
A Quest for Women Inclusion in the Priesthood: A Critical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35

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Abstract

*This paper examines 1 Corinthians 14:13-36 with respect to sex-role hindrance to the inclusion of women in the **priesthood** due to the age long conservative interpretation of the above mentioned text which has been in use from the time of the Apostles whose patriarchal background was masculine in nature. So Paul carried this tradition of women neglect to his teaching in (1 Corinthians 14: 33-35) by saying that women should remain silent in the churches. The woman was created in the image of God like the man. The noble roles of women in scriptures and in Nigeria today cannot be over emphasized. The Samaritan woman was the first woman evangelist and when Jesus was to be crucified men deserted him and no instance of a woman failing him was recorded. So women should be given equal rights with men and should be included in the Priesthood so that their potentials can be fully utilized.*

The purpose of this paper is to examine 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2: 11-42 critically with the aim of providing insight to what seems to be a sex role hindrance to active participation of women in both public and religious life. It aims to show that womanhood shares actively in the creation and is not inferior to man rather; they have equal right with their male counterparts. Thus, the injunction of silence made by Paul has been variously interpreted among scholars either for or against the active participation of women; however, the idea of women's subjection and non-active participation has become difficult to understand as we now have women who play leading roles in the private, public and religious life.

They have contributed meaningfully to the development of the Nigeria nation, thus it becomes necessary to re-examine the text in the light of the noble contributions made by women in the family and to the nation because women give birth to children and take care of them until they grow up. The special roles they play are instrumental to the development index of the nation. To achieve this task therefore, the expository approach is applied to the text heuristically. The main thrust of this study is an attempt to proffer solution to the text through a critical analysis. It seeks to recommend that all forms of cultural, religious and social maltreatment meted out to women are tantamount to deprivation and subordination of women's right thus; according them a second place in their career and social development. It can serve as a framework for national development and social integration of women in Nigeria.

Man's Equality Before God

It will be an understatement if a sweeping position is established about the status of women and their plight with respect to their right. Abogurin (2005), noted that it is an undeniable fact that women play certain irreplaceable roles in the society but quite often, these unique roles are not given adequate recognition and sometimes not acknowledged at all. They are even denied equal right with their male counterpart, an affirmation of the global phenomenon of women subordination.

Lewanika (2006), from an African perspective noted that women in leadership position are hampered by numerous obstacles. These include pervasive and often subtle attitudes and beliefs that women are unequal to men at work, home and government as well as in the religious setting. From both the biblical and African social background as presented by the above author, Adewale (2000) further expressed his opinion on the acts of women subordination from a comparative approach to the study of religion. He noted that women are not free to talk or express their theological views among the worshipping congregation. While in some beliefs, women play very insignificant and subordinate roles. The observation made by Adewale (2000) confirmed the statement made by Paul in his demand of silence from women in all the churches. This position is largely attributed to the pre-colonial African hierarchy of male dominance.

Hence, Little (2010) remarked that even when women played greater roles in certain religious practices, they were not totally free from male control as the "supernatural" is said to have rest in the hands of men who are still seen to be in control. In response, the women folk now see feminism as an ideology for cultural change with a call for a new orientation of the male-female axis. It recognizes the dynamism of the polarity between male and female, without leading to false polarization of superiors and inferiors. The significance of the above observation is that it does not input value to one over and against the other. It is thus, perceived by feminists as being crucial for well-

being, liberation and the evolutionary future. Ursula (2005), while commenting on the report from the conference devoted to Women in the World's Religion stated that:

In the past women from all traditions have been regarded not only as inferior beings who were not likely to have the capacity to experience ultimate reality, but also as actual obstacles to men's spiritual progress. These obstacles have left a residue of bitterness in women, especially as they see few signs yet of men acknowledging their needs or indeed their mutual humanity. Many women are now beginning seriously to question whether the model of patriarchal religions has any place in it at all.

Most scholars noted among other things, that women have been subjected to suffering, subordination and outright refusal in a patriarchal society. Hence Ursula (2005) from the liberational point of view, suggested the way forward to include that of getting beyond the fixation of sex altogether and to find ways of worshipping. Such worship should be life- enhancing and must transcend sexual orientation. People need to discover how to create situations, which wake up the basic insight and spiritual order that all humans have. The challenge facing women today is that of rising up to the male folk and a re-visit to certain key biblical passages on the Concept of Man as the Image of God, in (Genesis 1:26-27).

