

WOMEN DEPICTION AND TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN BIBLICAL AND
SELECT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN JOS

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Abstract: Gender roles are defined based on different expectations that people have of others based on their sex, societal values and beliefs about gender, which give cues about what sort of behaviour is appropriate for what sex. Extant literature show stereotypical gender roles in politics and diverse professional circles that mostly indicate women as subservient and dependent on men and men as chauvinists. What remains uncertain is the level with which Christian communities understand and interpret biblical gender roles and appropriate them. This study investigates select Christian sects in Jos to determine the depiction and assigning of gender roles within their communities and ascertain how societal and biblical values and beliefs determine how the female gender is particularly perceived and treated in the communities. A quasi-experimental and survey approach is adopted using interviews, questionnaires and observations amongst the clergy and laity of diverse Christian sects to elicit information on gender roles in Christian communities and the data subjected to critical discourse analysis from the Discourse Historical Approach of Ruth Wodak. The study offers profound insight into how women roles are constructed and deconstructed in religious hierarchy on the basis of sameness and the construction of differences and exclusion.

Keywords: Feminism, Sociolinguistics, Gender, Critical Discourse Analysis

Word count: 197

1. Introduction

Gender is an interactional and structural construct by individuals that create constraints in the environment to deny opportunities to women in favour of their male counterpart. And because gender is constructed, the goal usually is to shape peoples understanding to perceive and relate with women based on the factors that create gender. Such gender creations are based on different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender. Much research has explored how gender interacts with aspects such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class to affect diverse aspects of family and societal experiences (Coltrane 1998, p. 8). What remains relatively underexplored is the extent to which traditional gender roles reflect women depiction in Christian communities. Hence, this study investigates gender depiction in Biblical context alongside what obtains in Christian communities in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, so as to understand the Biblical position and the Church's position with regard to gender roles in Christian communities. This study posits that since religion is often regarded as the 'opium of society', what comes from religious beliefs will greatly impact on what happens in the larger society in relation to the behavioural patterns of people. Hence, this study expounds the horizon of gender discourse in the church and to ascertain the church's position to the ongoing debate on gender roles in societies and if its reference text – the Bible supports its position.

The goal of this study is to unearth the perspective of the church on gender roles, as it obtains in Christian communities and specifically to:

- i. determine biblical position in relation to gender roles;
- ii. ascertain Christian community positions on gender roles: and
- iii. establish the role of traditional gender role perspectives on Christian perspectives on gender.

2. Methods and theoretical perspective

In prosecuting this study, a quasi-experimental and survey approach was adopted. First, a content analysis was done to determine biblical views and comments on gender roles. Then, there were interviews, questionnaires and observations amongst the clergy and laity of diverse Christian sects to elicit information on gender roles in Christian communities in Jos. Ten (10) clergies, made up of five (5) males and females each were interviewed from different denominational sects, to get their perspectives on gender roles and as it applies to their communities. 150 questionnaires were also distributed across divide that encompassed varied Christian sects to ensure that at least 100 returned and were duly filled; this was coupled with physical observations in various Christian communities for firsthand interpretations.

Data got from the foregoing were subjected to critical discourse analysis from the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) of Ruth Wodak (2001). DHA is a sociological model of CDA studies; it stems from Bernstein's tradition of sociolinguistics of the Frankfurt School, especially Jurgen Habermas. Wodak studied institutional relations and discourse barriers in courtrooms, schools, and hospitals as well as sexism, anti-Semitism, and racism to show how discriminations are constructed in societies on the bases of race, gender and other factors. The distinctive feature of DHA is that it attempts to use all background information in analyzing different layers of a spoken or written text. Wodak (2001: Pp. 69-70) puts forward some features of DHA approach to CDA as follows:

1. This approach is interdisciplinary. Like other critical linguists, Wodak acknowledges the intricacy of the relationship between language and society.
2. This interdisciplinary nature is seen in both theory and practice as it combines argumentation theory and rhetoric with Halliday's Functional Linguistics.
3. The approach is problem-oriented, rather than emphasizing some special language issues.
4. Methodology and theory are chosen through eclecticism.
5. In this approach the analyst is always on the move between theory and empirical data.
6. Historical context will go under investigation and will be incorporated into the analysis of discourse and texts.

