



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA
FACULDADE DE TEOLOGIA

MESTRADO INTEGRADO EM TEOLOGIA (1.º grau canónico)

EDWARD ASAAH APAMBILA

**THE CHURCH, THE COMMUNITY AND THE
FEMININE QUESTION**
**A CASE STUDY ON WOMEN'S DIGNITY AMONG THE
GURUSI OF NORTHERN GHANA**

Dissertação Final
sob orientação de:
Prof. Doutor José Pedro Angélico

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DEDICATION

To All Women, especially those who bore in their body and mind the abuse of society

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and People's Rights
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
a cura di	Edited by
ATR	African Traditional Religion
C.C.C.	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CECOTAPS	Centre for Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
Cf.	Confer
Col	Colossians
Coord.	Coordenação (Coordination)
1Cor	1Conrinthians
2Cor	2Corinthians
Dn	Daniel
Dt	Deuteronomy
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
ed.	Edition
ed.	Editor
ed. Gen	Editor General
eds.	Editors
Eph	Ephesians
et al	and others
Ex	Exodus
Ez	Ezekiel
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
Gal	Galatians

GCBC	Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference
GDR	German Democratic Republic
Gen	Genesis
Gen.ed	General Editor
GES	Ghana Education Services
GS	Gaudium et Spes
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
Hos	Hosea
HRC	Human Rights Council
Is	Isaiah
Jn	John
1Jn	First Letter of John
JPIC	Justice and Peace Integrity of Creation
1Kgs	1Kings
2Kgs	2Kings
Lam	Lamentation
Lev	Leviticus
LG	Lumen Gentium
Lk	Luke
LXX	the Greek "Septuagint"
Mal	Malachi
MD	Mulieris Dignitatem
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NT	New Testament
Num	Numbers

OT	Old Testament
PNDC	The Provisional National Defence Council
Prv	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
2Pt	2Peter
Rev	Revelation
Rom	Romans
2Sam	Samuel
Spiritan(s)	Congregation of the Holy Spirit(s)
SRL	Spiritan Rule of Life
Tim	Timothy
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
Vatican II	Second Ecumenical Vatican Council
WCC	World Council of Churches
WIP	Women in Peace Building
Wis	Wisdom

ABSTRACT

This project, *'The Church, The Community and The Feminine Question: a case study on women's dignity among the Gurusi of Northern Ghana.'*, is an attempt to examine how women are viewed in the African Church (Gurusi Church) notably their dignity, vocation and role in the Church and community. It is the fruit of a careful and diligent thought-out work. Drawing inspiration from the world at large and the universal Church, it seeks to see how women can better be given an opportunity and be encourage to participate in the mandate of the Divine Master to all Christians, 'Go teach all Nations'. To successfully carry out this demanding task in the African culture (Gurusi culture), other studies needed to be incorporated. Among these studies were anthropology, African theology, inculturation, history, human rights, the three sources of the deposit of faith (Magisterium, Revelation and Tradition) and other social sciences that were necessary.

As a social issue that does not only affect the Church but the nation as well, mention was made of the measures which have been put in place by some social bodies to see how this problem could be lessened. The struggle for the emancipation of women, by and for women, is as old their domination and subordination. However, it was not until the age of enlightenment that this movement gathered much momentum. In studying the history of women in the world, we can see some scandalous stories that systematically kept women out of sight. This again is not limited to one religion of group of people or a particular time. The Christian vocation is one founded on Christ and, as such, one may ask why gender issues should be the yardstick to permit or prohibit one from exercising his or her role. In view of this, the early Church was attentive and opened up opportunities for women, though in a limited way. The first twelve centuries of Christianity actually witnessed women in the ministry of the Church. After this, the history of women's role was less bright.

Fortunately, the tide is changing and we are seeing more women playing an active role in the life of the Church. However, in certain quarters, much remains to be done. Unless the Church awakens to the realities of the world today (not to follow the world), the future may not be a promising one as a majority of the active and practicing Christians are women.

This is not a project that intends to propagate feminist ideas nor to fight them but to bring to light on one hand the sufferings of our dear mothers and sisters and on the other hand, their potentials. The dignity of a human being is *not* for trade! The Church has all it takes to restore, protect and defend the lost *precious* image of women in the world and in the Church. To be able to achieve their goals, in a world which is more and more demanding, the potential of women, who make up more than half of the Christian population, should be tapped without delay. It is a painful process but not an impossible one. In a nutshell, this project, taking Our Blessed Lady and many other women, as models, tries to say that women should not keep silent in the Church and that men may learn to listen to them.

KEYWORDS

Gurusi, Church, Women, African Traditional Religion, Dignity, Ministry

ABSTRATO

Este projeto, “A Igreja, a Comunidade e a Questão Feminina: Um estudo sobre a dignidade das mulheres entre os Gurusi do Norte do Gana”, é uma tentativa de analisar a forma como as mulheres são vistas na Igreja africana, no caso concreto da Igreja Gurusi, nomeadamente a sua dignidade, vocação e missão na Igreja e na comunidade. É o fruto de um trabalho pensado de modo cuidadoso e diligente. Inspirando-se no mundo em geral e na Igreja universal, procura perceber como poderá ser dada às mulheres uma melhor oportunidade e como poderão ser encorajadas a participar no mandato do Divino Mestre a todos os cristãos: “Ide e anunciai a todos”. Para que esta exigente tarefa possa ser bem-sucedida, deverá ser feito recurso a um leque multidisciplinar de estudos, nas áreas da antropologia, da teologia africana, da inculturação, da história, dos direitos humanos, tendo sempre em atenção as três fontes do depósito da fé (Magistério, Revelação e Tradição), bem como o necessário acesso a outras ciências sociais.

Como se trata aqui de uma problemática social que não apenas afeta a Igreja, mas também a nação, foram tidas em contas as medidas postas em prática por alguns órgãos sociais com o objetivo de minimizar este problema. A luta pela emancipação das mulheres, com e pelas mulheres, é tão antiga como o é a sua dominação e subordinação. No entanto, foi só o tempo das luzes, como a época do iluminismo é referido que este movimento ganhou impulso. Ao estudar a história das mulheres no mundo, podemos dar-nos conta de algumas histórias chocantes e até escandalosas que sistematicamente mantiveram as mulheres fora da vida da sociedade. Isto não se limita a uma religião, a um grupo de pessoas ou a um determinado tempo.

A vocação cristã tem o seu fundamento em Cristo e, como tal, pode-se perguntar por que razão as questões de género (sexo) devem ser o critério para permitir ou proibir alguém de exercer o seu papel na Igreja. Em vista disso, a Igreja primitiva estava atenta e ofereceu oportunidades às mulheres, embora de forma limitada. Durante os doze primeiros séculos do Cristianismo, as mulheres desempenharam um notável papel na Igreja. Depois disso, a história do papel das mulheres foi baixando, menos acolhido pela Igreja.

Felizmente, as tendências estão a mudar e vemos mais mulheres participando ativamente na vida da Igreja. No entanto, em certos setores, ainda há muito a fazer. A menos que a Igreja desperte para as realidades do mundo hoje (embora não seguindo o mundo), o futuro pode não ser promissor, já que a maioria dos cristãos praticantes são mulheres.

Este não é um projeto que tenha a intenção de propagar ideias feministas ou refutá-las, mas pretende mostrar, por um lado, os sofrimentos por que as nossas queridas mães e irmãs passam e, por outro lado, as suas potencialidades. A dignidade do ser humano não é algo para ser negociado! A Igreja tem tudo o que precisa para restaurar, proteger e defender a imagem preciosa e perdida das mulheres no mundo e na Igreja. Para ser capaz de atingir os seus objetivos, num mundo que é cada vez mais exigente, as potencialidades das mulheres, que constituem mais de metade da população cristã, devem ser aproveitadas sem demora. É um processo doloroso, mas não impossível! Em poucas palavras, este projeto, tendo Nossa Senhora e muitas outras mulheres como modelo, tenta dizer às mulheres, que não se calem na Igreja; aos homens, que aprendam a ouvir as suas palavras e seus silêncios”.¹

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Gurusi, Igreja, Mulheres, Religião Tradicional Africana, Dignidade, Ministério

¹ A. VALERIO, *As 23 Mulheres do Concílio: A presença feminina no Vaticano II*, Paulina Editora, Prior Velho, 2012, 5.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is (also) a *minister of the Church* at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well”. (Rom 16:1-2)

History of Research: The feminine question used here is an attempt to get into the world of women to see how they understand the world, how they see the Church, how society feels their pain, their dignity and vocation, their anxieties, their silence and last but not the least, their role in the Church, and more particularly in the Gurusi tribe of Northern Ghana. A lot has been said about women with different opinions, all trying to respond to what is going on in their hearts. As a theological and academic project, this work wants to present to the reader that it is not possible to fully understand a woman - her dignity, vocation, role in society and in the Church, her anxieties and her totality - without being allowed to be illumined by her creator, God. This has been made clear to us by many great figures in the Church. Notable among others is Pope John Paul II with his many writings and most importantly his encyclical, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. From the many readings I did, (though some may disagree), I am convinced of its teaching, and I will be referring to this most celebrated encyclical as “the Gospel” of women.

There is a very long history behind the choosing of this topic for my thesis. It is more a matter of lived experience than an abstract theological issue to be reflected on. As one who lived in the midst of his people, sat at the feet of the elders and was in contact with the daily struggles and untold sufferings of women, I deal with this topic which touches on a sensitive and delicate part of our culture which many are not happy with. Not all is negative for women in this culture, since they also have virtues that their fellow-women from other parts of the world lack. For example, the joy of motherhood which is highly revered, the care from all extended family members of both her paternal house and that of the husband’s to old age, rare divorce cases, the sense of human dignity, guardians of society and human life and so on. My coming into contact with many different cultures, both Africans and non-Africans, has triggered this desire to contribute a little to the fight with and for women in the Gurusi culture. Culture is not static and as such certain

unhealthy practice need to be pondered on and, if need be, to abolish or modernise, but always safeguarding their positive aspect.

The question of the place of women in the world and in the Church, which also speaks of their dignity, has received an increasingly tense discussion both in secular and ecclesiastical fields.² The actors on this stage, protagonists and antagonists, find terms to label each other. The former call the latter, among other names, “*machistas*”, traditionalists, chauvinists, *misogynists*, “antis”, etc. The latter call the former feminists, *misandrists* and so on. The Gurusi culture is no exception to this drama as it is a strong patriarchal society.

I would like to set the terms very clearly from the beginning: this work is neither about defending nor opposing feminist ideas nor does it aim at overturning the table in society. This academic paper takes the Gurusi culture as a case study to look at this prevailing issue in our beloved mother Church. For that matter, there are cases that are only peculiar to this culture and that only one from the Gurusi culture can fully understand. Even in the world and Church as a whole, there are tensions between those in favour of seeing women active in society and the Church and those who oppose it. One may ask, what is the real problem behind this tension? Is there a misinterpretation and misunderstanding of ministries and services? Is it about the politics of power and authority?³ Surely, the most celebrated Ecumenical Council, Vatican II, paved the way to ease this tension, but how has the Church lived this new “Spirit of Pentecost”?

