

Full Length Research Paper

The role of women in the Church in Africa

Kasomo Daniel

Department of Philosophy Religion and Theology, Maseno University, Kenya. E-mail:dkasomocounselling@yahoo.com.
Tel: +254 722-77020, +254 733-703603.

Accepted 3 February, 2010

This paper gives a general view of the role played by women in African instituted churches. It touches several roles of women in different instituted churches keeping in mind that there are so many African instituted churches some will be used to represent the general role played by women. The paper also will explain how women were viewed in the Old Testament, New Testament and Letters of St. Paul. This will give a background as to how women have been prominent in the churches throughout history. Interviews have also been conducted on the churches that could not be available this was to find out the general role played by women. The paper will centre its emphasis on the role of women in the African instituted churches, it will also touch some impediments that are facing women in some independent churches such as the Nomiya Luo Church in Kenya. This church that tries to bar off women from participation. This is caused by men's attitude towards women who are looked at as inferior, incapable and are in perpetual pollution due to their nature of being biologically females.

Key words: Women, Church in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the woman is a particularly disputed topic in contemporary political, theological and social debate. Three relevant and universal documents declare the fundamental equality of the human beings. The Bible, The Vatican II and The Universal declaration of the human rights. Let us see:

The Bible

"All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are in Christ Jesus" Gal. 3:28. "And you are all brothers and sisters" Matt. 23:8.

The Vatican II

"Men are plainly not equal in physical, intellectual and moral powers. But we should overcome and remove every kind of discrimination which affects fundamental rights, whether it be social and cultural discrimination or based in sex, race, colour, class, language or religion. All

such discrimination is opposed to God's purposes. It is really deplorable that the fundamental rights are still not everywhere securely guaranteed as when women are not allowed freely to choose a husband or adopt some other state of life, or are denied educational or cultural equity with men" Vat II. G. et Spes No. 29. The Universal declaration of the human rights (1948).

Article I

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood". Yes, but the reality is very far from the theory. In all times, cultures, places, religions, churches, among others the woman has been considered as "a bun fruit". Why is it? Any woman will say that is "irrational fear of the blood". Maybe Myths, beliefs, and rocentrism, chauvinism, economy, traditions, religion, psychology, philosophy and even biological factors have contributed to this situation. The particular conditions of the African woman, due to the singular traditions and especial situation of this continent makes the gender

issue very attractive and defiant. Questions like polygamy, cliteridectomy, levirate, dowry, barrenness, super-valuation of the women's role of production - reproduction, are very disputed not only among feminist circles but among all society.

Objective

The objective of this study was to find out the role of women in the church in Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The information contained here comes from two sources: first, library research and second, field research conducted between January, 2003 and 2004. Primary data was derived from first hand information through personal interviews, observation and questionnaire and document analysis methods. Primary data was the core of our data, which was supplemented with secondary data from relevant library data gathered from published books, unpublished books, articles, government records, archival materials and local dailies.

In this paper, there is only space to stimulate further reading and investigation. Particularly I wish to draw the attention about the interesting role that many women are playing today in Africa in the realm of the literature, Theology and new religious movements and taking advantage of this to help in the conscientization of many people in Africa, both women and men.

African woman, who are you? Who do tradition and religion to which you are ostentatiously the chief client say you are? Who does society say you are? And you African woman, who are you, what are you and who do you think you are? Before we enter into the manner of Woman in African church we are going to see briefly the situation of woman in other times and places.

Anti-feminism, an old problem

Eastern religions denied to the woman the human nature and attributed to them an animal nature, Mythra's cult excluded radically the women. In Greece, the things were no better. Aristotle stated: "The female is a male which for some accidental reason did not attain its full development". Euripides said: "The woman is the worst of all evils". And Aulo Gellio affirmed: "The women are a necessary evil.

The Jewish environment

The Judaism was openly discriminatory regarding women. Women were regarded as incapable of bearing witness, they remained excluded from essential religious tasks of men (as well) they were unworthy of participating in most of the religious feasts, neither could they study the torah nor participate in the sanctuary service. The woman was obliged to a permanent purification-ritual, especially in dates regarding with the sexual (Menstruation and birth). For the Jews, the birth of a female was a misfortune, the Rabbi Simeon said: "All are happy when a male birth but all are unhappy when female birth". And the Rabbi Jicaq: "When a male births, he brings peace to the word, he brings the bread in his hands, but when a female births, nothing is coming with her". According to Rabbi Jehuda (second century A.D.) Jews should recite the following prayer every day:

"Praised be God, that he did not create me as a goy (gentile)! Praised, that he did not create me as a woman! Praised, that he did not create me as an ignorant person!" Hauke (1988: 78) in his book *Women in priesthood*.

Instructing the female sex in the torah was not considered obligatory and was even seen in part as improper. Rabbi Eliezer wrote (Around 90 A. D.):

"He who teaches his daughter the torah is like one who teaches her dissoluteness ... may the words of the torah be burnt before anyone delivers them up to women".

(Billerbeck, Kommentar III, C. F. Leidopoldt, Frau). Women are often placed on a level with slaves and children in respect of fulfilment of certain command-ments. This, more than anything else, attests to the inferior position occupied by women, as compared with men, concerning the law.

"Each time that I beat my wife, she has to thank me because she is closer to the Salvation".

The book of Ecclesiasticus 42, 9 – 14 says

"Unknown to her, a daughter keeps her father awake, the worry she gives him drives away his sleep: in her youth, in case she never marries, married, in case she should be disliked, as a virgin, in case she should be defiled and found with child in her father's house, having a husband, in case she goes astray, married, in case she should be barren. Your daughter is headstrong? Keep a sharp lookout that she does not make you the laughing stuck of your enemies, the talk of the town, the object of common gossip and put you to public shame. Do not stare at any man for his good looks, do not sit down with the women, for moth comes out of clothes and woman's spite out of woman. A man's spite is preferable to a woman's kindness: women give rise to shame and reproach".

Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theological I. Q. 92 affirms:

"Woman is an occasional and incomplete being, a misbegotten male. It is unchangeable that woman is destined to live under man's influence and has no authority from her Lord".

And in more recently times, a philosopher said: "woman has long hair, but short ideas" (Arthur Shopenhauer, 1999:89).

CHURCH THEOLOGIANS AND WOMEN

1) You are the devil's gateway. It is you who plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree. You are the first who deserted the divine law. You are the one who persuaded him whom even the devil was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, man. Because of your desert, that is death, even the son of God had to die. Therefore cover your head and your figure with sackcloth and ashes (Tertulian on the 'dress of women).