DHA considers written and spoken language as forms of social behaviour. This is because discourse as a social act creates discourse and non-discourse behaviours; and they, in turn create discourse. Hence, Wodak distinguishes between discourse and text; and views discourse as a complex set of synchronic and coherent linguistic acts that emanate in genre and text. Consequently text is seen as the production of linguistic acts that constitute discourse. These features are thus adopted to determine how gender roles are constructed and perceived in Christian communities especially in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.

Overview of related literature

This section considers conceptual and empirical reviews that are related to this study by looking at the notion of gender discourse and particular ways that women particularly have been depicted. Gender discourse has evolved from the mid 1970s into a distinctive genre of discourse analysis that focuses principally on how linguistic resources are used by individuals to present themselves as gendered beings in relation to other aspects of the self within the constraints of their communities, as they more or less conform to or resist the set constraints. It is equally about the discursive construction of gender and its many components through words and images. Understandably, the notion of gender is a complex social phenomenon, as such, the study of gender and discourse requires attention to cultural influences that favor gendered ways of speaking and of negotiating both connection and power as well as other integral societal constraints that come with gender performance, (Kendall and Tannen, 2015).

To comprehend the term "gender roles" one needs to first understand the notion of the term "gender". Often people confuse the social term "gender" with the term "sex:" Sex and gender have different connotations. Sex is a biological concept that is determined on the basis of individuals' primary human characteristics. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the meanings, values, and characteristics that people ascribe to different sexes. Ann Oakley (1972) was one the first social scientists to distinguish the concept of gender from the concept of sex. According to Oakley, gender parallels the biological division of sex into male and female, but it involves the division and social valuation of masculinity and femininity. In other words, gender is a concept that humans create socially, through their interactions with one another and their environments, yet it relies heavily upon biological differences between

males and females. Because humans create the concept of gender socially, gender is referred to as a social construction. The social construction of gender is demonstrated by the fact that individuals, groups, and societies ascribe particular traits, statuses, or values to individuals purely because of their sex, yet these ascriptions differ across societies and cultures, and over time within the same society (Blackstone, 2003 p. 336).

In this study therefore, the constructions of the female gender as it obtains in the Bible and what obtains in Christian communities is the focus; given that the context of Christian communities is identified to be under explored in this area in terms of systematic studies. The following is an overview of extant literature on gender discourse that establishes the above claim.

There are a number of studies that have been done in the area of gender discourse. Some of which include: Newman, et.al, (2008), Perrone et.al, (2009), Fapohunda, (2012), Ejumudo, (2013) Castillo-Mayén & Montes-Berges (2014), and Samarina, & Poliakova (2018) among others. Newman, et.al, (2008), considered gender differences in language use by analyzing 14,000 text samples using standardized categories. The study found women use more words related to psychological and social processes; while men referred more to object properties and impersonal topics. Although these effects were largely consistent across different contexts, the pattern of variation suggests that gender differences are manifest more in instances where less constraint are placed on language use. On their part, Perrone et.al, (2009), looked at traditional and nontraditional gender roles and work-family interface for men and women. The established that gender roles in family and work domains are in a fluctuating state. It observed that the traditional view of the male as breadwinner and the female as homemaker has shifted over time; as changes in social norms have resulted in men and women placing a high value on both work and family roles there eroding those stereotypes. Hence, both men and women are faced with the challenge of successfully navigating between life roles. They also observe that occasionally, these changing challenges produce role conflict and eventually result in role strain. Fapohunda, (2012), examined gender and development; looking at challenges to women involvement in Nigeria's development. The study found that women lack basic training and the wherewithal to blossom in work environment. It advocated the need to advance the position of women, strengthen their capacities and skills and expanding the opportunities for women, to more fully develop their roles.

Similarly, Ejumudo, (2013) examined gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria; focusing on the desirability and inevitability gender equality through a pragmatic approach. The study argued that, central to the problem of gender disparity in Nigeria, is the action dilemma by the Nigerian government which has compounded the problem of expanding the capacity level that is required to enhance the opportunity of accommodating the varying needs of both male and female gender. It also contends that the attainment of gender equality in Nigeria which is already time-barred, could be stunted due to multidimensional constraining factors and called for concerted efforts to consciously remove all forms of gender bias. Equally, Castillo-Mayén & Montes-Berges (2014) investigated prevalent gender stereotypes that obtained around 2013 – 2014. They observed that gender stereotypes are beliefs about attributes associated to women and men that reveal gender discrimination. In determining the prevailing gender stereotypes they had a questionnaire with of 258 stereotypical characteristics that was divided into two, one for female and one for male; and used that to access the perception of opposite sexes. The study identified current gender stereotypes to be independent of socio-demographic characteristics, such as age or sex, as new gender stereotypes emerged especially those they termed feminine stereotypes. They argued that such changes are the consequence of the change in social roles in societies. Equally, Samarina, & Poliakova (2018) looked at the linguistic representation of gender stereotypes in English advertising texts within the framework of the communicative-discursive research to discover linguistic gender construction in the communicative interaction of individuals in advertising. The study advanced that advertising discourse reveals gender stereotypes, which are used as a tool for transferring information about the object of advertising and about social reality; as advertisers show traditional social role of men and women, by constructing images of not only the advertisers but also consumers of the adverts.