Challenges: Taking the Gurusi culture as a case study, immediately I am faced with countless challenges. Firstly, this tribe have a higher percentage of illiteracy. Again, its main means of transmitting information and formation is oral and employs many myths and tales in the process. As a result, a great part of this work relied on oral sources. This presents another problem. Contacting these people was not a simple task since most do not have social means of communication and I am very far away. This work will only serve as thought-provoking material for further research. Also, I could not use many local expressions, for the simple reason that, it should be available to non-Gurusi people. This work does not cover all the cultural practices and the lived-experience of

² The 19th century is said to be the century of women and feminist movements.

³ This is the theme treated by Amadi-Azuogu Adolphus in the following books: *The Empowerment of Women in the Church Today*, *The Politics of Power and the Ordination of Women* and *Women and Gender Equality*.

women in the Gurusi area. Another challenge was finance. Apart from getting some relevant books, which are all outside this country, I was faced with the fact that the Gurusi people are scattered throughout the country (Ghana) and outside Ghana. Many phone calls had to be made, hiring people to go to villages to discuss with important people and send me the feedback.

Time was another factor. It took a long time and patience to get the necessary information. Some information was distorted and had to be crossed-checked. After spending a lot of money in calling, sometimes I got nothing from some people. The people on the ground who do field work could spend hours getting to certain places and ending up with nothing. Really a lot has been invested in this work. People who are in offices were not readily available to respond to mails and calls. The most difficult people to reach were the clergy. Some were either not available or kept postponing meetings and in the end gave me nothing.

Hypothesis: The subordination of women and violence against women are a common thing in the northern part of Ghana. This is very tied up with the culture and has a lot of influence on other aspects of the daily life of all in the society. In view of this, my aim was to find out how the Church situates herself in the midst of this.

Methodology: In this project, various methods were used, quantitative and qualitative. However, the qualitative method was the pronounced one. I relied more on primary sources through interviews, which were done through various means of communication available. Though I received a couple of the responses in written form, the most were audios. In the appendix, I shall put a few examples of the written responses which never followed the order in which the questionnaires were sent. Because of the specific goal I had in mind concerning this project, the questionnaires were sent to targeted groups and individuals. These include many women's groups throughout Ghana, the GCBC, priests, traditional leaders, Church leaders, anthropologists, religious congregations and other important figures I had to contact personally.

Purpose: At the end of this paper, it is my hope that we shall all go along with the words of the renowned historian and theologian, Adriana Valerio: To women that they may not keep quite in the Church. To men, that, they may learn to listen to their words

and their silence.⁴ This exactly summarises the aim of this project, nothing more, and nothing less.

Objective: The role of women in the Church is invaluable. In the words of Pope Francis, the Church will be barren without their active roles. The Second Ecumenical Vatican Council documents and recent magisterial pronouncements have opened the way for more roles to be given to women. This is in recognition of the immeasurable contributions women have offered to the Church - in many cases, with their lives. However, can we categorically say this recognition of the role of women is honoured in many, if not all, ecclesiastical communities? The main aim of this project is to point out the role of women in the divine mandate of Christ to all, which is to spread the Gospel. I am also finding out among the Gurusi community of Northern Ghana, which is part of the Universal Church, how this call has been heeded to and whether women are willing to take up leadership roles in the Church. As a student of theology, I am trying to be more practical, coming down to see what is currently going on in my society in the light of recent theological discussions.

I am aware of some of the recent issues that the Church has to battle with. Even more, as a northern Ghanaian, I am fully aware of some of the challenges of our cultural practices and how they affect women. This is noticed both in the traditional and the ecclesiastical spheres. In addition, I want to present some of the invaluable roles women have played in the church which has not been acknowledged through the centuries. It's also to help the church in the Gurusi area to take a better look at how the potentials of women, instead of being a threat, should be encouraged so that they may fully participate in all pastoral activities. After all, they are the majority and women's qualities and personal attributes are needed in most cases.

⁴ A. VALERIO, *As 23 Mulheres do Concílio*, 5.

CHAPTER ONE

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND THE GURUSI CULTURE

“The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different. Hence a woman as well as a man, must understand her “fulfilment” as a person, her dignity and vocation, on the basis of these resources, according to the richness of the femininity which she received on the day of creation and which she inherits as an expression of the “image and likeness of God” that is specifically hers...whenever man is responsible for offending a woman’s personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation”. (MD 10).

Once again, this work is neither about defending nor opposing feminist ideas, but truly looking at the invaluable personality of women. Whereas it is not true that the Church and the Bible have a total negative view on women, it is also not true that the Church and the Bible totally support women. Though it has some global reflections, it is against the background of the Gurusi culture that I shall discuss this all-important question of our beloved mother Church. For that matter, I will like to take the reader through an excursion into the Gurusi worldview where he or she can understand and eventually move along convincingly. As such, this chapter is devoted first of all to exploring the geographical location, history of the people, economic and socio-political structures, and culture and, eventually to the treatment of the dignity of women in the Gurusi culture. Furthermore, this first chapter will look at some social bodies that are actively committed to defending the rights of women and children in the area. These social bodies are local, national and international agencies. To bring down the curtain on this chapter, it will be good to have a conclusion to it with a critical look at how fair we have been to the people and culture of the Gurusi people in the Church. In other words, examining the ecclesiastical challenges posed by the feminine issue.

Culture in its proper sense is a strong factor that determines the identity of a particular group of people or race. We could say that it defines, teaches, preserves, and keeps a people alive through time. It is the soul, the bloodline of any society. In many African societies, culture and religion, African Traditional Religion (ATR), go hand in hand. The cultural influences of the Gurusi are so strong that even when a person converts to

another religion, there are sometimes residues of certain practices and convictions that may even be contrary to the new found religion.⁵ It is the very reason that for an effective evangelisation to take place there must be a conscious and good inculturation process. It is also in this line that I first start this problem by letting the reader into the worldview of the Gurusi people so he or she can be a fair judge. Life for the Gurusi people is holistic and as such we cannot bring out only what affects women without having a minimum knowledge of the culture.

1.1.0.0 Brief historical, geographical, social, economical and political description.

I shall not go into details of the above mentioned topics in this paper but only to present a brief description of these about the Gurusi people. All will agree with me that it is a herculean task when one embarks on a systematic and critical study of many African peoples, due mostly to the rare, non-existent or sometimes conflicting documented materials available. These societies in question mostly have strong oral traditions as the means of passing on information and formation from older generations to younger ones. In this case little or nothing is committed into writing. This could also be the result of illiteracy or the lack of a culture of writing and documentation. The mode of education and formation is mostly perpetuated through oral means.

Having said these facts, my presentation of these descriptions of Gurusi society, which is my tribe and where I sat under the feet of the elders, is mostly based on oral information received from the elders who have also received this information from oral tradition. Secondly, my information is gathered from some anthropologists who have done some studies among the Gurusi tribe or elsewhere which have similar features to the Gurusi. I have also used theses and papers presented by priests, pastors and seminarians⁶ whose works have either direct or indirect bearing on this tribe. Thirdly, there are some Non-Governmental Organisations that have done projects in the area where information is also gathered from them through the internet as well as personal contact with the researchers. However, as a native of this area, I find some of the information gathered from the various sources contradictory and sometimes incomplete

⁵ There are cases where people go to Church or Mosque and come back to perform sacrifices to their ancestors and other deities. If they can do these things, how cannot they have other cultural practices?

⁶ I am referring to seminarians of the Northern Ecclesiastical Province of Ghana. This comprises of the Tamale archdiocese, the Wa diocese and the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese.

or even false. This is as a result of certain biases, language barrier, or arm-chair research. This in a way testifies to the fact that it is difficult to study such cultures.

In colonial times, the region occupied by the Gurusi had the name “Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland”, coined by the renowned Indian-born British anthropologist, Captain R.S. Rattray who actually wrote a lot describing the place. The name “Gurusi” or “Frafra” among others refer to the same people which I shall clarify from the outset. The real name for this tribe is Gurune, Gurusi or Grunsi depending on the dialect one uses. The term “Frafra” was coined by the British colonial masters to refer to this people from their common greetings *Fara fara* or *fare fare*. In essence, *Fara fara* or *fare fare* has nothing to do with what it stands for now. There are many explanations which generally arrive at the same conclusion but differ at some points. Among those who gave the reasons for the name “*Frafra*” is the South African-born anthropologist, Meyer Fortes, who lived a very long time with the Tallensi⁷ and the Ashanti of Ghana for which he is well remembered. He said the name comes from the customary greetings “*naa fara, fara*” which is actually congratulations. Other people say the name “*Frafra*” came about when the foreigners heard the greetings of the Gurusi people, “*Fara fara*” which is “thanks for a favour received” or “a petition”. Samuel Atinga⁸ agrees with the above views and goes further to say that it was the British colonialists who coined the word “*Frafra*” to refer to the Gurusi people. The simple reason is that it was easier for them to pronounce the word “*Frafra*” than the demanding word Gurusi, Gurune or Grunsi.

The Gurusi (which will be used throughout this work) is a broad term used to refer to five (or four, if one omit the Nankani people) main dialects or ethnic groups that have the same culture and customs but with some variations in linguistic as well as ritualistic aspects. These include: the Gurusi, the Nabdan, the Boone, the Tallensi and the Nankani speaking people. All these are in the Upper East Region of Ghana.⁹ One may ask how come the other four ethnic groups bear the name Gurusi. Some think that the Nankase

⁷ Tallensi is one of the dialects of Gurusi. Ashanti or Asante is the largest ethnic group in Ghana. It is in the southern part of Ghana.

⁸ Cf. S. ATINGA, *Death and Dying: A Study of the Mortuary Rites of the Frafra of Northern Ghana in the Light of the Christian Funeral Liturgy, an Attempt at Inculturation*, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2006, 2. [Unpublished doctoral thesis]

⁹ Gurusi people occupy the centre (Bolgatanga), the Nabdan people to the east of the Gurusi sharing boarder with the Kusasi, Boone is to the north of Gurusi with border to southern Burkina Faso, Tallensi to the south, and Nankani to the Kasenas to the south.

should be the name for this people, like Peter Barker.¹⁰ Others disagree on this saying the Nankase is referring to the Nankani people, a name the Kasenas use to designate the Nankani,¹¹ who though Gurusi, fall politically under the Kasena-Nankana district with Navrongo as the capital town. Many elderly people responding to my questionnaire said it is as a result of the closeness of linguistic expressions, cultural practices and rituals where there are more similarities than differences.

