

Why Must a Woman Be Silent? A Liberative Reading of I Timothy 2:12 for Gender Equity in Church Leadership in Nigeria

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Abstract

Bible interpretation concerning Pauline letters has been used to exclude women from the leadership in the church such as I Timothy 2:12. Therefore, this paper employs a liberative interpretation of I Timothy 2:12 to address the exclusion of women from church leadership within mainline churches in Nigeria, where this paper is contextualized. In Nigeria, the Bible is being used to exclude women from church leadership due to the patriarchal interpretation of the Pauline text. Such interpretation and reading tend to silence the call of God on several women within the church and they are not allowed to serve with their gifts in leadership because of the exclusive reading and interpretation. The liberative interpretation employed in this work addresses the marginalization, subordination, and exclusion of women who are also created in the image of God and can equally experience the call of God for their life into church leadership within the mainline churches in Nigeria. This can also serve as a hermeneutical key in interpreting Pauline gender passages using the same Pauline text to broaden the scope of the church's mode of interpreting the Bible as a whole. The interpretation aims to call the attention of the interpreters within Nigeria to balance their interpretation to be more inclusive rather than exclusive.

Keywords: Church, Patriarchy, Gender, Ordination, Interpretation, Contextual, Equity

Introduction

The Bible is believed to be a site of struggle regarding the various interpretations of the passages found in the scriptures (Dube, 2001). One of the debates within the Bible is the gender aspect. Several Bible passages tend to silence women's voices and their roles in the ministry of the Word from the early first century to the present. The challenge is that most interpreters of the Bible, especially in Nigeria, still stick to the traditional and conventional mode of interpreting the Bible that tends to silence the place of women in the leadership of the church and ordained ministry of the Word and sacrament. Even though there are references to women who are prophetesses and deaconesses in the Bible as is discussed later in this paper, the exclusion is still evident among the evangelicals (Evangelical Church Winning All [ECWA], Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ [ERCC], Church of Christ in Nations [COCIN]) in Nigeria. Musimbi (2001: 162) observes that theological engagement with gender issues seeks to expose harm and injustices in society and is extended to scripture and the teachings and practices of the church through cultural interpretation of the gender passages in Pauline's letters.

One of Pauline's letters has been the subject of gender debates, particularly about the inclusion or exclusion of women from the ordained ministry of the Word and sacraments. As one of the Pauline letters, 1 Timothy has been used for centuries to exclude women from the ordained ministry of the Word and sacraments, including leadership. Even though several hermeneutical keys have been used to interpret the text, the church within Nigeria tends not to agree with such interpretations, which is discussed later. Similarly, Belleville (2005: 205) notes that "the battle over women leaders in the church continues to rage unabated in evangelical circles. At the centre of the tempest sits 1 Timothy 2:11-15. This paper aims to examine the issue within Nigerian mainline churches using a liberative interpretation as the hermeneutical key to integrating women into the church's ordained ministry, including leadership positions within Nigerian churches, despite the wide spectrum of biblical and extra-biblical texts emphasizing female leaders.

The liberative approach in 1 Timothy 2:12 also considers the vividness of certain details that occur during the context of the letter and the instructions it contains. In addition to providing insight into how Timothy was the first recipient of the letter (1 Timothy 1:2), the liberative reading also illustrates how the churches (evangelicals; ECWA, ERCC, & COCIN) are using it as a means of excluding women from leadership positions within the church, based on a literal interpretation of the text. It is the purpose of this paper to answer the question: why

must women be silent when it comes to their inclusion in church leadership, both in the text and in the Nigerian context? With specific reference to evangelical churches in Nigeria, is it possible to silence women in real life through biblical interpretation and social location in terms of inclusive leadership?

Various Interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:12

It is believed that Paul the Apostle wrote the letter of 1 Timothy to his son Timothy, who was the pastor of the church at Ephesus at the time. Even though there are debates about the authorship of the letter and whether it was written by Paul or not, it is not the heart of this paper. This work acknowledges the debates from several scholars concerning authorship (Kroeger & Catherine, 1992: 42-44). Three concerns characterised the letter, such as false teaching and exalting the young man to stand against it. The second is instructions concerning their conduct and church life. Paul seeks to encourage Timothy regarding his responsibilities as the church's leader and teacher (George, 1992: 10). Third, the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy because the churches were faced with false teachings of different kinds, which Paul addressed in letters (1 & 2 Timothy).

