

CREATION OF HUMAN KIND IN THE IMAGE OF GOD AS BASIS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Societies define gender according to characteristics prescribed by their culture. While sex is classified based on whether a person has male or female genitalia; gender is determined by beliefs, norms and practices of the society. Gender issues are imbedded in religio-cultural systems that ensure that the characteristics and roles of a gender are learned by people classified into that group. The problem however is that the female gender is usually discriminated against in many ways using cultural prejudices. Agents of socialisation, especially religion, are used to entrench gender inequality and discrimination against women in many cultures. The various programmes being pursued to promote gender equality have made some inroads but fail to achieve the ultimate result. This paper looks at some manifestations of gender inequality in Ghana and argues that suppression of one section of society is suppression of the entire society. Using the biblical creation story, the author argues that God created both male and female in his image, making them equal in status but with different roles. He further calls on the church to purposefully rise to the task of transformation of the culture in general and the fight for gender equality and women empowerment in particular since that will benefit all, including men.

Keywords: *Gender, gender equality, religio-cultural, image of God, partnership, complementation, subordination.*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations (UN) aims at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls in the world, including Ghana, by the year 2030. Currently, gender inequality manifests in various forms in the Ghanaian society despite many methods being used to combat it. Gender refers to the characteristics, behaviours and roles prescribed for a particular sex by a given society and learned through socialisation.²

The society does not only determine how a particular sex should behave, gender roles are also entrenched within particular societies. The main problem is that these are stereotyped giving little or no room for individual differences. Sanctions are always in place to enforce compliance and perpetuate the gender characteristics. Members of the society learn these characteristics based on their sex. Gender is thus a product of socialisation with agents as religion, family, formal education and peers. In Africa (and Ghana), the role of religion as an agent of socialisation is huge considering the fact that it influences all the other agents. Religion strengthens as well as explains almost every aspect of social life.³ Gender equality can thus be achieved faster if religion is purposefully used to promote it. Gender equality is achieved when everyone has the same status, rights and opportunities as others, regardless of their gender. Equal opportunities must be opened to all in all spheres of life. All grounds of discrimination will have to be removed so that none

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² Nana Oye Lithur, "Gender, Economic and Political Power in Ghana," in *Gender Evolving Roles and Perceptions* (Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2004), 64.

³ Max Assimeng, *Religion and Social Change in West Africa* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2010), 71.

will be denied opportunities because of gender. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, gender equality means "women and men, and girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protection. It does not require that girls and boys, or men and women be the same, or they are treated exactly the same."⁴ This definition is collaborated by the National Gender Policy which has this to say:

"Gender equality entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female."⁵

Significant in both definitions is the statement that women and men should not have to become the same despite emphasising provision of the same rights, resources and opportunities.

This paper takes complementary position. This view emphasises equal status but different roles between men and women especially in marriage. After emphasising equality of status as male and female, Bruce A. Ware went on to say "While male is fully human, male is also male, not female; and while female is fully human, female is also female, not male."⁶ Ware explains that while God planned to create male and female as equal in their essential nature as human, He also intended to make them different expressions of that essential nature.⁷ Roseline Okeke expresses this view of complementarity aptly by saying "Christian religion advocates equality of status but not equality of functions. Males and females have different roles, but they are complementary."⁸ This view rejects any form of superiority and inferiority between the genders. It rather advocates for equality in gender relations.⁹ Gender differentiation is necessary to be able to take care of the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of both genders. Moreover, it will clear misunderstanding between the sexes and by that promote gender equality. Denying differences between the sexes will only result in submerging the needs and aspirations of women under those of men. In other words, masculinity and femininity cannot be dismissed from the discourse of gender equality.

Although men and women are equal in status, men are said to have the primary responsibility to lead, protect and provide for the wife and family. The woman on the other hand has the primary responsibility for managing household and nurturing children. However, both sexes are to support each other for the benefit of the family and society. In a situation where women are engaged in gainful employment earning income, they are encouraged to support their husbands in providing for the family. Likewise, men are also expected to help their wives in their primary responsibilities.

This position goes contrary to another referred to as subordinationism. Subordinationism regards men as superior to women and thus promotes male dominance. This position is promoted in societies where men take precedence over women. It over-emphasises differences between men and women and misquote scripture to support it. Biblical texts like Ephesians 5:22-24 which enjoin women to submit to their husbands are used to entrench subordination of women to men. Others include Genesis 3:16 which pronounced curse

⁴ Wikipedia, "Gender Equality." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_equality. Accessed 8th October, 2018.

⁵ Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection, *National Gender Policy*, 2015. National+Gender+Policy.pdf. Accessed 8th October, 2018.

⁶ Bruce A. Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* edited by Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2002), 81.

⁷ Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity," 81

⁸ Roseline Okeke, "Christian Ethical Response to Masculinity and Violence Against Women in Nigeria," in *Religion and Gender-based Violence: West African Experience* edited by Rose Mary Amenga-Etego and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ligon: Legon Theological Studies Series: 2013), 156.