The language spoken by the Gurusi people, Gurusi, belongs to the *Gur* language family, or Central *Gur* languages, a group of about seventy languages in the list of the Niger-Congo languages which are spoken in the Sahelian, Savannah of West Africa – Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, Niger and Nigeria.¹²

Within the Gurusi, it is only the Tallensi that have received intensive anthropological treatment by Meyer Fortes. The present geographical location of the Gurusi is not where they have always been. But to trace their original location is a difficult task. From legends, folktales and mythologies, the Gurusi people might have lived in the Ghana Empire which existed in the Middle Ages. This is because their present location is near where this empire once existed. These data however cannot be scientifically verified. In the words of Samuel Atinga, these people came from Burkina Faso because the Gurusi language is similar to that of the Moshie language spoken in Burkina Faso and the people of Zuarungu trace their roots back to Wuarungu in Burkina Faso. Again we could say that the mere fact that these languages bear similarities does not necessarily justify that the Gurusi people came from Burkina Faso. After all, Moshie is also part of the *Gur* languages just like Gurusi. It is something that can neither be proved nor disproved. Before the independence of Ghana on the 6th of March, 1957, the Gurusi people who are part of the three northern regions of Ghana belonged to the Eastern Dagbon kingdom with other tribes having their capital in Yendi under the Germans. In between the battle of Adibo in 1896 and the First World War, the Dagbon Kingdom was split between the British and the Germans. It was not until 1919 that the Kingdom was reunited. This kingdom which belonged to the German Togoland was added in the same year to the British administration called the Northern Territories Protectorate. After the

¹⁰ Cf. P. BARKER, *Peoples, Languages and Religion in Northern Ghana: A Preliminary Report*, Accra, Ghana Evangelism Committee/Asempa Publishers, 1986, 99.

¹¹ The major settlements of the Nankani are found in Sirigu, Mirigu, Kandiga, Nabongo, Kulgo and Naaga

¹² Cf. *Gur* languages, in www.britannica.com (taken on 08-01-2016).

plebiscite of the United Nations in 1957, most of the northern zone voted to be with the Republic of Ghana.¹³

Geographically speaking, the Gurusi people are found in the northern part of Ghana which comprises of the three northern-most administrative regions of Ghana: the Northern Region, the Upper East Region and the Upper West Region. These lie roughly along the north of the Lower Black Volta River with its tributaries like the White and Red Voltas and the Daka River drains of the northern Ghana.¹⁴ Northern Ghana is a neighbour to Burkina Faso to the north, Cote D'Ivoire to the southern-west and Togo to the east. Internally, it shares borders with the Brong Ahafo and Volta Regions to the south.

The principal towns of the Gurusi people are the Bolgatanga Municipality which is also the regional capital of Upper East Region, for the Gurusi people; Bongo is the capital town for the Boone people; Tongo for the Tallensi and Nabdan people, Navrongo is the capital for the Nankani people. The 2010 population census¹⁵ indicates the following data in terms of population and gender:

1. Bolga Municipality: 131,550 of which 62,783 are men and 68,767 are women.
2. Tallensi/Nabdan district: 115,020 of which 57,702 are men and 57,318 are women.
3. Bongo district: 84,545 of which 40,084 are men and 44,461 are women.
4. Nankani (Kasena Nankana East) district: 109,944 of which 53,676 are men and 56,268 are women.

I shall now move on to talk about marriage which is a very important institution in many African societies, cherished by all and through which the human race continues to exist. In the Gurusi culture, marriage is part and parcel of the norms of society and so, no normal woman or man should stay single. It is a duty, a requirement and anyone who refuses to marry is seen as a curse in the society, a deviant for that matter. It is an

¹³ Cf. National Commission on Culture, in www.ghanaculture.gov.gh (taken on 17-08-2015). Frafra (Gurune) People: The Hardworking Agrarian, Basket Weaving Experts and Musical People of the Upper Region of Ghana, in www.Kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.pt/2013/08/frafra-gurune-people-hardworking.html?spref=fb (taken on 17-04-2015).

¹⁴ Cf. National Commission on Culture, in www.ghanaculture.gov.gh (taken on 17-04-2015).

¹⁵ Cf. The Ghana Statistical Service, 2010 Population and Housing Census, Accra, 2012.

abominable act when one negates this duty to which he or she owes society. It is only through marriage and childbearing that the human race exists, is preserved and perpetuates, says Samuel Mbiti. For “through them, life is also deepened vertically and spread out horizontally...marriage and childbearing are the focus of life. They are at the very centre of human existence, just as man is at the very centre of the universe”.¹⁶ Thus, marriage and childbirth is the centre of human existence, an antidote to human mortality. In this regard, one who negates marriage indirectly wishes for the end of the human race. This takes us to another idea, namely that the purpose of marriage is procreation without which marriage is incomplete. Barrenness is seen as a sign of a curse on the individual and his family. For a man to have a status and acquire titles in society, he must father sons. A childless man will feel shy and may not be able to speak at public gatherings, or hold religious positions in the society. As such, he will continue remarrying until he gets offspring.¹⁷ The Gursi practices exogamous marriages with a strong and structured courtship process that can last a period of one to five or more years. Marriages are family affairs. It is not just a business of the would-be couples. It is the families of both the boy and girl who enter into dialogue and investigations to see to it that there are no impediments, that the other family have no bad history and that the family of the man is rich enough to take care of the girl and the children to be born. In certain cases, the boy and girl may not have had the opportunity to see each other prior to their marriage. Though not forbidden, divorces are rare as a result of this family involvement.

Monogamy and polygyny are the two types of marriages practiced in the culture. In the olden days, it was rare to see monogamous marriages but it is becoming the norm of the day. After the courtship process the lady is finally brought to the man’s house where other rituals will be performed. These rituals depend on whether the lady is the first born of her parents, a twin, the last born, the ethnic group and the circumstances surrounding the marriage. Apart from this, there is socialisation between the youth of the two families or clans. It is the family of the bridegroom who carries out these rituals as well as the paying of the dowry which is badly termed, “bride-price”, “marriage payment” or “wife purchasing fees”. The best term will be marriage gift which is very important in African societies. It is not a form of payment but

¹⁶ S. MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion* (2nd ed.), Waveland Press Inc., Long Grove, Illinois, 2015, 106.

¹⁷ Cf. S. OTTENBERG, *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society: An Interpretation*, University of Washington Press, Seattle & London, 1989, 3.

“a token of gratitude on the part of the bridegroom’s people to those of the bride, for their care over her and for allowing her to become his wife...At marriage she is not stolen but is given away under mutual agreement between the two families. The gift elevates the value attached to her as a person and as wife...legalizes her value and the marriage contract. The institution of this practice is the most concrete symbol of the marriage covenant and security”¹⁸.

This misinterpretation of the dowry even by Gurusi men makes them think they have bought their wives and as such they are part of their property. Wives are often relegated to the background and treated anyhow with little or no rights at all. In many cases when a man dies leaving behind his wife/wives, the widow(s) is/are also inherited as part of the properties by the brothers of the deceased. The dowry I am talking of here varies from group to group. Among the Gurusi, it is four cows or their equivalence in sheep, a cock and a hoe.

Economically, there are less economic activities in the northern part as compared to the southern part of the country. As a result, masses of northerners move southwards in search of jobs, better standard of living and education. Most of government infrastructures, industries, developmental projects are located in the southern part of the country. The area covered by the Gurusi people is the Guinea Savannah vegetative zone of Ghana having two separate seasons: dry and wet. The dry season is the longest from October to May. The rainy season is from June to September. Due to the few rains, the people, who are mostly agrarian, engage in subsistence farming of crops like cereals, legumes, vegetables, and livestock. There are also economic activities like metal and leather works, the weaving and selling of smokes, as well as the famous artefacts that people all over the world throng to buy, the Bolga baskets, hats, fans made from elephant grass.

The socio-political organisation of the Gurusi people is a very complex system, typical of many African societies. For example, the concept of a nuclear family until recently was foreign to the Gurusi people. This concept has many meanings. It could be all members living in a particular house or members of the same clan. As Samuel Mbiti says, a family in Africa has a wider connotation than it has in Europe and North American societies. In a traditional African society, a family includes parents, children,

¹⁸ S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (2nd ed.), Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford, 1989, 137.

uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, grandparents, grandchildren and immediate relatives. The whole clan is a family. These live in big compounds and in certain houses, one need a visitor needs a guide to go to go to another yard¹⁹ or to go out of the house. I am talking of five to twenty nuclear families living in their respective quarters but joined together with walls. Family according to the Gurusi culture includes the living and the dead. The deceased members, the “living-dead”, are equally treated with respect just as the living. In some instances, the dead are accorded more respect than the living because they are now in a better place and able to guide and protect the living. There is a strong bond with the dead. The “unborn” are also family members. In the words of Samuel Mbiti, which rightly reflect the Gurusi culture,

“the African concept of the family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its existence is not extinguished. The family provides for its continuation, and prepares for the coming of those not yet born”.²⁰

The Gurusi have a patrilineage cultural system where members of each clan, *yizou*, trace their roots back to the same ancestor, *yaaba*. The binding force for a clan is its taboos and totems which keep the members in constant communion and communication with one another even if they no longer live in the same geographical area. As such, marriage is strictly forbidden between a boy and a girl with the same totemic ancestor, no matter how far they live from each other or how wide the generational gap, as these are all bound by the same consanguinity. They are brothers and sisters. Terms like cousins, nieces, nephews, paternal uncles, step-father, step-mother, step-brothers, in-laws²¹ and sisters and the like do not exist in the Gurusi culture. It is a father, a mother, a brother, or a sister. In this patrilineal system, it is the oldest surviving son who is always the head of the family or clan. The family ties are very strong with a strong solidarity in any occasion like funerals, sacrifices, farming, marriage ceremonies, and rituals.

In every human society, certain institutions are equipped with power to ensure law and order. In the Gurusi culture we have *yidaama* (family heads) at the family level and

¹⁹ By yard I am talking of the building facilities for a husband and wife with their children like rooms, kitchen, food storage barns, etc, but sharing a common kraal with other yards.

²⁰ S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 105.

²¹ Only parents can call the husband or wife of their daughter or son in-law. For brothers or sisters of the husband or wife, they call him or her, husband or her wife. It is a very complex relationship but all done safeguard the solidarity that should exist between the family members.

na'doma (chiefs) and *kiima* (elders) at the clan or village level. The custodian of the land who takes care of spiritual matters is the *tindaana* (land owner). He commands respect and is feared more than the chiefs since he is the link between the physical and the spirit worlds. The earth (mother earth) is a sacred shrine dedicated to the earth goddess who sees to the wellbeing of all. Politically, it is the paramount chiefs together with sub-chiefs and elders who rule. Apart from the diviners who can be women, all these heads are men.