As noted above, the letter of 1 Timothy is known for its gender issues, especially regarding the inclusion or exclusion of women into ministry and church leadership. The use of Greek words such as *διδάσκειν*, *ἐπιτρέπω*, *ἀθηνεῖν*, and *ἡσυχία* which appear to be the driving forces in the silencing of women and their exclusion as noted below. Several interpreters approach the text through different dimensions and lenses. According to George (1992: 130), Paul presents his instructions to women parallel to his instructions to men in the preceding verse which the interpretation of *ἀθηνεῖν* poses a challenge whether Paul was speaking to women temporarily in connection with false teaching or in terms of permanent instruction on women that affects the wider Christian community.

Several scholars interpret 1 Timothy 2:12 in various ways based on their understanding and interpretation of the verbs *διδάσκειν*, *ἐπιτρέπω*, and *ἀθηνεῖν* either for exclusion or inclusion of women in church leadership. Several interpreters and commentators interpret those verbs as an imperative which they are not. For instance, Chrysostom (Chrysostom in Thomas Oden, 2000: 165) noted that the divine law had excluded women from the ministry, but they endeavoured to thrust themselves into it. And since they can affect nothing about themselves, they do it all through the agency of others. So, for him, the command in 1 Timothy 2:12 is a divine instruction from God whereby women are not permitted to have authority or dominate a man in a society or church setting.

Johnson observed that to understand the section of the letter that deals with gender issues (1 Tim. 2:8-15), an interpreter needs to understand that the meaning will come at the end of the section, verse 15. Johnson (1996: 133-135) further argues that the literal interpretation of the section focuses on the tone of command that dominates the letter's section. The command in verse 12 fits Paul's cultural perceptions, even though some scholars find this position uncomfortable. Davies (1996: 83) notes that women are instructed to have good deeds required of those who profess piety. It implied that they do not have the authority to teach men (1 Tim. 2:12). The instructions required them, on the contrary, to learn in silence and with all submission. Women are especially excluded from public teaching, which, so it appears, is understood as having authority over or domineering a man or a husband. Such an attempt is made to justify the refusal of a teaching role to women through an interpretation and allusion to creation in the genre within several contexts (Gen. 2-3).

Several scholars approached the text from the position of authority using the creation story in Genesis, a woman having authority over a man. Many scholars, including Ngewa (2009: 51), Luke (1996), Richard and Catherine (1992), have argued that the section dealing with the use of authority by a woman over a man is extremely accurate, taking into account the letter's historical, social, religious, and political context. Other scholars, such as Mouton (2012: 583-601), view the letter as "New life from a pastoral text of terror gender perspectives on God and humanity in 1 Timothy 2." Johannes (2016: 105-122) did not consider the whole of the genre but focused on 1 Timothy 2:15 where he deals with the idea of "changing the feminine face of poverty – reading 1 Timothy 2:15."

Audeoud (2016: 125-138) illustrates how women in West Africa are rising into leadership positions, even though they come from Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, not Nigeria. A similar argument was made by Ango (2016: 147-161) in his work "Inclusive Leadership in African Instituted Churches in Nigeria," where African Instituted Churches are still patriarchal in their leadership, and women are not considered in most of their churches. Ajah (2016: 175) authored an article entitled "The Experience of Women Leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria." This article discusses the experiences of women leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, where several of them have found it difficult, particularly with their fellow women and men. Even though they were included, other factors made it difficult for us to accept them, as indicated below. Several challenges exist, including parishes preferring male ministers to females, male ministers serving as guest speakers more frequently than females, and male ministers holding the position of critical leadership in the church.

Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Church Leadership in Nigeria

The Bible is greatly upheld on the continent of Africa and more precisely in Nigeria. Therefore, the interpretation of the Bible or African Biblical Scholarship, as Mbuvi (2017: 149-178) argues, is an emerging discipline, an untapped ground for scholarship on the continent. Njoroge (2001: 13) argues that Christianity is growing faster in Africa than in other parts of the world. Yet, the violence, exploitation, and marginalization rate of women in the church and society is not a winning battle. This is because of how the Bible is being read, interpreted, and applied to the people of the continent.

The interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 in Nigeria is greatly influenced by the patriarchal interpretation of the text that is intertwined with culture. Culture has the power to shape our everyday behaviours and influencing the important decisions we make in life. That is why Anyalebechi (2016) postulates that the cultures of many societies are characterized by subjugating women to men and undermining their worth. This is very true of Nigerian culture which is patriarchal and women are considered second class compared to men. That is why Teteki from Ghana shares the same cultural values as Nigeria and thinks that 1 Timothy 2:12 has been used to exclude women from being included in leadership and being ordained. Teteki (2001: 145) argues that the Pauline passage "for centuries has been used to deny women ordination, the study and practice of theology has been dominated almost entirely by men." Similarly, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) (2019: 43) states: "It is the policy of ECWA not to license or ordain women in conformity with 1 Timothy 2:11-12."

This decision of the above denomination can only be influenced based on Nigerian society's cultural practices that value men more than women. The inclusion of women in leadership within mainline churches in Nigeria has not been welcomed like in some Pentecostal churches. Anyalebechi (2016: 63-71) argues that in Nigeria, women are discriminated against in politics, churches, offices, and families. Women are considered lesser human beings compared to men. Therefore, bringing up the issue of gender equality, mainly including women in ordained ministry, is considered as trying to strip men of their power. The basis of the exclusion is based on the social construction of gender roles in which culture plays a significant role in maintaining and sustaining the status quo. One cannot undermine the roles that traditional culture within Nigeria where women are not considered as anything but domestic workers such traditional culture finds its way into the interpretation of the Bible within the Nigerian context.

These cultures have found their way into the church, as evident in the saying of Jesus in Matthew 15:6, “Thus you will nullify the Word of God for the sake of your traditions” (NIV). The Bible has been sacrificed on the altar of cultures greatly influenced by patriarchy (male dominance mode of interpretation that oppresses women rather than liberating them). This has contributed to the researcher raising questions about the exclusion of women in leadership roles using 1 Timothy 2:12. Mbugua (2004: 69) correctly notes that “women are allowed to take the same courses as men in Bible colleges, seminaries, and most of their teachers are women, but they are not ordained at the end. Most churches have used and twisted Biblical doctrines against women’s inclusion as ordained ministers.” The churches continue to misapply generic terms, cultural practices and sex roles to promote male supremacy over females, who are already experiencing unfair treatment in various spheres of their lives.

The patriarchal interpretation of the Bible is a male-centred worldview, which values the male as superior and the female as inferior. It also deals with the patriarchal interpretation of the Bible, which supports male dominance and superiority in leadership. Patriarchy is found in most cultures, even in theology, where for a long time, the dominant interpretation of the Bible has been patriarchal. As Ukpong (2001: 11) rightly postulates, Africans need to have their mode of interpretation based on our context and realities as the communities receiving the text rather than those producing it. In dealing with these realities, they also include the oppressive patriarchal system of society. The lack of such interpretations challenging the norms has led to gender exclusion in the Anglican Church of Nigeria, Evangelical Church Winning All, among other mainline churches where women are marginalized in leadership.

Essien and Ukpong (2001) assert, “Paul has some discriminatory messages in the scripture which serve as the oil and grease of patriarchal ideology and the fulcrum of discrimination against women.” In such a scenario Dube (1997: 11) avers that to read the Bible as a Botswana African woman is to read a Western and patriarchal book. In Nigerian churches, the traditional teachings of missionaries propagated the notion that women’s vital role was in the domestic and not in the public domain. Nigerian church leaders have the Bible to turn to help bolster women’s place in the church, but men who are the majority in leadership still choose to interpret the Biblical text in a way that demeans women. Similarly, some women are satisfied with and have accepted male leadership roles in the church as divine, while others do not accept the roles.

