

**CULTURAL PATERNALISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATING
NIGERIAN WOMEN**

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INTRODUCTION:

One of the principal measures of the success of the Christian gospel and mission has been the degree to which the teaching and worship of the church was adapted to local cultures.¹ In the last century and, especially since Vatican II, the church has undergone a radical shift from an essentially North Atlantic synthesis of faith and culture to a more complex worldwide ecclesial phenomenon. In this context, worship evangelizes when it authentically embodies multiple and diverse ecclesial expressions in its adaptability to manifold local cultures.

Since the end of Vatican II, inculturation has become a central issue of the church in Africa. In its ministry, the African church perceives the vital necessity of taking seriously the culture and experience of Africans. David Bosch documents that inculturation “is today one of the most widely used concepts in missiological circles.”² As the gospel makes contact with the reality of the diverse African peoples and cultures, there is a symbiotic enrichment of traditions. This process of mutual enrichment, with Jesus at the center, is the crux of inculturation. *Ecclesia in Africa*, insists that inculturation is about people. It is people who are the subjects of culture, the church, its faith and its praxis. Inculturation is not just about mixing faith and culture; it is about the faith becoming a culture in the church and this culture becoming the culture of the people in the church.³ John Paul II writes, “The Synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the Particular Churches, for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa ... and one of the greatest challenges for the Church on the continent on the eve of the third millennium.”⁴ One of such challenges is that of the religious education of women who, even though they constitute the majority of church membership, are often discriminated against, oppressed and alienated in the Nigerian society and the Church.

Since the start of the 1970s, Nigerian women started organizing into professional, social, and religious groups. Operating at both grassroots and national levels, these groups have taken advantage of new socio-cultural and political openings to raise issues in new ways and to form alliances with other civil society groups to advance women’s

¹ David N. Power, *Worship: Culture and Theology* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1990), 3-24.

² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 447.

³ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), no. 78.

⁴ *Ibid*, no. 59.

causes. Women have entered into debates and action on gender concerns that previously were perceived as divisive and unpopular, such as female education, domestic violence against women, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation, in addition to a whole range of economic and cultural issues.

Women also are organizing on the issue of peace. They are demanding resources and legal recognition to rebuild their lives, as well as participation in peace-building and conflict-resolution, citing both their traditional peace-making roles and their right to equal involvement.

Although African theology emphasizes the necessity of contextualizing the Christian gospel within African culture, it has often neglected African women's issues.⁵ Women's experiences of God are assumed to be the same as those of men. And in the church, the issue of women's education and constructive engagement in ministry has not been adequately addressed.

It may be argued that this is as a result of a sexist and misogynist attitude that is deeply rooted in the patriarchal structure of the society. Women's voices are often rejected or trivialized in the church and in religious education simply because they are women. Tissa Balasuriya argues that such an attitude is further perpetuated, in part, due to the near total monopoly of theology by the clergy, especially in the seminaries. He writes:

Theological preoccupations have been very much those of persons within the church institution and administration, or dependent on them. Incidentally, in the Roman Catholic Church, they are almost all males and mainly celibates. Thus theology has given more attention to issues which concern adult, male, celibate clerics. Theologians have tended to read the Scriptures with culture-bound eyes. They naturally were inclined to find in revelation many texts which reinforced their power, self-importance, and indispensability even for God.⁶

This paper hypothesizes that the Nigerian church is confronted by several challenges that could endanger sound inculturated evangelization, religious formation, and religious education of women, so that they could become equal participants in the ministry of the Church. It situates the slow emergence of Nigerian women religious educators and theologians in the context of a complex web of connective religious, historical, social, and cultural factors. Using the qualitative methodology, this paper examines cultural, ecclesiological and educational foundations of the Nigerian Church which sustain the attitudes of benevolent paternalism and domesticating forms of education. This is with a view towards the: a) Formulation of constructive and consistent

⁵ See John S. Mbiti, "Flowers in the Garden: The Role of Women in African religion," in *The Place of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Olupona Jacob (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1991), chapter 5. Some African male theologians such as Mbiti have attempted to deal with gender issues, but it is the female theologians themselves individually and through The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians who have really highlighted and given publicity to the issues of gender over the years.