1.2.0.0 Religious context of Ghana and the Gurusi culture: main religious features

Under this headline, I will be discussing the religious features of Ghana in general and the Gurusi tribe in particular. There are three religions in Ghana: African Traditional, Christian and Islamic Religions. The 2010 population census showed that, 71.2% are Christians, 17.6% are Muslims and 5.2% are African Traditionalists. Muslims are mostly found in the northern part of the country. There is a high level of religious tolerance in the country and in many cases within the same family one finds adherents of these three religions. The Gurusi people fall within the category of the African Traditional Religion (ATR).²² There is a strong Muslim presence than Christianity since the Islamic religion came to Ghana through Burkina Faso and the Christian religion from the southern part of Ghana.

I shall briefly point out some features of ATR. In the belief system of the Gurusi, there is a corresponding relationship between the physical world in which we live and that of the spiritual world. These active worlds interact constantly with each other which directly influence human progress to the extent that, what happens in the spiritual world affects the physical and vice versa. The spirit world is ever present in the daily lives of the people. As such, there is always a spiritual or religious explanation for any unusual event and human beings are subject to the principles of these two worlds. Religion permeating all aspects of life makes it impossible to separate the divine from the profane. For this reason, Samuel Mbiti says “Africans are notoriously religious”.²³ One cannot separate in the daily lives and activities of the African, the sacred from the profane. In everyday conversations, important gatherings, festivals, farming activities and the like, there is always the consciousness of the sacred, God.

²² There is a strong presence of Muslims in this region but all converts from the African Traditional Religion.

²³ S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.

Talking of the ATR among the Gurusi, I can point out some cardinal points in the belief system. In order of importance, we have the following structure:

- a) The belief in the Supreme Being
- b) The belief in the Ancestors,
- c) The belief in the divinities and lastly
- d) The belief in other spirits.

There are also other aspects like divination, sacrifices or the pouring of libations, among other religious ceremonies. Permit me to say a little about these features. The Supreme Being, *Yine*, is at the very top with no equal. The name, *Yine*, comes from another word, “*ayina*”, meaning one, alone or only. Thus *Yine* is Only One, Alone. He is often prefixed with the reverence article, “*Na*” and so *Na-ayine*. His abode is above the skies. The concept of God is both immanent and transcendent as some expressions show. For example, *Yine ka zae* (God is not far) and *Yine yeti* (God sees) refers to his immanence. In his transcendence nature, his ways of doing things are different from human beings: *nera a saala dag Yine* (human beings are not God). He cannot be fully known.

The name of God is evoked, both in blessing and cursing.²⁴ The Supreme Being is so revered and feared that he is worshipped through intermediaries. In the Gurusi traditional society, an elder or chief is not approached directly. The chief speaks through an intermediary. Even though the person being addressed is present and understands what is being said, he **must** wait and receive the message from the intermediary. He also answers the chief through the intermediary who may pass the message to the chief modifying it with the right words and proverbs. Analogically, God is worshipped through the ancestors and other divinities who act as the intermediaries. So, labelling adherents of this religion as animists or idol worshippers outright is a big mistake.

The belief in the ancestors, “*yaadoma*” is very important in the society. They perform pivotal roles in the life of the community. They are very much felt alive among the people. The term “ancestors” should rather be termed “fathers” and “forefathers”, says Meyer Fortes. According to him, “though it is always clear from the context of speech

²⁴ *Yine wan soke ho* (God will (literally ask you) punish you) and *Yine kae maale ho* or *Yine sunge ho* (God bless you).

and of ritual that the reference is to the dead and not the living, the terminology indicates how close they feel their ancestors".²⁵ They have more space in the society than the divinities because they feel and know the human condition since they once lived on earth. They are also in a better position to plead to God on behalf of the living. There continues to be a strong link between them and the clans or families they departed from. Death is not the end of one's life but the gateway home. After death, one travels to a better land, the real home. Not everyone can become an ancestor, just like in the Catholic Church not all are canonised.

There is a very strict moral process in the admission of one to the *ancesthood*. Among these standards are: he or she must die a natural death, in old age, must have raised a family, be a responsible person in society, an elder and mentor in the clan or society, with a life of sacrifice and self-giving among others. No one who practiced dark magic, witchcraft, harmed people, and one who died of a curse or some types of diseases, who dies childless or at a young age, can be an ancestor.²⁶ Some ancestors can be reborn into the community. Thus reincarnation is another belief. We recognise these ancestors who are reborn from their names. An example is *N so lebna* (my father has returned).

Next is the belief in the divinities. These have powers and can influence the lives of people and natural events. They are like the ancestors but separate from them because unlike the ancestors who once lived in flesh, they have never. Their origins are unknown but have links with communities, villages, families who worship them. In the words of Bolaji Idowu,²⁷ these divinities and the ancestors form a separate homogeneous category of their own. We could say that these are domesticated spirits. Their places of abode are groves, rocks, mountains, hills, rivers, streams and trees. Shrines are dedicated to these spirits and no light or fire is allowed in these sacred zones. One can only enter these places barefooted with respect. No farming activities or lumbering is allowed in these designated zones. If any of these offences are committed, the culprit or the community will experience the wrath of the gods. We have examples of these places like *Baat Daa* at Baare, the *Tengzug* shrine in Tongo, *ayia* in Bolga. These divinities are benevolent spirits and so are consulted in difficult times. They

²⁵ M. FORTES, *Religion, morality and the person: Essays on Tallensi religion*, Cambridge University Press, The Edinburg Building, Cambridge, 1987, 194.

²⁶ Those who died young in battles can be ancestors since they died defending the society.

²⁷ Cf. S. BAYETI, *Jesus Christ of Frafraland: a Study of the Interface of the Gospel and the Frafra Culture and its Implication for Evangelisation in the Frafra Context*, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, 2011, 29. [Unpublished masters' thesis]

receive thanksgiving sacrifices at joyful times. Usually, it is the *Tendaana* (land owner) or *yezuo* (head of family or clan) who goes to consult the divinities and offer the required sacrifices.

There are other spirits different from the ancestors and the divinities. These are feared because they can cause harm to people and mostly move about at night, manifesting themselves in different forms. These spirits can also enter the womb of a pregnant woman and be born. Suspected children are killed and secretly buried in the forest. These spirits are responsible for causing all types of disasters in society. Included in this category are *suuba* (witches) who possess evil powers and can kill by eating the “soul” of the person. Witches have powerful eyes through which they see things that an ordinary person cannot see. There are neither shrines nor sacrifices to these spirits. They live in rivers, forests, mountains, lakes, the sea and graveyards. Wherever they live, the place is dangerous and one should never go there in the night or pass there in the day alone. You only experience them when you are attacked. In rare cases, these spirits can be good. Examples of such instances are when they empower one with certain supernatural knowledge like healing and divination. People who possess these powers are consulted always.

Divination and sacrifices are part of the religious activities. Human life is full of mysteries. To the African, every event that happens has an explanation which calls for divination. Before important events take place, there must be divinations to determine how these events can be carried out. The *bogro* (divination) is the way to unravel all the mysteries and it is the *bakolko daana* or *bakolbugreeba* (agents of divination) who carry out the divination on behalf of the people. From time to time too, family heads will visit these diviners to find out the state of affairs of the family, living and dead. Hardly does the Gursi carry out any event without consulting the diviner to know how to go about it. Such events include marriage, childbirth, naming ceremonies, death, funerals, and building of new houses, farming, harvesting, travelling and others.

After these consultations, sacrifices are required. The forms of prayers are different depending on the outcome of the divination. We have bloody and bloodless sacrifices depending on the request of the gods, which I shall not go deeply into. In bloody sacrifice, a victim is immolated (a fowl, goat, sheep or cow) and the blood poured over the deity. As blood signifies life, so it is the life of the victim given in return for a

favour. In bloodless sacrifice, water is fixed with flour of millet or sorghum and poured over the deity. During times of intense drought, flour without water is poured over the rain gods to inform them of the serious nature of the drought. Depending on the occasion, there are three types of sacrifices: thanksgiving, pacification and supplication. Sacrifices of thanksgiving are joyful and celebrative ones in thanking the gods for favours received during the year like good harvest, child naming ceremonies, successful business adventures, journey mercies, health and marriages among others. Sacrifice of pacification is done when there is a transgression or evil act in the society. We can talk of examples like cutting down a tree or branches of trees in the shrines, having sex in the bush, adultery, abortion, suicide, murder, stealing and a lot of others. This is done to appease the anger of the divinities. The sacrifice of supplication is carried out before any big event like farming, constructing a new house, taking up a business or any adventure.²⁸ As there is always a constant communication and relationship with the dead, sacrifices are also performed often.

1.3.0.0 The dignity of women within the Gursi Cultural context

After a brief but vivid description of the Gursi people and their worldview, I now proceed to discuss the question of the dignity of women in this culture. In order for us to have a clear picture of this issue, I shall also talk briefly of some cultural practices as well as some of the cultural resources. This chapter is aimed at seeing how there can be a good understanding of the Gursi culture and how the Church in the midst of this cultural constraints can respond to the unceasing cries of women. The discrimination of women in the Gursi culture cuts across all religions. When one's dignity is taken away, the person's humanity is also brought to question. In the Gursi culture, there is a saying that, before a dog is hanged, it is first given a bad name. So, to understand how women are treated or how their dignity is viewed, one must first of all understand many things in the culture. This "bad name" is already labelled against women by nature, as the culture sees it. These views have historical and traditional roots which I call structural discrimination and inequality. Though women have a very low status in the Gursi culture just like in many traditional cultures, it is also true that women have certain inalienable rights.

²⁸ Cf. S. ATINGA, *Death and Dying*, 12.

There are many cultural, political, psychological, and other traditional obstacles that continually put women under men, by which they are relegated to second class citizens. Let us turn to what Pope John Paul II has to say about the dignity of women. “The dignity of women is measured by the order of love, which is essentially the order of justice and charity” (MD 29). He went further to state that, the dignity of a woman is connected with both the love she receives by reason of her femininity and the love which she gives in return (MD 30).

These words rightly and clearly state the “mission” of women in the Gurusi society in particular and in the Church as a whole. As a native of the Gurusi culture, I can say that women continually give out love but are rarely recognised. It is not uncommon to hear mothers say “for the sake of my children I will not abandon the house” or “for the sake of the family I will persevere”. Meanwhile all this time, they are turned into punching bags. It is so amazing how these women, especially mothers, treasure their vocation to motherhood with unimaginable sacrifices. The amazing words of Gertrud von le Fort are worth quoting: “To be a mother, to feel maternally, means to turn especially to the helpless, to incline lovingly and helpfully to every small and weak thing upon earth”.²⁹ These women continually remind us all of the merciful gesture of God towards the human race as we celebrate the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy this year.

1.3.1.0 Cultural Practices and mentality

Culture colours our vision of things and the people around us. The term, “culture” as we use it daily is so an imprecise term to describe the social realities in a given society. It embraces many things within a given society. In the Gurusi community, culture it is the root of the people. It includes religious life, social, morality and the person. I will devote some few lines to discuss some of these in the Gurusi society. Meyer Fortes³⁰ has a good piece of information to showcase the Gurusi culture, an excellent ethnographic adventure of its kind. To him and other anthropologists, culture is a complex term to define. From Spencer-Oatey, Hellen’s compilations of what is culture in 2012, it is said that two American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn in 1952

²⁹ G. le FORT, *The Eternal Woman: The Timeless Meaning of the Feminine*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2010, 78.