According to Ulanor (2005), if sex is undervalued, it will ultimately lead to the total destruction of the human race. In the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, both male and female were created in the Image of God; there is no inferior value of women in creation. According to Walter (1987), in an exhaustive study which serve as a background for the position of subordination maintained by Paul in his letters, in which Enuwosa (2007) remarked that he handled with levity, "the Jewish-Christian religion received a masculine structure as only men were exclusively in contact with God, women were given a marginal place. "The hierarchy - God, man and women" brought about a legislation of masculine privileges in the Old Testament divorce law (Deuteronomy 24:1-3).

In the New Testament (1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12), Paul gave theological sanctions to this fact with the doctrine of the "head". "The Bible is not a closed book that has already said all that needs to be said, it can speak to anyone in different ways if he or she will take time to open it". The above opinion is concretized by Boje (2005) who argued that, there are two basic uses: oppression and liberation. Oduyoye (1994) expressed her view on the Bible and the Women Oppression or Liberation. She noted that though some have maintained and used it as a tool in promoting oppression and injustice, women as inferior beings, silence of women and male children preference; it is also seen as liberation for it contains texts on divine love.

As a woman scholar, Akintunde (2005) posited that as a Nigerian, the bible rather than being oppressive to women, it has been a source of women emancipation and has been found a role model as noted by Oduyoye. With particular reference to the language of Paul on women silence, she affirmed that it did not hold sway for the contemporary women. Rather, women interpret these texts in a way that free them from patriarchal subjugation because Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 has no universal say.

Interpretative Look at 1 Corinthians 14:33-35

From the writings of Paul to the church at Corinth, there are so many controversies over a wide range of issues. There is the use of the veil and head covering by women in (1 Corinthians 11:5). The dress code in (1 Timothy 2:9- 10), The submission of women in (Ephesians 5:22-23) and women silence in (1 Corinthians 14:33-35). These teachings form the watershed for most of the debate surrounding the changing role of women in the church. Keener (1992) reasoned that since 1 Cor. 11:5-6 allows women to prophesy in church as long as their heads are covered, and 1 Cor. 14:34-35 talks about women silence and digresses briefly from its context, this passage has often been regarded as an addition to chapter 14 by a later editor and not Paul. This view is also shared by scholars like Wayne (2000), Meeks (1998), Hans (1999), Conzelmann (1995), and Bruce (1998). Hence Jewett (2005) maintained that Paul's teaching about women finds its roots in rabbinism. He thought of the women as being subordinate to the man. In 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 there are parallel passages in other texts written by Paul with similar command saying.

As in all congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (1 Corinthians 14:33-35, Timothy 2:11-12).

The above passage in (1 Corinthians 14:33-35) has actually divided the opinion of scholars into two major groups: the Conservatives and the Liberal. While the former accepted the passage in its plain and literal meaning as prohibiting all talking by women during services in every society, the latter, do not accept this position. The Liberal sees this text and interpreted the same as a local situation whose influence should not be extended over the whole churches. Through the centuries, scholars have tried to reason out the exact position with different views in order to end the ongoing confusion.

1. These verses are to be taken as a new beginning, since it interrupted the flow of thought. This position is supported by the Western text which places 1 Cor. 14:34-35 as a transpose following 1 Cor. 14:40 but the discussion still did not flow at that.

2. These verses 33b-35 actually spoils the flow of thought and interrupts the theme of prophecy as there is a discontinuity between verses 36 and 37.
3. The view of Conzelmann (1995), is that this passage contradicts 1 Cor. 11:5- 6, where women are described as taking active roles in the church such as praying and prophesying during service. Therefore, either the above passage or 1 Cor. 11:5 must be invalid as well as the eschatological egalitarianism in Galatians 3:28.
4. There are some linguistic and theological peculiarities; hence Obi (2005) remarked that the phrase of the saints' is found only here in Paul Epistles while the thought pattern closely resembles the household code of the pastoral letters.
5. The purpose of first Corinthians was to answer a number of questions raised by the church at Corinth, hence Paul's style was to write a brief quotation such as: 1 Cor. 3:1; 5:1; 6:1 and 8:1). Therefore, verses 33b-35 is not a comment by Paul rather it's a question raised by a Corinthian who objected to women speaking in church. To these, Paul will now respond.
6. Paul's intention was to limit women's role but referring to a temporary problem of a local church nature because women do chat during services and cause some interruption as well as emotional outburst.
7. As a revelation of Paul's poor regard for women, this, originated from his Greek and Jewish background that was not overcome by his religious conversion to Christianity. Since they are the expression of his personal beliefs, they can safely be overlooked in this present day. The way people have learned to ignore the passage regarding slavery, covering of hair and certain kind of Jewelry, they should also recognize the evil of Paul's sexism and disregard the passage and follow the affirmative texts like: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you all are one in Christ Jesus"*. On this backdrop, critical scholars have challenged the Conservative refusal view to reconcile traditional Christian beliefs and doctrines with contemporary experience and knowledge. The exegesis of the passage will be divided into three groups as follows:
 - a) The need for orderliness in the Church (1 Corinthians 14:33)
 - b) The silence of women in the Church (1 Corinthians 14:34)
 - c) The husband as a teacher of the wife (1 Corinthians 14:35)
 - i. The passage contradicts 1 Corinthians 11:5 where women are described as taking active part in church assemblies by praying and prophesying during

services. Therefore, either 1 Corinthians 11:5 or 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 is invalid.

