

READING JUDGES 4:1-6: IMPLICATION FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA.

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in various homes, villages, towns and the nation cuts across every area of human endeavor. For instance, concerning child upbringing, home care and environmental sanity, women cannot be left out. Although some women are not respected in the societies and in various endeavors yet their contributions to national development cannot be overemphasized. These functions to a large extent impart positively on the society. Hence, empowering women is a call in the right direction because their pivotal roles in the human society demand nothing better than acknowledgement and motivation. To some extent, it is a move to curtail oppressive measures created by the cultural norms to cage women in their limited areas from advancing into zone of wide reflection and performances. Such a norm describes the bad conditions in which women go through. In view of that, this paper outlines the immeasurable roles of women in our society and advocates for empowering them against all odds of societal norms. The paper does not only provide some measures for enhancing the efforts of women in the society, but also devises a means for motivating women to take up higher responsibilities in the society to enhance the development of the nation. The discussion is done in relation to Deborah's efforts of saving the Israelites from the hand of Jabin, king of Hazor Judges 4:1-6.

INTRODUCTION

Women and men alike are created and equipped with the necessary ability to function equally in various regards. This is evident from the 'contributions of women in many sectors towards national development'.² For instance, women are active food producers, influential in decision making, managers in private sectors, ministers of the Gospel, teachers, nurses, lawyers, civil servants and business women. However, on many occasions, men turn to undermine, denigrate, oppress, suppress, subjugate and subordinate females in the community and the nation³. These experiences had resulted in the emergence of feminist groups, female theologians and other gender advocates to speak for the women in the society. This means that they saw the need for empowering women in order to keep them active in their various ventures. The word empowerment has various meanings; for this reason, it is important to give a suitable definition to empowerment.

In this context Empowerment refers to the process of creating awareness for women and help them to emancipate from the calculated scheme of derision of life. This empowerment is described by Nelly P. Stromquist as a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of

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² Jane Irina Adu, *Woman in Human Development* Accra-Ghana; Horizon Publication, 1999, 34.

³ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 12.

human rights and social justice⁴. Nelly P. Stromquist adds that empowerment is a socio-political concept that goes beyond formal political participation and consciousness⁵. Per Stromquist's definition of empowerment, the attempt to empower must not be limited to the two common situations: formal political participation and consciousness awareness of life. Rather, something beyond the common view must be looked at in the liberation struggle. In other words, Stromquist's concept points out that empowerment should be a holistic exercise which must comprise of three dimensions of human life. Besides, Stromquist mentioned cognitive dimension as crucial to be included in this struggle.

According to Stromquist, the 'cognitive component is about women understanding their condition of subordination and the causes of such a condition at both the micro and macro levels of the society'⁶. Inherently, Stromquist's description is up to the task. So the current writer agrees with Stromquist that 'it will not be enough to talk about the social, political and awakening consciousness of women without disclosing the causes of the problems they are going through'⁷. They must be reminded of their troubles, be advised on how to overcome them and be encouraged to come out of them.

Our conducts towards one another seem to be questionable especially when it comes to gender injustice. Meanwhile, the Bible gives us a clear picture of Imago Dei in the creation stories. Thus, in the first creation story Genesis 1:27 it is revealed that God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Likewise in the second creation story the in Genesis 2:22 revealed that the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and brought her to him. Therefore both Genesis 1 and 2 talk about the Imago Dei. In these narratives, it appears that man and woman were created equally.

Of course, some people try to use the second creation story which talks about Adam and Eve to score points in the issues bordering around gender inequality. One of such activists is Augustine who was cited by J. Dorcas Gordon. Dorcas Gordon reveals that 'Augustine attached the inferiority of women to the creation stories and argued that not only was Eve inferior, but God intended her to be so because her creation was dependent on Adam'⁸. She expresses a concern that 'it is not surprising that theology soon conceptualized a woman as a helper of man'⁹. Dorcas adds that 'woman was important for her ability to give life, but even with that, it was argued that she was only the carrier and the incubator of life, in that what was created came wholly from the man'¹⁰. The current writer disagrees with Augustine on the grounds that a woman is inferior to man. Women are not inferior because they were created and equipped to live meaningfully as their counterpart men. More so their survival does not depend on men for them to be credited for it. Can women not function in all areas? As far as the writer is concerned women are capable of doing whatever they are responsible for. Of late in Ghana women are allowed to serve in various capacities. Example are chief justice position, speaker of parliament, electoral commission and so on. So far their performances are not below the belt.

