take part in leadership positions but rather the Apostle Paul stressed that issue to save them from religious confusion manifesting from that era, of which the church should be wary of today (James,2003:34). Remarkably, the role and contribution of women in the church has gone beyond secondary or supplementary - rather their participation in the commissioned ministry and lay involvement in governance has considerably increased. Therefore, it is important for the church to look at the ways of encouraging and employing the talents of its women and how to improve on this notion (Ampofo, Nd.:233).

Coincidentally, God's essential revelation is changeless about the issue of women leadership in the church and is in line with 1 Timothy 2:11-12, it is universal and permanent, and then the woman issue is transposed into contemporary cultural terms. Granted that the theology of submission constrains the power Pentecostal women have and the roles they play both in their church and in society, such theology should be re-examined and re-read to break the 'jinx of women barrier' to leadership posts (Miller, 2016:52). Nevertheless, as one in Christ, whether male or female, having been redeemed, then no restriction should be placed in the way of women who want to exercise God's potentiality in them by becoming leaders in the church. Women should be encouraged to 'come out of their cocoon' in the church and to take up leadership



positions and succeed where others have failed (Oke, 2009:36). Therefore, womens' formal theological education plays a significant role in liberating them for ministry in the church and as such it is imperative for women to avail themselves for thorough training so as to assist them to take their rightful place in the ministry of the church and lead effectively to the glory of God (Shier-Jones, 2010:213-257).

### **Conclusion**

The church is the body of Christ of which women are inclusive as they are also the Temple of the Holy Spirit and play significant role in the church of Christ. Jesus was born of a woman and the first person to see him after his resurrection was a woman. Even in his death, those that went to anoint his body were women. Thus, women should use their potential and giftedness to grow the church of Christ without being viewed as inferior or being afraid as God is both the God of men and that of women. Consequently, a woman who has committed her life to Christ should have a place of service in the church of Christ because the Bible never excludes them from serving in the church. As long as women can head and lead secular organizations, nothing should stop them from leading in the church.

Therefore, women are expected to participate effectively in the leadership of the church that is owned by Christ as evident in the earthly ministry of Christ. This coheres with the submission of Barth that men and women are fully equal before God because male and female are created concurrently both in God's image, and both are given the same dominion over every living thing (Justus, 1978:6-12). The church should take up the challenge of interrogating and resisting all oppressive and abusive practices in the name of culture and tradition, and should stand with women to speak out and keep speaking out against violence in all its forms against them. Women have come of age and are fully human and fully called, fully committed to living out that call to serving together with all who serve to bring in the reign of God.

The church built and headed by Jesus Christ does not discriminate against women attaining leadership positions in all its spheres, and in like manner, the contemporary church should not disallow what Christ allowed as regards women using their giftedness and potentials in the leadership of the church. Women should also emerge and avail themselves for leadership posts in the churches for God use their talents to promote His glory in the body of Christ and the contemporary society, cultural prejudice and presuppositions notwithstanding.

### **References**

- Adetunji, O. G. (2010). *Leadership in Action: A Source book in Church Administration for Students and Ministers*, Ibadan: Baptist Press.
- Allison, R. W. (1988). Let Women be silent in the Churches (1 Corinthians 14:33b-36): What did Paul really say and what did it mean? *Journal for the Study of New Testament*, 32.
- Ampofo, R. "The contribution of women to church growth and development in Africa: The case of the Presbyterian church of Ghana" *International review of Mission*.
- Aremu, T. & Malomo, E.O. (2016). *Christian Theology in African Context*, Ilorin: Amazing-Grace Print-Media.
- Aune, K. Ed. (2008). *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization*, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Company.