⁹ Okeke, "Christian Ethical Response," 155.

on the woman and I Timothy 2:11-14 asking women not to teach or exercise authority over men. This and other biblical texts are misquoted to perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination against women.

Manifestations of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality manifests in many cultural practices against the female gender some of which are child marriage, Trokosi System (Shrine Slavery), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), harmful widowhood practices and domestic violence.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is a situation in which one or both of the marriage partners are below age eighteen. It is estimated that one out of four (27%) girls gets married before their 18th birthday in Ghana. Though widespread, the phenomenon varies from region to region. The regional breakdown in Ghana in 2011 is as follows:¹⁰

S/N	REGION	PRCENTAGE
1.	Upper East	39.2
2.	Upper West	36.3
3.	Western	36.2
4.	Central	31.2
5.	Ashanti	30.5
6.	Volta	29.3
7.	Brong Ahafo	29.1
8.	Northern	27.4
9.	Eastern	27.2
10.	Greater Accra	12.2

These marriages may be contracted against the wish of the girls who are forcefully married off. Many of them have to be withdrawn from school for the purpose of marriage. Many reasons account for the problem of child marriage but it is generally rooted in gender inequality and patriarchy. In many societies, boys take precedence over girls in terms of status. There is a common saying that the woman's place is in the kitchen. With this perception females are considered to be there to serve their husbands. It is also meant to control female sexuality; their behaviour, dressing, marriage and the like. Child marriage also stems from tradition. Usually the victim's grandmother and mother might have been married not long after they started their menstruation. It thus becomes a tradition that girls should be given off in marriage in their teenage years. Economic reasons may also be mentioned. The bride price taken from marrying the girl child away gives some economic benefit to the parents rather than the bride. Moreover, the parents push the burden of caring for the girl child to her husband through marriage. There are also the social reasons. The parents may aim at protecting the family name. They do not want the girl child to get pregnant outside of marriage and by that tarnish the family name; hence marring her off that early. There is also the issue of wrong priority from either the family or the girl herself. This comes from prioritising marriage and child birth over and above formal education, gainful employment and other opportunities available in society. Some of the girls also see their peers have children and think it is an appropriate thing to do at their age and go into marriage.

In Ghana, Ending Child Marriage Unit is set under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) in 2014. The Unit has been charged to lead the campaign to end child marriage in the country. In February 2016, the Government of Ghana further launched a national campaign to end the

¹⁰ UNICEF. Really Simple Stats: The UNICEF Ghana Internal Statistics Bulletin, July 2015.

[https://www.unicef.org/ghana/REALLY_SIMPLE_STATS_-_Issue_5\(3\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/ghana/REALLY_SIMPLE_STATS_-_Issue_5(3).pdf). Accessed 10th February, 2018.

menace of child marriage in line with African Union regional campaign. The “He For She” project was also launched in 2017 with the aim of promoting male participation in the fight against gender inequality. In all these, the Church should be seen as partner in the fight against child marriage and gender inequality.

Trokosi System (Shrine Slavery)

Trokosi system, mostly found in the south-eastern part of Ghana, is another cultural practice which degrades the status of women and girls in society. Through the system, innocent young girls are sent to the shrine to atone for the crime of other members of the family and by that believed to protect the family from the wrath of the gods. Again, culture and religion are used to victimise these innocent girls. The Trokosi girls are victims because they are made to pay for crimes they have not committed. It is a way of exploiting feminism as these girls and women are considered wives of the gods and by extension the priest. They are made to serve the priest but have little to eat and wear. The practice infringes on the fundamental human rights of the people subjected to it and was criminalised in Ghana in 1994. Non-Government Organisations (NGO) have been at the forefront of liberating victims of the Trokosi system over the years. International Needs Ghana (INGH) is one of such Christian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) which has rescued many women through advocacy and lobbying.¹¹ However, the problem is yet to be eradicated because of its religious and cultural underpinnings.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is another act of violence against women. In performing FGM, the external female genital organs are removed or changed for reasons other than medical. The prevalence rate in Ghana is at four percent among women 15 to 49 years of age according to UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2011.¹² FGM is considered violence against women because it has serious health implications. It may lead to excessive bleeding, death, infertility, contraction of HIV/AIDS as well as difficulties in menstruation and urination. The main purpose of the practice is to subdue sex drive in girls and women and by that aim to prevent them from engaging in early or extramarital sex. Like many other acts of violence against women the practice is against the laws of Ghana, but people still engage in it hiding behind culture and religion. Some families still consider FGM as their culture and may go at all length to perform it on their innocent girls. Such people may at times travel to neighbouring countries where they could perform the act before returning.

Harmful Widowhood Practices

There are also harmful widowhood practices which affect women negatively. Widowhood practices are not only meant to break any spiritual relationship between the dead husband and his living wife but also to seek blessings from the deceased. They are based on the belief that ancestral spirits and the dead person would bring misfortune on widows who refused to go through the rites. This belief, which puts a lot of fear in widows, has not been adequately refuted in the minds of many. To explain away the belief as superstition or dismiss the existence of ancestral spirits and ghost or deny that they have the power to harm people do not solve the problem.