From the foregoing is evident that studies on gender discourse have looked at a myriad of context adopting various approaches too. As an ongoing discourse event, this study identified that since the Christian community as a context is yet to receive such a robust engagement in terms of systematic study, it is worthy of been given such attention. Hence, the focus here is to examine Biblical positions and current position(s) on gender issues in Christian communities, using Jos, Plateau State in Nigeria as case study.

3. Data analysis

The analysis is guided by the objectives set above

3.1 Biblical position in relation to gender roles

The bible is a sacred book; it is the Holy Scripture for Christians and the Jews. The bible is not just one book; it is a collection of books that includes stories, songs, poetry, letters and history as well as religious literature. It has two main sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The bible is written for everyone. There is the part for the Jews – it traces their history, culture and the progression of their walk with God. There is the part for the Christian believer – that deals with salvation, being in God’s family and eternity; and there is the part for the unbeliever (non-Jew and non-Christian) – which is revealed in God’s love for mankind and his demonstration of love by dying in place of the unbeliever.

Interpreting the bible is therefore first premised on understanding the contexts with which statements are made – are they made to the Jew, Christian or to the unbeliever. There is equally another salient aspect worth noting, which is ‘who makes the statement in the Bible with which one is referring to’; is it God making the statement (whether Father, Son and or the Holy Spirit), is it man making the statement (either on the behalf of God or for himself); or is the devil making the statement? This is pertinent because all these voices are found in the bible.

On gender roles, the first reference in the bible is very early at the story of creation. Genesis (Gen) 1:27 states that, “...in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” NIV. At this point there is no disparity created on the basis of gender – the man and woman were created equal. Distinction however came in Gen 3:16, when disobedience came and retribution followed:

To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. **Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you**’ NIV.

This passage introduces the origin of gender disparity roles in the bible and this has become a basic norm, not just in the biblical context but in most cultures and tradition of the world where women have become subservient to men, but in the beginning this was not so. Similarly, in the New Testament, Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 re-echoes the injunction God placed on the woman in Gen. 3:16, to be in subjection to man by saying: “...As in all the 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,” NIV.

The big question therefore is that ‘is this new norm (gender disparity introduced in Gen 3:16) rigid or flexible all through, scripture; and is it applicable across board, making all females subordinate to the males or is it only applicable to spouses? Is this sentence perpetual or has it been atoned for, in the redemptive act of Jesus Christ, along with the other plights that came with the fall, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ? If Christians believe that Jesus’ sacrifice saved/delivered mankind from sin, sickness, toil, sweat, removal of thorns and thistles that militate against man etc., why has it not included the sentence on the woman, which came along with all verdicts after the fall?

In God’s dealings with his people all through scripture, does He show disparity and discrimination based on gender? It is instructive to note that while God dealt with mankind mostly from the masculine dimension, stemming from His sentence on man as a result of sin in Gen 3:16, He did not disregard the women, who positioned themselves for leadership and exploits in His dealings with mankind. Hence, in a time when God raised Judges to lead the nation of Israel, there is mention of Deborah in the bible, where it is said: “**Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time**” Judges 4:4 (NIV). This showed a disregard by God to male chauvinism. Also at different instances in the Bible, reference is made to the office of a prophetess, who is a female character who speaks to the people on the behalf of God, what is God’s counsel and will, at every time - (Exodus 15: 20 – Miriam the prophetess; Judges 4:4 – Deborah a prophetess; 2 Kings 22:14 / 2 Chronicles 34: 22 – prophetess Huldah; Nehemiah 6:14 - prophetess Noadiah; and in Isaiah 8:3 prophet Isaiah referred to his wife as a prophetess, who gave birth to a son. In all these instances, we see the Bible and indeed God ascribe to women roles and responsibilities irrespective of their gender.