2) Why must a woman cover her head? Because the women does not possess the image of God in herself but only when taken together with the male who is her head, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she

is assigned the role as a helpmate, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God. But as far as the man is concerned, he is by himself alone the image of God, just as fully and completely as when he and the woman are joined together into one (S. Augustine on trinity).

3) As the philosophers says 'woman is a misbegotten male'. Yet it is necessary that woman was made in the first production of things as a helpmate. Not indeed as a helpmate in any other works than procreation, for in all other works, man can be more efficiently helped by an other man than by a woman, but a helper in the work of generation. The woman is in state of subjugation in the original order of things. For this reason, she cannot represent head-ship in society or in the church. Only the male can represent Christ. For this reason it was necessary that Christ be incarnated as a male. It follows, therefore, that she can not receive the sign of Holy orders (Thomas Aquinas. S. T.).

4) When a woman thinks alone she thinks evil, for the woman was made from the crooked rib which is bent in the contrary direction from the man. Woman conspired constantly against spiritual good. Her very name, femina means 'absence of faith'. She is insatiable lust by nature. Because of this lust, she consorts even with devils. It is for this reason that women are especially prone to the crime of witchcraft, from which men have being preserved by the maleness of Christ (Malleus maleficarum 5th century; Manual against witchcraft).

5) Eve originally was more equally a partner with Adam, but because of sin the present woman is far inferior creature. Because she is responsible for the fall, woman is in state of subjugation. The man rules the home and the world, wages war and tills the soil. The woman is like a nail driven into the wall, she sits at home (Marthin Lutero, 'on marriage').

The covenant of creation dictates a certain order, a relation of priority and posteriority of A and B. He must be A, he must be first. She is B, she must be second. He must stay in his place. She must stay in hers. She must accept this order as the right nature of things through which she is save, even if she is abused and wronged by the man (Karl Barth Church dogmatics).

It is the unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church that women have never been admitted to the holy orders, with which the orthodox tradition also concurs. Jesus Christ did not call any woman to be part of the twelve, even his own mother. The apostolic church faithfully carried out this exclusion of women from priesthood that was instituted by Christ. Moreover, it should also be said that the maleness of the priest reflects the sacramental mystery of Christ and the church. As a representative of the head of the church the bridegroom, the priest must be male. There must be 'natural resemblance' between the priest and Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a male (Vatican declaration, 1976).

WOMEN IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL CHURCH

Africa's traditional society was not as fair to women as we would like to think. Often they were used and handled like personal property of men, exploited, oppressed and degraded. In Africa often women have been treated as "second -class" as portrayed in many African proverbs and sayings. In most of these proverbs, women are referred to as stoves, old cooking pots, large wooden stirring spoons, hoes, cows, merino sheep, fields and fires and even dogs usually with a derogatory meaning. "Does woman speak in public?" "Is the woman considered person?" "When are you going to make me a babe?" "Woman is the devil's tail".

Therese Sounga. "The Christ event from the viewpoint of African Women" states that. Women themselves seem to accept this situation. When there is an unidentified noise and someone asks, who is there? A woman answers: "It is nobody, just me!"

In some cultures people think that it is not worth educating a girl because later she will get married and no longer belong to the family. In other groups after husband's death, the woman is forced to marry one of his brothers to get children in the name of the former husband (Luo community in Kenya for example). Again some women are forced to get married with men against their will only because they can pay a big dowry. In most parts of Africa women are still the property of the men who father them or marry them. In some societies, it is the uncle who holds sway over a woman's life. It makes little difference any talk of women's liberation is met with cynicism, hostility or ridicule.

In many African societies, the traditional role of woman seems to be largely passive. African Theologian M. Oduyoye exposes this problem as she writes:

"I did study of Okan proverbs (attempting) to demonstrate that women fall victim of linguistic imagery that socializes them to accept "their place" in society and to view with caution any call for more space Oduyoye (1990) in her book "Women Tradition and the Church in Africa".

She observes that in the traditional communities of Yoruba, (Nigeria) and Akan (Ghana), where gender socialization is the norm, the strategy has distorted the quality of human relations and it continues to deny the parity between women and men or to accept female and male as equivalent expressions of human being. Oduyoye study has led her to conclude that making chauvinism is a problem in Africa, "and not created ... by the arrival of Islam and Christianity, but, one that is an integral part of our Africa world-view"

"Women in general are educated to believe that being born female means to be born innately inferior damaged that there is some thing with us. We are told that we are needed as mothers, caretakers, cheap labour in the field

and factories. Due to women's low self esteem they under rate themselves and leave leadership role to men. The traditional way is that women do most of the work in the church and in the society and men hold most of the leadership".

Talking about the female initiation rites a Mozambican woman says:

"They (Initiation rites) have a common purpose of instilling an attitude of submission to man into women's heart by making them accustomed to the notion that they were born to take second place in society. During the ceremony, the girls are told that from now onwards their task is to procreate and attend to their husbands and their homes and any other task is forbidden for them. These initiatory, surrounded as they are, by an aura of mystery and religious solemnity have such a devastating psychological impact on the girls that they are mesmerized into a blind acceptance of the indoctrination through a traumatic experience bound to affect them for the rest of their lives".

There are also some cultural hardships that African women experience. In African ethnic groups, there are taboos which restrict women. For example, a woman should not talk when men are having conversation. The idea of female inferiority can be conveyed through taboos. Certain foods, usually those high in protein are reserved for men to eat. For example, Mbum women in Chad did not eat chicken, eggs or game meat, Luo women in Kenya were forbidden to eat chicken, eggs, milk, sheep, rabbit and other game. In addition to seriously affecting women's health, such taboos express a male/female hierarchy. Other taboos surround sexuality and purity. Menstrual blood is thought to be polluting. Often female obedience is a lesson learned in female puberty rites.

Motherhood is a "traditional" way of defining the woman status since a woman is woman only if she is a mother. Women experience of being persons primarily in relation to others - as a mother or as a wife predominates in Africa. A woman's social status depends of these relationships and not any qualities or achievements of her own.

Matrilineality may give the impression of the structural dominance of women in certain parts of Africa, but not real power resides in the hands of woman. "African depopulation on the one side has accentuated the reproductive function of woman, on the other hand it has made their participation in production necessary. Rarely will a woman with all her individual and social exigencies, be an item in official programs: she is always a tool, never a person" Maria Rosa Catrullini (1986) "Women of Africa, Roots of Oppression".

Certainly, one can respond that African society recognizes the woman's role as a mother, wife, educator

and nurturer. But it is clear that all these roles are utilitarian, so much so a childless woman is generally not highly regarded by those around her and indeed may be regarded as having failed in her calling. How can one be fully a woman without being a mother? Therese Souga in her book. The Christ-event from the view point of African Women.