Although the practice varies from place to place and even from one family to another, Michael Mortey Tei-Ahontu identifies some common widowhood practices that cut across societies in Ghana.¹³ These core practices include wearing of black clothing, one-year period of mourning and a period of confinement. Tei-Ahontu also notes some other practises commonly carried out as part of the widowhood

¹¹ Edmond Nii Addo Vanderpuye, “Holistic Ministry and Development: A Case Study of International Needs Ghana,” in *Journal of Christian African Thought* Vol. 18 No. 1, June 2015, 63.

¹² Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Health Service, Multiple Indicator and Cluster Survey, 2011. https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/country_profiles/Ghana/FGMC_GHA.pdf Accessed: 9th October, 2018.

¹³ Michael Martey Tei-Ahontu, *Widowhood Rites in the Ga Traditional Area of Accra-Ghana: A Review of Traditional Practices Against Human Rights*. http://www.umb.no/statisk/noragric/publications/master/2008_michael_martey_teianhontu.pdf. Accessed: 2th July, 2016, 40-43.

rites like crying loudly most of the time; the widow sleeping with the corpse overnight; and heckling of the widow after the funeral rites. These other practices he thinks are usually carried out in families where there seems to be some already existing tension between the widow and her in-laws. Women who do not submit themselves to these practices are usually accused of causing the death of their husbands. Pressure would therefore be piled on them through threats and abuse, putting fear in them to make them conform.

It should, however, be noted that although widowhood rites are still performed in many families in Ghana, there have been some changes due to the influence of Christianity and modernity. Many Christian churches have adopted a simpler way of performing the rite. Some who are Christians would opt for the Christian option. Other Christians will still go through the traditional rituals because of the fear that unless it is done strictly according to tradition misfortune will befall the widow. The non-Christians however do not have any option but to go through the traditional practice. Widowhood rites are also gender issues because it is basically “a woman affair.”¹⁴ Although men sometimes go through these customs, they are not subjected to the harsh forms of treatment as in the case of women. Moreover, men are usually not under the same pressure to go through the practice.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is “violence committed against a person by an intimate partner, including co-habiting partners, and by other family members, irrespective of whether this violence occurs within or beyond the confines of the home.”¹⁵ It is abuse of the human rights of individuals within the family. Ghana passed Domestic Violence Act in 2007 in a bid to protect victims and punish the perpetrators of the abuse.¹⁶ The Act defines domestic violence to include any threat, harm or acts of physical, sexual, emotional or economic abuse or harassment which take place within current or previous domestic relationship.¹⁷ Domestic violence takes various forms like physical, social, psychological/emotional, sexual and economic abuse. Although men at times suffer domestic violence the main victims are women and children thus making it a gender issue. One of the causes of domestic violence is the social attitudes that value male gender as superior to the female. In such societies it is considered not only as a man’s right but also responsibility to control women’s behaviour. Women who do not conform to such control regarded as normal in society are more likely to face abuse. Domestic violence is therefore a result as well as manifestation of gender inequality.

PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY

Promotion of gender equality and ending violence and discrimination against women and girls has taken many forms over the years. In line with that, Ghana has been a signatory to various international protocols and conventions. These include the Convention on all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Its Platform (1995). In Africa there are the Maputo Protocol, The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (1986), The African Union (AU) Gender Policy and The AU Constitutive Act. There are also national protocols and policies some of which are The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana (2004), The National Gender and Children Policy (2004) and The National Gender Policy (2015). Ghana also has institutions in place to facilitate gender concerns. There is the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection under which the other organs operate. There are the National Council on Women and Development, Department of Gender, Department of Social Welfare, Commission

¹⁴ Emmanuel Asante, *Theology in Context: A Theological Reflection on Selected Topics* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2014), 38.

¹⁵ Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Ghana Statistical Services (GSS) and Associates, *Domestic Violence in Ghana: Incidence, Attitudes, Determinants and Consequences* (Brighton: IDS, 2016), 33.

¹⁶ Ghana Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act, 732). https://www.africalegalaid.com/download/domestic_violence_legislations/Ghana_Domestic_Violence_Act_2007.pdf. Accessed: 1st January 2018.

¹⁷ Gladys Attobrah, “Towards a Sustainable Elimination Against Women in Ghana,” in *Religion and Gender-based Violence: West African Experience* edited by Rose Mary Amenga-Etego and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ligon: Legon Theological Studies Series: 2013), 528-529.

on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and Ending Child Marriage Unit. Within the Police Service there is the Women and Juvenile Unit which is meant to prosecute crime against women and young ones. Above all the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana has a chapter on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms. The chapter deals extensively with various rights including respect for human dignity, protection from slavery and forced labour and equality and freedom from discrimination. The constitution therefore leaves no doubt about the fight for gender equality.

Gender activists and Feminist Theologians are among people who have also been working to promote gender equality.¹⁸ As Ayuba A. Ndute puts it, these understand that “religious traditions were born within patriarchal cultures where the male sex was regarded as superior while the female was relegated to the lower status and confined to domestic spheres.”¹⁹ They see patriarchal culture as the main cause of suppression of and discrimination against the female gender and make deliberate effort towards transformation. To them it is inappropriate for religious traditions to continue to support suppression of women.