3.2 Ascertaining the Christian community’s positions on gender roles

In this section, views of members of different Christian communities are collated as got through a questionnaire administered and appraised to determine their opinions on gender roles in their Christian communities. Their responses and reactions are here presented in percentages and their frequency of occurrence. Out of a hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires administered, one hundred were used in this study as some, were not returned or not completely or properly filled. The questions asked are given and the responses given are computed as follows:

Table 1: Q1 = Age bracket: 18 – 30years [], 31 – 40years [], 41years and above []

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18 - 30years	13	13.0	13.0	13.0
31 - 40years	51	51.0	51.0	64.0
41years and above	36	36.0	36.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The first question sought to determine the age bracket of respondents to the questionnaire and the result indicates that no minors took part in the survey. Only about 13% of the sampled population constituted young adults between the ages of 18 – 30years. The remaining 87% are made up of matured adults who are in the best position to comment on gender roles in the context of the Christian religious settings, with some having had firsthand experiences.

Table 2: Q2 Sex = [Male], [Female]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid male	28	28.0	28.0	28.0
female	72	72.0	72.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Question two sought to determine the gender distribution amongst the participants that responded to the questionnaire. The result indicates that 72% of the respondents were female against the 28% male population. This is not unconnected to the fact that from the topic, which reflected on the questionnaire, the female gender was more inclined to bear their mind on the subject matter, as there was no deliberate effort to reach females.

Table 3: Q3 Christiansect

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid catholic	16	16.0	16.0	16.0
Anglican	7	7.0	7.0	23.0
Mainstream orthodox	33	33.0	33.0	56.0
Pentecostal / charismatic	44	44.0	44.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The third question identified the various Christian sects that respondents to the questionnaire belonged to. Findings indicate that 16% were Catholics, 7% were Anglicans, 33% constituted the rest mainstream orthodox sects that include: ECWA, COCIN, BAPTIST and all others. While the Pentecostal and Charismatic sects made up the rest 44%. Overall, the views got cuts across all the major blocks that constitute the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

Table 4: Question4 - Are there perceived or clearly stated constraints placed on certain members of your Christian Community, on what they can do and not do, base on sex, age, or status?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	72	72.0	72.0	72.0
	No	28	28.0	28.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Question 4 sought to determine the existence or perceived existence of gender disparity in the various Christian sects that respondents belong to; and an overwhelming 72% affirmed positively to the fact that discriminations exist in Christian communities on the basis of gender. This validates the significance of this study, which postulated that the church is not immune to gender issues and sought to identify and determine how gender issues play out in the church.

Table 5: Question 5 - Is there a separation in the sitting arrangement between males and females in your congregation?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	15	15.0	15.0	15.0
	No	85	85.0	85.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

On the sitting arrangement in churches, which question 5 sought to determine 85% of respondents denied that there was no disparity in the sitting arrangement by males and females in their congregations. Only 15% affirmed that in their congregations there is a separation of where male and female sit. This suggests that though not a wide culture among Christian communities, there are some that extend the gender disparity to when women can even sit in a church congregation apart from not having the privilege of speaking.

Table 6: Question 6 - Do women rise to become clergies / vicars in your congregation?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	40.0	40.0	40.0
	No	60	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The hierarchy of church communities is structured on the basis of clergy and laity; with the clergy at the upper rank of the scale and saddled with the responsibility of leadership that includes teaching and guidance in issues of the faith. Thus, question six of the questionnaire sought to find out if women rose to such position(s) in church communities that the respondents belong to. The response show that in most Christian communities, as reflected by 60% of respondents to the questionnaire, women do not rise to the position of clergy, or leadership roles.

Table 7: Question7 - Are women fated to the position of laity in you congregation?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	43	43.0	43.0	43.0
	No	57	57.0	57.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The notion of ‘fate’ connotes predestination or predetermination, where events (or the course of events) are bound to happen because the trajectory has already been set. It is in light of this that question 7 sought to know from

respondents if it was already an established fact that women are fated not to rise to leadership position(s) in church, where they could also be clergies and will perpetually remain laity by design. Responses show that most Christian sects condemn women to the position of laity with 57% of respondents to the questionnaire affirming this claim.

Table 8: Question 8 - Are you satisfied with women’s role and participation in your congregation?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	39	39.0	39.0	39.0
	No	61	61.0	61.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

It is one thing to have a status quo; and another thing to be contented with the status quo. Thus, question 8 in the questionnaire sought to find out if respondents were comfortable with the role and position ascribed to women in their congregations. In response it is observed that 61% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with what obtains with regards to women roles and leadership in churches.