Role of women in African church and society

A lot of twaddle, out of ignorance presumed, has been written about the role of women in African church and society. Their role has been reduced to children bearers and little else and at worst to domestic workers!

Here is the truth

Ancient Africans believed that one of the reasons God made a woman after making man, was that he wanted to improve on his art. He wanted that art to reflect among other attributes, physical beauty, intelligence, tenderness, compassion, patience and tolerance. That God had tried but miserably failed this combination in man. All he had got were muscles, a bit of a brain and very little else. Forget about beauty! Africans also believe that God knew that man would be lost without a woman. That he would be incomplete hence would only be a half human. In modern times, the woman in Africa remains a powerful figure. She is the essence of being and existence. A man is not considered a man in Africa unless he has a woman behind him. A home without a woman is looked down upon and often the object of ridicule by society.

The home is also shunned by people because it is considered unblessed hence cursed. Who in his right mind would want to visit a home not graced by presence of a woman? African would ask. Not all women in Africa are regarded as mothers. Not in the limited sense of bearing children, but in the larger sense of being the one's God blessed with the gift of continuity of the life line and the linking of man with fellow man. A woman, who even though may have not borne children of her own, is often referred to as a mother in most African societies. A man who beats up his wife is considered by society to be weak in mind and utterly lacking in moral character. So that crap that you have read about the woman in Africa being a second class citizen is more than just that - CRAP Chief Musamaali Nangoli (1990) in his book "No more lies about Africa".

In traditionally African contexts, fully human undertakings are done conjointly by man and women. The traditional priesthood for instance, embraces both women and men each in his/her own right as a person Teresa Okure (1985). "In some cultures, like the Ewe culture of Ghana, women enjoy a much higher status and respect than they do in the church which is supposed

send to proclaim and be God's agent of liberation in and through Christ of all oppressed and marginalised persons". "In our African religious tradition women were priests and ministered well to the community, why not today?"

In many opinions such words of comparison as inferior and superior are out of place in the African context, they represent the importation of western attitudes into a context to which they do belong. It may be confidently asserted that it is more correct to speak of complementary roles which African societies expect of sexes in order to serve the greater purpose of enhancing society's effectiveness. Account must be taken of the fact that women in African societies do play diverse roles. They may be queen-mothers, wielding considerable influence in the state. They may be priestesses, being as prominent as men in the conduct of religious affairs or practitioners of medicine or mediums then there are female deities whose role in society is recognized by both sexes. The most significant of this is the earth goddess. The fon of the republic of Benin have a dual significant of this is the earth goddess. The fon of the republic of Benin have a dual deity, Mawu-lisa. Being Mawu female and lisa male". (A. Dickson. *Theology in Africa*, Pg. 64.). Rosemary Edet states: traditionally women play vital roles in religion and contribute their quota to the community worship life. It is a bit confusing to talk about the progress or regression of women's role in religion, be it traditional or Christian, without some knowledge of what women did in the traditional society. Suffice is to say that in African traditional religion, the salvific ministry associated with acts of healing, driving away evils spirits, promoting fertility and encouraging success in life's ventures was performed by priestesses and priests alike. These persons who officiate at communal worship do get professional training under tutelage of a chief-priestess or priest of the particular deity. They like those in the Christian ministry have been called by the deity. They have to obey or face dire consequences. In African traditional religion therefore, women professional occur who can be equated to ministers, pastors and priests in the Christian churches and they undergo a period of training for their offices.

We would like to continue supporting this positive side of the role of the woman in Africa but unfortunately it is impossible because most of the observers and even African themselves realize that a discriminative role of the woman is a common reality. The above quotations do not exonerate the African continent from the charge of sexism. Let us conclude this section with Oduyoye's words:

"As to the religious role of women: much as I would like to joining the chorus of voices that points out women's prominence in traditional cults, experience prevents me from doing so. Traditional African has many cults from which women, some times even

girls are excluded and some whose practices women may not even see. Granted there are exclusive cults and rituals for women (widowhood rites, for ex.) but I have yet to come across one ritual that takes place in the daytime and that decrees that no males should see it. In addition the supposed ritual impurity of the menstruating woman places her outside full involvement in religious ritual for almost half her life" Oduyoye (1986) in her book "Hearing and Knowing" Theological reflections on Christianity in Africa

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

The role of women in the churches is a very crucial section because of the roles of men and women in the church are more clearly stipulated than in the Secular World (Maina, 1995:11). This is because the church seems to have dictatorial ideas than in the ordinary life where women are taken for granted. David Crabtree on the same notes states that women do comprise the large majority of active church members and are the sustaining force in the almost every congregation (Crab, 1970:19).

In that note, women cannot be ignored in their church participation. Maina in her book states that church has continuously been accused of supporting and perpetuating the unjust social institution customs and myths which the church itself should evaluate. One finds that she (the Church) is more rigid than the secular society in her approach to gender issues. For instance, the society has opened up avenues for women to participate in any sphere of the society which the church has still kept some roles as men's roles. It is on that note that Crabtree states thus:

The church has given rise and supported the myths of dependency and emotionality the nuclear family system the all male Trinity. Crabtree, 1970:19.

In the early church the role of women was highly recognized and appreciated. Women participated as deacons, companions of Paul and other Apostles and as apostles themselves (Rom. 16:7). Church leaders (Rom. 16:3-5) Church rulers (Rom. 16:1). Mary McKenna notes that women's pastoral functions included teaching, catechizing to other women and caring for the sick (MacKenna, 1967:153). These pastoral works that women perform are done even today by lay and religious women; the world is emphasizing on equal rights and some dignity of sexes should respond accordingly to the situation where women play their role.

Mackenna continues to assert that women's role in the structure of the church difficult though it may be to define at times it's a real case based on the fact that she too from the start received charism from the spirit of God (MacKenna, 1969:154). Thus, they are all called to serve the church irrespective of the sexes. All through the ages the church has not been fair to women in its assigning of

roles as societies would like to assume. This is supported by Wachege by asserting the following:

History has it that the church too cannot be absolved from the evils of inflicting lamentable injustices on women this has been happening through its hierarchical structures which are predominantly and essentially male (Wachege 1992:93). The church has persistently and systematically excluded its women folk from ordained ministry thus it has kept her away from other roles that can only be performed by an ordained minister on the other hand the women's role in the church is considered less demanding and important.

This view is supported by Crabtree by saying the following:

It is apparent that the contemporary church's view of women is that she is an aesthetically child centered individual who has no talents for ordained ministry or policy making position. Crabtree 1970:19).