The cumulative effect of all these and other interventions is some improvement in gender issues over the years. One can say that there has been marked improvement in treatment given to gender issues. One area that much success has been achieved, for example, is that of gender parity in enrolment at school at the basic level. This notwithstanding, considering the efforts made over the years, one would have thought that gender equality would have been attained in Ghana. However, the phenomenon is still experienced in various forms as discussed above. This situation is confirmed by Women’s Manifesto for Ghana when it states that in spite of the “laws, instruments and commitments, women continue to suffer bias and discrimination in Ghana. International human rights instruments are not fully integrated and enforced within national laws.”²⁰

Gender inequality is resistant to change because it is imbedded in religio-cultural milieu of the people. In Africa (and Ghana) religion and culture are intertwined so much so that it is difficult to separate the two. Kwame Gyekye states this opinion aptly when he says, “To be born into the African society is to be born into a culture that is intensely and pervasively religious and that means, and requires, participating in the religious beliefs and rituals of the community.”²¹ Max Assimeng also articulates similar view when he says that in traditional societies, religion buttresses almost every aspect of social life and provides definition of the universe and man’s place in it.²² The place of religion in African societies therefore is huge. Every aspect of social life is undergirded by religion which also gives it meaning. Faithful members of the community are, in this wise, expected to preserve the culture and religious ideologies supporting them. Attempts to transform these beliefs may be interpreted as standing against the will of the gods or ancestors. In this way, religion is used to perpetuate oppression of the female gender.

Emmanuel Asante defines culture as:

The sum total of patterns of behaviour acquired from humans’ dealings with their environment and transmitted to later generations through art and symbols, the aim of which is to define a group’s identity and aspirations, to serve as the basis of social

¹⁸ Dorothy Bea Akoto, “Gender and Culture in the Church and in Theological Education: Wounded-ness and the Need for Healing,” in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* Vol. 19 No. 2 November 2017, 10.

¹⁹ Ayuba A. Ndute, “Women Ordination Revisited,” in *Women Culture and Theological Education* edited by Protus O. Kemdirim and Mercy A. Oduyoye (Enugu: WAATI, 1998), 99.

²⁰ The Coalition on the Women’s Manifesto for Ghana, *The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana* (Accra: The Coalition on the Women’s Manifesto for Ghana, 2004), 36-37.

²¹ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankorfa Publishing, 1996), 4.

²² Max Assimeng, *Religion and Social Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology of Religion* (Accra: Woeli Publications, 2010), 71.

behaviour, and as a factor determining what is to be accepted or rejected in a given situation.²³

Culture in this wise, defines as well as explains the way of life of a people. If a society accepts gender inequality as the norm they use it to define themselves. When questioned, they will quickly point to the religio-cultural reasons for upholding such a tradition. One is likely to hear people say ‘it is the will of the gods’ or ‘it was practiced by the ancestors.’

Gender inequality as a religio-cultural phenomenon is perpetuated through institutions like the family. The *Daily Graphic*, a Ghanaian newspaper, published an article entitled “Ever wish you were a girl? Guys share their views.”²⁴ The paper published answers from ten respondents. Interestingly, all the ten answers are in the negative. In other words, no boy would like to be a girl. But more revealing is how the answers demonstrate gender bias in families and training of children. Five of the answers are reproduced below.

- a. As a boy, people respect me wherever I go.
- b. I enjoy being a boy because I feel girls are mostly the ones who keep the house tidy and do all the work in the kitchen.
- c. I enjoy being a boy because I am treated better than the girls in the house. I am given anything I ask for without any strings attached as compared to girls who will have to do house chores before their requests are granted.
- d. I don’t ever dream of being a girl and as a guy, you get some kind of freedom such as staying out very late at night before returning home unlike girls who are always being monitored with everything they do.
- e. I love being a guy because most boys have control over girls which makes us very important. The fact that guys are the head of the house is simply great.

From these answers one can be sure that gender inequality is systemic in the Ghanaian society and perpetuated in the families through the training of our young ones. At the time when gender roles are changing, it is difficult to understand why girls should be made to do all the house chores while the boys are free. Such differential treatment at home provides training that entrenches gender inequality. The boys are made to believe that they have control over girls and thus perpetuating male dominance and male superiority in society. On the other hand, girls are made to believe that they are inferior to their male counterparts through the way they are brought up at home.

Culture, on the other hand, is dynamic; it is neither static nor only about the past. Although culture and tradition look at the past, they are relevant only if they help society define the present and chart the appropriate course for a better future. In other words, culture must be in an on-going process of transformation. For culture to be an agent of transformation it must be seen to be relevant in the present. Since gender inequality is rooted in religio-cultural milieu of the people it is wise to tackle it from the religious angle using the Bible as the word of God. In Ghana, 71.2% of the population profess to be Christians according to the 2010 census.²⁵ This makes the teachings of the Bible important and makes the biblical creation story relevant in tackling the issue.