³⁰ Cf. M. FORTES, *Religion, morality and the Person*.

critically went through the various concepts and definitions of culture and made a list of 164 different definitions. The problem, says Spencer-Oatey, is explained by Apte who wrote in the ten-volume Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics making stunning observations. In this compilation of Spencer-Oatye, there are varied amazing descriptions of culture.³¹

Continuing on this, let's take a look at some few definitions of culture. Piddington says the culture of a group of people is "the sum total of the material and intellectual equipment whereby they satisfy their biological and social needs and adapt themselves to their environment".³² Sir Edward Tylor defined culture in the widest ethnographic sense as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".³³ Another great scholar, Sir Raymond Firth writing about culture says if we understand society as a group of individuals with a particular way of life, then this way of life is termed culture. Also if we see society in terms of aggregation of social relations, the content of those relations is culture. "Society emphasizes the human component, the aggregate of people and relations between them. Culture emphasizes the component of accumulated resources, immaterial as well as material".³⁴

The French Dictionary has among the following observations of culture which are similar to the definitions given.³⁵

- Culture enriches the mind through intellectual exercises.
- Culture is knowledge in a particular field.
- It is all material and ideological phenomena that characterises an ethnic group or a nation, a civilisation, as opposed to another group or to another nation.
- In a social group, culture is a set of behavioural characteristics of someone's signs which include language, gestures, and clothing to mention a few, that

³¹ Cf. What is Culture in [www.http://go.warwick.ac.uk/globalpadintercultural](http://go.warwick.ac.uk/globalpadintercultural) (taken on 22-09-2015).

³² E. AYISI, *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture* (2nd ed.), Printed in Great Britain by Fletcher & Son Ltd, Norwich, 1979, 1.

³³ E. (Ellis) CASHMORE, et al, (4th ed.), *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*, Routledge, London, 1996, 91.

³⁴ E. CASHMORE, et al, (4th ed.), *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations*, 91-92.

³⁵ Cf. *Le Larousse Expression*, ©Larousse/VUEF2002.

differentiate his or her behaviour from someone belonging to a different social class.

The various definitions and observations available so varied as they are, the following features cut across: a group of people with a particular way of life, mankind's sociological and biological needs, that which contributes to the survival of the human species as well as the factors that safeguard this survival like physical, sociological, psychological, ecological, and spiritual. To know the human person, we must first come to a full comprehension of what constitutes and institutes his or her society. This is true even more of the African, I might say. The "social facts" or "collective manifestations" of which the great French sociologist and philosopher, Emile Durkheim spoke of are what constitute the system marking out how and why a group of people behave and do things in a certain manner.

For example, in a gathering among the Gursi people, a lady must give her seat to a man or a boy no matter how old she is. She must always bow to a man. A woman can never own a property less talking of a house (things are changing now). She can never take a decision by herself. If there is no man around, she must consult her son no matter how young he is. A lady cannot make a journey alone; there must be at least a boy to accompany her. There are codes reserved for men and women and these "sacred" lines must be observed, especially by women, or the consequences will be severe: payment of a fine, expulsion or in certain cases life threatening actions. As we see, in other cultures like the European ones, these are absurd, sounding like tales from another planet.

Culture therefore can be summarised as "'art', 'customs' and 'ways'...the common possession of a body of people who share the same traditions in social terms. Such a body is society".³⁶ However, almost all cultures have been influenced by other cultures and so talking of pure cultures especially this age of globalisation is rare. There are interactions and intermarriages of cultures. Certain elements are easily accepted while others bring shocks or encounters total rejection. We see these cultural influences in the Gursi culture.

³⁶ E. AYISI, *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture* (2nd ed.), 3.

I now turn to enlist some of the cultural practices and belief systems of which some are less beneficial or prejudicial to women. I am indebted to Agnes Apusigah in this place³⁷ together with the results obtained from the questionnaire. These beliefs and cultural practices stretch over a wide variety of many aspects of life and vary from group to group.

1.3.1.1 Taboos and Norms

- a) Food: it is a taboo for a woman to peep into the storage barn of the family and in some cases, first sons as well. This is the secret of the man. In some communities too, a girl will not be allowed to eat chicken or dog meat when she attains the age of puberty otherwise she will fall sick. A pregnant woman is prevented from eating eggs and meat; if she does so, the child to be born will be a thief. In the sharing of an animal, there are portions that women cannot eat. The thigh of a fowl for example. Mostly, women are allowed to eat only guinea-fowls. The reason is that if they are allowed to take chicken, they will finish them all secretly since these stay close to the house. Guinea-fowls are wild, living on top of trees or fly away which makes it difficult for women to catch. Birth-rank as well as generational elements also counts. When an animal is killed, it is given to women to prepare but it is men who do the sharing later.
- b) Space and property: *poka n'soe yire* (the house belongs to a woman) is always said but referring to the inner circles of the house only. In fact, a woman never owns a house in the real sense of having rights over it. As home managers they control all activities in the household. This role is very important in the sense that it fortifies and strengthens the family. The kitchen for example is the powerhouse of the family where the essentials of life (water and food) come from. The woman maintains the house and cares for the children. In other words, all activities within the house are for women: preparing food, cleaning, doing the dishes, fetching firewood, plastering walls, nursing children and flooring the ground. Men (and boys) are barred from entering the kitchen or performing the above mentioned duties. The good news is that, a man cannot fight or follow a woman into the kitchen to beat her up. Also, women cannot fight outside these

³⁷ Cf. A. APUSIGAH, *Indigenous Cultural Systems and the Rights of Women and Girls in the Upper East Region of Ghana*. This research paper was presented to Action Aid Ghana, 2004.

circles or punish children outside them. Women have powerful weapons in these areas. Any man, who enters these areas or is hit by certain utensils, will lose his manhood. A woman can neither sit with nor be found where men are chatting or having discussions except that she is explicitly invited to testify or say something. On the possession of property, women can own only few things. Even with the few she has, a man can easily pounce on them but never the other way round. In certain instances, she needs permission of her husband to use what is hers.

- c) **Morality:** married women cannot have an affair outside marriage. It is her husband who has exclusive sexual rights over her. If she goes against this, it is so serious that rituals have to be performed immediately to take away this “curse”. In the process, the lady is humiliated. If the crime is not confessed, some serious illness or death will visit the family. This does not apply to a man since he can even marry two or three females who may even be related. In this case, mostly it is the first wife who being so happy with her husband goes to her paternal house to bring more ladies to her husband.
- d) **Marriage:** “forced” marriages whether directly or indirectly are common. It could be betrothal where children are given out in marriage without them knowing what is going on. When they are of age and want to date, they are simply told they can no longer date anyone because they are married. It could also be the case where a girl is given out in marriage to an old man in return for a favour. In this case the girl has lost her freedom to choose whom she really wants to spend her life with. Another phenomenon these days is the case of an unplanned pregnancy. When a girl “accidentally” gets pregnant from any man or boy before marriage, the parents of the girl will chase her away from the family.³⁸ She must go and live with the one responsible, whether they love each other or not. It is a shame to have such ladies in their paternal homes. Certainly, such a marriage which is not founded on love will not be lived happily. The lady is trapped in such a situation forever.

³⁸ In olden days, this was an abomination where the girl would have been banished from the village or rituals performed to take away this curse. The lady will be totally humiliated in the process since all in the village will know what happened. The rituals process itself, which is meant to scare others, is very painful.

- e) Education: formal education, if it was³⁹ accepted at all, was reserved for only boys. It was always said that educating a girl is a waste of time and resources. Waste of time because she will lose the time she has to concentrate on learning from her mother or other women about marriage life. Also, education delays women from marrying early enough in comparison to those who have not been to school. The father or brothers are impatient to receive her dowry. It is a waste of resources because she will eventually marry out and what has been spent on her will be carried to her husband's house.

1.3.1.2 Maxims, proverbs and mythologies

It is said that women are by nature weak. This is expressed in these proverbs like “a woman may kill a snake but cannot cut off its head”, “a woman cannot/does not grow beard”. Women are dependable; they cannot keep secrets, as they are easily persuaded and the like.

Temporality: women do not own houses because they belong to somebody else. Thus, she does not completely belong to her father's house since she will marry and move out. She does not also belong fully to her husband's house since she moved in and could abandon it when things are tough. It is the duty of men to provide food and security at all cost. Men are so important in society, that if a man begets only girls, he will try to marry more women to see whether he can find a “fertile” woman who can bear him sons. He may be kind enough to keep the other(s) or he may divorce them.

Childbearing: having only girls in a family is unacceptable. It is seen as a loss and a sonless man feels ashamed in the midst of his fellow men. Boys are *yire meteba* (house builders) and girls are *yire voore* (empty house). An unmarried woman is *yir-yi'a* (incomplete house). As men stay at home and women marry and move out, having too many girls is a loss. The richness of a person is measured in terms of how many children he or she has or how many live in a particular than material wealth (*A tari neereba ngane a tari yiri*). Women themselves are even sad when they have many girls

³⁹ There is still a very low level of formal education of the girl-child in many communities. The problem of girls getting pregnant and dropping out of school is another issue that discourage parents from educating their girl-child.

or only girls. For “woman – and worse still a man – who has no male child contemplates old age with horror”.⁴⁰

Rites of passage: among the many practices which are injurious to women is *yabga mwaa*, clitoridectomy. This practice also known as FGM is carried out by women. The Tallensi and the Nabdams have never practiced this. It was a practice young girls looked forward to.

Courtship and marriage: this is a very highly treasured institution in the Gurusi community where children are seen as the fruits of a good marriage. We have marriage by elopement or kidnapping and betrothal where it is not always the wish of the lady to marry the man in question. *Ta'za'ba* (brother or sister lover) is another case where distant cousins can engage in sexual relationships but can never marry. It could be the situation where a girl is forced to stay at home to give birth to a male child for her father before marrying in the case where a man could not father a son. Though children from this relationship belong to the father of the girl, it is not always the case that these children will be treated well. They are often termed bastards. In most cases, the lady is left alone to struggle and take care of the child therefore increasing the cases of single motherhoods in the community with its entire burden. We also have the cases of widowhood rites and inheritance which increases the humiliation of women. Though some of these have minimised drastically, their effects are still felt and many still live under the shadows of these cultural practices, most of which are considered crimes.

1.3.2.0 Women's willingness to take part in society

The question of whether women are willing to take up leadership roles in the Gurusi society has no simple answer. On the surface, it may seem that women are not willing to assume leadership roles, especially in the midst of men. It is culture that dictates so and being aware of the consequences, no one dares to challenge its structures. It is not surprising to see that the first people who react against women leadership being women. In chorus with Martha, they call Mary to come back to the kitchen. They prefer to be under men's leadership than that of their fellow women.⁴¹ It is often said in my culture

⁴⁰ S. OTTENBERG, *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society*, 3.