This implies that the women are not interested in highly demanding and challenging positions. At this point we cannot fail to point out the effect of sex role stereo types since they have a lot of effect even in denominations where women are ordained thus even in denominations that ordain women, they still do not consider them for higher positions. Crabtree gives the reason that these women are allocated for the most part in small country churches which are not taken seriously by those in power Crabtree (1970:20).

It is from the above that we see the church still operates on stereo types that view person's basically as men and women. Although ordination is not so vital for women's participation in the church, it becomes important as Wachege notes that: When the church fails to ordain women into Sacerdotal Ministry, it cuts them systematically from the subsequent religious roles (Wachege, 1992: 101). Their roles in the church are therefore limited on the basis of their gender.

FEMINISM AND RELIGION

The place and role of Man in every religion is very well stipulated in the major religious of the world particularly Christianity and Islam the role and place of woman leaves a lot to be desired. In traditional African religions, the women had a central place for she could be a healer, a diviner and sometimes she could preside over sacrifices. Most modern religions suffer sexist problems. The Biblical language Molomey presents woman in terms of her sexuality as a virgin, daughter, wife, mother, harlot, prostitute or barren (Moloney, 1984:27). In feminist ethics, the principle of equality is an underlying factor coupled with the principle of equitable sharing of human

resources out of this, feminist argue for a universal right of all to an equitable share in the good and services necessary for human life and basic happiness. The major concern is solidarity of human race. This is against the self isolation, hence a combination of principle of mutuality with the principle of equality. The image of a woman has been painted negatively in the patriarchal society, in the dictionary of christian ethics this issue is challenged by feminists. They condemn the association of women with religious symbols of evil Macquarrier and Childress Eds (1986:230).

For instance, women are presented as temple prostitutes without pointing out the male figures. In creation myth, woman is portrayed as being deceived by the serpent leading to the introduction of evil in the world therefore presenting a woman as a source of evil, the creation myth has also been used to give past theology justification of the inferiority of women to men. When we look at feminism, it is a social movement that seeks to expose and eradicate variety or injustices that women suffer on the basis of their gender. According to the encyclopedia of sociology, feminism is a social movement of women whose aim is to abolish patriarchy (Mann ed. 1967:127).

This plain attitude is disputed since for many modern feminist it is not necessarily women's movement because at the core of the movement abolishing of injustices against women is of paramount importance than abolishing of patriarchy therefore there are some men feminist because they fight for injustices against women on the basis of their gender. John Stuart is said to be a feminist for in his book dated 1869, he asks "Is it right and expedient that half of human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half" (Stuart Mill, 1869:116). Feminist insist that the woman has dignity hence all oppressive and discriminative forces against women are what they are particularly concerned with.

The above general view indicates how women in all ages have been viewed the feminist mentality tried to balance the role of women so they can also be respected in their roles. It is important to see women in the Old Testament and how they were viewed and treated.

WOMEN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The Old Testament is the product of patriarchal and more specifically of a literate urban elite or male religious specialists. Whatever the ultimate origin of its traditions in family worship clan wisdom, popular tales or the songs of women, the present form of the Hebrew bible is the work of male authors and editors whose views reflect the dominant theological perspective. Women in the biblical text are presented through male eyes for purposes determined by male authors (Fred Man, 1992:951). In all Israelite family however, the woman has an essential role to play though the family was always a male headed

household. Being a patrilineal family organization, women were either aliens in the family of marriage or transients in the family of birth Freed Man 1992:951. According to Genesis verses 21 - 23, a woman is inferior to man because she was taken from him such a subversive argument is forwarded by E. Jacob among others for him man by himself is a complete being, the woman who is given to him adds nothing to his nature while a woman drawn forth from him owes all her existence to him (Jacob, 1958:73). Such a misinterpretation of the bible is basically what male chauvinists have taken as excuses to the negative image of woman that they hold.

To contradict Jacob, Mary Evans asserts that it was the direct creative act of God in building up the rib that gave her being not the rib itself, women owes her life solely to God for both of them the origin of life is divine mystery (Evans, 1983:15). It is therefore wrong to say that woman owes her existence to man just as it would be wrong to say that man owes his existence from which he was made. In looking at women in the gospels, it is said that Jesus teaching has liberating effect on women, this is evidenced by the fact that women and men enjoyed equal heirs of the Kingdom of God and hence they were to prepare themselves equally with them for the coming of the Kingdom (Mathew 25:1-3). Another incident is healing men and women Jesus showed his compassion and power in his healing of women no less than of men Brown (ed. 1986:1059).

Jesus concern towards women's humanity always left his listeners wondering. Witherington points out that such an incident is Jesus' teaching about marriage, divorce and singleness would have been seen as radical not only by Jew but also by various people outside a Jewish context in the Roman Empire (Witherrington, 1984:49). The Deuteronomic book Deut. 19:15 states clearly that witness of two or more required in this case the Pharisees and the Scribe claimed that they had caught her in the very act. In this case, Leonard Swindler adds that: "the witnesses had to be male" (Swindler, 1979:186). Looking at Pauline Literature, throughout his teaching, Paul seems to be struggling to show the distinction between men and women. As an apostle he had a positive and cordial relationship with many women who were leaders in the early Church Rom. 16: 3 - 5) he therefore sent greetings to Aquila and Prisca who were very active in the Lord's work and were leaders. In Romans 16:7, Paul salutes Tunia whom he called outstanding apostle in verse 1 of the same chapter Phoebe is condemned as a deacon and a Church ruler. The contradiction arises when the same Paul in 1 Corinthians 11: 7 - 9, he asks women to cover their heads because a woman is man's glory and the man is the glory of God. MollenKnett says that "this would seem to imply that the man is in God's image and the woman is not" MollenKnett (1973:96). It surprises the reader even more when Paul urges women to be subordinate in Corinthian Church. On the basis of Genesis chapter 2,

Paul constantly changes from one version of his view of women to the next. In Galatians 3:28 Paul asserts that there is neither Jew nor Greek neither bonded nor free neither male you are all one in Christ.

This is one of the many evidences of Paul's rabbinical conflict and Christian insight for instance 1 Corin. 14: 34 and Gal. 3:17 - 19, the former demands women to keep silent in Churches in accordance to the law while the latter calls for taking the law as a temporarily measure that is superseded and fulfilled through Christ. These verses contradicts each other on the role and place of women in the Church the created woman therefore has equal authority to that of man according to Christ's teachings, this demands that the woman accepts herself as such and not disguise herself to look like a man he insists therefore that women must appear as women and enjoy freedom as women.

However, the Old Testament adopts somehow similar, some women have status and respect and on occasion like Deborah who held prominent religious office as prophets.