Creation of Humankind in the Image of God

The foundation for gender equality is laid in the biblical creation story as recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis. Firstly, the Bible states that human beings are created in the image of God. The first in Genesis 1:26-28 reads:

²³ Emmanuel Asante. *Culture, Politics and Development: Ethical and Theological Reflections on the Ghanaian Experience* (Accra: Challenge Enterprise, 2007), 2.

²⁴ Daily Graphic, “Ever wish you were a girl? Guys share their views.” Daily Graphic, 27th January, 2018, 25.

²⁵ Wikipedia, “Religion in Ghana,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Ghana. Accessed: 8th October, 2018.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (NIV).

One of the basic teachings of the Christian faith is that God is the creator of the universe including human beings. Hence, Genesis 1:27 affirms that ‘... God created mankind.’ God did not only create mankind he also blessed them (Gen. 1:28). The one who created them male and female blessed them both with the same blessing. God would want both the man and woman to enjoy the same blessing. Together, they are to be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it and also take charge of God’s creation. God, therefore, links the blessing of one gender to that of the other. It is only by working together in partnership that mankind can enjoy the full benefit of its labour. Suppression of one gender results in the suppression of all of humanity. Imposing misery on women, for example, does not result in improvement in the situation of men. It rather degrades all of humanity including men. On the other hand, seeking improvement in the affairs of women brings about improvement to all mankind including men.

Secondly, God created human beings in His own image. The image of God (*Imago Dei*) differentiates humans from the rest of creation. By creating humans in His image, God places some God-like qualities in humans making them “human persons.” As Anthony A. Hoekema puts it, in the concept of man as the image of God, man was created to mirror God and also represent Him.²⁶ To mirror God means human beings are to reflect God on earth. In other words, God is to be visible in human beings. Anyone who sees human persons should see in them a reflection of God. In reflecting God, human beings are to exhibit His moral attributes like love, goodness, compassion, grace, mercy, kindness, patience, forbearance, humility and submissiveness to Christ and the Holy Spirit. Human beings are not only to mirror God but also to represent Him. To represent God is to become God’s ambassador on earth just as ambassadors represent their nations in foreign lands. As representatives, human beings are to seek to promote God’s will on earth. In that wise, they are to always seek after God’s desire instead of their own. They are to fight suppression, discrimination, wickedness, and such other vices in society.

Thirdly, God created both male and female in his image. It is not only the man who is in the image of God but both. This is expressed in the phrase ‘male and female he created them.’ God is a relational being. The pronouncement, ‘Let *us* make mankind in *our* image, in *our* likeness,’ introduces God as one in relationship. God the creator is not a lonely isolated personality but rather a “Trinitarian community of persons who are distinct from each other yet united in mutual love.”²⁷ To mirror God, He created human beings as male and female.

Fourthly, God created the man and the woman to be equal in value and dignity. God did not create the man to be superior to the woman; neither did he create the woman to be inferior to the man. In other words, male dominance and male superiority have no place in God’s creation. As Wayne Grudem rightly puts it, “The Bible thus almost immediately corrects the errors of male dominance and male superiority that have come as the result of sin and that have been seen in nearly all cultures in the history of the world.”²⁸ Daniel L. Migliore agrees with this position when he asserts that “in the first creation story there is no mention of hierarchy, of superiority or inferiority, or an above and a below, of a first or a second in the

²⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 67.

²⁷ Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 199.

²⁸ Wayne Grudem. “The Key Issues in the Manhood-Womanhood Controversy, and the Way Forward in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* edited by Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 20.

relationship between male and female.”²⁹ As it stands then, God created human beings, male and female, with equal status.

Fifthly, men and women are equal in status but distinct from each other. Commenting on Genesis 1:27, Bruce A. Ware rightly explains that the intention of the text is to say both that the man and the woman share a common humanity and equal worth before God (hence, both are ‘man’), and yet they do so not as identical (hence they are distinctly ‘male and female’).³⁰ God created mankind male and female so that they can partner and complement each other, hence the differentiation. This position is supported by the second creation story in Genesis chapter 2. God declares in Genesis 2:18 that it was not good for the man to be alone and that He would make a companion suitable for him. As a lonely man will not mirror God who exists in relationship, there is the need for him to have a companion that he will share common humanity with. In a situation like this, God created the woman from the rib of the man. When the woman was brought to him the man exclaimed, “This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” They are equal in substance and value as expressed in the phrase, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Yet they are so significantly different that she should be named “woman.”

In essence the woman is a companion appropriate for the man. A companion that is suitable is filling his needs. According to Hoekema, the phrase “suitable for him” literally means “a help answering to him.”³¹ Hoekema rightly explains further that, “The words imply that woman complements the man, supplements him, completes him, is strong where he may be weak, supplies his deficiencies and fills his needs.”³² Man is therefore unfulfilled without woman. It is the same with the woman as well. The woman also is unfulfilled without the man; the man supplements the woman, complements her, fills her needs, is strong where she is weak.³³ In essence it is not about superiority and inferiority; it is rather about moving from unfulfilled state to fulfilment. In the first place, it is the man who was unfulfilled and the woman came in to complement him. Then the woman too was unfulfilled and needed the man to complement her. God in his wisdom created both the man and the woman to have the need for each other through which they could complement one another.