The subjugation of women within the mainline churches in Nigeria is due to the structure of the churches that do not create room for women to be ordained or included in leadership. This is rightly captured by Ango (2016: 151) when he states that “biblical literature

and the growing consensus among both men and women the world over, point to the need to abandon the archaic structures that support inequity and embrace equity in life and ministry." However, the above mode of interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 states why women within mainline churches in Nigeria are not included in the leadership and ordained ministry of the Word and Sacrament and do not use other hermeneutical keys in interpreting the genre. This paper uses a liberative reading as the hermeneutical key in interpreting the genre for gender equity in church leadership in Nigeria. The background of the letter to Timothy serves as a yardstick for the inclusion of women in the leadership of the church.

A Liberative Reading of 1 Timothy 2:12

A liberative reading focuses on 1 Timothy 2:12 specifically but references are made to other verses. The liberative reading focuses more on the historical background and reasons why Paul gave that instruction to Timothy and how it should be interpreted from the context of the author's intention rather than the patriarchal interpretation. The background of the letter of 1 Timothy also needs to be considered side by side in the interpretation of the text since Paul wrote to address the false teaching that was going on in the church at Ephesus, which tends to exclude women.

The starting point of verse 12 with the Greek verb διδάσκειν (present infinitive active from the root word διδάσκω) is important to interpreting verse 12. Διδάσκω refers to the act of providing instruction to someone on what to do; it can be formal or informal setting (Danker 2009: 95, Bauer, 1957: 240). Διδάσκω is to hold discourse with others, to instruct them, to be a teacher, to discharge the office of a teacher, to impart instruction, inculcate doctrine into someone irrespective of gender, age, status, etc. (Danker, 2009: 95). Interpreting it in this context refers to the imparting of instruction in the form of teaching which several women in the first century were involved. Even though based on the socio-cultural setting of the church in Ephesus, women are mostly not allowed to teach that does not mean there were no women teachers.

In verse 12, the verb ἐπιτρέπω (present indicative active first person singular) which the root word means "to turn to, commit, and entrust; to allow, yield, permit." The verb is descriptive present and translated as "I am permitting" instead of "I do not permit" as translated by NIV & ESV, "I suffer not a woman" KJV, and "I allow no woman" AMP. The Greek verb ἐπιτρέπω is not in its imperative and therefore should not carry such force as several interpreters are alluding in the genre especially in verse 12 when it comes to its interpretation and appropriation within the text and context. Another option would be to take it as a gnomic

present which usually states a general, timeless fact. In this view, the translation would become “I do not permit a woman to teach” (Wallace, 2000: 518-519, 523-525).

Therefore, the translation and interpretation cannot be determined on one aspect alone in this case, using it as a timeless truth to exclude women but as temporary. This work does not translate or interpret it in a gnomic way because this paper believes that Paul does allow women to teach so he cannot contradict himself but was referring to the present situation that Timothy was faced with at Ephesus.

Why is Paul putting a prohibition on the women of the Ephesian church? To understand why Paul said this, there is a need to understand the cultural setting at that time. When it comes to issues of religion, women were not considered important in either the Jewish or pagan systems of the Roman Empire because women were considered second-class citizens. However, with their new freedom in Christ, Paul encourages the women in v. 11 to learn; which corresponds with his admonition in Galatians 3:28 where he says everyone is equal before God. In a way, Paul was challenging the status quo that was oppressive to women during their time. The use of the verb ἐπιτρέπω indicates: that it was about the present situation at Ephesus about false teaching and the carriers of it. The women of Ephesus had been handling the matters of religion with the temple of Artemis the goddess of fertility before Paul's writing to Timothy, but they were learning from the wrong people and teachers. Robert and Ronald (2004: 60) argue that “In Timothy’s church at Ephesus, women whose learning was limited were attracted to false teaching and were heavily influenced by it.” Since the women were new in their learning of Christian truth, it seemed most practical to Paul to temporarily prohibit women from teaching so that they had a chance to learn the truth.