CAUSES THAT LED TO THE FORMATION OF INSTITUTED CHURCHES IN AFRICA BY WOMEN

Mwaura Philomen in quoting Nandi 1993 states that:

"Women want to remain in the Church but when the patriarchal hierarchy puts obstacles on their way and they cannot attain spiritual fulfillment, they leave to express their spirituality in a new Church or an accommodating one" Mwaura 14 - 19th September, 1997.

The assault which the missions were seen to be mounting against African traditional family structure was therefore felt primarily by women. Their first reaction was to defend the discredited institutions then as the contents of scripture became diffused throughout society, women gradually became aware of the discrepancy between their relatively under privileged status under the mission Churches and the liberty in Christ proclaimed for women in those scriptures.

Through their power influences in the home this disillusionment with mission spread until renewal movements leading to independence began under which new regime the status of women altered radically for the better. This assault at first caused bewilderment but trouble only began for the mission when vernacular translations of the scripture revealed both the similarity between traditional society and the Biblical pattern and also the centrality of the family the importance of women and the sanctity of the home within the Biblical scheme, gradually climate disaffection arose. Apparently, these foreign christians were withholding from African society the fullness of the biblical welcome. While allowing for such motive as

personal ambition and an impatience of European discipline it was not here that the root of the matter lay, it was in failure of the white man as the African saw it, to act in accordance with the demands of the Gospel which he proclaimed (Groves, 1958:156). The root cause common to the entire movement of independence therefore may be seen in this one aspect of culture clash, a failure in sensitivity, the failure of missions at one small point to demonstrate consistently the fullness of the Biblical concept of love as sensitive understanding towards others as equals, the failure to study or understand African society from the vernacular scriptures of the catastrophic nature of this failure and of the urgent necessity to remedy it in order that Christianity might survive on African soil.

C. H. Dodd in his book *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, states that Agape demands that one should not only refrain from offending or shocking one's pagan neighbors but also endeavor positively to do them service (Dodd, 1932:206). Regarding women in African contentment, they were the ones whose status, security and influence had suffered the most from the mission's assault on tribal institutions, they became the unwitting agents whereby subconscious tribal grievances were brought to the surface, articulated and spread.

Their desire both to preserve the integrity of their culture and later to secure what they regarded as a more satisfying and biblical religion gained full expression in the family home where traditionally they wielded religious as well as economic power. At this juncture, the religious influence of the home served as the intervening mechanism between the severe and schisms. Through the family and the home, the new biblical ideas became disseminated at a certain point the limit of tolerance was reached, the break then came with the emergence of a charismatic leader visionary seer, prophet or prophetess of them claiming an experience of wilderness death and resurrection similar to that of Christ and who now came into prominence in some intolerable situation that served as the immediate cause of revolt. The climax that led to the breakaway was manifested in the following fields:

- i. Lack of brotherly contact with Africans led directly to a failure to understand Africanism, the whole traditional complex, sufficiently well to differentiate the good element in it from the bad.
- ii. Community structure: where the status of women suffered.
- iii. Land and property: tribal land rites where ancestral ownership of the land was disputed by whites.
- iv. Laws and taboos: met oppositions.
- v. In religious concepts mythology, the tribal world view concepts of power tribal concepts of God and the ancestral cults were despised.
- vi. Religious leadership: Priests and princes, prophets and prophetesses, medicine men and witch doctors, rain makers and mediums, seers and diviners, reincarnation of leading ancestors, all these met disapproval in the

eyes of the missionaries.

vii. Vernacular: language itself in which was enshrined the tribe's soul together with vernacular songs histories and traditions. These traditional features however were often so closely interwoven into the social structure that to suppress one feature by force in any given tribe was liable to disrupt the whole society.

Despite the traditional flexibility shown by African societies, the situation was further aggravated by the fact that missionaries themselves land owners and therefore white settlers of kind appeared to be attempting this social control in consort with European traders and settlers and were in some degree held responsible for the parallel eroding forces of African cultures (Barret, 1968:266).

WOMEN REACTION TOWARDS MISSIONARIES IN THE CHURCH

Before I start giving the roles of women in instituted Churches, it is important to define what the Church is and how they were created. Mwaura (1997) in her paper, *Empowerment of women*, defined the Church as:

"The people of God, the assembly of believers regardless of denominational affiliation (Mwaura, 1997:4). She continued to explain that in the light of

Vatican II and past conciliar documents the Church is not to be seen primarily in terms of hierarchical community divided into two types of Christians the clergy and laity, though the hierarchical nature of the Church cannot be denied as this structure has enhanced gendering of human relationships both the clergy and the laity are involved in the priesthood of the baptized. As such, they are consequently called to witness to Christ. In the light of the recent African Synod in the Catholic Church, the Church is also the family of God on its earthly pilgrimage to the final destiny. This vision of the Church as family of God has profound implications for all members of God's family" (Mwaura, 1997).

In many African cultures, women have long held prominent positions, they have traditionally dominant in the tribes within the Swazi, Luapula and Lunda. Among the Loyedu, the rain queen rules as monarch. Many societies are matrilineal some are matriarchal and a handful practice polyandry, polygamy although it reflects the fundamental inequality between the sexes typical of many African social systems. Nevertheless, it provides women with status, security and considerable measure of economic and religious power. Agriculture remains their responsibility in numerous tribes giving them control of the economics of society. Women play an important role in the cult of the earth mother, although women are

usually excluded from ancestor cult ritual they are closely linked with it at several points in many tribes. At conception, whoever dreams of a particular family ancestor realizes that he wishes reincarnation at birth the diviners are consulted to verify this and to name a child accordingly after the ancestor. Although, missions in Africa attempted to be loyal to these insights, certain categories of women nevertheless stood to lose much of their traditional status when the missionary work began. A polygamist desiring baptism had only to choose one favourite wife but the fate of the other wives then sent away under the stigma of disgrace was tragic. Many women left found livelihood in prostitution in the new cities neither were those in the Church better off. Women were not permitted in the ministry nor in the hierarchy of its executive structure. The concern of many missionaries of the Anglo Saxons traditions was as their diaries reveal to go to all lengths to counter the strongly emotional character of African popular religion and to prevent religious hysteria, stemming from the disturbing influence of women in cultures with highly emotional and sexually arousing rites. In numerous other ways too, the rigidity of institutionalized churches such as their frequent refusal to baptize illegitimate children was felt primarily by women the mission seemed to be practicing an unjustified form of social control and in attacking the foundations of African society in the family, they were attacking the status of African women and failing to offer them the full status accorded in the bible. In Christianity expansion, women have often played part especially in what Max Weber calls "Sectarian Spiritualist Cults" (Weber 1958:240). The missionary assault on the family complex caused women to act for they felt the issue at stake far more keenly than men with more to lose they defended their traditional institutions and way of life then as the influence of the scriptures spread, the emphasis changed to the contrast between the mission's rigidity and the new visions of the freedom of women in Christ. Through the religious influence, they existed in the home women spread the growing disaffection they felt concerning this discrepancy. The East African revival is a good illustration of a movement in which women have played a dominant role in this spread of disaffection with missions yet which has in the main stayed within the mission churches.