Genesis 2:24-25 continues this way: Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Life Application Bible). It is because the man finds a companion suitable to him that is why he has to leave his father and mother to be united unto his wife to become one flesh. As the man finds the woman to be of significant essence to meet his needs, he leaves his parents to unite with her. It does not mean the woman will remain with her parents. The woman leaving parents to unite to the man was the norm in biblical times as it is today in many societies. Both the man and woman would therefore leave their parents so as to unite to become one flesh. The unity is formed by equal partners coming together. There is nothing like superiority and inferiority, but equality of gender. This equality is expressed vividly by Paul in Galatians 3:28 when he says, ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ In other words, in Christ Jesus all believers are equal and must see themselves as such. Men should not be seen as superior whiles women considered as subordinates.

²⁹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Understanding to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 147.

³⁰ Ware, Bruce A. “Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* edited by Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 80.

³¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 77.

³² Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 77.

³³ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 77.

To say men and women have equal status does not mean they are identical. Men and women have their distinctive qualities in terms of sexuality, psychology and physiology.³⁴ In the same way equality of status is not the same as equality of functions. Men and women should not necessarily function in the same way. It is these differences of function or role that provide the basis for partnership and complementarity. In this respect, the directive to leave the father and mother to cleave unto the wife to become one flesh is directed to the man. This is significant as it signifies that the primary responsibility of providing leadership in the partnership is on the man.

The image of God in humanity became perverted with the advent of sin as recorded in Genesis chapter 3. When Adam and the wife sinned, God pronounced curse on them. Part of the curse God pronounced on the woman is that her desire will be for her husband and he will rule over her (Genesis 3:16b). Male dominance and female subordination are thus introduced into the male-female relationship as a result of sin and the curse that follows. In other words, suppression and evil against the female gender are sin and should not be seen as normal. Moreover, since the advent of sin humanity has failed to mirror as well as represent God appropriately. The fallen humanity now manipulates others for selfish gain instead of loving them. This has resulted in all kinds of vices in the world like immorality, worldliness, wickedness, slavery, oppression, domineering, over exploitation and degrading the environment and inequality of gender status. This is where the creation story should be accurately interpreted. Its proper interpretation will in turn shed light on interpretation of the whole scripture especially passages touching on gender issues.

Male Headship and Female Submission in Ephesians 5:21-33

Some of Paul's writings refer to the creation story and gender issues. One of such is that of male headship and female submission in Ephesians 5:21-33. It should be indicated up front that male headship is not the same as male dominance; neither is female submission equal to female suppression. Male headship and female submission is about love and respect in marriage. Paul opens the discussion in verse 21 by requesting of the whole body of faith to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. It is about believers having mutual submission to each other whether male or female. He did not ask all women to submit to all men but rather everybody, irrespective of gender or status, to submit to others. On that basis Paul continues in verses 22 to 24 asking women to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord. The passage reads:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (NKJV).

Adesanya Ibiyinka Olusola argues that although most English translators render verse 22 as "Wives, submit to (*hupotasso*) your own husbands as to the Lord," the word "submit" is not found in the Greek.³⁵ That is to say the verse should literally be rendered "wives to your own husbands." That is to say, verse 21 provides the verb for verse 22. To understand verse 22 then one must refer to the verb in verse 21. In other words, the kind of submission expected of wives to their husbands is the same mutual submission required of all believers in verse 21. Submission required here has nothing to do with dominance and oppression exhibited in gender inequality. It is about respect for each other as indicated in concluding the passage, '... and let the wife see that she respects her husband' (Ephesians 5:33).

³⁴ Roseline Okeke, "Christian Ethical Response to Masculinity and Violence Against Women in Nigeria," in *Religion and Gender-based Violence: West African Experience* edited by Rose Mary Amenga-Etego and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ligon: Legon Theological Studies Series: 2013), 149

³⁵ Adesanya Ibiyinka Olusola, "Misinterpretation of Some Christian Teachings and Traditions as Violence Against African Women," in *Religion and Gender-Based Violence: West African Experience* edited by Rose Mary Amenga-Etego and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ligon: Legon Theological Studies Series, 2013), 287.

Important to the discussion is the reason Paul offers for asking wives to submit; that is, ‘For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body.’ A close study of the text indicates that Paul is in no way permitting men to dominate their wives. The Greek word *kephale* (head) used in the passage is not about the man having dominion over his wife.³⁶ The man as the head is rather to provide leadership in the marriage relationship. The relationship between Christ and his church is the model to be replicated between husband and wife. The husband is to handle his wife as Christ will handle the church. Christ will not discriminate against the church, suppress or act violently against her. The passage therefore demands that husbands should love their wives just as Christ loves the church and gave himself for her (Eph. 5:25). Paul also states that Christ is desirous to sanctify the church and present her glorious without blemish or wrinkle (Eph. 5:26-27). That is the Christ-like leadership husbands are to emulate. It is a matter of providing leadership in terms of supporting one’s wife to be the best that she can. It is with this understanding that some preachers define male headship as “sacrifice and self-giving love” and “agency” for female empowerment.³⁷

In many churches husband and wife make similar vows of sacrifice and self-giving love to each other at their wedding.³⁸ Nowhere in the Ministers’ Handbook or Liturgy of these churches do the vows place one spouse above the other in terms of status. The husband does not take a vow of dominance over the wife; neither does the wife take the vow to submit to a suppressive man. They both rather pledge to give themselves to each other and further promise to love and be faithful and loyal to one another. As an example, the husband vows as follows:

I, A
Give myself to you B
To be your husband, and take you now,
To be my wife, I promise to love you,
To be faithful and loyal to you,
For as long as we live.