For instance, some women happened to be leaders and teachers during the time of Paul such as Priscilla who was one of the founders of the church at Ephesus, a teacher there, and the church in Ephesus met in her home as well as the church in Rome when they lived there (Acts 18:18-19, 26; Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19). There is also the theme of false teaching throughout the book of 1 Timothy and there seems to be something wrong with the way or the message that the women in the Ephesian church were teaching, so for a time, Paul is not permitting the women to teach, which they were doing in a dominating way.

Paul uses the adverb οὐκ, the conjunction οὐδὲ, and another conjunction ἀλλά in a syntactical construction. Payne (2009: 228) makes a convincing argument that Paul’s typical usage of the conjunction οὐδὲ (neither, nor, not even, or not) is to join separate expressions together, and in the case of 1 Timothy 2:12, into a single prohibition at the moment or based on the circumstances that he wrote to Timothy. Instead of giving two separate prohibitions, to

teach or dominate, Paul is giving one, to teach and dominate as a temporal solution to the situation of false teaching. The conjunction οὐδὲ joins equivalent expressions to convey a single idea (Rom. 2:28, 9:6-7; 1 Cor. 15:50; Gal 1:1, 4:14; Phil. 2:16).

Οὐδὲ joins conceptually different expressions to convey a single idea (Rom. 3:10, 1 Cor. 2:6, 5:1, 11:16; Gal. 1:16-17, 3:28; 2 Thes. 3:7-8; 1 Tim. 2:12; 6:16) and οὐδὲ joins naturally paired ideas focusing on the same verb (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 3:2, 4:3; 2 Cor. 7:12; 1 Tim. 6:7) (Payne, 2009: 339-343). To interpret οὐδὲ as being two separate prohibitions for women, one against teaching and the other against having authority over a man does not conform to Paul's normal use of οὐδὲ. For instance, the usage of οὐδὲ and οὐκ is bringing two ideas together to form a single one where there is division between Gentiles and Jews but in Christ there is no division but all are one and there is equity between them (Gal. 3:28). When οὐδὲ is used by Paul in this context was based on the situation that women were carrying false teaching and bringing confusion in the church which Paul is admonishing that it should not be so which is why Paul provided a way forward in verse 11 she should learn in quietness (Payne, 2009: 339-343).

BDAG (2000) and Nida (1989: 473) define ἀθεντέω as “to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to,” or “to control in a domineering manner ‘to control, to domineer.’ The verb present infinitive active ἀθεντέω comes from two words: αὐτός (by one’s self) and ἔντης (which achieves, realizes), derived from the root word ἀνόω. The verbal root of ἔντης, which is ἀνόω, had two meanings: “effect, accomplish” and “make an end of, destroy, kill” (Payne, 2009: 363). So, what is Paul prohibiting of the Ephesian women? He is prohibiting them from the domineering and excessive usurping of authority from those in authority. Robert and Ronald (2004: 62) affirm that “Paul would not allow a woman to ‘lord it over a man’ by seizing authority not granted to her by the church.” Since, in the context of the passage, the women were beginning to learn and were being taught so that they may later teach, they must submit to the teaching of those who had the church’s authority which were men.

Westfall (2016: 291) argues how the Word ἀθεντεῖν has been debated where some scholars assume the Word connotes “being a Pastor,” whose primary justification is to exclude women from the ordained ministry and church leadership. But Westfall argues that none of the usages of the Word refers to any pastoral care or church official. Belleville (2005: 211) shows how ἀθεντεῖν has been translated from “murderer, in the wisdom of Solomon 12:6,” “original or authentic in 3 Maccabees 2:28-29,” while others translated it as “to have [or exercise] authority over.” It should be observed that if Paul had the ordinary exercise of ecclesiastical

leadership and authority in mind, he had at his disposal several words that could have served this sense, for instance, the Greek verb προϊστημι which is either “to preside, rule over, give attention to, direct, maintain, or practice diligently.” Paul uses the word about church leaders (1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Thessalonian 5:12; Romans 12:8), that have the senses of “manage, conduct, rule, direct, be concerned about,” and connotes the “normal” and “expected” type of leadership that should be exhibited by those selected to lead (Balz & Gerhard, 1990). But probably Paul used ἀθεντεῖν, which carried a nuance (other than a rule or authority) that was particularly suited to the situation in Ephesus. Paul seems concerned with women teaching false doctrine rather than exercising general authority on men, which is different from the context of 1 Timothy 2:12 (Geer, 1993: 294).