⁶ Tissa Balasuriya, "Toward the Liberation of Theology in Asia," in *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Cadorette Curt, Marie Giblin, Marilyn J. Legge, and Mary Hembrow Snyder (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 36.

curriculum in favor of organized religious education of women; b) Promoting public awareness on the advantages of religious education of women; c) Establishing infrastructures for practical access to religious education; and d) Inculturating the best cultural practices of the Nigerian society into the educational curriculum and practice of the church.

Nigerian Women in Perspective

Throughout the course of history, women have always been assigned different roles in society, most of which usually place them in “subservient” positions to men. In the Roman times, women were regarded as chattels or slaves. In 19th century middle class families, women’s roles were largely domestic, as housewife and manager.⁷ Without doubt, there are some African cultures with misogynistic practices, just as there are European and Asian cultures that have sexist customs. But Africa, like Asia and Europe, is a continent of diverse ethnic groups and social cultures. There is a wide range of African attitudes towards women and any other topic for that matter.

In Nigeria, the position or status of women has not been radically different than in any developing societies in the world. The Nigerian society is essentially male-dominated. In many cases, women are marginalized, and generally excluded from playing leadership roles, socially, economically and religiously. Their avenues for self-expression and self-realization are drastically limited by tradition and cultural practices. In ordinary everyday life, there is generally a good deal of social distance between men and women, including the relationship of spouses.

There is appreciable difference in the position of women among the various ethnic groups in pre-colonial Nigeria. The position of women was varied according to either the kinship structure of the group or role of women within the economic structure of the society. In pre-colonial societies, women complimented men but mostly along patriarchal and patrilineal kinship structures. Research done by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Rosemary N. Edet and Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike on pregnancy, birthing, and naming rituals, confirms the varying societal attitudes.⁸ In some societies women are treated as sacred vessels of life because giving birth is considered a spiritual experience. Successful delivery and motherhood is celebrated with thanksgiving to the Supreme Being and the ancestors. And there are instances where women exercise significant roles of leadership both in traditional worship and in communal administration.

However, there are several practices, rituals, and ways of life that denigrate the image of the woman. The strong emphasis on reproductive abilities, and the fact that barrenness is most often blamed on the woman gives the impression that she is valued not necessarily for who she is but for what she can produce. The traditional polygynous social structure denied women the undivided love of their husbands and, seems to project the woman as an appendage to the man’s wealth.

⁷ Reuther Radford Rosemary, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000), 84.

⁸ Oduyoye Amba Mercy and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, eds., *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

In the Islamic north, education was generally less formal; early teenage marriages were prevalent, especially in rural areas; and confinement to the household, which was often polygynous, except for visits to kin, ceremonies, and the workplace, if employment were available and permitted by a girl's family or husband. For the most part, Hausa women did not work in the fields, except helping with harvesting, in some instances, and being responsible for all household food processing. Urban women sold cooked foods, usually by sending young girls out onto the streets or operating small stands. The predominance of this practice was one of the main reasons city women were opposed to schooling for their daughters. Research in the 1980s indicated that, for the Muslim north, education beyond primary school was restricted to the daughters of the business and professional elites, and in almost all cases, courses and professions were chosen by the family, not the women themselves.

In the south, women traditionally had held economically important positions in interregional trade and the markets, worked on farms as major labor sources, and had influential positions in traditional systems of local organization. Among the majority of rural and low-income urban dwellers, women perform all domestic tasks, while many also farm and trade. They are responsible for the care of children, the sick and the elderly, in addition to performing essential social functions within their communities. Women in the south, especially among the Yoruba peoples, began to receive Western-style education in the nineteenth century, so they occupied positions in the professions and to some extent in politics. In addition, women headed households. Such households have been on the rise in the south.