Though Augustine refers to women as helpers, incubators of life or carriers of life as if these roles are unnecessary yet the roles they play are more important because no man could incubate life or carry life

⁴ Nelly P. Stromquist, *The Theoretical and Practical bases for Empowerment: Report of the International Seminar Held At Uie, Hamburg, 27 January - 2 February 1993 Hamburg, Germany* :Unesco Institute For Education 1995, P13

⁵ Nelly P. Stromquist, *The Theoretical and Practical bases for Empowerment*: P13.

⁶ Stromquist *The Theoretical and Practical bases for Empowerment*, 13.

⁷ Stromquist *The Theoretical and Practical bases for Empowerment*, 13.

⁸ Dorcas Gordon *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from North America: in celebrating hope for life in fullness: challenges for the Church*: World Alliance of Reformed Churches 3rd Women's Pre-Council, July 27-29, 2004, Accra Ghana p.34.

⁹ Gordon, *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from North America* p34

¹⁰ Gordon, *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from North America* p34

as a woman does.? Such a reference to women as inferior is unfortunate. May be his position for such submission could have been the result of the influence from the second creation story which is found in Genesis 2: Man is known to have been made first before a woman; hence, she is called a helper. But being a helper does not make her inferior; rather, it indicates her to be important. Probably, without a woman, man may remain incomplete and what he is touting about would have been missing.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women and Culture

Culture is a human creation therefore ‘we are not born with a particular culture. We learn our culture from the community where we are brought up’¹¹. Isabel Apawo Phiri adds that ‘every culture assigns roles to men and women based on how those cultures understand the identities of women and men’¹². Expressing her sentiment she notes that ‘unfortunately, all African cultures have viewed women as less important than men; thereby, making it difficult for women to have the right relationship with self, others (both men and women), creation and God’¹³. However, this does not mean men are better than women as it is the orchestration of society. The point here is that men should not continue to tout this man-made enterprise and denigrate women as inferior. What should attract their attention should be the massive contributions women are making towards the development of our communities. Men must know that this issue of the patriarchal system was not created because of men’s ability or they being special.

Those that can be found were generally recorded by males and display a male bias’¹⁴. Ruether and McLaughlin, note that ‘even those sources written by women were preserved by a male cultural system. They have to be looked at from the perspective of the woman internalization of patriarchal ideologies or the editing of her views to make them acceptable to the official models of women’s nature and prescribed roles’¹⁵. This is why men must know that women are not inferior.

It is obvious in the above citation that where we have derived our concept about culture¹⁶ as Africans has the same problem of regarding women as less important than men just as we do. They must know that women are now realizing their positions in the communities¹⁷ so that women are given room for executing their aspirations. For example, this is revealed in the prayer of Ghassan Rubeiz. He says ‘our Lord, today we men have to confess our sins against women. We acknowledge the structural barriers, which our societies all over the world erect to oppress baby girls, female children, young women, adult women, middle-aged women, old women, all women. Barriers are created which stop women from realizing themselves, achieving their ambitions, having their dreams fulfilled, and often denying them room to dream positively and far enough’¹⁸. It is not surprising that women, particularly African women theologians, arise to address these perilous actions against the women. Isabel Apari Phiri points out that ‘African women theologians accept the fact that African culture is important because it gives them their identity as Africans.

¹¹ Isabel Apawo Phiri *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from Africa: in celebrating hope for life in fullness: challenges for the Church: World Alliance of Reformed Churches 3rd Women’s Pre-Council, July 27-29, 2004, Accra Ghana* p23.

¹² Apawo Phiri *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from Africa* p23.

¹³ Apawo Phiri, *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from Africa* p23.

¹⁴Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish Traditions*. New York; Simon and Schuster. 1979, P16.

¹⁵ Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit*, p16.

¹⁶ Eunice Okorochoa, *Cultural issues and the Biblical Message*; 1468.

¹⁷Apawo Phiri, *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from Africa* p21.

