

# AN APPRAISAL OF THE ATTITUDE OF EARLY AND CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES TO WOMEN ORDINATION

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## Abstract

It is obvious today that women are regarded as second class citizen and also inferior to men. The monthly discharged popularly called menstruation has made some cultures and adherents of religion to name them as unclean. In line with this idea, women are discriminated not to lead the congregation especially religious gatherings. Some also see women as only tools to be used in the kitchen and for sexual satisfaction. Apparently this work is set out to correct this erroneous idea of people as highlighted above. Secondary source of gathering data was used to gather information, such as Books, Journals, Archival materials and a host of others. Interpretative research method cannot be divorced from this work because opinion put in place by scholars were interpreted. However, it was observed in this work through the biblical evidences that women have no limitation that incapacitate them to compete with men in any establishment. Similarly there are some women who have risen to the position of authority in the record of the Old Testament and even in the contemporary society. It was recommended that women should be entrusted to the position of authority either in the church or government establishment. Monthly discharge of women popularly called menstruation should not be a barrier towards their appointment since this does not make them dirty.

*Keyword: Women, leadership position.*

## Introduction

In many cultures of the world, women are portrayed as inferior to men. They are regarded as lesser human beings than their male counterpart. Women are not protected from the vicissitudes of life. Nevertheless, women all over the world are quietly but surely struggling to free themselves from this discrimination and looking forwards for liberation.

According to Barclay (2001) he pointed out that under the Jewish law “Women were vastly inferior to men. It was true that in the synagogue for instance, women were segregated completely from men in a short-off gallery or other part of building. In Jewish law and custom, it was unthinkable that women should claim any kind of equality with men.” In Jewish law, what a woman can do has been illustrated in the book of law. Like Clark (2000) observed that the Rabbis taught that a woman should know nothing but the use of her distaff. Furthermore, they expressed that the words of the law should be burnt rather than having them to be delivered to the women.

In Israel, women are regarded as second-class citizen and incomplete species good only for sexual gratification and child bearing and tiding the home. The Jewish society is culturally discriminating against women. Women were not allowed to hold any important post in the

religious activities of the land. Due to the prevailing tradition among the Jews, women were not to occupy important position within their society.

Today, in some identified churches i.e spiritual churches, women are not considered fit for ministerial job partly because of an inherent belief that their monthly discharge is considered as an uncleanness Lev. 15:19)

Margret (1992) contends such view in her word:

“As priestly service in any case is intermittent, it is not clear why menstruation should disqualify a woman from priestly service. The church rather than being in opposition to women’s good intention of serving God, they must give them the free hand to do expressly for God among all. For it is our conviction that the ministry will grow in effectiveness and the church will better fulfill its mission if churches laity, ministers work hand in hand with women”.

We must commend the devotion of women to the things of Christ despite the fact that men had a dominating influence over them through the established norms. Like Melcom (1982) reiterated:

*Which stand up better in a crisis men or women? The best way to arrive at a conclusion is to go to the greatest crisis the world ever faced namely, the crucifixion of our Divine Lord. Where we come to the great drama of Calvary, there is one fact that stands out clearly: men failed on the other hand, there is not a single instance of woman failing Him.*

There is need for us to be objective in our assessment of women’s place. Tradition should not always remain as watchword for the approved and disapproved values in our contemporary age.

There had been laid down rules, which for long had remained normative in the governance of the people within the Jewish world. On the contrary, as much as the rules were there to guide human relations, we must point out that there were some observed variations. Biblical Deborah though a woman acted much more in a leadership position as opposed to the set rule that forbid women from occupying prominent positions (Judges 4:4-7). We must also understand that the Jewish feeling about Deborah was expressed. She accordingly described as the wife of Lappidoth in which case she was not absolutely free concerning the law, because she was under authority of a man though now executing as a prophetess among the people.

### **Paul’s View of Women and their Roles in Communities**

Paul was an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, called specially for the spread of the good news among his gentile counterpart. We can assume that women played significant role in the ministry of Paul. This can be in the roles played by Priscilla one of his female helpers who propagated the gospel of Christ though with her husband. She and her husband were tent makers. They explained the gospel to Apollo (Act 18:24-25). They provided food for Paul and made their house available for Christian fellowship. Edith (2006) opined that concerning women in his letters, we could not be finally accepted as rejecting women from holding key post in the church but rather should be viewed as checking the excesses of women within the Christians-dom as contained in his letter.

In Paul’s message, the idea of the Jews that women are not allowed to teach or preach in the church in any authoritative capacity should not be interpreted as discrimination against women. Galatians 3:28 here we would see that Paul acted as Feminist. He said in this text that there is neither Greek nor Jew and there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female for we are all one in Christ.

Women provided hospitality in the church for visiting guest. Woman is shown to be trust worthy in the early church and Act 12:13 presents Rhoda as an example for his audience. Women were allowed to play a significant part in Macedonia during Hellenistic siege e.g Lydia the seller of purple (Act 16:14).