⁴¹ It is also true that some women in power are meaner to women than men.

that women are weak and so they cannot take up leadership roles that require a “lion’s” heart. There are certain codified feminine qualities that men are forbidden to exhibit like emotions of weakness. These include: crying, being playful, caring, nursing, fear, pain, etc. Men are the defenders of houses and families. They go to war; they sacrifice a lot for their families, even to the point of dying to protect them. As a result, we see in my society many widows than widowers. We see many women left alone to take up roles of their late husbands. The only way things can change is an effective and conscious education for both women and men. History and experience in a wider way have shown that women can be best leaders in certain instances more than men. This could be in religion, politics, medicine, education, law, business and other fields.

Generally, women, as my investigation shows, are not willing to take up leadership roles especially in the midst of men. As some women told me, cultural and social stigmas from both men and their fellow women contribute greatly. Apart from the lack of funds that can equip women to get the necessary skills to take up such position in society, family life style⁴² make women who would have had the ability or courage to take up such position lose interest. There are no many women who are well prepared enough in terms of academics to take up certain roles. In the Gurusi society, there are instances where men feel good in oppressing women, in order to put a lack of interest in women who try to challenge them in leadership positions. For instance, in political campaigns when women try to file their nominations, the arguments passed around are not whether they are competent. Comments like, this particular woman is disobedient, she had no good family education, she is *pug-burra* (woman-man)⁴³ and all kinds of defamations go round.

Some roles played by women are very crucial showing how men are rather incompetent in many things. The caring for homes, children, tedious and delicate issues of daily life reserved for women are among the things that few men can perform. Thus having all these responsibilities, definitely, one cannot afford to hold other posts outside the house which will be taking her out of the house every now and then for meetings, programmes and passing many days or weeks outside her matrimonial home. Her family will be at stake. As responsible and prudent people, they prefer to sacrifice other positions to care

⁴² All house chores, taking care of children, childbearing alone without a help from their husbands etc are some of the reasons.

⁴³ This is a big insult in the Gurusi culture. In the same way, when a man is termed a woman, it is one of the greatest insults said to man.

for their families. Despite all the work they do, they are not owners of properties. In the face of all these, some are resigned to their fate. There are very few who have the audacity even to try to take up leadership positions. The kitchen is not only meant for women, I think. Decisions affecting all members of the society as the reserve of men alone should not be.

1.3.3.0 Social Bodies Response

There are delicate and sensitive issues in some cultures that require diplomatic and prudent measures in addressing them. One of such is gender-related questions. This gender issue in many indigenous cultures is a bone of contention and can be heightened where there are misinterpretations of or, better still, misinformation on, the values of the said cultures. This is because many researchers or foreign bodies prefer to draw premature conclusions based on false information or arm-chair researches. We all belong to cultures which are as different as our vision of things.

There are many social bodies such as local, national and international, governmental and non-governmental organisations which are actively engaged in gender issues in the country in general and Gurusi area in particular. These social bodies are so many that their lists can neither be exhausted nor their activities. Most of them have devoted themselves to a close relation with the cultural systems to see how best they can shape their activities in view of promoting, defending and empowering women and children. Some of the activities of these social bodies make me think about the real solidarity they show towards women. Is it that the world really has compassion towards women or that this solidarity is a lever in disguise to keep women always at the receiving end, therefore continually exploited? In Marxist terms, could this be the opium for women that make it impossible for them to compete with men and eventually triumph? These chain questions might furnish possible areas of research in the future. The reason for this feeling is that some agencies are not interested in knowing what the real needs of women are, or what formation or information they need in order to receive their just value and rights. They are only interested in getting women material items, money and the like to put a temporary smile on their faces. They want to have celebrations with them and after which they will take photographs to prove they are doing something.

Their way of thinking and doing things could be for a good reason but giving somebody fish instead of teaching him or her to fish is definitely not a help.

As a result of the above mentioned issues, among others, social bodies are working and collaborating with the indigenous people in these areas to eliminate or change, in the best possible way, some of these cancerous issues in my society. These social bodies range from radical to passive ones. There are also government commitments to eradicate these unhealthy issues on national and local levels. Some of the known actions engaged by the government of the Republic of Ghana as well as other social bodies are listed here. There is the Ghana 2003, Ghana 1995, Nikoi 1998. We can also make mention of the Ghana 1992 Constitution, the Ghana Vision 2020 and not forgetting the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy documents that have as their main objective the protection of women.⁴⁴ Dating back to a previous age in the history of the country, there have been movements both political and civil that have as their priority the emancipation of women (as well as girls and children).

Ghana is a signatory to many global initiatives. We have the United Nations Charter on Rights (1949), African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1989), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Action Aid Ghana, World Vision among others. On the national level, Ghana is committed to this cause with the enactment of: Interstate Succession Law (PNDC Law 111) in 1985, the Domestic Violence Act adopted in 2007, and Anti-Human Trafficking Act in 2005. Other operational bodies in this area to better enforce laws are the Children's Act, the Criminal Code of 1960, Act 29 on Rape and Domestic Violence and later amendments criminalising Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and widowhood rites harmful to women. We also have the Women's Manifesto and the Domestic Violence Bill which all aim at enhancing women and girls' rights as well as creating platforms where aggrieved women and girls can seek protection and justice. Though some of these bodies go into studying how they could understand the culture and bring about change, there still remain a lot to be done. They have been met with great oppositions and on certain occasions things go from bad to worse for women as a result of the intervention of these organisations.

⁴⁴ Cf. A. APUSIGAH, *Indigenous Cultural Systems and the Rights of Women and Girls in the Upper East Region of Ghana*, 2004.

1.4.0.0 Conclusion to the chapter: synthesis, critical approach, and ecclesiastical challenge

Many issues have been raised in this chapter. The objective is to bring the reader to understand the Gurusi worldview, what the culture has in store for women and how women are looked upon. Though the image of women in the Gurusi is not so positive, not everything in the culture should be seen as bad. Otherwise we may be doing some disservice here. Gender issues are very delicate especially in certain institutions like the Catholic Church and in certain societies like the Gurusi. However, we need to have a different way of thinking as to how we can go forward. Education in the form of formation and information is one of the keys to aid us in addressing this issue.

The struggle for the Rights of Women which are also Human Rights has a very long and interesting history. These Rights include the right to a dignified life, to education, to vote and to be voted for, to a decent work, to equal pay, to respect, to freedom of expression especially in the midst of men, to choose her own husband out of love, to hold leadership positions. The list goes unending as we are all aware of the facts. Some of us have either witnessed or experienced some form of inhuman treatments meted to women.

We have come of age. Humanity has evolved a lot and yet it is unfortunate that certain obvious negative acts still remain the same. It is even worse when we move to certain cultures or classes of peoples. Due to these insurmountable atrocities against some people simply because of gender, there are countless movements who advocate for the Rights of women. These movements and activists however are neither homogenous in nature, nor in their objectives nor methods. We could say this about some traditional societies. On the other hand, we have modern societies which have canonised certain negative acts and tried to push them down the throats of others. These two ways are not among the paths travelled in this paper.

Coming to the Church, there are people who try to reread the Sacred Scriptures, Tradition and the Magisterium to see the place of women in society and in the Church. All take their point of reference as God, Christ, the Church, they have the same objective: the salvation of all. As in any human institution, there are points of divergence and convergence. So, there are some hitches that cause conflicts between the

advocates of the Rights of women and their opponents. The Church (everyone) needs to be sensitive to what goes on and be guided by the Holy Spirit, who does not work along gender lines, to see how best the different talents of all her children could be harnessed for the greater glory of God (*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*). The struggle does not remain at the level of the universal Church but to the local Churches as well. In my case, I want to see how the local Church of the Gurusi area which is within the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese, erected on the 30th of May, 1977 with its Patroness as Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, has seen and addressed, or otherwise, this problem.

Pope John Paul II in *Mulieris Dignitatem* wrote:

“The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at his moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling”. (MD 1).

This priceless message, invaluable as pearls of wisdom for our day, in a vivid way summarises the indispensable roles of women in society and the Church and sets the tone for this work.

The feminine question is a real issue which has many manifestations needing urgent attention. When one takes a historical trip along the road to the emancipation of women, the results are startling. These tugs-of-war between the pros and antis of feminine rights cut across all religions, all societies, all spheres of life and all disciplines. Depending on the field of play, where others are fighting for “advanced rights”, others are still languishing under the shackles of men longing for the Sun of Justice to shine on them. Thus, these women long for some fundamental human rights. They yearn to breathe, but in vain. The causes, complicated as they are, are found deep within the society, in the hearts of all and seem to be part of our “nature”. But we need to speak up, accept certain challenges, bitter truths though they may be. Silence, they say is gold but certainly it loses its virtue when charity calls for speech, says St. Poemen. In this project, I want to draw the attention of the Church in general and the local Church in particular to this issue, to tap the rich talents of women for the good of all. Thus, women should be encouraged to take up leadership roles. Where they express interest, they should be given opportunities and the support of all. This will also mean that the Church should be

ready to form more women so they can give of their best in any field they occupy. The Church, attentive to the messianic message of the prophet to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to set the oppressed free (Is 61:1), should take up the cause for the rest of society to follow. Surely, the Church will be in the right direction in doing this.⁴⁵

The role of women in the Church and society is amazing. In his response to the Filipino girl, Pope Francis' tearfully moving words in Manila, Philippines about the space of women in the Church and society is important.⁴⁶ Women have so much to speak to today's society. He went further to say that sometimes we are too *machistas* and not allowing or giving space to women. The fact is, he continued, a *woman*⁴⁷ sees things with different eyes than *men*. A woman knows how to pose questions that we men cannot understand. Certainly, the question of this poor young girl made the Supreme Pontiff drop his prepared speech. The holy pontiff confessed that, this girl asked a unique question that has no answer. Women can sometimes only express certain deep questions with tears.⁴⁸ This is what happened. But this does not mean that there are no women who harbour evil thoughts with this girl.⁴⁹ Pope Francis ended by advocating for more space for women in the Church and this is not the first time that this appeal is addressed to the Church. Once again, how does the Church look at this proposal?

The fact is that, in the face of all these humiliations, the advocate for change is either slow or sometimes pushed aside. There is the need for a strategic move that takes into account the involvement of the indigenous people, in order to bring about a change. Being aware of the lip service to women with many unfulfilled promises, Pope Francis during his first press conference on the issue of advocating for a theology of womanhood said it was time for concrete measures to be taken to ensure women are actually given a space in the Church and society. In this project, I intend to contribute my small quota to the discussion of this topic from a Christian, and for that matter, from

⁴⁵ Cf. A. VALERIO, *As 23 Mulheres do Concílio*, 26.