¹⁸ Mercy Amba oduyoye, *Who Will Roll the Stone Away: The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990, 62.

Therefore, African women theologians endorse African theology's initiatives of taking African culture as part of their source when doing theology'¹⁹.

However, 'African women theologians warn African theologians that African culture should not be treated as if it is static but dynamic. The current writer agrees with Isabel that culture is not static but dynamic'.²⁰ Once culture is created by human beings, it can be changed to suit everyone in the community. This call for cultural transformation is to enable women in our society to come out from denigration, suppression, oppression and sexism activities against them in all sectors of life.

Nation and Women

It is enshrined in the constitution of Ghana article 27 clause 3 that 'women shall be guaranteed equal rights to training and promotion without any impediments from any person'²¹. Perhaps the recent appointment of female in the immediate passed National Democratic Congress regime and the current New Patriotic party has drawn many attention to our social responses to women elevation in public service.

Of course, there are certain areas that the state is trying to minimize this ill-treatment of women in our nation. That is, by putting an agency in place to see to the wellbeing of women in the nation. Aside from the above areas of social treatments meted out to women in the nation, there are other actions of men which are crippling women from free operation in the nation and the society at large. Some of such acts of the day are oppression and suppression of women in one way or the other.²² Adu puts it that after work when both of them are tired, the man relaxes in the living room and expect his wife to do the cooking and other house chores.²³ That is, we allow culture to penetrate into our offices and religious organisations. Women are not easily allowed to assume high positions in many endeavors.²⁴

This trend of life seems to change but it is far better in the secular world than in the world of religion. The office of the President, bank managers and some other offices are getting attention from the masses. But, this has not solved all the problems women face in the society.

Religion and Women

Because of some activities like discrimination, oppression, suppression and victimisation, religious reactions towards women cannot be glossed over. These actions against women cut across many religious settings in the world. In the church, Murrow expresses his view that 'for years the experts have told us the church is a men's club'²⁵ to suggest that men are taking things for granted to the extent that some of their actions are signs of power abuse. This could be the reason why 'feminists condemn the church as patriarchal and male dominated. The reformers complain that the language of the Bible and hymns is sexist and excludes women'²⁶. David Murrow adds that 'liberals accuse certain churches of oppressing women by refusing to allow them to become pastors or elders'²⁷. There are three main issues to be considered in the above quotation. The first to be considered is the patriarchal roles against women in the church; the

¹⁹ Apawo Phiri, *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from Africa* p23.

²⁰ Apawo Phiri, *Life in fullness: Gender Justice A Perspective from Africa* p23

²¹ 1992 constitution of the republic of Ghana, Article 27.

²² Adu, *Woman in Human Development*, 59.

²³ Adu, *Woman in Human Development*, 59

²⁴ Oduyoye, *Who Will Roll the Stone Away*, 62.

²⁵ David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to church, completely revised and updated*. Nashville; Thomas Nelson, p11.

²⁶ David Murrow *Why Men Hate Going to church*, p11.

²⁷ David Murrow *Why Men Hate Going to church*, p12.

second is the language of the Bible and hymns and the third is some churches' refusal to allow women to become pastors and elders. Proper justice can be done to the noted points if they are discussed individually.

The first point is patriarchal roles against women in the church. These are mostly the cultural roles which seem to relegate women to the background. Nyambura J. Njoroge remarks that 'the role of women in the church is a contentious issue, particularly, when the passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 are regarded as laying down absolutes rather than general principles within a particular culture'²⁸. In these texts, women are required to be silent, be submissive and keep to their role of childbearing. In effect, women are not to be recognized in many churches in decision making and other leadership positions. No wonder such culture is being exhibited in the church where David Murrow reacted that 'in the church, men have always been in charge. Christianity was founded by a man and his twelve male associates. Ninety-five percent of the senior pastors in America are men. Every Catholic priest, bishop, cardinal, and the pope is a man. Some church boards are composed entirely of men'²⁹.

