

Patriarchy in the Israelite Religion: Implications for the Present-Day Christianity

Emmanuel Nwachukwu Uzuegbunam, Ph.D

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

Abstract

That Christianity was formed and nurtured in, and inherited, many of the features of the Israelite religion have long been acknowledged. One of such features is a patriarchal orientation which implies a system ruled or controlled by men, giving power and importance only to men. Patriarchal became a feature of the Israelite religion right from its origin, exacerbating the dimensions of that orientation as time progressed. It is a highly discriminatory feature which makes the female folk altogether non-existent, incapable of attaining or manifesting the spiritual attributes or being used by, or attuned to God. This parochial orientation has filtered into all facets of social life leading to other dimension of discrimination and abuse of human rights and dignity. This feature, having been inherited by Christianity at its earliest origin and, in some Christian denominations, sustained till the present day, makes the Christian faith discriminatory against the women folk, leading to abuse of the rights of women and a debasement of their dignity, especially in appointment to priesthood and leadership positions. This paper examines the patriarchal orientation of the Israelite religion within which Christianity was formed, and the transfer of that feature to Christianity; and appraises the implications of that orientation to the Christian faith in the present-day society where efforts are being made to eliminate all forms of primitive discrimination and abuse of rights and debasement of the dignity of all segments of the human society.

Keywords: Patriarchal, Discrimination, Human Rights, Dignity

Introduction

As society develops, the facets of its operations elongate beyond their traditional domains and confines. New axioms replace old ones and new perspectives to ideas originally held begin to emerge. The ultimate aspiration of the human society in its development is to create, or at least be seen to make efforts to create, as much as possible, within the tenets of human abilities and resources, a just society, free from any form of social, economic or gender oppression or inhibition. The objective of this aspiration is to create a society in which there is a maximum enhancement of diverse human potentials to the ultimate profiting of the total human society.

Since the mid-20th century, a new awareness has arisen in the domains of human development and this new awareness is in the area of women liberation. A vast array of dimensions of women liberation movement has arisen, and one of the facets of this movement is to raise critical hermeneutical consciousness on the biblical text. This consciousness has started to interrogate the existing axioms of the Judeo-Christian faith, with a view to establishing the intention, or otherwise, towards a perpetual subjugation of the female folk. As Conn (1988) puts it;

This agenda increasingly focuses on hermeneutical questions. How do we interpret what is seen as the male orientation of the Bible? Is the experience of women more than merely a corrective for the Christian context? Is it not also a starting point and a norm? In what sense can liberationist feminism serve as a part of Biblical hermeneutics? (p. 255).

Patriarchalism is the name given to the theological orientation which places the male folk over and above the female folk in matters of relationship with, and worship of the deity. Conn goes ahead to admit that;

The rejectionist (or Post-Christian) model of studies sees the Bible as promoting an oppressive patriarchal structure and rejects it as not authoritative. Some reject the whole Judeo-Christian tradition as hopelessly male-oriented. The most radical wings of this approach call for restoration of the religion of witchcraft or are attracted to a nature mysticism based exclusively on women consciousness. (p. 255).

The Earliest Origin of Israelite Religion

The narratives regarding the early origins of the faith and nationhood of Israel are contained in Genesis Chapters 12 – 50. We start here by attempting to reconcile, or at least draw, where possible, a line of symmetry between the two approaches to identifying the Pentateuchal origins, namely, the Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis and the tradition-historical approach. As Harrison (1969) puts it;

According to the Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis of Pentateuchal origin, Genesis assumed its present form through various editorial processes that saw a combination of elements of J, E, and P sources into a continuous document. In the view of those who advocate the tradition-historical approach to the problem of Pentateuchal compilation, Genesis arose through the presentation of “Cycles of Tradition” that grew up in various areas in oral form. These “traditions” developed around focal events such as the Passover and other similar occurrences significant for the religious life of the nation, and found expression in the ritual and liturgies of the Israelites. In the more moderate forms of both these views, there is no necessary attempt to deny historicity to the material involved, even through most of the scholars who support their approaches would prefer to attributes general rather than specific historicity to the subject matter. (p. 543).