Paul had female helpers in achieving his aim which was to present Jesus as the Saviour of mankind to the gentiles in a language and manner that would be understood and accepted by them. Paul mentioned some of his female helpers in Romans chapter 16, thus; Phoebe, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Appelles, Aristobulus, Staclyis and Priscilla, Mary, Urbanus, Julia, Hermes, Patrobas and Hermas.

Priscilla and Aquilla preached the gospel, an example was their explanation about the gospel to Apollo (Acts 18:24-25). Records show that a church (the church in Rome) met at the home of Priscilla and Aquilla. It is note worthy that Priscilla's name is always mentioned before that of her husband. Could this be due to being more active in the ministry of Paul when compared to her husband, we would like to submit that it could indicate that she was more active than her husband though this is not conclusive.

Clouse (2005) observed that it is quite obvious that for Paul to have had women as followers and helpers in the propagation of the gospel, he must have respected them to a large extent. We can therefore guess that women played significant roles in the ministry of Paul providing shelter in their houses, food for his hunger and by ministering to him either in cash or kind. We also note the role of Priscilla and Aquilla who actually preached the gospel alongside with Paul.

### **The Role of Women in the Early Church**

Women were converted to Christianity along with the men on the day of Pentecost as a consequence of Peter's preaching. They were full members of the early church. They were usually referred to as sisters (Act 1:14, 13,50; 17:4; 16:13). Women provided venues for church gathering in their houses. An example was Mary the mother of John (Act 12:12). The early Christians met in private houses due to both economic and security reasons most often than not these meeting places of theirs were usually houses of females.

Christian women behave exemplary e.g Tabitha. She gave material aid or money to the needy. She made garment for needy women and was viewed to be of good works. Tabitha was in charge of an order of widows. Tabitha means Dorcas (Act. 9:36). It is in the programme of God that salvation is equally for men and women as it is revealed in the day of Pentecost where men and women were baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) Joel 2:28 also testifies to this "your sons and your daughters shall prophesies and your old men shall see vision".

Women were ordained as prophetess in the churches. This is in fulfillment of the promise of God in Old Testament scripture quoted above. Philips daughters were Prophetess (Acts 21:9). Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Susan (2000) Prophet and Prophetess are shown to have supernatural ability to discern people's character or to see beyond physical environment. There are false prophets and prophetess but they are not as powerful as Christian prophets.

In the early church, women served as teachers. In Act 18:26 we have a story of a couple Priscilla and Aquilla who were teachers, preaching the gospel to people. Priscilla's name came first before husband. This showed the significant role she played in the spread of good news as one of the women of old who dedicated the whole of her life to the service of God and to humanity. She provided accommodation for Paul and turned her house to a place of worship for the believers. Among the women who travelled to Asia Minor preaching in the first two centuries,

Theda was referred to as the first female Martyr. According to Basil she won many Christians for Christ and baptized them. She set up a teaching center in a cave near Seleucid after severe persecution in Iconium. Susan (200) speaks of Theda along with Peter, Paul, James, Stephen, Luke and Andrew as contending for the "Faith" with fire and sword, beasts and tyrants".

Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that in the early church, women played significant roles by making their houses available as venue for gathering of the people of God. They also made provision for the poor and used their diverse talents for the growth of the church.

### **The Teaching of Jesus about Women**

Women have played important roles throughout Christian history which many people overlooked. Women have always been very important in God's plan and programme for the earth. Right from the beginning, God made women to stand out as the last and most excellent work of creation that God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female. God ordained men and women for the purpose of taking care of the universe.

What is Jesus' attitude towards women? He treated women as persons of value and dignity. He continued throughout His ministry to elevate the status of women especially during the New Testament era.

Jesus was willing to teach women, as a Rabbi would teach his students, and it seems he was not afraid to do this in private when he was alone with women and he was not afraid to show His love for them. The plan of salvation for women is in Jesus programme and this could be seen in what happened at Mary and Martha's house. Jesus took God's word to be more important for all who seek to please God than cooking in the kitchen. This can be found in (Luke 10:41-42) "Martha and Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Women were allowed to hear the word of God in the synagogue but were not allowed to talk or ask question unless their husband or a Rabbi was willing to teach them. Women benefited from Jesus teaching and healing. Jesus rejected much of the Rabbinic teachings on women's inferior nature. The first woman to be mentioned was Mary Magdalene who benefited from Jesus healings. She was a living proof of the gospel's power, she was devoted and became Jesus disciple. The women that followed Jesus served Him and His disciples with their own money, properties and foodstuffs.

Eliade (1987) observed that the traditional roles of hospitality and service are seen by them as a way of serving not only physical family but also the family of faith. Mary was portrayed as one who witnessed Jesus death and was ushered into the community of faith and thus became a full pledged disciple.

Women played an important role during the time of Jesus death and burial. Mary prepared Jesus for His burial by pouring an expensive oil of alabaster on His leg. This was recorded and became credit on her part up till today.