In verse 12, the NRSV translates ἡσυχία as silence, but it is better translated as quietness. The other two places in the NT where ἡσυχία is mentioned, are Acts 22:2 and 2 Thes. 3:12, the NRSV uses the words quiet/quietly. BDAG (2000: 440) defines ἡσυχία as a "state of quietness without disturbance, quietness, rest." The idea is not a state of complete silence but of quietness and listening to the rabbi without interruption. The issue here is being submissive to the teaching and authority of others while learning. It should be done quietly. In both places, ἡσυχία is referring to how the women should learn (Witherington, 1990: 226). Raymond Collins (2002: 72) avers that

The pastor's Word about women must be situated within the context of his desire to actualize the teaching of Paul for his congregation. That is the burden of choosing a letter's literary form and developing a Pauline ethos as the warrant for his paraenesis. Paul's letters are remarkable in what they say about women. His basic principle is that of Galatians 3:28... in Christ, men and women are equal. There is fundamental equality, “for just as woman came from man, so man comes through a woman” (1 Cor. 11:12).

In appropriating and interpreting 1 Timothy 2:12, an interpreter needs to understand why Paul used the verbs διδάσκειν, ἐπιτρέπω, and ἀθεντεῖν in verse 12. Apostle Paul never intended to a universal prohibit women from exercising authority over men, he could have used an imperative which means a command and permanent; as Johnson (1996: 135) noted "Paul is deeply committed to the sort of gender equality expressed in Galatians 3:28, and that it is the Paul of the pastorals who suppresses the active and public role of women in the assembly." An individual can find this when Paul mentions women leaders in the letter to Romans 16:1-16 and other letters. If Paul was against the inclusion of women in the leadership of the church, then he could have been consistent in all his letters, as documented in the New Testament.

Grenz (1995) is of the idea that apostle Paul temporarily bars women from teaching in keeping with the close connection he makes between possessing wisdom or knowledge and being actively involved in the teaching and admonishing role in the church. That the ban will one day be lifted, however, as indicated by Paul's instruction to Timothy to entrust sound doctrine to persons who, in turn, could teach others. Such sound doctrines are to be passed to all human beings, not minding the gender, similar to Acts 2:17-19, about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh. There is also a need to consider the background of the letter in interpreting the verse and its application within various contexts.

Mouton (2011: 2-3) observes that the background and Paul's whole experience must be kept in mind if we interpret it fairly. In other passages of the letters of Paul where he knew of women prophesying (Acts 21:8ff), his recommendation on women in some of his letters (Acts 18:1-3; Romans 16:3ff; 1 Corinthians 16:19 among others). Considering the background of the text, Keener (2014: 606) argues that some women during antiquity had the opportunity to learn and become leaders; only a tiny proportion of respected sages (such as Aspasia, Sosipatra, and Hypatia) were women who could also teach men. Most women during the Graeco-Roman period were probably not trained in the Scriptures. It should be observed that if Paul had the ordinary exercise of ecclesiastical leadership and authority in mind, he had at his disposal several words that could have served this sense. As it has been argued above, these circumstances, as indicated in the letter itself, involved women who are being deceived by false teachers and, as such, are not suitable for teaching or ruling authority in Ephesus.

The Implication for the Church in Nigeria

As Musimbi (1996: 151) observed, many churches preach an inclusive gospel, but struggle to connect that with an inclusive church. Although many churches in Nigeria may preach the inclusive gospel, they may not practice inclusive ministry or partnership in ministry with women as co-workers in leadership, as Apostle Paul alludes to those women. It is important for mainline churches in Nigeria to understand that theology cannot be based on a single passage isolated from its historical context before concluding on serious issues, such as the inclusion of women in leadership. Mimi (2004: 32) avers that "the basic thrust of 1 Timothy is a treatise against false teaching in the church at Ephesus... False teachers, perhaps some of whom were women, were troubling the church at Ephesus."