The south, like the north, however, had been polygynous, and it still is for many households, including those professing Christianity. In the past, when a male child was born the parents were happy, but when a female child was born there were usually sighs of disappointment. Worse still, if all the children were female, the father looked for male successors by marrying more wives or acquiring concubines. Parents, especially the father, had the idea that male children would help to propagate and perpetuate the family name. Any amount spent on the education of the male children was considered an investment. In the case of the female children, it was considered by many parents as a waste of money, time, effort, and resources because they would eventually end up in another man's house or in the kitchen.

In Nigerian terms, a woman was almost always defined as someone's daughter, wife, mother, or widow. Single women were suspect, although they constituted a large category, especially in the cities, because of the growing rate of divorce. In popular culture, even when hardly acknowledged, single adult women are seen as available sexual partners should they try for some independence, and are easy victims for economic exploitation.

Presently, the situation is significantly changing. Judging from the common experience today, Nigerian women, although still a long way from achieving equality with their male counterparts, are no longer regarded as things or slaves. Conscious of their potentialities in and contribution to the task of nation building, Nigerian women today are making frantic efforts to educate themselves so as to fill the gaps and shoulder their socio-economic responsibilities. So far they are succeeding. A good number of them are now found in all sorts of enterprising occupations such as law, teaching, medicine,

business, politics and the armed forces. Some have formed women's rights groups to protect the civil, political, religious and social rights of women all over the country.

However, the fact remains that Nigerian societies still believe men are superior to women and, to some extent, in control of women. The high levels of gender-based violence, genital mutilation and the higher HIV infection rates among girls and women are tragic consequences of female disempowerment.

Nigerian Women and Cultural Paternalism

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Paternalism as "a system under which an authority undertakes to supply needs or regulate conduct of those under its control in matters affecting them as individuals as well as in their relations to authority and to each other."⁹ An earlier edition of Webster's offers more details, defining paternalism as:

The care or control of subordinates (as by a government or employer) in a fatherly manner; esp.: the principles or practices of a government that undertakes to supply needs or regulate conduct of the governed in matters affecting them as individuals as well as in their relations to the state and to each other.¹⁰

The term "Paternalism" which derives from the Latin "*Pater*," meaning "*Father*," has had indefinite meaning in common usage. The father-child relationship on which the term is based is one in which the father acted, provided, and dictated to the child within a moral framework that credited him as knowing best what was good for the child. Hence, one might argue that paternalism is a policy or practice of treating or governing people in a fatherly manner, especially by providing for their needs without giving them their rights or responsibilities. In modern philosophy and jurisprudence, it is to act for the good of another person without that person's consent, as parents do for children.

Paternalism is a temptation in every arena of life where people hold power over others: in childrearing, education, therapy, and medicine. Mary Jackman writes,

It is a powerful ideological mold that offers the most efficient and gratifying means for the social control of relationships between unequal groups. The attitude structure that it comprises – the combination of positive feelings for a group with discriminatory intentions toward the group – has been underestimated by students of intergroup relations and unheeded in research of intergroup attitudes.¹¹

Paternalism is controversial because its end is benevolent, and its means coercive, even though subtly. Paternalists advance their interests at the expense of other people's liberty, supposing that they can make wiser decisions than the people for whom they act. Sometimes this is based on presumptions about their own wisdom or the foolishness of

⁹ Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, s.v. "Paternalism.", <http://www.m-w.com/> (accessed September 24, 2007).

¹⁰ Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. "Paternalism."

¹¹ Jackman R. Mary, *The Velvet Glove: Paternalism and Conflict in Gender, Class, and Race Relations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 11.

other people, and can be dismissed as presumptuous. But sometimes it is not. It can be based on relatively good knowledge, as in the case of paternalism over young children or incompetent adults.