Similarly, a large majority of the powerful Manyano groups (union) of women or mothers in South African churches are still linked with the mission Churches. In 1952, the Methodist church of South Africa had 19058 women as Manyano members. The Anglican diocese of Johannesburg 3,967 members and the Roman Catholic diocese of Johannesburg 900 members. In Rhodesia, this women's movement began in 1919 as the name Manyano Ruwadzano and is particularly strong in the Methodist church UK; these movements run their own affairs, are independent of their churches and have separate convention rules, hierarchies and fees. Their meetings are charged with emotions, sighing and weeping, members wear fantastically variegated colored

dresses of every hue. All these indicated by tremendous power wielded by women and by women's religious movements in Africa. Brandel sums these reactions in one brief sentence "nothing stops them from expansion" (Brandel, 1962:148). The existence in such powerful organization indicates that in many cases the female need for status and opportunity for initiative can be contained within the Churches without secession. When however, disaffection became too potent and the schisms began, it was women in the main who supported the seceding prophets as a result women now comprise the majority of the membership of independent Church movement across Africa" (Barret, 1958:148).

This is partly because church life in Africa centers on residence patterns and the life of women centers on residence more than that of men, women have therefore become far more deeply attached to their churches whether historical or independent, but the greater majority of women in the independent churches is due to a number of other factors also including the fact that these Churches meet such deep unresolved problems as barrenness, sterility and domestic difficulties concerning which mission churches have often been powerless to help. Many independent movements have actually been initiated by women beginning with Fumaira and Beatrice around the year 1700 right up to the contemporary period. Mother Jane of Freetown and her Martha Davies Confidential Association. Laou's Eglise Deimatiste founded in 1922, Christian Abioduns Cheribim and Seraphim Society founded in 1925. St John Apostolic Faith Mission near Johannesburg founded by the Ndebele prophetess Manku Mai (Mother) Chaza's City of God near Umtali (1952). Alice Lenshina's Lumpa Church 1954. The series of catholic secession in Kenyan began by Marrian Rogot from 1952 and Gaudencia Aoko in 1963.

Some of these movements have been very large both Chaza and Lenshina at one time had followers approaching the 1,000,000 mark. Some have been very small, little more than a single congregation in size, but there is a strong resemblance between them particularly in their emphasis on Christian marriage, the home, family life, the emotional needs of women etc. Mother bloomers Organization, though one of the smallest group and not strictly a separatist body is typical of many. In the Sierra Leone of 1910, Mrs Martha Davis with nine other Creole women founded her confidential band as a society loosely related to existing Churches with a membership restricted to married mothers whose private (confidential) needs were catered for. When the foundress died in 1917, there were one hundred (100) members; the leadership then passed to mother Bloomer who is noted for composing emotional religious shouts in the Krio language which were also easily translated into vernacular. Mother Bloomer is well known for its philanthropy (love of women). It became the largest and most successful of the fifty band meetings.

In the Free Town area began a mission among the

Mende tribe in 1948 and at one period considered aligning itself with the church of the Lord (Aladura). From Nigeria, Mother Bloomer died in 1958 but the movement carried on counting 150 full members in 1961 with seventy on trial neither fully inside the historical churches nor fully outside them. Holas in Barrets book exclaimed that, "The band nevertheless continues as an expression of revolt against the suppression of feminine exuberance in older Churches" (Holas; 1958:91). It is an interesting fact that such prophetesses often began their ministry at a very early age. Lenshina was called at twenty nine (29 years). Beatrice began at the age of twenty two (22). Aoko was a slender girl twenty years old (20) when she founded the legion of Mary Church. Nenilava a dynamic prophetess still within the Lutheran Church in Madagascar was seventeen (17 years) in 1939. Christiana too was seventeen when she received her spiritual vision in 1952, immediately after a Roman Catholic Corpus Christi procession in Lagos. It is also interesting that almost all of these women married early and that the arduous task of raising a family can be regarded as consistent with and even the norm of prophetic office.

The vastly improved lot of women in the new movements and churches has been widely observed. Inflexible church laws foreign to African thinking give way to more human and intelligible rules, baptism requirements for adults and children are more lax and sympathetic; this is understandable for desire for speeches. Baptism has been a recurring factor in African separatism. Whether the new churches allow polygamy as the majority do or prohibit it as strong minority do, women will still prefer new order to the old. In a polygamist church such as Musana Disco Christo Church of Ghana, the families of polygamist need no longer break up but can be baptized and accepted as family units into the Church. But a Church enforcing monogamy as did the Lumpa Church may also be more attractive to unmarried women and women concerned for the future education and advancement of their daughters. In other ways too, instituted churches protect the status and rights of their women. Baeta supports that statement by saying:

"One interesting feature of all the Ghana spiritual Churches has been the renewed menstrual taboos and campaign against a typically male vice drink" (Baeta, 1958:134).

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AFRICAN INSTITUTED CHURCHES

In a report presented at the African Theological Institute by Mwaura, it states that "Women all over the world are the pillars, they witness to the image of God within them and the hope and renewal for the Church rests within this witness" (Mwaura, 1997).

In quoting the WCC Unit III Commission meeting of 1997, Mwaura continued to say "That women are all active strong and ready to carry forth the Church's mission". The report also observed "That many churches have failed to fully receive and respond to women's gift and have failed to admit them to key areas of participation. Yet women are still the majority. In most congregation and participate strongly in the spiritual and liturgical life of the Church" (Mwaura, 1997).

Women are also majority voters in the political sphere and are very active in the economic life of the nation and are the pillars of families and by extension the society yet their input is barely recognized. In celebrations women are assigned areas decision about food preparations, sewing arrangements, they can be secretaries, cateresses and treasurers. In the church, they are confined to diakonia ministries, fund raising, teaching, and catechism to children, decorating and cleaning Churches (Mwaura, 1997). In the same report, women as they perform their roles are seen as capable of offering leadership services; they are female theologians and lay women who are willing to serve the Church at any levelThese women are determined to draw out the liberating strands of their faith(WCC Report 1997). These women nurture a vision of the Church that is a community of women and men that listens to the hopes, dreams and is a source of liberation. In the instituted Churches, women are at last given posts of leadership and responsibility. They are given status as office bearers, mothers in God, and evangelists ordained ministers of the sacraments, healers and prophetesses. In West Africa, the moving Yoruba chants in the United Native African cathedral in Lagos are led by women of the Ladies Christian Improvement Society vested in colourful traditional dress. In East Africa, it is chiefly women who have gained fame as hymn composers in the Wanga independent churches (Sangree, 1958). In South Africa, the Zulu Independent churches more than any other organization, give someone a chance for self display and assure them of power and prestige (Sunklea 1968: 150).