Table 9: Question 9 - Do you support the belief that women are equally called and gifted by God and should be free to express this calling and gifting freely in congregations?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	89	89.0	89.0	89.0
	No	11	11.0	11.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Gifting, talents and ministries are perceived as ‘gifts and callings’ from God who endows people with enabling grace to fulfill given tasks. These gifting, talents and callings often come without regard to gender. It is in light of this that question 9 sought to determine how respondents felt on the issue of women receiving God’s call and being gifted to perform clerical roles. The response showed a total of 89% of respondents affirming that women just like the men receive callings and gifting just like the men counterpart. The salient question is that if there is this unanimous affirmation by so great a percentage of Christians that women are so called and gifted to function as clergy, why the high level of gender disparity still found in Christendom?

Table 10: Question 10 - Should women be mute in church, and only speak outside or to their spouses and home?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	16	16.0	16.0	16.0
	No	84	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Going by the injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 that “...women should remain silent in the churches, they are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says” which re-echoed God’s injunction on the woman in Gen. 3:16, that she be in subjection to man. Question 10, asked if this injunction is still relevant and should subsist. Eighty-four percent (84%) of respondents feel that this injunction is obsolete.

Table 11: Question 11 - Are women allowed to preach, or admonish in your congregation?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	29	29.0	29.0	29.0
	No	71	71.0	71.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The privilege to preach and or give admonition in church is often the exclusive preserve of a select few that make up the leadership/clergy. It is in this regard that question 11 sought to know from the respondents if women had such rights / privileges in their local churches to preach. In response, 71% of the respondents declined that women are no given such opportunity that would enable them stand before the congregation to preach and or admonish. This is in spite of the fact that women could also carry the calling and gifting of God in various aspects.

Table 12: Question 12 - In your opinion are women in your congregation satisfied with their present status?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	55	55.0	55.0	55.0
	No	45	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Satisfaction connotes a state of fulfillment and or contentment that one derives from being or doing something. Question 12 was designed to find out from respondents if women in their Christian communities were satisfied with their status as women and the roles that are assigned to them. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the respondents indicated satisfaction with women’s position and role as second fiddle. Forty-five (45%) however expressed dissatisfaction with the status ascribed to women in the church.

Table 13: Question 13 - In your own estimation, are there traditional egocentric cultural sentiments on gender that are found in operation within the church?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	74	74.0	74.0	74.0
	No	26	26.0	26.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

A people’s culture reflects the totality of their values, norms and knowledge; whether they are good or bad. Different societies view and hold their women in different ways, that range between them being subservient, or them being objects of sight that are not to be heard or not being different from objects that can be picked and discarded with at will; and yet others view them as valuable components that cannot be easily dispensed with by men. It is from this background that question 13 sought to know if the church in its dealings with women have imported some aspects of culture in their dealings with the women. Seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents affirmed that aspects of culture are evident in the church’s dealings with men, while 26% declined the presence of cultural traits in the church.

Table 14: Question 14 -Do you think keeping women mute in church is scriptural?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	32	32.0	32.0	32.0
	No	68	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

In light of 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 which states that “...women should remain silent in the churches, they are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says” which re-echoed God’s injunction on the woman in Gen. 3:16, that she be in subjection to man. Question 14 sought to find out if this has become a yardstick or a doctrine that guides the operation and dealings of the church with women across board. In response, 32% of respondents affirmed that keeping mute by women in church is a scriptural tenet that is embedded in scripture; while 68% of the respondents declined that the idea of keeping the women mute in church is unscriptural, hence, suggesting that 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 does not have universal application.

Table 15: Question 15 - Is it scriptural for women to rise up to positions of authority and exercise same over men in church?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	63	63.0	63.0	63.0
	No	37	37.0	37.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Authority is used to represent persons who exercise (administrative) control over others or those who have power or right to give orders or make decisions. In societies today, women have risen to peaks in their careers and often superintend over men. It is in this light that question 15 asked if it is scriptural for women to rise to positions of authority and exercise same over men in church. The responses indicate that 63% of respondents think women rising to positions of leadership are scriptural, while 37% feel otherwise; suggesting that for women to be in authority is unscriptural.