The cultures of the various Nigerian societies are based on three broad traditions: the clan system; religious system; and the Western influence. The gender roles and differentiations, perceptions of equality or inequality, acceptance or discrimination, dominance or submission, have their roots in the early socialization process within the family sub-structure, and the clan structure. Patterns of upbringing and education of children, of young boys and girls, are the result of both parental and communal norms and expectations. Cultural norms, rituals, play, values and practices are gender-sensitive. Girls were organized and raised as primary caregivers, responsible for the bulk of food cultivation and processing. While their role was considered central, it was emphatically subordinate to the males. April Gordon argues that, male authority and power is located in and exercised through the extended family, a pre-capitalist unit of production which continues into the present time.¹²

Some might argue that there is also the abundant evidence of women's power and authority in pre-colonial religious, political, economic and domestic spheres. The celebrated women of power such as *Iyalodes* in Western Nigeria, and the Aba women in the East, while being highly commendable, were few and far in-between. Where it existed, female authority was largely tokenistic.

The patriarchal foundations of Nigerian cultures clearly favored the education of the male child more than the female child. Gordon writes, "Formal political institutions and cultural norms typically accorded more authority, status, and control of wealth and other resources (including women) to men"¹³ Within such a cultural milieu, paternalistic practices are relatively common. Its argument was that, paternalism protects people from themselves, as if their safety were more important than their liberty.

Critiquing Patriarchal Ecclesial Structures

Many scholars acknowledge that Jesus' treatment of women represents a radical break with the Jewish cultural tradition of his time. Indications of Jesus' inclusive actions and teachings dominate the gospel accounts. For people who have been systematically left by the wayside of life - widows, orphans, tax-collectors, prostitutes, the gospel of Jesus was indeed good news.¹⁴ The most consistent theme of the story of Jesus in the gospels is that he included everybody. The outcasts and rejected people who did not keep the details of the Law, the poor, the sick, the despised, all were loved and accepted by Jesus who did not subscribe to the judgmental legalism that characterized the religious practice of the time.

¹² Gordon A. April, *Transforming Capitalism and Patriarchy: Gender and Development in Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 7.

¹³ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁴ See Luke 4:17ff

Elisabeth Tetlow argues that the image presented by each gospel writer was conditioned by their theological perspective.¹⁵ Tetlow argues that,

There is nothing inherent in the character of Christian ministry as it is presented in the writings of the New Testament which would give reason for the exclusion of women. On the contrary, the New Testament portrays Jesus treating women as equal human persons. It also portrays women and men serving side by side in the various ministries of the early Church. . . . According to the evidence of the New Testament, the exclusion of women from ecclesiastical ministry is neither in accord with the teaching or practice of Jesus nor with that of the first century Church.¹⁶

Jesus' ministry to and acceptance of women must have been a very important part of the gospel, preserved even against the background of Jewish and later the Gnostic influences that tended to reduce Jesus' freedom with women.

However, in the process of ecclesiastical adaptation to the first century Greco-Roman society and culture, the early Christian community which had not yet been fully yoked to the patriarchal ethos and structures of its society was gradually transformed into the Roman imperialistic-patriarchal church. In the post-Pauline writings, the values of "submission" and "obedience" became more emphasized, in somewhat contradiction of the authentic Christian vision and praxis. Such patriarchalization of the Church brought about the victimization and exclusion of women from church leadership and ministerial positions, while rendering them subservient to male leaders. Thus, as Elizabeth Fiorenza argues, the church existed between the call to the discipleship of equals and the call to patriarchal structures.¹⁷

This is perhaps the most strident criticism of the Church in Nigeria, where the attitude of benevolent paternalism, feasting on the cultural treatment of women, has become deeply entrenched. The case can be well made that the overwhelming experience of church by Catholics in the Nigeria has been one of a mediating priesthood with the authority of the clergy over the laity and of the bishop over all.¹⁸ The structures of education, ministry and governance are often superfluous and make an elite group of the clergy. George Ehusani opines that this is an inherited model from Western Europe and mediated through the early missionaries.¹⁹ Elochukwu Uzukwu argues that a poor theology of baptism and a clericalized ministry has long denied the laity of their position

¹⁵ Elisabeth M. Tetlow, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament: Called to Serve* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), ch 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 131.