Quite clearly, a lot of light has been shed on the Patriarchal narratives, that is stories about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob contained in Genesis 12 – 50, by the recovery of the second Millennium BC cultural remains from Mari, Nuzu and Alalakh. These archeological evidences have no doubt accorded a great deal of historicity to the narratives, and Harrison has added that the archeological evidence recorded to date “has brought an inestimable wealth of detail to bear upon the Patriarchal narratives and has set the traditions relating to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob against a properly accredited background of second Millennium BC social life” (p. 563). For Albright (1952);

In no case are these Patriarchal stories mere reflections of the life of Israel in the divided monarchy, as used to be maintained by most of the literary critics. Instead, they actually go back almost a thousand years to the middle bronze age. (p. 542).

Although Thompson (1982) acknowledges that Biblical data is insufficient to settle the matter of dating of the Patriarchal traditions, he adds however that;

We are forced to propose tentative dates by comparing data within the Patriarchal stories in Genesis with extra Biblical data from the first part of the second millennium BC. There is a further difficulty in drawing a general picture of the Patriarchal age because Genesis concentrates on only a few individuals. The total group which made up kinspeople of this narrowly defined family was probably quite extensive, all of them having originated in lands to the North East of Palestine. Further, the Biblical writers must have selected their own materials from a wide range of traditions which were available to them in order to stress important religious and theological points. Hence, if we restrict ourselves to the Biblical narratives alone, there are severe limitation for the historian. (p. 884).

Two factors are evident from the forging, and for us, these are cardinal to our analysis. The first is that the historicity of the Patriarchal narrative is not in anyway either jeopardized or obscured. This is even further confirmed by the archeological discoveries. The second is that the setting of the Patriarchal narratives agrees with the social life within the defined communities in the projected dating of the second millennium BC within which setting the religion of Israel took a firm root. The character of that society, a profound component of which is patriarchalism, an orientation of male domination, is one which has also sufficiently influenced and formed the bedrock of the religion of the Old Testament.

Abraham became the founder of the faith and nationhood of the Israelite nation, his son Isaac, and grandson Jacob, becoming instruments to the actualization of the religious and nationhood ideals. This is without prejudice to the existence of another tradition which credits Moses with the origin of the faith and nationhood of Israel. The narratives of Joseph to which the greater proportion of the

Patriarchal narratives, Genesis 12 – 50, has been dedicated, has been used to reconcile the two traditions.

Patriarchal Religious Orientation in the Israelite Religion

We begin the discussion of the patriarchal religious orientation of the Old Testament religion by looking at preliminary linguistic issues.

A. Preliminary Linguistic Framework (Gen. 1:1)

אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית

Literally, In the beginning, God created.

The patriarchal theistic orientation of the Old Testament religion, rooted in the linguistic features of the Hebrew text, has been acknowledged. As seen in the text above, two patriarchal features are evident in the language. First is in the name אֱלֹהִים. This word, which is the Hebrew generic term for God has a masculine plural termination, יִם, and of necessity implies a masculine import. Concerning the plural significance, Dr. Hengsteinberg, Professor of Theology in the University of Berlin, in his work, Dissertation on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch, quoting the Jewish Rabbi's, asserts that this is intended to signify *Dominus Potentiarum Omnium* (Lord of all powers).

The second word that is indicative of masculine or patriarchal theistic orientation is the verb בָּרָא which is 3rd person masculine singular *qal* perfect verb. WTM Morphology and Whittaker's Reversed BDB Lexicon confirms that the verb is *qal* perfect 3rd person masculine singular homonym. A similar language pattern is seen throughout the narratives in the text.

According to Conn (1988);

Patriarchalism is clearly the orientation of the Old Testament. The preponderance of biblical images for the Father-God are masculine. The slant of cultic legislation is male-oriented. The period of uncleanness for giving birth to a son was seven days; for a daughter, fourteen (Lev. 12:1-5). (p. 256).

B. Responsibility for Religious (Cultic) Dissemination and Transference

Clearly then, the religion of the Old Testament became predicated upon, and an exclusive entitlement of the male progeny. By the circumcision law of Genesis 17, for instance, admission to Abrahamic covenant was an exclusive preserve of the male progeny.

This is the covenant (Hebrew בְּרִית), which you shall keep between me and you and your seed after you. Every male child among you shall be circumcised, and you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you. (Gen. 17:10-11).

The implication of this is that only male children were to be admitted into the covenant relationship between God and Abraham. In other words, the congregation in this covenant religious relationship was to be made up only of male children of the household of Abraham admitted into the faith through the token or symbol or sacrament of circumcision.