Overall, it worthy of note from the aggregate position of respondents to the questionnaire that traditional gender roles as currently obtained in Christian communities does not wholly reflect the individual convictions of most persons in the congregation, who also lack the wherewithal to change the status-quo. This position is further supported by the response to question 8, where 61% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction on the gender roles accorded to women in churches as it is obtained now, where most Christian dominations forbid women to hold leadership position and are resigned to the posture of silence in affairs of the church. It is worth noting also that in this age and time women have accomplished great feats in life and have risen to very high positions where they wield influence and have control and authority over large populations including men. If they can be in such positions in other spheres of life, why can't they lead in Christian communities? After all, the bible says in James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning, NKJV" and Gal 3:28, it says "There is neither... male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus, NIV". Hence, gifts of leadership and all others come from God and because he has no preference and gives to all, why do we then create barriers to who, where and when to express such gifting to others based on their gender?

3.3 Traditional gender roles and influence on the Christian perspective on gender

Here, we do a critical appraisal of biblical and public assessment of gender roles. Comments and opinions of select clerics, drawn from different Christian sects, are aggregated as got from interviews and interactions had with them on women depiction and gender roles in Christian communities generally and their local church communities in particular.

The biblical position on the role and place of women unarguably is that the woman was given to man as a *'help meet'* in Genesis 2:18 and 20. Commentators have explained the phrase 'help meet' to mean "a help like him (man), one of the same nature and the same rank of beings; a help near him, one to cohabit with him, and to be always at hand; a help before him, one that he should look upon with pleasure and delight. (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, PC Study Bible Formatted Electronic Database) This position placed man and woman on the same pedestal in terms of status and role at creation. The situation however took a detour in Genesis 3:16 after the fall of man through sin and the sentence that came from God afterwards, which placed the woman in subjection to man thus: "16... Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (NIV). From this point onward the role and status of the women changed to subordination and subjugation to the male gender.

This notion of women subjugation has overtime been entrenched in traditions and customs of people and religious organisations including the church. Interactions and engagements with clerics of various Christian sects on this issue reveal that there are divergent views and beliefs in the church, on women's role and positions, depending on the sect and personal convictions of clerics. There are those who hold that "women need to know their place as helpers and submit to the leadership of the men in charge of their lives and ministries; women can speak but must do so with utmost reference and submission to male leadership" (As presented by one of the interviewee.) Those that hold this view strongly believe that male chauvinism is scriptural citing the patriarchal custom and tradition of the Jews as

revealed in the bible and hold firmly to Paul's position in 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 that women be silent in church and only consult their husbands at home.

On the other hand, others view and believe that there is the need to separate acts of the fallen man from God's ideal. The idealist that male and female were equal before God, at creation and before the fall (Genesis 1:27-28); and the charge given them in versus 28 did not put one person over another...

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. **Rule over the** fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." NIV

The charge to rule was for both the male and the female to exercise and to exercise that rule not over themselves but over other creations. The fall of man came with the consequence of bringing the woman under subjection to man, (Gen. 3:16). The argument goes further that since Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection dealt with sin and its consequences entirely, then the woman is no longer in the bondage of subjection to the male. When a woman thus submits to a man (as in a marriage), it is an act of deference and not superiority. Those that hold this view argue further that women are therefore joint heirs of the kingdom of God (Romans 8:16, 17), and have equal stake in issues of church hierarchy and can rise through the ranks to leadership positions and head of ministries and churches based on their calling and gifting.

Conclusion

The issue of gender roles is something that has generated controversy amongst Christian communities owing to different interpretation of biblical injunctions. While some place certain restrictions on females, based on the biblical pronouncement that men rule over women; others believe in a level playing ground amongst both the male and female based on the development of their God giving gifting and talents. Beyond the biblical injunction that created this divergent position on gender roles, it is imperative to note God's distribution of gifts, talents and call across the bible, which reveals that gender has never been a determining factor but availability and the level of yielding to God. God's call is usually to whosoever... God is no respecter of persons... (Acts 10:34 KJV). His grace and the Holy Spirit abode on both male and the female in the same measure, power and unction.

Credit must be given to organisations and business ventures that create a level playing ground for both male and female. There are female chief executives and heads of government that have distinguished themselves and have shown uncommon flare for leadership. Often, men who are also members of Christian sects have no misgivings submitting and working under women in the organisation, company and in government but vehemently forbid for such leadership acumen to extend to the church. Should it be said then that the call and gifting of women is fit for only the world outside the church but not fit for the church of God who created the women and also gave the gifts?

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