In some tribes such as Ga of Accra where women have traditionally played a dominant part behind the scenes, the same situation is found in the new Churches. Behind the charismatic figure of Brother Lawson whose divine healer's church now claims 198,000 adherents in Ghana is the dominant but unseen figure of his wife, Sister Lawson. Women in the independent Churches have come into a prestige and authority that they never knew in the parent bodies.

In black American Churches, women perform their roles: these have been manifested in the words of Gilkes concerning the role of women in the sanctified Church:

But all the same, I said thank God I got another chance I wanted to preach a great sermon about colored sitting on high, but there wasn't no pulpit for me (Gilkes, 1986: 24 -

41).

In Afro American experience, women have been established important legacies in their respective denominations. Regardless of the level of office or specific activity these women are brought to bear their historical role model in the Churches. The recent work of Paula Giduigs and Dorothy Sterling indicates that the special history of black women in American societies delivers important historical antecedents that are instructive and prophetic for all women. Black women were the carriers of culture and tradition both within their families, the extension of women's spiritual contribution into autonomous leadership ... works fostered the development of heroines and myth the most important pillars of tradition.

In a social setting that placed a primary value on spirituality, women play key roles in African instituted churches (AICs). Two thirds of all in the AICs are women which makes them a significant force in the movement. Women are also influential in small business, in various fundraising activities such as sewing, cake baking etc. Women are drawn into the formal and informal economic sectors: many act as heads of households. In some sample of seventy households headed by local women, fifty five of the women had come from different parts of the country; net working is thus an important aspect of the survival of the women and their children in the formal settlement" (IBMR: 1997: 8 -7).

According to an interview with Wanjiru Kiarie, one of the Akorino women, she pointed out that "the women play a very great role in their church for example some of them all chosen to be leaders after their movements are watched for a long time and they are proved to be leading a good family life, they lead in songs and in prayers. They play instruments that they use during their worship e.g. drums and tambourines. They maintain their Church and they see to it that the values are kept and respected. They also maintain the cleanliness of their Church. They teach moral conduct to the children that is catechism. They are well recognized when it comes to receiving the Holy Spirit because it is said that men receive him first and women later but the Holy Spirit possesses the latter more because they are well to speak in tongues thus prolonging the spirit of prayer. Also they have a major role to play when it comes to main functions because they are the ones who prepare food for the whole group. Those women who are not married in the Church are exempted from these roles" (Wanjiku Kiarie October 1998).

In Legio Maria church, women also perform their roles effectively since Gaudencia Aoko is the founder of the Legio Maria church, the role of women is considered vital. The position is recognized and thus stems from the role of Mary Mother of Christ whom the church is named after and the role she played in salvation history. Not only is the role of women recognized in Legio Maria only but in other instituted independent churches e.g. Alice

Mulenga founder of Lempa Church in Zambia, Grace Tani who co-founded the Twelve Apostles Church with Papa Nackabah in Ghana among others" (Mugambi 1990:49).

Josephine Wanja in her paper women in the Struggle for Peace said the following:

"Women assume new roles and are able to break down preconceived ideas about their capabilities. It an equal dilemma that without creating conflict they will not achieve equal status with men in societies..... Women must therefore pioneer ways of managing conflict which achieve without violence" (Andama 1993).

Josephine in her paper continued to say that women have been demanding and taking a more active role in fighting rather than a more active role in achieving peace by non violent means. This is because winning a war is seen as the path to peace; they have also played subsidiary parts in war situation, an alternative has been active demonstration for peace but even this has had violent outcomes. Their involvement in the process of mediation and developing strategies for securing and maintaining peace by peaceful means has so far been minimal because there are few women in top political positions and the voice of women is not considered by men as important in such deliberations (Wanja, 1993).

Among the African Independent Churches, female leaders often wield immense power and influence. In some of these Churches, prophetesses and leaders with prophetic gifts have left an indelible mark on the African context. In the Movement of William Wade Harris, women became leaders and to date gender roles are well balanced although polygamy was not renounced. In Ivory Coast Marie Lalon was inspired by a dream to start a Church; some women have ceremonial leadership and clear sense of gender roles is maintained. In Zambia, Alice Henshina Malenga started a silent movement after being thrown out of the Presbyterian Church and persisted in spite of persecution in 1971. Examples abound of female founders and leaders of Independent Churches: Chanza Mai of Zimbabwe, Ma Nku of South Africa, Alica Lakwena of Uganda, Mother Jane Bloomer of Freetown. Kenya has its own examples: Maria Aoko and Mary Aktsa, Maria Ragot Trufosa, Pastor Esther Otieno of God's Last Appeal Church. This trend causes Bengt Sunkler to remark that the African Church was like a woman's movement. It functioned like women's lib long before the term was invented, perhaps in South Africa this is the Zionist greatest contribution to African society Sunkler (1997). In giving position, the spiritual Churches gave women a central and a honored position in healing activities in worship and social life of the Church because these are considered gifts of God's spirit with illuminate authority. But perhaps the dominance of women in such position is determined by parallel occurrences in the

secular world as well. For example in South Africa in 1955, women led in the bus strike in the Rand and were very active in business.

So generally women were very powerful in the secular world. There are those who claim that they spring up especially when male leadership fails. Thus they are the last voice, the last resource or possibility of protest.

MEN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS WOMEN IN SOME AICS

In opening up churches women's role vary tremendously between and within religions. Some religious organizations are founded on fundamental principles which promote a traditional or even a regressive social position of women. Others are progressive and in the forefront of promoting women's rights. Religious fundamentalism has been identified as a trend that may limit women's participation in religious organization and society and women's access to leadership position.

In various Christian denominations, women have been striving to open up the Church's hierarchies to the participation of women and to increase women's representation in Church and decision making bodies. But in some Churches, men are adamant that their roles are God given. Take the case of Grace Tshebale in South Africa for example who brought revival in the church but was described as "after all she was merely a woman". The husband and other Zionist leaders said "Yes she can pray alright but of course men's prayer are stronger for he is the head and leads in everything". This was reiterated by Holy Family Juma Pesa of Kenya who remarked that the ordination of a woman was a deviation from Christ's teaching and called for the immediate end of the practice.