Looking further, we see that it is to the male family head that the responsibility is thrust for the propagation of this faith established by the religious covenant relationship between God and Abraham, and by implication the subsequent fathers (male family heads) designated as custodians of the faith.

And the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (Gen. 18:17-19).

It is evident from the Hebrew word used here to imply the ordering of one's household in the way of the Lord, the Hebrew verb יִצְרֶה (from the *qal* perfect root צָרָה, which is the *pi'el*, (intensive verb form) imperfect 3rd person masculine singular) that what is intended in a matter of propagation of faith, is not a persuasive dialogue, but a forceful imposition. From this, it is easy to understand why this responsibility is thrust upon the man, the male head of the family, as a matter of compulsive demand from אֱלֹהִים.

So, the transmission of the religious system of the Old Testament was essentially by patriarchal ordering. The male family head was essentially to order or command (Hebrew צַרָה) his household unto the observance of the religious traditions as ordained by אֱלֹהִים. The same point is further emphasized in Deuteronomy 6:1ff;

Now, these are the commandments, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that you might fear the Lord your God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments which I command you, and your son, and your son's son all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. (Deut. 6:1-2).

Now, two facts are worthy of note in this command. First of all, from its linguistic framework, it is addressed to masculine addressees, and that is the male family head. This is shown in the text as follows;

1. יהוה-אלהיכם Translated the Lord your God. The pronominal suffix, כֶּם, attached to the construct form of the generic word אֱלֹהִים is the second person masculine plural pronominal suffix, implying male addressees. The same applies to the word אֲתֶם the direct object particle which is again second person masculine plural homonym.
2. The second verse of the text makes it even more glaring that the responsibility for the transmission of the commandments (Hebrew הַחֻקִּים , meaning statutes) and judgments (Hebrew הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים) is given to the אַתָּה (you, second person masculine singular), וּבְנֶךָ (and your son), וּבְנֵי בְנֶךָ (and thy son's son). This further clarifies the indication that even the transmission of the statutes, commandments and the ordinances of Yahweh Elohim is to be done only unto and through the male progeny. Just as admission into the covenant of faith was the exclusive preserve of the male offsprings, the teaching and preservation of the statutes, ordinances and commandments belong only to the male offsprings. It is this patriarchal understanding that has shaped the Old Testament religion.

Patriarchal Orientation of the Liturgical Framework of the Israelite Religion

Shaped then by this fundamental patriarchal posture, the Israelite religion acquired a solid liturgical framework that was intrinsically and functionally patriarchal. Conn (1988) outlines the patriarchal orientation of the liturgical framework of the Old Testament religion thus;

The slant of cultic legislation is male-oriented. The period of uncleanness for giving birth to a son was seven days, for a daughter, fourteen (Lev. 12:1-5). A Hebrew daughter sold into slavery could not go free as men servants do (Exod. 21:7). A man might divorce his wife if he found something indecent about her (Deut. 24:1-4), but nowhere is there mention of women divorcing their husbands. A compensation gift, the *mohar*, was given to the family of the bride to seal the marriage covenant and bind the two families together (bride price in the NIV, Gen. 34:12; Exod. 22:17; 1Sam. 18:25, but better rendered "marriage present", RSV, or dowry, AV). (p. 256).

That this patriarchal religious perspective has shaped the entire socio-ethical outlook of the people and faith of the Old Testament has also been firmly acknowledged. Thus, Agbo (2003) has affirmed that;

The Jewish or Hebrew society is highly patriarchal; hence, the position of man is obviously absolute over that of the woman in many of the available Jewish writings.

Women are variously given status which differ at various points of time. (p. 24).

He goes on to elucidate on the various points of socio-religious regulations of the Jewish or Hebrew society which seemingly portend a deliberate arrangement to relegate the women folk to a despicable status in relation to their male counterpart.

Thus, in a Jewish society, a wife (i.e. woman) along with other property, belongs to the man. The Decalogue's stipulation is that one should not covet any of his neighbour's property, house, wife, male or female slave, ox or ass or anything that is his neighbour's (Ex. 20:17). Sometimes, women are also regarded as spoils of war in a Jewish society (Num. 31:15). Precisely in Deut. 21:11ff, the Jewish soldier can take captive any beautiful woman (as wife) that he desires, and is permitted to release her if he finds no desire in her any longer. (p. 26).