In the same way the wife also vows saying:

I, B
Give myself to you A
To be your wife, and take you now,
To be my husband, and promise to love you,
To be faithful and loyal to you,
For as long as we live.³⁹

Beyond pledging love, faithfulness and loyalty to one another, they both give themselves to each other in marriage. It is difficult to comprehend how in one breath the man will give himself to the wife and in another claim he has the right to oppress her; unless he does not appreciate the vows he takes. And this is where the church will have much to do in promoting gender equality to help people comprehend the vows the couples make before God.

The Role of the Church in Promoting Gender Equality

It is difficult for people to give up what they have accepted as their belief system and culture and practiced over many years. Laws and regulations imposed on them may not change their perception as these

³⁶ Olusola, “Misinterpretation of Some Christian Teachings,” 287-288.

³⁷ Ernestina Novieto, “‘The Real Man is Responsible’: The Case of the Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements,” in *Religion and Gender-Based Violence: West African Experience* edited by Rose Mary Amenga-Etego and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Legon: Legon Theological Studies Series, 2013), 109.

³⁸ Global Evangelical Church, *Ministers’ Handbook* (Accra: Global Evangelical Church, 2009), 24.

³⁹ Global Evangelical Church, *Ministers’ Handbook*, 24.

are not likely to address their real needs and fears. There is the need for a lot of interventions, in the forms of educational, moral and religious support aimed at taking care of challenges that may arise as a result of abandoning or alternating their cultural and religious practices. Since gender inequality stems from deep rooted belief and cultural system of the people, there is the need to see the promotion of gender equality as a way to advance socio-cultural transformation.⁴⁰

The church in Africa (Ghana) has been involved in socio-cultural transformation since its inception. The main strategies employed in this endeavour include evangelisation, Christian education and formal education. The missionaries came to Africa (Ghana) to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, win souls and establish churches. But the converts made were made to abandon not only their traditional religious practices but also obnoxious cultural practices. Max Assimeng identifies some of the customs that the missionaries maintained constant attack on as human sacrifice, ritual murder, widowhood rites, panyarring and killing of twins.⁴¹ The converts to Christianity “were adopted, ‘body and soul.’ into a new way of life.”⁴²

One way that the church tries to inculcate Christian teachings in the believers is by Christian education. Most of the denominations have baptismal and membership lessons for new converts in attempts to ground their faith in the basic doctrines of the faith. Beyond that the churches give their members teaching on the topics that they deem necessary to help them mature and live successful Christian lives. The missionaries found it expedient to translate the Bible into the local languages of the areas of their operation so as to facilitate the teaching and study of the word of God. The initial works done by missionaries like Johannes Gottlieb Christaller, Johannes Zimmerman and Bernard Schlegel among others in the Akan, Ga and Ewe languages respectively have been acknowledged.⁴³

A significant aspect of the missionary endeavour in Africa (and Ghana) is formal education. The missionaries that came to evangelise and established churches also started schools alongside. They made it a policy to give formal education in addition to evangelisation. They were very much aware that for them to succeed in their missionary work their converts should be able to read and understand the Bible for themselves and also take advantage of opportunities offered by formal education. The mission centres also became centres of formal education making much impact on socialisation.⁴⁴ The church in Ghana is still actively involved in providing classroom education up to tertiary level building on the impact made during the missionary era.

The missionaries educated both boys and girls though the male-child education was more popular. Moreover, the wives of the missionaries gave females training in things like dressmaking, knitting, baking and home-making. These were to prepare the beneficiaries to play their part as adult female members of the home and society and also promote gender equality. Through this the church has gained some grounds in advancing gender equality and female empowerment. Moreover, the mission stations produced new elite, men and women, through formal education. This social class derived their status from knowledge and skills provided by formal education instead of the traditional practices. The church has thus been an important agent of social transformation.

The time is ripe for the church to further advance the course of gender equality taking it to a higher level by strategically identifying and eliminating obstacles that are still prevalent. Gender education will have to be mainstreamed in all church programmes making it a regular affair in the church. Church leaders, especially denominational leaders, and pastors will have to be re-oriented to understand that firstly, the

⁴⁰ Ayuba A Ndute, “Women Ordination Revisited,” in *Women, Culture and Theological Education* edited by Protus O. Kemdirim and Mercy A. Oduyoye (Enugu: WAATI, 1998), 99.