¹⁷ S. Elizabeth Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993), 215-216.

¹⁸ This conception of church may have its foundations in the change and application of sacred and cultic language to the life and ministerial activities of the post-Apostolic church era, a change which was followed by a large influx of other allied ideas taken largely from the Old Testament and its concepts of temple, and sacerdotal priesthood, as well as the socio-political model of government of the Roman society in which the church found itself at the time. Even though the second Vatican Council aimed at reviving the concept of ministry predicated on the sacrament of baptism, it is still to be seen if this has made adequate inroad into the educational curriculum of the church in the Niger Delta.

¹⁹ George Omaku Ehusani. *A Prophetic Church* (Ede: Provincial Pastoral Institute Publications, 1996), 71.

and responsibility in the church.²⁰ He reasons that this patriarchal and highly clericalized model of ministry is what the 1994 Synod of Bishops for Africa set out to address.²¹

The Purpose and Context of Religious Education

The term ‘education’ is not amenable to a single meaning. It means learning, training and bringing up. Maria Harris offers a ‘broad and extensive’ description of education as ‘form giving.’ She writes, “Education, like all other artistic endeavors, is a work of giving form. More specifically, it is a work especially concerned with the creation, re-creation, fashioning, and refashioning of form.”²² Christian religious education is applicable to the various forms of information, formation and transformation of Christian believers by the communication of the Christian gospel, to become part of a Christian process of social engagement and transformation.²³ Anton Vrame writes that “Religious education, as an effort of the entire community, strives to nurture all of its members in all stages of life toward whole personhood through the ministries and curricula of the Church.”²⁴ Christian education nurtures not just the individual’s trust in God or loyalty to particular doctrinal propositions, but an engagement of the individual’s intellect and affectivity which is subsequently manifest by lived actions. It is educating for a faith that is an existential reality. Vrame writes that “religious education is seen holistically, that is involving: a) the whole person - mind, body, spirit; b) the whole community - all believers and their collective wisdom, knowledge, and experience of past and present; and c) the whole Tradition - *orthodoxia and orthopraxia*.”²⁵

What religious education aims at then, is not merely information but living; not merely knowledge but dynamic action, because the purpose of Christian faith ultimately is service to the reign of God. The values of the “kingdom” that Jesus preached and taught were profoundly social as well as they were personal and spiritual. It was through the prism of the “kingdom” that one could adequately understand the ministry of Jesus.

²⁰ Elochukwu, E. Uzukwu. *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 105.

²¹ Ibid. 104.

²² Maria, Harris. *Fashion Me A People*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989, 40.

²³ Christian religious educators cannot forget the foundational historical commitment to social transformation. The agenda of Jesus’ ministry in Luke 4:18-19 lends credence to the argument that Christian religious education must continue to address issues raised by the evolving situations of the world, especially the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, with its poverty, violence, insecurity, environmental devastation, and the widening gap between the “haves” and “have nots,” and about how the Christian message should, of necessity, speak meaningfully in the cultural context of the society in which the church exists and ministers. This is without prejudice to the personal transformation of the believer. Instead, the personal agenda must be balanced with the social agenda, in the context of the mission of the church in and to the world. Models of religious education which tend to only transmit doctrinal information, enhance privatistic religiosity, and with unembodied content which insulate the individual from prophetically engaging the existential realities of the world are inadequate in the context of the Niger Delta. Religious education needs to incorporate an all embracing vision—social, cultural, political, ecological, etc., in its curricula.

²⁴ Anton C. Vrame, *The Educating Icon: Teaching Wisdom and Holiness in the Orthodox Way* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 11.

²⁵ Ibid. 11-12.