The reference here to Mosaic decalogue must be seen from the perspective of the patriarchal redactional infusion into the original decalogue statement which, as Okwesili (2004) has already observed, is "usually brief and blunt, terse and vivid" (p. 16).

Redactional evaluation of the original decalogue statement has, no doubt, become necessitated in the Jewish or Hebrew society as part of occasional legal reforms necessitated by incessant disputes in the course of the settled life in Canaan. In other words, these are situations that could not have arisen, neither could have been envisioned during the wilderness wanderings of the Mosaic era. But what is evident, anyway, is that the early religious and liturgical procedures shaped the Israelite society into a patriarchal society with pronounced notions of avid male domination and chauvinism, growing into deep-seated resentment and prejudice against the women folk. Barclay (1974) gives further insight into the despicable forms of this male-originated and perpetrated prejudice against the women folk;

In the Jewish form of the morning prayer, a Jewish man every morning gave thanks that God had not made him a Gentile, a slave or a woman. In Jewish law, a woman was not a person but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely in her husband's possession to do with as he willed. (p. 199).

On the matter of the women remaining a possession of the male custodian all her life, Stagg (1973) asserts that;

The Mishnah is basically demonstrative of a man's authority over the woman. A Jewish girl was under the control of her father until she came under the control of her husband. (p. 49).

The Mishna, according to Brown, Perkins and Saldarini (1990) is;

A collection of 63 tractates of rabbinic laws (and) is arranged in six epical divisions covering agricultural tithes, feasts, marriage (including economic arrangements and divorce), torts (including judicial procedure), sacrifices at the temple and natural purity. The Mishna was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince in Palestine ca AD 200. The tractates repeat biblical laws, expand the laws into new areas and develop new legal topics which are only loosely based on the Bible. The Mishna as a whole has similarities to both a law code and a textbook. Some laws and legal opinions are presented anonymously and others are in the names of the sages of the 1st and 2nd cents. Controversies and conflicting opinions manifest the many sides of legal interpretation, and lists of cases make clear the application of legal principles. (p. 1081).

The Mishna in the Jewish legal system is significant in two vital respects. One, it forms the bridge between the old Jewish legal system as shown in the Old Testament, and the modern legal reforms in the judicial system of the modern Jewish society. It is the link between the ancient and the modern of the Jewish legal system. It sustained the elements of the old system in the new, and contains in the new system a gradual protracted refinement of the old. More importantly, it has helped in no small way in reproducing the ancient legal sentiments of the old judicial system in the modern judicial system of the Jewish society. One of those ancient legal sentiments is the patriarchal orientation of male domination.

Two, the Mishna forms the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. As at the time when Rabbi Judah was editing the Mishna in AD 200, the Septuagint, Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament, along with some apocryphal (or deuterocanonical) books had been produced. The Septuagint was in fact the Bible used by the early church which had a preponderance of the Jewish community in its membership. Needless to say, the socio-religious sentiments of the Jewish community, through this leeway, became reproduced full strength in Christianity, an issue to which we now turn attention.

The Early Church and Patriarchal Orientation

Although Jesus, the founder of Christianity, was physically born an Israelite into the Israelite patriarchal socio-religious society, yet his attitude to women was completely different. Chukwuma-Offor (2018) observes that;

Jesus, aware of the indispensable roles of women, elevated them to a dignified status, hence his attitude to women was not only innovative and creative, but revolutionary. As the incarnate God, Jesus turned a new page by putting to an end such obnoxious practices meted out against women by being born of a woman to redeem those under the bondage and influence of the law, women inclusive (Gal. 4:4-5). To the greatest dismay of his disciples, Jesus broke the barrier placed against women by conversing publicly with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:27). He never considered the state of impurity of the woman with

the issue of blood (Matt. 9:20-22). He recognized and appreciated women's role in the family and also directly enhanced their role by expanding it to include their being witnesses to his resurrection. (p. 470).

Wilson (1945) corroborates the above position on Jesus' attitude to women, asserting that "Jesus sheared a radically new stance towards women, not only in his preaching but also in his miracles" (p. 39).