- Belleville, L. L. (2000). *Women Leaders and the Church: 3 Crucial Questions*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.
- Børresen, K.E. (1995). "Subordination and Equivalence." *The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, Kampen: Kok Pharos.
- Buhrig, M. (1993) *Woman Invisible: A Personal Odyssey in Christian Feminism*, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International.
- Cleary, F/ X. (n.d.). *Women in the New Testament: St. Paul and the Early Pauline Churches*, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri.
- Ember, C. R. & Ember, M. (Eds.). (2003).. *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures*, New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Grudem, W. (1994) *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Henehan, M. P. (2000). Women's spiritual practices: survival to graceful living, *Journal of women and Religion*, 18.
- Horton, D. (Ed.). (2006). *The Portable Seminary* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bethany House.
- Ide, A.F. (1984). *Women as Priest, Bishop and Laity in the Early Catholic Church to 440 A.D.*, Texas: Ide House.
- James, R. M. (2003). Holistic Partnership: Women in Theology as a sign of Hope, *Africa Challenge: All Africa Journal of Theology* , 2,June.
- Justes, E. J. (March 1978). "heological Reflections on the Role of Women in Church and Society, *The Journal of Pastoral Care*,XXXII No.1.
- Keane, M.H. (1998). Feminist and Womanist Theology, In Maimela S. & König A. (eds.) *Initiation into Theology*, Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Liefeld, W. L. (July 1978).Women and Evangelism in the Early Church, *Missiology: An International Review*, XV. No.3.
- Loades, A. (Ed.). (1990). *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, London: John Knox Press.
- MacKendrick, P. (1980). *The North African Stone Speak*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.
- Mepaiyeda, S. M. (June/December, 2014). The Legacies of Cyprian's Leadership Policies for Nigeria, *Insights: Journals of Religious Studies*,10.
- Miller, E. (2016). Women in Australian Pentecostalism: Leadership, Submission, and Feminism in Hillsong Church, *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion, JASR* , 29(1).1
- Nicolaides, A (2022). A Critical Investigation into the Role of Widows in Early Church Life, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 103.
- Nicolaides, A. (2016). Assessing Tertullian on the Status of Women in the Third Century Church, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 97.
- Nicolaides, A. (2010). The Laos tou Theou – an orthodox view of the "people of God", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 66(1).



Nicolaidis, A. (2005). The Role of Women in the Eastern Orthodox Church. *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 4, 1–8.

Oduyoye, M. A. (1981). Standing on both feet: Education and Leadership Training of women in the Methodist Church Nigeria, *The Ecumenical Review*, 33(1).

Oke, R.O. (June/December 2009). Women leadership Role in Nigeria: A Contradiction or confirmation (A Re-reading of 1Timothy 2:11-13), *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies*, 5.

Patrick, A.E. (2013). *Conscience and Calling: Ethical Reflections on Catholic Women's Church Vocations*, New York: Bloomsbury.

Phelips, V. (1931). *The Churches and Modern Thought*, London: Watts & Co.

Piper, J. & Wayne G. Eds. (1991). *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books.

Power, K. (Spring 2007). Ordination of Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History (Review), *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 15(1).

Ruether, R.R. (Ed.). (2007). *Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Ryrie, C. C. (1970). *The Role of Women in the church*, Chicago: Moody Press.

Schneiders, S. M. (1982 ). Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church, *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture*, 12 (2).

Shier-Jone, A. (April, 2010). Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches, *Ecclesiology*, 6(4).

Tarasar, C.J.(n.d.). Women in the Mission of the church: Theological and Historical Reflections, *International Review of Mission*. Tool 9: *Women in church leadership: co-option or transformation?* A Gender Transformation Toolkit for Women and Men in churches. Created in God's image. <http://www.kirkensnodhjelp.nca-createdingodsimage-tool09-june2015>. Accessed, 21/10/2020.

Tavard, G.H. (1962). *Paul Tillich and the Christian Message*, New York: Charles Scribner & Sons.

Vogt, K. (2003). Becoming Male: One aspect of an Early Christian Anthropology, In. Soskice J.M. & Lipton D. (eds.) *Feminism and Theology: Oxford Readings in Feminism*, Oxford: University Press.

Women in Ministry, [Available online at <http://www.fuller.edu.womeninministry>}. Accessed 21/10/2020

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



**This article is open-access and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence.** The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