Hence, the educational ministry of the church should be understood also through this prism. Groome writes as follows:

If, then, the Church is to be an effective sign of the Kingdom ... it will have to preach those values of the Kingdom. But preaching alone will not be enough. To be a credible sign of the Kingdom, it will have to embody within its own structures the values it preaches. Further, it will have to harness its ministry and whole way of being in the world toward helping to create social/political/economic structures that are capable of promoting the values of the kingdom. Structures which obviate the realization of the Kingdom, or, as is often the case, promote its opposite, must be opposed.²⁶

Arguably then, the religious educator must lead people into authentic service to God's reign by engaging them in an action—reflection rhythm of Christian praxis. Paulo Freire argues that education is either domesticating (banking) or liberating, but never neutral. Freire insists that liberating education is the process of humanizing people who have been oppressed.

Humanization is a politically subversive process as it empowers oppressed people to question their lives and position in society. Humanization requires individuals to achieve critical consciousness, which arises from questioning what one knows and making a conscious decision to see the reasons for the reality in which one lives. Freedom to live life to the full can only be attained when the oppressed achieve this critical consciousness and use that knowledge to gain “praxis.”²⁷ Consequently, the teacher who wishes to liberate learners must do more than just pass on information. The teacher has to be in solidarity with the learners. Freire writes, “. . . true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality that has made them these ‘beings for another.’”²⁸

The Christian community's understanding of faith and the exigencies of the socio-cultural context of Nigerian women demands a religious education that is not simply indoctrination in an ideology or memorization of dogmas. In an age characterized by socio—political and economic emasculation and the devaluing of human life, religious education needs a pedagogical framework that enables women to understand for themselves and to commit to the concrete living of Christian meaning and values.

²⁶ Thomas, H. Groome. *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980, 45. Groome would go on to argue that the Kingdom of God in Christ should be the overarching purpose of religious education. He insists that the privatization of faith and the individualistic interpretation of the Gospel message can only be rectified when the Kingdom of God becomes the central element of the educational ministry of the church.

²⁷ Praxis is the practice of reflection on readings, current events, situations, and questions that leads one to act on those findings. By equipping persons to name their present situations with critical intentionality, Freire hopes they also will become empowered to imagine that these situations may and can be transformed. This pedagogical process unfolds in a dynamic and reciprocal praxis movement of critical reflection toward humanizing action, followed by subsequent critical reflection toward action and so on. According to Freire, this is the reason to educate. Praxis changes the world.

²⁸ Freire Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Transl. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York, NY: Continuum, 2002, 34.

Understanding Christ as Representative of the Victim

While available evidence indicates that the ministry of Jesus and the early church does not reveal a definitive educational, ministerial and organizational pattern to be followed in later centuries, it does present the church with a normative language of education and ministry, it promotes a servant-leadership model of authority, a Christian ideal of regional pluralism and apostolic unity, and an inclusive conception of service, fellowship and participation. How the Nigerian church understands this will determine its reasoning and approach to the education of women for full and active ministerial participation.

Even though the church has done much to alleviate the suffering of women in regard to abhorrent traditional rituals and practices, much more need to be done. However, since ordained ministry is reserved for men, and most of the faculty in the seminaries and houses of priestly formation are male, gender issues with African women perspectives are rarely taught. The result being that, most of the trained clergy graduate with the classical cultural paternalistic attitude, and western male theological perspectives on gender and related issues. Yet, women constitute the greater majority in the church.

In many Nigerian societies where parents still prefer to send boys to school, factors such as adolescent pregnancy and early marriage pose immediate challenge for the educational ministry of the church. The educational curriculum should be guided by the reality of the cultural experience and its content geared towards empowering girls and women to be fully integrated members of the “body of Christ”.