⁴⁶ Cf. PAPA FRANCISCO, «Encontro com os jovens na universidade de São Tomás de Manila», *L'osservatore Romano*, 4, 2015, 10-12.

⁴⁷ Notice the use of the singular, "woman" as against the plural "men". This I reflected much coming to the conclusion that, what one woman is able to see is more than what a couple of men can see in this statement.

⁴⁸ Cf. PAPA FRANCISCO, «Encontro com os jovens na universidade de São Tomás de Manila», 10.

⁴⁹ Like Lady Macbeth.

a Catholic point of view. These are some of the challenges that the Church in the Gurusi society will need to deal with.

After these cultural descriptions, I am now set to move to the next chapter which talks of the teachings of the Church on the dignity of women and their role in the Church and community. How do we talk of the ministry of women in the Church, their unhindered, undiluted functions and roles they play in the Body of Christ in this case? This is my aim. Themes like hope, real joy, dignity, despair, respect, and humiliation as well the need to be loved will feature. In short, making the voice of women ever dear to Jesus sound again in the ears of all today. I could call it, conversion. How has the local Church responded or not to this issue will be well dealt with in the second chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHURCH TEACHING ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

“Over the past months, on various occasions, I have drawn attention to the positions of the Holy See and to the teaching of the Catholic Church on the dignity, rights and responsibilities of women in today’s society: in family, in the workplace, in public life. I have drawn inspiration from the life and witness of great women within the Church throughout the centuries who have been pioneers within society, as mothers, as workers, as leaders in the social and political fields, in the caring professions and as thinkers and spiritual leaders”.⁵⁰

In this chapter, the discussion will be centred on the Teachings of the Church on the dignity and role of women in the Church and community. This will include documents of Ecumenical Councils, Encyclicals, Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation and finally the response of the local Church and community with a conclusion to the chapter. In Tradition, Revelation and Magisterium, we find the fullness of Truth. These, though separate, are complementary. I shall discuss Tradition and Magisterium in here while Revelation, otherwise called Sacred Scripture, will be discussed in the next chapter.

The teachings of the Church on the dignity of women and their role in the Church is (should be) nothing less than that of men. The dignity of the human person is something that cannot and **should not** be put on the table for negotiation. He or she is an end in himself or herself; has an intrinsic value. There are countless references one can find on the Social Teachings of the Church and other ecclesiastical documents over the years that champion the dignity and equality of all persons. The basic principles underling human dignity and equality are what the Creator willed for all; for man and woman he created them (Gen 1, 27). If the Church feels obliged, and justly so, to defend this patrimony of humanity in the world, why will she deny it to her daughters? This obligation on the Church is clearly stated “What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defence and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to

⁵⁰Pope John Paul II address to delegates of the Holy See at the 4th Women’s Conference in Beijing, in www.laici.va/content/laici/en/sezioni/donna/tema-del-mese/ottobre2015.html (taken on 01-11-2015).

whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt”.⁵¹ To attain this social justice, an unconditional respect for the transcendent dignity of man and woman is called for; they represent the ultimate end of society.⁵²

With these views on the innate dignity and value of humanity in the Church (and in the world) where women belong, I will move on to look at what kind of Church women are yearning for, especially in the contemporary milieu. This is an urgent issue which the Church needs to address with courage and humility especially as we witness the fast changing roles of women in society today. We know the pivotal roles selfless women play(ed) in society and the Church as history shows and we are also witnesses to some of these roles. In the face of all the humiliations, abuses, restrictions, slavery of every kind, I may ask: have women been given a voice, or have their voices been heard? There are many diverse opinions on the role of women in the Church: passive defenders of women’s rights who are merely content with the present status quo and only seek more respect and the acknowledgement of the feminine gift to the Church. And radical views, where there is a great and ardent hunger for the Sacred Orders to be granted to women, among other things.

If we look at the Gursi society, we can see clearly all the injustices that women and girls are subjected to, daily in society. But what is the situation in the Church? Rarely is this seen as one of the issues that need attention and even if people reflect on it, it is hardly discussed. Some even think that there is nothing wrong with the minimal representation of women or their role as “spectators”. The arguments are that it is culture and custom. As my researched proved, rarely can this topic be discussed in an emotionless manner. Tempers rise when one advances with this issue either with the majority against this topic or the minority in favour of it. There are some who do not want to even hear of it. Those who will be patient with you in discussing this topic begin to quote cultural dictums or even half-quoted biblical passages either to justify the domination of women or to prove how women are oppressed. Those who support the present status of women in the Church and society do say women are not oppressed. They never use these terms “oppressed” or “subordinated”. Sadly enough, there cannot be change when the people do not admit that there is such a situation, never mind speaking of how to redress it. But surely, if Christian spirituality is an art and discipline

⁵¹ John Paul II, *A Sollicitude Social da Igreja, Carta Encíclica «SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS»*, 1987, 47.

⁵² Cf. *Catecismo da Igreja Católica, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1993, 1929.*

that bring Christ to the ‘here-and-now’ daily lives of everyone who profess the name of Christ,⁵³ one will expect that the daily issues of today be addressed not with archaic ideas, cultural belief systems or a strong cling to certain traditions, that do not go with the spirit of the gospel, but with rapt attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit speaking in modern languages and customs – the signs of the times, as is often said.

This paper whose aim is to point out feminine issues in the Gurusi culture that need attention, looks forward to see how a better understanding or a (re)discovery of the dignity and the role of women in the ministry of the Church can aid in the valorisation and empowerment of women which have a direct bearing on evangelisation and pastoral activities of the area. At the same time there is the need to safeguard their indispensable feminine roles in the family, Church and society. As we shall see, these demands – or should I call them religious and ecclesiastical rights of women, as daughters of mother Church – are not in the least contrary to the Sacred Scripture nor Tradition when looked at carefully with an open heart and attentiveness to the promptings of the Spirit. We just need to tear down these imaginary walls, overcome our fears, and do away with the obstacles, even if these are raised by women because of prolonged oppression. We may recall the lovely episode in the Gospel of John where Christ (God, thirsting for the love of his creatures)⁵⁴, had to overcome the numerous obstacles raised by the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. To women who, out of fear of traditions, sit on the fence and cite unreal obstacles in taking up certain ministerial and pastoral activities, this is a lesson. To those who are not comfortable with the presence of women in leadership, this is also a lesson helping us to open up to women and in some cases take the first step to “entice” women to aspire to these leadership positions without fear.

2.1.0.0 The teachings of the Church

Though the Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents of Vatican II are paramount to my work in this chapter, the way it was celebrated, its preparation and the spirit of openness is what interest me most. The reason is that, for the very first time, women (few) were invited to participate. The announcement for women to take part in this Council, a

⁵³ Cf. E. JOHNSON, (ed.), *The Church Women Want: Catholic Women in Dialogue*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2002, 11.

⁵⁴ Cf. St. Thérèse of Lisieux on John 4:7: M. HOLLINGS, (ed.), *By Lone Alone: Daily Readings with Thérèse of Lisieux*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London, 2000, 24.

shock to some and admiration to others caused division in certain parts of Christendom. Following the intentional and provocative question of the Belgian Cardinal, Leo Jozef Suenens to his fellow Conciliar Fathers, reflects the seriousness of this issue: “Why are we even discussing the reality of the Church when half of the Church is not even represented here?”⁵⁵ One can see immediately in this question that the Church was (is) awakening to this reality. Women, says *Gaudium et Spes*, “ought to be permitted to play their part fully according to their own particular nature. It is up to everyone to see to it that women’s specific and necessary participation in cultural life be acknowledged and fostered” (GS 60).

Five years later, the Church wrote the following heart-breaking message concerning the participation of women in liturgical celebrations, almost inverting the above message: “The traditional liturgical norms of the Church prohibit women (young girls, married women, religious) from serving the priest at the altar, even in women’s chapels, houses, convents, schools and institutes”.⁵⁶ In this same document it is stated that women may proclaim the scripture readings with the exception of the gospel from *another suitable* place designated by the Episcopal Conferences, take the Prayers of the Faithful, function as pass-keepers and welcome the faithful into the Church, etc. Behind this text which was to correct certain abuses in the liturgy since the Vatican II, is a very retrogressive spirit I think, in relation to the role of women in the Church when compared to the spirit of Vatican II. As a native of the Gurusi tribe, I can say that in many things, the Church in the Gurusi area sticks too much to the letter of this above cited document. An example is that, in the Bolga deanery, there are no female Altar servers. This society of Altar servers is a very strong one in the Ghanaian Church enjoying many prerogatives from all. Girls are not admitted and no one attempts to introduce girls inside. That was by the way.

The Church through Vatican II sought to recuperate the invaluable treasures of history: the early Christian communities and of the Fathers of the Church, and to reconcile these with the needs of the contemporary world. This Council is a strong bridge between the

⁵⁵ Tobin, L. Mary, Women in the Church since Vatican II, in <http://americamagazine.org/users/mary-luke-tobin> (taken on 05-10-2015).

⁵⁶ SACRED CONGREGATION ON DIVINE WORSHIP, notice to the, Third Instruction on the Correct Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, «LITURGIAE INSTAURATIONES» 7. In A. FLANNERY, (ed. Gen), *Vatican Council II: The Post Conciliar and Pot Conciliar Documents*, Dominican Publications, Dublin, 1987, 214.

old and new worlds. Looking at the past with gratitude, the Council also recognised the times the Church did not present herself as a worthy Bride of the Lamb. With the same zeal, the Council looked to the future with unwavering hope. In this way, we see the Church as “Beauty so ancient and so new”,⁵⁷ borrowing enchanting words of St. Augustine of Hippo. Women and the advocates of women’s rights in the world and ecclesiastical circles in particular have Vatican II to be grateful for. However, can we certainly say without reservation that the Church is ready to carry out what this Council said in relation to women in particular and the laity in general? Within the various divides in the Council, there were some who welcomed with a sincere and joyful hearts women’s role in the Church and hoped to see this role enlarged, while others against any change, said that this is against the faith and doctrine left by Christ. The Church which, becoming more aware of the invaluable role of her dear daughters through the Magisterium, made way for women to participate in that Ecumenical Council though with the vow of silence.

Among the key ecclesiological principles of Vatican II is its conception of the Church as mystery and sacrament. Mystery because she reveals to humanity the hidden presence of God’s unconditional and unfolding love, and a sacrament in that she unites us with God and the whole human race (LG 1). The Church continues to unveil to the human race the Triune God, the God who continually invites us into a personal and communal relationship with himself. He is experienced by those who seek to respond to his will; nevertheless this mystery is infinitely unfathomable and inexhaustible. In this way, the Church continues to do what Christ did on earth and what she received as a command from the Lord until he comes again in glory. In summary, she is to make visible that love of God through the human community.⁵⁸ This human community called the Church, the new Israel as *Lumen Gentium* puts it, is

“the chosen people of God...: ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’; sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope, and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the bases of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because “there is neither Jew

⁵⁷ AGOSTINHO, *Confissões*, (13^a ed.), (X:27) Lúcio Craveiro da Silva, S.J et al (Revisão do texto), Livraria Apostolado da Imprensa, Braga, 1999, 242.