It must however be recognized that Jesus was aware that the new community of faith he had come to found was to be nurtured within the religious cradle of the Israelite religion, with its strictly patriarchal posture. With this at the back of his mind, even in his radical disposition to liberate the womenfolk from the shackles of socio-religious bondage, he was careful not to swing too swiftly and too drastically to the other extreme, a situation that would have cost him the loyalty of the Israelite male disciples whom he needed greatly for forming the foundation of the new community of faith. This situation, more than anything else, accounts for the postures and actions of Jesus for which he is often aligned with the patriarchal Israelite society. For instance, it would be surprisingly smacking of a patriarchal posture that although Jesus had many influential, highly placed women who openly supported and provided for his ministry, yet, none of them qualified to be appointed among the twelve apostles. Also, whenever Jesus referred to his mother in public discussions, as is typical of a patriarchal society, he would use the term *γυνή* (*gune*, meaning woman), rather than *ματὴρ* (*mater*, meaning mother). Instances of this are found in John 2:4; 19:26.

However, it is to Paul that the credit goes for the formation of the New Testament theology. Even though Paul was not among the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus, it was Paul that began to interpret the significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. For instance, in the Acts of Apostles, prior to Paul's entrance into the new community of faith, the kerygma of the apostles consisted, in the main, of the bitter lamentation over the brutal murder of a righteous man by the elders of the Jewish faith, according to the traditions of their fathers. But rather than subscribe to the bitter lamentation, Paul began to explore the Christological motif, and to show the theological value of the crucifixion of Jesus. However, sadly, in his numerous epistles in the New Testament, estimated at one-third of the entire New Testament, Paul occasionally injected, or permitted the infiltration of the vestiges of his Jewish patriarchal background in seemingly unleashing subjugating attacks on the status of the women folk in the early church. It is in this regard that Onwu (2004) observes that;

We also have certain passages in Pauline epistles which deal with the status, role and/or general demeanor of women in such a manner as to support Paul's negative attitude towards women and the principle of male dominance and female subordination, both in the home and in the church, and by implication in the society as well. (p. 223).

Agbo (2003) attempts an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the controversial Pauline injunctions, particularly in the epistles to the Corinthians, believed by many as deliberate effort to diminish the status of women in the early church;

In Corinth, during worship, some women were imitating the priestesses and prophetesses of Hellenistic cults, showing off in their ecstatic vision in the church. They showed lack of regard for social behavior and dress. Some even preferred to renounce marriage in order to devote themselves to God (Ref. 1Cor. 7:12, 16). Orderliness was indeed at stake at the Corinthian church. So, Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reacted sharply to the situation. Therefore, this may not be taken as status quo for a contemporary church with no similar situation. (p.32).

De-Patriarchalizing Old Testament Hermeneutics

Patriarchal textual hermeneutics is actually a perspective of hermeneutical expedition which tends to magnify and sometimes take out of context, textual contents that reinforce an already existing patriarchal posture, while diminishing textual contents that tend to deviate from, or outrightly oppose such posture. Here, we must be able to draw a line between the content of the text and the reading, that is, the hermeneutics, of it.

That the Jewish society is fundamentally patriarchal has already been acknowledged. The same can be said of the entire Ancient Near East. However, it cannot be established with equal strength that the

Old Testament text is fundamentally patriarchal, or that it tends to support to the tenets of patriarchal orientation prevalent in the society in which it has grown and found usage. What can be said with substantial evidence is that the human avenue through which the Old Testament has been formulated and transmitted has permitted the infiltration of an unruly tincture of its patriarchal orientation more into the reading (that is, the hermeneutical perspectives) than in the text itself. That the Old Testament as a text is not patriarchal, nor does it reinforce the tenets of patriarchalism has also been acknowledged. Thus, Conn (1988) has asserted that;

Even the masculine images of God in the OT are set forth only as anthropomorphisms. God is a spirit and not to be depicted as either male or female. Infact, female imagery, though not common, is also used to describe Jehovah. The Lord is a nursing mother (Is. 49:15), midwife (Ps. 22:9-10), female home-maker (Ps. 123:2) and helpmate to humankind as Eve was to Adam (Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:26; Ps. 121:1-2). In the same way, patriarchalism was also transcended in the OT legislation. Both father and mother are deserving of honour (Ex. 20:12). The woman was to share in the Sabbath rest (Ex. 20:8), to benefit from the reading of the Law (Deut. 31:9-13). Both adulterer and adulteress are to be put to death (Lev. 20:10). Food taboos are mandatory for both sexes (Lev. 11). (p. 256).