- ii. There are peculiarities of linguistic usage and thought which are not found in the rest of the epistles like “all the churches of the saints” 1 Corinthians 14:33.
- iii. The passage 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 spoils the free flow of thought and interrupts the verses 1 Corinthians 14:36 and 1 Corinthians 14:37, where 1 Corinthians 14:37 link up perfectly with 1 Corinthians 14:33a.
- iv. The only hindrance to a smooth flow of thought in this passage (1 Corinthians 14:33-36), which is believed to have been inserted by a redactor.

According to Beleziken (1999), in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor is man independent of woman for as woman was made from man, so also man is born of a woman and all things are from God (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

1. There are no rooms for the unmarried women in Paul’s context because all the women should be married, however young they may be. This Judaic practice did not accommodate Paul’s position of celibacy for the sake of the ministry.
2. Since the Jewish society placed premium on male children only, they are the ones that are educated and from that Judaic background, Paul presents the husband as the sole teacher of the wife. She is expected to ask her husband the entire questions. The reason being that, the male child receives religious education.
3. The only privilege for the wives to ask questions is in the hands of their husbands, not in the church, street or public. This absolute segregation of the sexes reflects ancient Judaic life.
4. The only religious group in the time of Paul that promoted passionate hatred and segregation, racism and sexism was Judaism. In the world of Paul, the difference between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female represented the deepest class of society. As a Jew, he has always promoted this identity of superior and inferior.

The Nigerian Woman Quest for Equal Rights and Opportunities

According to Isirovoja (2010), the challenges facing women today is that of rising up to the male folk and a revisit to certain key biblical passages on the concept of “Image Dei”. Oduyoye (2001), strongly posited in favour of women’s right in the

conference organized under the auspices of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and the institute of Women in Religion and Culture. She argued that the concept of women's right has been generated by the contemporary articulation of women's experience that suggests that human rights have tended to mean man's right. Though all men are entitled to education, in many African countries, one can identify girls whose education has been truncated to facilitate the higher education of their brothers or simply because they had to serve while their brothers studied or played. This scenario is true as the African culture is replete with language that enables the community to diminish the humanity of women. No amount of denial negates the fact that, the relationships between men and women are not all that cordial. Hence, the quest for women's right universally should become the preoccupation of African women, men and all people of faith. In Nigerian culture and in most cases, out of religion, there is endemic sexism that has given rise to gender stratification, male entitlement and female self-abasement coupled with acquiescence that plainly cannot be exhibited in the presence of God. While making a very serious case for women and girls education, Kimberie (1999) said, "The empowerment of Black women constitutes the empowerment of our entire community". The same idea was corroborated by Onuoha (2008), who stated that the need to empower the women and the girl child cannot be overemphasized. He argued that women by the special roles they play as mothers are instrumental to the development index of the community. He observed with keen interest that women and girls education is not only an essential condition for sustainable human development, but also a factor for the overall developmental goals of any nation especially the developing nations of the world.

Kimberie (1999) added that women are known as agents of change. They are also the moral strength of their husbands and children. They also inculcate discipline and good habit in their children. (Igbonivia, 2008). In attestation of the above statement, Qudirat Dada a female politician from a political dimension openly declared that, "Women participation in politics in Nigeria is still very low and a lot of factors are responsible for this low participation. I believe women need a lot of encouragement and financial support... (Yetunde, 2008), In pursuit of egalitarian quest for women and the girl child, Idumange (2003), pointed at equality and justice as the two cardinal principles underpinning the Nigerian constitution and the National Policy on Education (NPE) because many women are not yet enlisted as part of this noble objective of the nation. Isiorhovoja (2010) asserted that, in pragmatic terms, there exist monumental gender imbalances in access to secondary education where female enrolment in Senior Secondary Examination is less than 50% of the male population based on the study of Bayelsa state that is also true of some States of the Federation. He identified potent factors as tradition, early marriage, poverty and religion as key players. He drew inspiration from the constitution and argued that one of the objectives of Nigeria educational system is "the building of a just and egalitarian society". Thus, different