'Christians sit in church, look up and see a man in a pulpit, and assume the institution he leads is a bastion of male power and privilege'³⁰. It is very obvious that the patriarchal system has dominated the entire church. As it has been expressed in the words of Murrow, due to the patriarchal roles for women, they are not included in the decision making of the church; that is why some boards are formed without women representatives. Although the trend is not the same as it has seen a change, the change is not significant. Akoto expresses a concern about this change, that 'in 1958, when the church universal assembly approved a bill on female ordination and this bill was passed, the new law did not oblige bishops to ordain women'³¹. Oduyoye also notes that in prayer men admitted that consciously and unconsciously delay women from reaching their goals from receiving their fair share of rewards-getting sufficient education, being free, being able to express their choices about their bodies and their life-styles, creating their own designs, leading, composing, getting jobs, and being what they want to be³².

Probably, Bishops do not want women to be recognized and respected as the society does to them so they made the bill in such a way that they are not obliged to ordain the women. According to Akoto, the bill for ordination sparked off a crisis in the Swedish church as some bishops resisted on the biblical grounds: 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34.³³ The issue of scripture was also a powerful tool used to prevent women from certain functions in the church. This is why we need to look at the Bible language concerning the role of women in the church.

Biblical language and women's roles in the church: this section examines how the language of the bible was used to describe women and their actions in the Bible. Barbara J. Mchaffie opined that

the Bible has been written, translated and interpreted for centuries by cultures that were patriarchal. In patriarchy, women are subordinated within the gradations of a hierarchical society. Materials on women, therefore, have been misinterpreted or overlooked. In some instances, generic nouns and pronouns in the original languages have been translated into English as masculine words.³⁴

²⁸Nyambura J. Njoroge, *The role of women in the church*; in Tokunboh Adeyemo *Africa Bible Commentary*, Nairobi-Kenya: Zondervan, 2006, p1471.

²⁹David Murrow *Why Men Hate Going to church*, p12.

³⁰David Murrow *Why Men Hate Going to church*, p12.

³¹ 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*; Special 75th anniversary Edition vol.19, no.2 (November, 2017),18.

³²Oduyoye, *Who Will Roll the Stone Away*, 62.

³³ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 18.

³⁴Barbara J. Mchaffie, *Her story: Women in Christian Tradition*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1986, p6.

According to the above citation, women's oppression is Biblical. For instance, the way the story about Deborah who was considered as one of the exceptional women in the Bible was narrated is an evidence. In this narrative, three main things can be identified as far as the role of Deborah is concerned. The first is that because Deborah was a woman, her name was complemented with a man's name Lappidoth even though the name Lappidoth was under contention.

Secondly, there is a disregard of the ability of Deborah. That might be the reason why she was projected to have called on Barrak to lead the Armies of Israel against the Armies of Jabin, king of Hazor, led by Sisera. In the narrative, you could sense the struggle of a men-dominated view, where Deborah is presented in a heated conversation with Barrak regarding how they will go to the field to fight their opponents. It is revealed that Deborah prophesied that Sisera will be killed by a woman; after that, he agreed and went to the war with the Israelites and secured victory for them. Here, the writer seems to downplay the physical potential of Deborah in order to emphasize the male-dominated power of Barrak.

Third, is how all of a sudden a new female figure is introduced into the narrative to accomplish Deborah's prophecy. Even there, the story looks skeptical because Jael is presented as an instrument of God to fulfil the purpose. It appears that there was a male-dominated picture in the story of Jael. That might be the reason why Jael is presented as wicked and crafty for providing Sisera milk instead of water as a way of security assurance which later turn to be of his death trap. Such male-dominated story can also be seen in the story of Delilah in the Bible.

According to Akoto, with the issues regarding the ordination of women, several other issues can be added. These issues include hermeneutical, emotional, inclusive, liturgical, psychological heredity, discrimination, sexism/male chauvinism, identity, contextual, political, socio-economic, educational, horizontal violence, dress code among others.³⁵ The conclusion suggests that the list of the troubles women are facing in the church and the nation at large continue.

Certainly, it will be unfair to keep mute about these perilous troubles women are going through. There is no other time for addressing issues of this kind than now. These developments in the church must not be allowed to thrive or offshoot roots. Otherwise, the church will be left without life since women are seen as the lifeline of the church. This relives David Murrow's assertion 'whenever large numbers of Christians gather, men are never in majority. Not at revivals, not at crusades, not at conferences, not at retreats. Not at concerts with the exception of men's events and pastoral conferences, can you think of any large gathering of Christians that attract more men than women'? In other words, Murrow is telling us that women are contributing greatly to the running of the church than men. That means aside the economic support to the church their attendance to various functions of the church cannot be overemphasized.