In the Book of Judges, the era of occasional charismatic leaders in the settled Canaanite land, when the hostile neighbours of the Israelite settlers attacked one or other of the Israelite tribes, a time came when all the men of Israel went into hiding on account of the intensity of the assaults. The spirit of God (Hebrew, רִיחַ אֱלֹהִים) charismatically empowered a woman, Deborah, also described as a prophetess, to lead the Israelites in war. And she did that to the best of her ability, supported by a few men, and also as she had prophesied, God gave Israel victory in that war by the hand of a woman named Jael (Judges 4,5). The Old Testament text in recording the incident accorded full regard unto the women deliverers as to their menfolk.

The epitome of de-patriarchalized prophetic records is to be found in Joel 2:28ff in which Yahweh is quoted as affirming that in days to come, he would break the patriarchal posture of deployment to service by pouring out his spirit of service upon all flesh (Hebrew קָלִיבֶשֶׁר)

Your sons and daughters (Hebrew וּבָנֹתֵיכֶם וּבָנוֹתֵיכֶם) shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Upon your man servants and maid servants (Hebrew וְעַל־הַשְּׂפָחוֹת הַתְּהַעֲבָדִים) will I pour out my spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29).

This is a clear declaration that even if the religion of the Old Testament tended to be driven by male operators in the past, God was going to change the pattern and pour out his spirit upon all flesh (קָלִיבֶשֶׁר) such that all of humanity, without gender restrictions shall lift up their hands in praise and worship of, and in service to God of all flesh. Needless to say, this prophecy has been massively fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Jewish feast of Pentecost in Acts of the Apostles chapter two, and has continue to expand and extend into the nooks and crannies of the world ever since.

Implications for the Present-day Christianity

Although vestiges of the patriarchal orientation still pervade various societies, yet Christianity is pushing through these boundaries and barriers and touching lives without gender restrictions all over the world. As already evident, the slight tincture of patriarchal orientation in the early church, such as the appointment of the all-men, twelve-man apostolic council of Jesus ministry, similar to the all-men *sunedrion* (Sanhedrin, ruling council of the Jewish Synagogue) is only a part of the bequeathal from the patriarchal influence of the Israelite society that was the cradle for the infantile nurture of the Christian community. Such vestiges have long been overrun by the imperative divine de-patriarchalized operation. The greatest divine impetus to the de-patriarchalization of the operations of the early church is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:28ff as firmly accomplished in Acts 2:1ff. God poured out his Spirit of service unto all flesh, the first recipients being the one hundred and twenty Christians, male and female, gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem. They all alike received the power of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire on their foreheads and spoke in diverse tongues and the Spirit gave them utterance. They ministered unto God and unto men. It is then on the basis of that

universal appointment to divine service without gender restriction, that Peter, writing to the entire community of faith, said;

Ἔμεις δε γενοσὲς κληκτον βασιλευσιν ιερατευμα ἐθνος ἁγιον (You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, 1Pet. 2:9).

The word ιερατευμα according to BGM Morphology and Barclays Newman commentary, is a nominative neutre singular common noun, meaning priesthood. The pronoun Ἔμεις is personal nominative plural pronoun. In other words, it is to the whole body of Christ that the injunction is addressed, implying that it is the entire body of Christ, male and female, that is addressed as priesthood of the kingdom (Greek, βασιλευσιν ιερατευμα). The critical implication of this is that the gender restriction still existing in the priesthood of the primitive orthodox churches is a subsisting influence of the patriarchal orientation carried over from the Israelite society, and it is in fact grossly misrepresentative of the spirit of the New Testament Christian faith and community.