This was after the ordination of two women priests by the Presbyterian church of East Africa and the anglican church of the province of Kenya. The meeting he addressed was attended by representatives from many African instituted churches including Akorino Churches, Nomiya Luo Roho Church and Roho Israel Church.

In the subordination of women, some Churches have caused the further subordination of women. My case of reference is the Nomiya Luo Church. The Nomiya Luo Church (NLC) is very much a men's world. This dominance of men in their relations with women has found expression in many ways; for example there has been no genuine involvement of women in consultation and decision making positions.

Leadership is an important feature of the Church. The hierarchy provides outlets for the exercise of leadership ability and at the same time ascribes status to office bearers. However, right from its beginning women in Nomiya Luo Church were not supposed to aspire to or hold any hierarchical position such as bishop, archdeacon, pastor, rural dean, teacher, sheriff and most recently Archbishop.

This hierarchy is largely a replica of that of the church of the province of Kenya which was adopted after the death of the founder. One wants to assert that perhaps had the founder lived long enough he would have established a different one. But viewed from the existing events even before his death it can be inferred that his was a male venture. It seems that the leader considered the energy which emanated from female sexuality to be dangerous and used this belief to curtail women's involvement. For example a menstruating woman, a woman who has just delivered, a woman who was unwashed after sexual intercourse and one with uncovered hair were not to be involved in worship. One argument against women officiating in a worship service let alone holding of priest is that she must be menstruating (Ndeda, 1997:19). In administering sacraments and religious ceremonies, the female inferiority is evidenced by their lack of participation in most of the important Church functions. Sacraments or religious ceremonies believed to be accompanied by great spiritual benefits such as baptism, ordinations, confession and marriage are presided over by men while women play minor roles or those to which high value cannot be given. The significant weekly worship service, the annual festivals and other communal prayers all conducted by man who in most instance be ordained priests. During these functions in the recitals, Bible readings, vocal prayers and may call on another man to give the sermon. The bet a woman can do in these functions is to lead in the singing but only when called upon to do so.

Women can actively participate in other side gathering such as (mony) the all night meeting. In gathering such as these the women lead in the singing since they have the best solos. This singing is specifically communal and especially appreciated by the women. The NLC has a rich stock of songs but singing alone does not give high status. A woman may also preach in such gatherings but she must be past child bearing age, so female sexuality is again associated negatively with a religious role and this automatically bars the majority of women from participation.

As women are often ignored actors in NLC, many critical aspects of religious are obscured and the opportunity for exploring the relationship between personal and political life is lost. Dr. Mildred Ndeda echoing Evelyne Sullvot says:

"A visitor from another planet would find it paradoxical that while the majority of Church goers are women, religious doctrines certainly do not value the female sex very highly or at least have been misinterpreted over the centuries to give women a subordinate role in religious practices. They have been debarred from conducting religious services and administering sacraments" (Ndeda 1997).

In the Main Line churches a number of women are currently rejecting the self effacement involved in this definition of their religious roles and a number have been ordained priests. It is necessary that the independent churches too, authenticate the ministry of women by giving them roles as clergy and in the decision making bodies of the church. Currently, both the secular and religious worlds are experiencing great changes with regard to gender roles and women in the church are speaking with a new voice and new urgency. The AICs should not remain untouched by world events that have touched deeply the lives of women since 1975. It is imperative that existing issues be addressed with a sense of urgency. Women are an integral and vital part of the independent church movement. Their role in the churches is an important force behind the vitality of these groups. Mildred in quoting Hastings comments that: "The quest of the Independent church was the quest for a ritual, a belief and a realized community in and through which immediate human needs, social, psychological and physical could be appropriately met" (Ndeda 1997). This is as much the quest of women as it is the quest of men, if these demands are not addressed, the Church remains static or will eventually die a natural death as its usefulness will have been spent.

CONCLUSION

In looking at gender role in the traditional society, the problem of social inequality between the sexes was a fact in African social systems. This difference in gender was making African women not to be understood hence priority was given to men in religious professions, men were dominant while women suffered social and religious inferiority. Traditional African women played a great role mainly in the domestic activities for instance provide food, giving moral foundation for their children and maintaining the family. Women were not allowed to attend meetings not even accompanied men in some religious rituals because they were considered people of low spirit and weak to perform some acts simply because they were physically below the level of men. Very few elderly women would only be requested for an opinion on a given issue but not decision. Among the Turkana in Kenya some women were recognized performing some healing rituals, they were called Ngamurok. These are healing or nursing women whose powers were limited, they only deal with simple healing and could not take prophetic roles in the community. However, we cannot limit ourselves to this understanding only. African societies inform of gender role were classified into two: Patrilineal or Patriarchal societies. Patriarchal was male dominant: in these societies, men were dominating in all structural systems in politics, social, economic and religious structures. Women were subjected to powers of men as domestic workers. In matrilineal or matriarchal

societies where women take upper hand in powers was even limited till the period of Christianity in Africa.

When Christianity was first introduced in Africa by missionaries, the first African converts mainly the poor, slaves, women and children; why only women and not men, because men were custodians of traditions, customs and religion and laws. Men resisted Christianity in order to remain in their traditional level of identity as African leaders. Christianity was preaching equality which was very strange thing to most African men and women. Christian messages was liberating women, equality was preached human solidarity, freedom. For women, life of Mary the mother of God was inciting even to take the Gospel message seriously. Women leadership in the Bible were the examples like Deborah, Anna among others because of these examples women felt mobilized. They felt they were able to take and preach the Gospel and act as prophetess, bishops, and priests among others. In the case of independent churches in Africa, some missionaries assaulted families in their preaching; were against polygamy while in the Bible there were many polygamist such as David, Solomon, Abraham to mention but a few. This caused women to find fulfilment elsewhere so that their hopes were fulfilled.

Beside that women whom their husbands left due to Christian preaching took refuge to founding their own expression through small gatherings which later sprang into a church. As such women started participating fully in the Church's ministry. In spite of all these, some independent churches like that of Nomiya Luo church still regard women incompetent and not worthy the church's ministry in spite of all that some women who are enlightened have stood against such prejudices and hope to encourage women emancipation out the church's ministry. With this reflection as a man participating in the church, women in all walks of life are hereby called upon to keep on participating regardless of how men view them. All these are because of their stereotyped negative attitude towards women. Christ tells us in the Gospels that we are all equal. The study wonders where men got the mentality of taking women to be of a weaker sex. The work of God can be done equally by all, bringing salvation to all. African woman, who are you? Who do tradition and religion say you are? Who do the chief client say you are ostentatiously? Who does society say you are? And you African woman, who are you, what are you and who do you think you are?

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