The news of His resurrection was brought to His disciples by women. Jesus referred to a woman as the daughter of Abraham and healed her infirmities (Luke 13:16-17) Similarly, Jesus helped the woman who is in need (Luke 13:10-17). And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?. And when He had said these things, all His adversaries were ashamed; and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him. Jesus was reported to have been surrounded by a band of women (Luke 8:2). They were with Him in his suffering and

glorifications. He never spoke negatively of women. Eniola (1990) stated that it would not be an overstatement then to say that the various roles played by women in the ministry of Jesus contributed significantly to the success of Jesus Ministry.

It must put on record that, there were men of repute who had met with Christ, but all they could offer Christ was food alone. Levi in Luke chapter 5 verses 29 and 30, was an example of a noble in the Jewish setting that invited Jesus to a meal in his house. In the light of this fact, the women acted much more in a desired way in the ministry of Jesus as opposed to Levi who was apt in providing physical food for Jesus. Jesus in His reaction; He appreciated the spiritual food much more than the earthly food. No wonder in His reply to one of the temptations, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

### **Women Ordination in the Contemporary Churches.**

Women ordination as perceived by the contemporary churches today has changed from being passive to active. Today in some identified churches i.e spiritual churches often referred to as Pentecostal churches, the role played by women has been greatly improved due to enlightenment and awareness. Danielou (2000), opined that women in the churches today are now Teachers, Preachers, Pastors, Singer, Founder and some with ministry of healing.

Today we have a woman who is a co-founder of a church i.e the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Co-founded by Moses Orimolade and captain Abiodun Akinsowon on June 18, 1925. History of Cherubim and Seraphim in Nigeria does not complete without making reference to them.

Women can now be found in the fore-front of evangelism both in the orthodox and African churches. The Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals are not exempted from the ordination of women as leaders. Lady Evangelist Mekanjuola (a.k.a Omo Jesu) a member of the Anglican Diocese of Ilorin is known for open-air crusade and her healing ministry. Mrs. Ajileye of Mount Olive Chapel, Basin Road, Ilorin is another example of a woman leader who preaches the word of God and wins souls for Christ. The Mount-Olive chapel belongs to the Anglican Diocese of Ilorin. In the African Independent churches, women can attain any level of leadership without discrimination. They constitute majority of those who prophesy in the church, i.e the prophetesses, visioners and evangelists.

Eniola (1990) observed that apart from those people mentioned above, there are other outstanding women leaders in the cherubim and seraphim church. Example include: Madam C. Olatunrinle who was the founder and leader of Oja-Igbo No. 1 church, Ibadan. Other examples are Ona-Iwa Mimo cherubim and seraphim church, off stadium road Ilorin, founded by prophetess F. E. Alaba, Saint Peter's spiritual church, Oko-Erin, Ilorin founder and led by Grace E. B. Kolawole, Christ the Messiah church, Cocacola Road Ilorin founded and led by Propheteess G. I. Aimila, Mrs. Odeleke of the land of no impossibility for God (Agbala Olorun kii ba ti) ministry in Ibadan and Mrs. J. O Ogunranti of the Christ Apostolic church bethel, University of Ibadan.

Lahmann (2002) opined that some orthodox churches up till today do not allow women to preach on the pulpit. This act of discrimination should stop because we are all equal before God both male and female. One would like to suggest the eradication of such a rule wherever it exists. Any individual who propagates the word of God and win souls into the kingdom of God qualifies to stand on the pulpit to preach if she so desires.

## **Recommendations**

Since women are indispensable at home i.e we cannot do without them. This idea needs to be transferred to churches and must not be limited at home.

Whenever women are appointed to the position of leadership in the church, such position must be seen as a call and not for self aggrandizement or ostentation.

Monthly discharge of women otherwise known as mensuration should not be de-barring towards their ordination.

Principle of equality before the law should be upheld in all denominations.

The spirit of love, oneness and accommodation should be the Christians' watchword.

Women's mode of dressing in the church and outside the church should be moderate and be the type that glorify God.

## **Conclusion**

The researcher has considered the position of women in Jewish law, Paul's teaching about women, the roles of women in the early church, Jesus' teaching about women and women in contemporary churches. It is however noted that the future of women leaders within the church today looks encouraging, and judging from the trend of events which should continue. Attitudes toward the women folk are fast changing from being looked down upon. One would like to suggest that equal opportunity should be given to men and women in the service of God. Women should rather be given all the encouragements to enable them attain a fulfilled life of service within the church while the discriminatory regulations like prohibition of women from preaching from the pulpit and barring of women from holding certain posts in the church should be eradicated quietly. It is only then that the spirit of service in the life of the women in the church can be utilized in the fullest to the glory of God. As Lahman (2000) has rightly noted in his work "Women in the independent African churches"

At the present state of church development in Africa, it is important to help the women to see themselves not as fighters in the churches for a state which is lost or endangered in secular life nor looking back to the secular which the customary institutions offered before they started to break up, but as call to be free as part of the member of God's family to serve Him with all her talents and spiritual gift wherever she finds herself-in her home, classroom or even on the pulpit of her church. Women today should seek to work in full capacity for God as evangelists.

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