Conclusion

It has been shown that patriarchal orientation became intricately interwoven with the Israelite religion, primarily as a result of the attitudinal patterns of the Israelite community, an orientation which pervades the entire Ancient Near East, and has had reaching influence on the religious practices originating within the region. In some of those religious practices, women are to be hidden in the inner courtyards, far withdrawn from the public space. If they are to learn anything about the faith, they are to do so from private enquiries from their husbands. That the Apostle Paul, driven by an intense patriarchal spirit, sought, albeit without success, to introduce this posture in the early church is rather worrisome. A critical study of the Old Testament text shows that it is neither patriarchal nor does it in any way seek to reinforce the Jewish socio-cultural tenets of male domination, even though, being mediated through persons and religious systems that are predominantly Israelite, one would not be surprised to identify elements of the patriarchal background in the text. Here, the content of the text must be sufficiently distanced from the reading, that is, the hermeneutics, thereof. The Old Testament prophetic dispensation announced the de-patriarchalization of the empowerment of the divine Spirit for service (Joel 2:28ff), a promise which became fulfilled in Acts 2:1ff. That accomplished, God broke, totally and finitely, the gender restrictions in appointments to the service of God. Though one may find in the early church an attempt to import the Jewish socio-cultural tendencies of male domination into the community of faith, arising from the preponderance of Jewish elements in the early church leadership, however, such tendencies were eventually subdued in the light of the true revelation of divine intentions of de-patriarchalization. The primitive orthodox churches which still maintain the gender restrictions in appointments to the service of God, therefore, do so in obstinate insistence on retrogressive patriarchal orientation of the Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern societies, and in utter disregard and misrepresentation of the spirit of the New Testament Christian faith and community.

References

- Agbo, T. O. (2003). *Women ordination in Nigeria: Ecclesiological analysis*. Enugu: Snaap.
- Albright, W. F. (1952). Religion in Life. XXI No. 4.
- Byrne, B. (1988). *Paul and Corinthian women*. Austria: St. Paul's
- Chiegboka, A. B. C. (2001). *The hour of women*. Nimo: Rex Charles & Patrick's.
- Chiegboka, A.B.C. (2007). The Exclusion of Women in the Catholic Stable Ministries of Lector and Acolyte: A Reflection on the Canon 230&1. In L. Ugwueye, P. Nmah, E. Ezenweke, B. Udezo and C. Uche (Eds.). *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. (pp. 54-75). Enugu: Rabboni.
- Chukwuma-Offor, A. M. (2018). Re-Reading 1Cor. 14:26-40. Addressing the Challenges of Male Chauvinism in Africa. In B.A.C. Obiefuna, P. E. Nmah, I. L. Umeanolue (Eds.). *The Return of the Gods. (Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Jude Emeka Madu)*. (pp. 470-476). Onitsha: Corkan Associates.
- Conn, H. M. (1998). Feminist Theology. In S. G. Ferguson, D. F. Wright (Eds). *New Dictionary of Theology*. England: Inter-varsity.
- Dandy, H. Trans. (1997). *The Mishnah*. London: Oxford University.
- Harrison, R. K. (1969). *Introduction to Old Testament*. England: Inter Varsity.

- Haughton, R. (1985). *The re-creation of Eve*. Illinois: Templegate.
- Holladay, W. L. (Ed.) (1988). *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.
- Hornby, A. S. (2010). *Oxford advanced learners dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Jacobs, E. (1958). *Theology of the Old Testament*. London: Holder and Stephen.
- Jewett, P. K. (1975). *Man as male and female*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.
- Mamman, J. (2006). The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: A Case for/against Women Ordination in the Catholic Church. In *The Journal of Theology*. (pp. 19-32). Enugu: Snaap.
- Nmah, P. (2003). *Women's right in Igboland: A Christian reappraisal*. Aba: Soul Winner.
- Oduoye, M. (1990). *Talitha Cumi*. Ibadan: Daystar
- Onwu, E. (2004). *Basic issues in the close of New Testament era*. Nsukka: Great Ap.
- Stagg, E. Stagg, F. (1973). *Women in the world of Jesus*. Edimburgh: St. Andrew's.
- Stott, J. (1990). *Issues facing Christians today*. London: Marshal Pickering's.
- Thomson, J. A. (1982). Patriarchal Age. In J. D. Douglas (Ed). *New Bible Dictionary*. England: Inter-Varsity.
- Uchem, R (2005). Gender Equality from a Christian Perspective. In R. Uchem (Ed.). *Gender Equality from a Christian Perspective*. (pp. 57-90). Enugu: Snaap.
- Umeanuolue, I. L. (2018). Using the Bible in Africanizing Christianity: The Old Testament Preference in African Instituted Churches. In B. A. C. Obiefuna, P. E. Nmah, I. L. Umeanohue (Eds.) *The Return of the Gods: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Jude Emeka Madu*. (pp. 448-455). Onitsha: Coskan Associates.
- Umorem, A. (2005). Theological Basics of Gender Equality. In R. Uchem (Ed.) *Gender Equality from a Christian Perspective*. (pp. 57-90). Enugu: Snaap.
- Wilson, H. (1975). *Women priests -Yes now*. London: Den Holm House.