In the event that the prohibition against women teaching and exercising authority is universal, as several mainline churches imply, Paul would not refer to women leaders as co-workers in Romans 16:1-16. The instruction was tailored to the specific circumstances Timothy

faced in Ephesus, which is why Paul wrote and provided the instruction. It should be noted, however, that if some of the mainline churches believed that it is a timeless truth or imperative, this raises several questions, such as: Why allow women to be lecturers in their universities, seminaries, and Bible colleges? Are those women not exercising authority over the men who are students? Are the same women not part of those preparing the men for ministry? Why is the patriarchal interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 not applicable in such a context? What is the spiritual, moral, and reasonable justification that the text is silent in such places and not applicable? Are women not heading organizations where Christian men are under their authority in Nigeria? These and several questions come to mind when it comes to the interpretation of the prohibition to be universal or timeless. The paper believes that most of the mainline churches in Nigeria cannot answer them. Therefore, why use such patriarchal interpretations only in church settings and deny the women who have experienced God's call from exercising it in the church and its leadership?

According to Paul, the redemption of humanity does not depend upon gender, but on the call of God to each individual's life for ministry; for this reason, gender distinctions are irrelevant to salvation and calling from God (Gal. 3:28). In that case, both male and female have equal access to God through Christ and consequently share in every sense in the body of Christ (wa Gatumu, 2016: 51-52). In Nigeria, mainline churches need to consider the context in which such texts were produced; they are based on the reality of the time at the time of production, where women were not considered and treated as whole persons. As a result, Paul challenged their view of women by noting that in Christ, there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28); thus, he neutralized gender and offered a gender-inclusive church of God (wa Gatumu, 2016:53). There is a battle in Nigeria for gender equity that is a quest for justice, equity, and a proper interpretation of the Bible that empowers both men and women to assume leadership roles.

Therefore, for the Nigerian mainline churches to be inclusive, it is necessary to reconsider the following: to deconstruct the patriarchal interpretation of the Bible, especially Pauline texts that seem to deny women inclusion within the church with hermeneutics that empowers and liberates both men and women. A patriarchal interpretation of the Bible that is oppressive should not be encouraged in the church. However, the transformative mode of interpretation should be the focal point for churches. According to Oduyoye (1995: 181), African churches should empower women to speak for themselves and to include the correct and critical interpretation of Biblical text, its theology, and how it should be applied to the Nigerian context. Only then will the church become a home for both men and women.

Oduyoye (1995: 181) further observes that “liberation must be viewed as men and women walking together on the journey home, with the church as the umbrella of faith, hope, and love. The church must shed its image as a male organization with a female clientele whom it placates with vain promises, half-truths, and the prospect of redemption at the end of time.” Both men and women need liberation from patriarchal modes of interpretation in order to achieve an inclusive and holistic interpretation that empowers everyone. Women should not be viewed by men as threats, but rather as those who are called by God and created in His image and likeness. The same patriarchal system oppresses men as well, and therefore, men must take appropriate measures to liberate themselves (Okure, 2001: 53).

Conclusion

Due to the patriarchal mode of interpretation, this paper demonstrates how various interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:12 have been used to deny women the opportunity to serve as leaders and ordained ministers within mainline churches in Nigeria. Gender roles also play a role in the substance of the exclusion of women using the Pauline text. However, using a liberative reading and interpretation of the text was it possible to silence women without a just cause? The work shows that interpreting it through a contextual situation that happened at Ephesus gives a better understanding of why Paul said he did not permit women to teach or have authority over men which was due to the false teaching that women were the carriers. Paul wrote concerning giving instruction that is not for life but for the time being, stating that women ought to learn if they want to teach. The Nigerian mainline churches need to understand that if Paul intends to prohibit women for life, he will not be commendable to several women as in his letters. The spiritual gifts would strictly be made for men and not women.

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