Now some of the women are having opportunities to be ordained. How did it come about? Does it come unexpectedly to such individual women? Since ordination comes after training and education, it is imperative to find out the church's concerns about the theological education of women. The concern for women education even in theology is problematic and disheartening in the church today³⁶. Still, there is a low intake of women into theological institutions³⁷. Akoto, therefore, outlines her experiences by noting that 'in addition to the African/foreign cultural subordination of women, theological education has also perpetrated a form of subordination of women.'³⁸She states that 'in this twenty-first century, though more females are enrolling in seminaries and theological institutions than formerly, they are still very few numerically compared to males in the same setting'.³⁹

³⁵ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 18

³⁶ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 10.

³⁷ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 12.

³⁸ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 12.

³⁹ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 10.

Effects of Patriarchal Roles on Women

The results of the patriarchal system against women are enormous. ‘Patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women’s advancement and development. Despite differences in levels of domination the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control.’⁴⁰ He adds that ‘in the modern world where women go ahead by their merit, however, patriarchy there creates obstacles for women to go forward in society.’⁴¹ He insists that ‘patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women’s human rights also.’⁴² Some of the effects are ‘son preference, discrimination against girls in food distribution, burden of household work on women and young girls, lack of educational opportunities for girls, lack of freedom and mobility for girls, wife battering, male control over women and girls, sexual harassment at workplace, lack of inheritance or property rights for women, male control over women’s bodies and sexuality, no control over fertility or reproductive rights’⁴³. Akoto refers to all of the above including physical and mental abuses of females by the male gender, political legislation and the list goes on as wounded-ness of women.⁴⁴

Way Out

Having discussed the ordeals of women in the church and nation, it is, therefore, necessary to suggest some measures which can serve as remedy and encouragement to the women. Nyambura J. Njoroge advises ‘women not to focus on the gender roles that society, church and African cultures have assigned to women’⁴⁵. Njoroge explains further that ‘the focus should fall on the biblical call for all human beings to discern what is the will of God in their lives (Romans 12:2), Jesus’ radical mission of transformation for liberation (Luke 4:18-27) and fullness of life (John 10:10)’.⁴⁶ Generally it is important that women should work to the best of their abilities devoid of intimidation from culture and religious settings. This means that women and men are equally called and empowered to participate in the same mission in the church.

The women must, first of all, understand that they are equally human beings as men so that their self-abnegative life is done away with. The church must also realize its core mandate for all-inclusiveness and do away with divisiveness between men and women in order to accomplish God’s purpose. Both men and women must pay attention to the concern of Eunice Okorocho. She says: “because culture is not static but is constantly changing, we need to be attuned to the changes that are taking place around us”.⁴⁷ Certainly, both men and women must not hold strictly to male-dominated cultural practices. They must expect a reform to cultural practices which might be healthy to work with.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, if there is the need for change, such change for the women to be liberated from those shackles of oppression and discrimination. Women remain a “shell” within which life emerges, evolves and is secure. Thus, just as a shell of nail does not only provide shade to the snail but also protects the life of the snail, so are women for humanity. Therefore, a nation which does not allow women to function as

⁴⁰ Abeda Sultana *Patriarchy and Women’s Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis*

⁴¹ Sultana *Patriarchy and Women’s Subordination*

⁴² Sultana *Patriarchy and Women’s Subordination*

⁴³ Sultana *Patriarchy and Women’s Subordination*

⁴⁴ Akoto, *Gender and Culture in the Church*, 15.

⁴⁵ Nyambura J. Njoroge, *The role of women in the church*, p1471.

⁴⁶ Nyambura J. Njoroge, *The role of women in the church*, p1471.

⁴⁷ Eunice Okorocho, *Cultural issues and the Biblical Message*; in Tokunboh Adeyemo *Africa Bible Commentary*, Nairobi-Kenya: Zondervan, 2006 1467.

supposed will always have a problem. Likewise, the church which suppresses, oppresses, denigrates, discriminates, subjugates and subordinates women will not experience growth numerically and spiritually.

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