For truly holistic religious education, the process of recreating and retrieving Nigerian women’s stories so that they can become an integral part of the story of the church is of paramount importance. Women have made, and are still making, huge valuable contributions to the success of the church’s pastoral ministry in Nigeria.²⁹ The church’s religious education curriculum should reflect women’s ways of knowing. According to Harris:

..., we have discovered that our gender identity shapes our spirituality. Reflecting on that identity, many of today’s most articulate women have discovered that our way of being in the world is influenced and fashioned by being in the world as female. Routinely, women’s spirituality is characterized as rooted in our bodies, attentive to ritual, inclusive of nonhuman universe, reliant on women’s experience (not only on men’s), and insistent that the political cannot be separated from the personal.³⁰

This author proposes the metaphor of Jesus Christ as representative of the victim, the lamb that was slain. In John’s Gospel Jesus is described as “the Lamb of God, who

²⁹ The lack of literature may be an obvious difficulty but it is not an impossible task to overcome. Several African female theologians and writers such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Isabel Apawo Phiri, Lilian Dube, Elizabeth Amoah, Betty Ekeya, and Teresa Okure, among others, have shown the way.

³⁰ Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran. *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice*. Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998, 77.

takes away the sin of the world.”³¹ The symbol of the “Lamb” takes our thoughts back to the Old Testament-to the Passover in Egypt, the beginning of the history of Israel as a nation. First came that series of plagues, culminating in the death of every firstborn in Egypt. There was no automatic exemption for Israel. They were required to kill an unblemished male lamb, eat its flesh and sprinkle its blood upon the lintels and doorposts of their houses. Only if they did this were their firstborn children spared when the Egyptians were destroyed, see Exodus 12.

The “Lamb” which was simple, pure and precious, represents the best that human beings could afford. The best is offered up to God. Human beings are required to offer up to God all that is worthy in themselves, and all their treasured possessions and above all life itself. The paschal lamb was not offered instead of the offerer. By eating the flesh of the lamb, the Israelites symbolically identified themselves with it. Its blood was, in a sense, their blood, which means that its life represented their life. By this ceremony they declared that they were not their own-they were offering themselves to God. And God recognized them as his people and delivered them. So too with the Lamb of God, offered up for those who have been wounded by sin.

The “Lamb of God” identifies with the victimized and un-empowered. He is not raised up as a benevolent male who dominates women, but as a holy sacrifice who transcends all barriers, draws all to himself, and serves them as co-sufferer, healer, teacher and enabler, women and men alike. Jesus’ inclusive ministry and identification with the oppressed and alienated, overcomes the ideology of sexist dualism which has been unfavorable to the religious education of women, and unbiased involvement in ministry.

CONCLUSION:

Education is a pre-requisite for every facet of human development, without which women and indeed human beings in general, can not enjoy or appreciate the value of life’s entitlements. Without education, it is difficult for women to gain information about their fundamental rights and entitlements and where they are informed, illiteracy hinders them comprehending the texts and notions involved.

The Nigerian church is confronted by several challenges that could endanger sound inculturated evangelization, religious formation, and religious education in the African. These include, the handling or otherwise of increased vocation to the clergy and vowed religious women engaged in the ministries of the church; the growth of Pentecostal churches in rural areas; the emergence of private elementary and secondary schools; the necessity to grapple with religious pluralism in the larger Nigerian community; the need for more comprehensive theological education and cultural preparation of the laity and lay ministers; a passive attitude towards cultural, ecological and social engagement within the Catholic theological and ministerial traditions; and what appears to be a lack of serious interest at the diocesan-level in grassroots evangelization in preference to the maintenance of inherited structures and congregations.

³¹ John 1:29

The paper acknowledges that Nigerian traditional religions may discriminate against women but that same heritage also allows for an appreciation of women as full members of society. For a long time the Nigerian church has slept too easy and missed the opportunity to listen to the voices of its female membership, thereby appearing rebellious to the ideals of its teacher. But the times are changing, so too are the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities. The need for more collaboration and inclusive ministry is more today than ever before. The everyday living realities of women, their perceptions and knowing, as well as, their authentic way of being is both enriching, beneficial, integrative, and complementary, and cannot be ignored.

The purpose of women's education in Nigeria is to enable women contribute to life and the church, adapt to the society, develop and broaden their minds, have all-round development, be active participants in preparing the younger generation to be able to cope with every aspect of work and family life, develop in the women's folk social, economic, religious and political sophistication in their ability to understand, participate in life, and finally to be the best of citizens they are capable of being.

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