⁴¹ Max Assimeng, *Religion and Social Change in West Africa* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2010), 92.

⁴² Assimeng, *Religion and Social Change*, 87.

⁴³ David N.A. Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana: The Ecumenical Heritage* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2008), 78; Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer, Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2006), 55; Christian F.W. Gbekor, *From Local to Global* (Accra: Jardon Publishing House, 2015), 45.

⁴⁴ G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1992), 142.

creation story and the entire Bible does not support gender discrimination and suppression of women. It is rather a cultural prejudice being read into the word of God. Secondly, gender discrimination is sin which alienates human beings from God as well as human beings from each other.⁴⁵ It should not be entertained in the church as the body of Christ in particular and society in general. Thirdly, since it is embedded in the culture of the people there is the need for socio-cultural transformation to eradicate this phenomenon. If the church leaders understand that the Bible promotes gender equality rather than discrimination against women, it will inform their interpretation of scripture. In undertaking their pastoral responsibilities like preaching, teaching, counselling and conflict resolution they will bring the appropriate perspective to bear.

The church and entire society have to be educated on gender issues. The women and girls should be educated on their rights and how they could advance those rights. Men should also be educated on their rights vis-à-vis those of the opposite sex. Everybody should be educated on their right as against those of others. As it stands, gender equality can be attained if people are given the right education.

The church will have to purposefully open her doors to gender activists, who understand gender issues and can relate them appropriately to scripture. It also means the various denominations have to train their members as gender activists to lead the education. On the other hand, gender education should be an integral part of the curriculum for the training of all church leaders especially pastors. Unless the pastors and other leaders of assemblies or congregations understand issues of gender and human rights and how these manifest in society it will be difficult to achieve the goal of gender equality.

The Bible, as the word of God, has the power to transform cultures and therefore very important in advancing gender equality. As pastors and other church leaders preach and teach, they are expected to accurately and truthfully interpret the word of God. Such interpretation should consider what it meant to the original readers and relate these to contemporary issues confronting the society today. One of such contemporary issues is that of transforming the culture as a whole and especially aspects militating against gender empowerment.

Gender inequality comes with prejudices against women. The prejudices militate against women empowerment by developing their competences and skills. It keeps women in secondary and inferior positions; even if they are better endowed they find it challenging to engage in activities considered domain for men. In such a situation, the whole society suffers as half of the population is prevented from developing their competences and taking up roles that they could perform effectively. The church should be seen to be at the forefront in identifying and eliminating such prejudices.

The church should imitate Jesus Christ who overturned much of gender inequality and discrimination during his life on earth.⁴⁶ When Jesus was asked to declare his stand on divorce of women he drew on the creation story saying that in the beginning God created humankind male and female and for that reason a man will have to leave his father and mother and be united to his wife for the two to become one flesh. He emphasised that they are no longer two but one and that whatever God has joined together no one should separate (Mark 10:2-9). Jesus by that declares that God created both men and women to be equal and that both have the same rights. To him then, divorce is not an option.

The question that was put to Jesus itself was gender biased. The Pharisees asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” The question presupposes that only men have the right to divorce their wives and that women do not enjoy the same right. To Jesus, however, divorce is sin whether it is sought by a man or a woman (Mark 10:10-12). Teaching on divorce in Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus says anyone who divorces his wife, except on the grounds of sexual immorality, makes her a victim of adultery and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Jesus by these teachings seeks to limit male power over women and

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Martey, “Women and Culture in Contemporary Africa,” in *Women, Culture and Theological Education* edited by Protus O. Kemdirim and Mercy A. Oduyoye (Enugu: WAATI, 1998), 53.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Martey, “Women and Culture,” 56.

create new male-female relationship.⁴⁷ Jesus, by that, dealt with discrimination against women and places the status of both men and women at the same level.

In the same way, Jesus attacked gender bias prevalent in his time when he taught that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28). Jesus condemns the unfair behaviour of male dominated society which considers women as objects at the disposal of men. He further seeks to uplift the status of women to new and better level than society accords them. Like the Master, the church has the duty to lift the status of women and promote gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination within its own ranks as well as in the entire society.

CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination is real in Ghanaian and other societies although gender roles are changing. Gone are the days when women's place is said to be in the kitchen only. Women are working hard to be found in all careers including military, engineering, politics, education, administration, medicine and security and the like. God does not create the female gender to be inferior to the male counterpart. Neither does God desire at creation that women should be dominated by men. Some may argue that during the fall God said to the woman that her desire will be for her husband and he will rule over her (Genesis 3:16). But that is not God's initial plan at the creation. It is the result of sin from which Christ came to redeem us including the woman. As we read and interpret the word of God it is important, we are aware of the religio-cultural practices that place a lot of prohibition on women so that we do not read them into scripture. We should rather emulate our Master and Lord Jesus Christ, who fought religio-cultural prohibitions on women, working to liberate them. Christianity as an agent of socialisation has been part of women liberation and should be seen to lead in promoting gender equality. In any case, achieving gender equality is not about women only but that of transformation of the whole society including men.

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⁴⁷ *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1755.

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