administrations have made successive approaches aimed at entrenching geo-political and gender equality as well as access to education at all levels. Based on Idumange's argument, it is strongly recommended that government should take a more drastic action in ensuring that there is a fair representation of women based on the recommendations of the National Policy on Education and the global perspective for emancipation and recognition of their potentials. The traditional attitude of restraining women and the girl child from education because of marriage, religion (pudah) and other domestic purposes should be outlawed by government legislation and direct action. Hence, the National Policy on Education as the instrument of the government according to Sofolahan (1992), can be seen as a widening and an enrichment of the school curriculum in order to achieve well-articulated national objective. The widening of the curriculum therefore is to give the student in an educational system the opportunity to learn how to use the head as well as the hands, and also to appreciate the dignity of labour as an individual with potentials. Accordingly, Ipaye (1992) noted that education is the largest industry in Nigeria as of today. He added that since the introduction of Western Education to Nigeria in 1842, there had been various ordinances, codes, and government pronouncements to guide education. Yet, the plight of women and the girl child has not really changed as some are still denied qualitative education. Thus, it becomes imperative to take a closer look at the development of women in line with "Human Rights" regulation. From the *Fourth World Conference on Women* held at Beijing in 1955, it recognized the goal for equality and development for all women, acknowledging women's voice everywhere and their roles and circumstances, honouring the women who paved the way and were inspired by the people present in the world's youth congress.

From the perspective of Akintunde (2001), women should interpret social contexts, religious practices and beliefs as well as other forms of male dominance in ways that free them from patriarchal subjugation Paul's statement in 1Corinthians 14:33-35 has no universal say. Male dominance in the religious scene is transference from the age long tradition to which women must submit. This has caused many Nigerian women and the girl children to litter the street corner as commercial sex workers, roadside hawkers, street-traders and forced into early marriages while the male child is overwhelmingly accorded honourable position in the house. Consequently, the girl child has suffered rape and other forms of dehumanizing ill-treatments in the eyes of the society. It is only a privileged few that have attained to the point of liberation. Hence a re-visit of the Pauline text and its subordinate interpretation to mean women subjection and the full implementation of the National Policy on Education as well as the adoption of the right of women and the girl child is the final arbiter when fully implemented to ensure the egalitarian society envisaged in the NPE and a free society. The presence of women like Prof. Akunyili Dora, Oby Ezekwesili, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Ama

Pepple in the Nigerian experience are pointers to the fact that women need to be empowered and not subjugated or relegated in the overall development of the nation.

Conclusion

Based on practical observation from the Nigerian religious and secular scene, it becomes imperative to strictly uphold the humanity of women among men. Though there are very many cultural and religious hurdles to be scaled, it is for the maximum good of the nation and for her general development. Women are equally endowed as men hence, any thing that will hinder the full utilization of their potentials are tantamount to deprivation and dehumanization as there are no known scriptural backings for such degrading treatment as they are also created in God's image.

Looking at the wonderful contributions made by women today, if Paul were alive, would such a universal statement proceed from him? Thus, the liberationists are actively mounting pressure through Women Liberation Movement as an attempt towards achieving the position of companionship and comradeship, rejecting the "headship" concept of Paul that is strongly enshrined in the Law. The contemporary situation clearly reveals that there is a global drive through educational bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and other international institutions like the United Nation (UN) and Human Right groups to protect the right of women and the girl child as well as to provide basic needs essential for life. The socio-cultural and religious stigmatization of women is anti developmental as it hinders the attainment of the national objectives; it is a worthwhile crusade to empower women in every area so that the attainment of the global development can become feasible as it has been said that the education of women implies the education of the community.

Recommendation

1. All hands must be on deck to encourage cultures and persuade people that neglect girl child education to accept that the girl child has equal rights with her male counterparts, because what is good for the goose, is good for the gander
2. Education for gender equality is necessary to facilitate the elimination of stereotyped concepts of roles of men and women in the church.
3. The relevant stakeholders should intensify efforts to create awareness through various forms on the need for both male and female to be educated, so that when the mantle of leadership in the church and secular world falls on women, they will not be incapacitated.
4. Campaigns on the importance of women education and their leading roles in the religious sector to reduce corruption in the country and enhance national development must be carried out throughout the country
5. The Federal Government should commission a special programme for women education and women leadership training

6. Parents should discourage early marriage so as to create room for the girl child to attend school as well as motivate women to accept challenges and higher responsibilities both in the secular and religious sectors.
7. The male should obey and cooperate with the female pastors as they cooperate with their male counterparts.
8. The men should not look down on female Pastors, they should give them their due support and respect for the work of God to move forward
9. The mainline churches' Priests and Pentecostal Pastors should approve the ordination of female Priests and Pastors and ordain them.

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