⁵⁸ Cf. B. PRUSAK, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries*, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, 2004, 14.

nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus" (LG 32).

Among all God's creatures, men and women are distinguished from all others. For they have (rational) souls, created in the image and likeness of God, with the same nature and origin and are redeemed by the salvific action of Christ. As such, they have the same divine calling and destiny which is the basic principle of undiluted equality which must be recognised and upheld as such (GS 29). In this, the Church is against every form of discrimination: social or cultural, whether based on sex or race, colour, social condition, language or religion. These need to be done away with as they are totally against the will of God. Regrettably, our world still witnesses abuses of all these rights daily. For example women are not given the chance to live freely and to make free choices like embracing a state of life, acquiring education or cultural benefits equal to those recognised for men in many parts of the world. Equality in this case will demand humane and just condition of life for all (GS 29).

2.1.1.0 Ecumenical Councils' documents

Here, I am interested in few documents of Ecumenical Councils that are either directly or indirectly related to the role or ministry of women in the Church. In doing this, I would like to prove that women actively involved in the ministry or affairs of the Church, which have been in practice since ages, is not against Tradition, the Sacred Scripture or Magisterium nor an invention of modernity. These practices have been accepted and in some cases, encouraged as certain Councils' documents show. The Church has wholly accepted these, and therefore, they cannot be unbiblical or against Tradition. Speaking technically of Ecumenical Councils, we have twenty-one: from the first Council of Nicaea (325) to the Vatican II (1962-65). Apart from the first two Ecumenical Councils (the first Council of Nicaea, 325 and the first Council of Constantinople, 381), that had had a universal recognition by the Christian world, the later councils continued to be sources of separation with the first seven Councils aimed at attaining orthodoxy.

In the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, among the main points of discussion, was the heresy of Arianism. This heresy, according to many scholars, is among the

greatest forces⁵⁹ that shook the foundation of the Church. The question of the role of women in the Church was not part of the agenda but it was mentioned in passing in a canon that refers to the acceptance of former members of the Syrian theologian and heretical patriarch of Antioch, Paul of Samosata into the Church. A friend and high official to the great queen of Palmyra, Zenobia, denied the three Persons of the Holy Trinity saying that it was only during Jesus' baptism that the Logos came to dwell upon him and so Jesus possesses no divine nature. He is the same as all men. Paul was eventually excommunicated in the local council of Antioch in 268. There were women among his sect. Below is an excerpt of the relevant text of canon 19 referring to the diaconate ordination of women in the Church.

“...In this way one must also deal with the deaconesses or with anyone in an ecclesiastical office. With regard to the deaconesses who hold this position we remind [church leaders] that they possess no ordination [=cheirotonia], but are to be reckoned among the laity in every respect”.⁶⁰

A simple reflection shows that there existed deaconesses in the Church, thus women exercising leadership roles was accepted. Whereas this was not a council called to debate matters of gender, it was important to the ministerial and pastoral activities of the Church which shows the existence of deaconesses. It was never in the least mentioned that these deaconesses were heretical as their leader. They were not doing anything against the norms of the Church. Can we say that women serving in pastoral and leadership positions are unbiblical?

The Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) treated the question of deaconess clearly to the point of putting conditions and age limit for their ordination. Before this council, the minimum age for a woman to be ordained a deaconess was 60 years as stated in 1Tim 5:9 but this council reduced it to 40 years. Clearly, with this act, the Church actually encouraged more women to receive this ministry by lowering the minimum age as contained in canon 15: “A woman shall not receive the laying on of hands as a deaconess under forty years of age, and then only after searching examination...”⁶¹

⁵⁹ It is often said that the Arian heresy and the Protestant Reformation are two greatest problems that the Church have greatly suffered.

⁶⁰ G. ALBERIGO, et al (a cura di), *Conciliarum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 1996, 15.

⁶¹ G. ALBERIGO, et al (a cura di), *Conciliarum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 15.

In 692, the Council of Trullo or Quinisext⁶² was held in Constantinople, and followed the decision of the council of Chalcedon to maintain the minimum age for the ordination of women as deaconesses at forty. What is unique to this council is the stressing on the sacramental nature of the ordination with the use of the term, *cheirotonia*, ‘ordination’ for deaconesses, the very same term used for the ordination of deacons and priests. This is contained in canon 14 as follows: “In like manner let no deacon be ordained before he is twenty-five, nor a deaconess before she is forty”.⁶³

The next important council for us is the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, 787. This council never said anything about deaconesses or their role in the Church but said something else very important in its first canon. It endorsed all apostolic canons of previous general and local councils. This means that what has been agreed on the ordination of women was also endorsed.

We can acknowledge the efforts these Church Fathers made to follow the gospel. Equally, there were other ecclesiastical assemblies that were against the ordination of women as it is today. We have local Synods like Nîmes (394), Orange (441) and Epaon (517), the last two in the region of Gaul. Canon 26 of the Synod of Orange banned the continual ordination of women and those who already exist should be “laicised”.⁶⁴ Canon 21 of the Synod of Epaon says: “We abrogate the consecration of widows whom they call ‘deaconesses’ completely from our region. If they wish to convert, no more than the blessing of penance should be imposed on them”.⁶⁵ Clearly, these words to deaconesses show the existence of the practice which they do not want in their region though it continued in other parts of the Church and even in the region of Gaul as is evident in the last will of St. Remigius of Reims (533) where he talks about his daughter Helaria, a deaconess.⁶⁶ There is a huge list of deaconesses in the Church who carried out remarkable pastoral activities. But as stated in the beginning of this section, these first seven Councils were aimed at attaining orthodoxy and so to attain the maturity of the

⁶² There is no consensus to the ecumenicity of this council. However, it later received papal approval by Pope Adrian I (772-795). For more information on the convocation of ecumenical councils as well as their nature in general and the council of Trullo in particular, see <http://www.arcaneknowledge.org> (taken on 24-10-2015).

⁶³ Canon 14 of the Ecumenical Council of Trullo, taken on 24-10-2015, in www.womenpriests.org (taken on 24-10-2015).

⁶⁴ Cf. L. SWAN, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women*, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, 1954, 108.

⁶⁵ Canon 21 of the Synod of Epaon, in www.womenpriests.org (taken on 25-10-2015).

⁶⁶ Cf. L. SWAN, *The Forgotten Desert Mother*, 108.

present-day Church it had to go through certain periods. If we believe that the Holy Spirit is the guiding principle of the Church even to the end of times, we could be sure that some of these practices were to be peeled off. There were many practices which were accepted in the Church but were later seen as unhealthy. We can mention things like forced conversion, inquisition, married clergy, Episcopal titles given to children and some even named cardinals. We can get a full grasp of some of these abuses from Church history, which eventually contributed to the Reformations. Certainly some things had to be done away with. But the role of women in pastoral ministries should not be one of them. The ordination of women is not part of this project but is here mentioned in passing to show how the role of women in the Church from time immemorial has gone through changes.

Vatican II, seen as a pastoral council, did a lot for the cause of the dignity of women and their role in the Church. Though it never said anything of raising women to the Sacred Orders, it nonetheless stands tall among other councils in the history of the Church in other respects. In the Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents, there is a great concern as to how the laity can be given more roles in the Church and society. It is important to mention the address of Pope Paul VI to women on the 8th of December, 1965 on the closing of the Vatican II. Since then, women have never been the same, regarding their vocation, dignity and respect. In this address, he affirmed the words of Cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens that, women constitute half of the human family. Moving further, he said something so important which will later serve as the inspiring words for John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

“As you know, the Church is proud to have glorified and liberated women, and in the course of the centuries, in diversity of characters, to have brought into relief her basic equality with man...”⁶⁷

These words from the Supreme Pontiff clearly show the intention of the Church by word and deed. Adriana Valerio⁶⁸ has given us a wonderful work that showed the progress of the Vatican II, thanks in part to the feminine presence with their voices. Though limited, they found the right time and the right words to intervene. In this

⁶⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Letter to Women on the Closing of the Second Vatican Council*, 8th, December, 1965, in www.vatican.va (taken on 12-10-2015).

⁶⁸ Cf. A. VALERIO, *As 23 Mulheres do Concílio*, 2012.

passionate book, Adriana Valerio shows how it was difficult before the first woman⁶⁹ was finally able to enter the Conciliar Halls. Even the papal call did not deter some men who saw the presence of women unpleasant and against the norm and tradition of the Church. They tried to reduce these women to symbolic gestures but as capable as they are, with a sense of duty to the Mother Church, women found ways to contribute enormously. Things would not have been the same without them. These twenty-three women – ten religious and thirteen lay – experts in various areas for which they were chosen worldwide, were indeed wonderful. The encouragement of the then deceased pope, Pope John XXIII, directed to the laity to also forward their worries and demand to the Council, was a rare occasion that women could not afford to miss. Before the Council, women were already pleading with the Church to modify the nuptial liturgy in three different occasions – in London (1961), in Orleans (1962) and then in Fribourg (1963).⁷⁰ To me, this book is a critical re-reading of historical facts on the cause of the feminine figure in society and in the Church. With better psychological, sociological, philosophical and theological insights of recent studies, this Council made an opening for the recognition of the unspoken indifferences towards women and how the Church had long ignored some of the great potential and immeasurable treasures in store of the Body of Christ.

Ever since, women have never ceased to fight for the realisation of their dreams (and society's). As we have seen, the problem is not with the Church being opposed to the concerns of women who she loves so dearly but the interpretation and implementation of these instruments in the various ecclesiastical communities. For this matter, we see many women's movements springing up, especially in northern America and Europe as well as in other zones in the Church whose aim is to push their cause forward.

2.1.2.0 Encyclical letters and other documents

I must stress again and again that the Church is not at all silent on the dignity of women and their role in the Church and society though they encounter many obstacles. Their presence, needed more than ever in the Church and society, is captured in many Church

⁶⁹ The French lady, Marie-Louise Monnet was able to enter the Conciliary Halls on the 25th of September, 1964 following the papal announcement, Pope Paul VI, on the 8th of September that same year that 23 women will be joining the Ecumenical Vatican Council II as auditors.

⁷⁰ Cf. A. VALERIO, *As 23 Mulheres do Concilio*, 27.

documents. It is evident that, from the fourth century onwards when Christianity gained its independence and acquired the status of an official religion in the Roman Empire, leadership roles in the Church became more public and official. At the same time, women, according to social mores of the time, were expected to stay out of public affairs. The Church, which always distinguished herself from the rest of society, stood out against this practice though in some places it bowed to societal pressure. We have women who exercised important roles such as community leaders, teachers, and preachers as well as practicing ascetic lifestyles.

It is true that the Church was not fully and structurally organised as it is today and leaders were called from communities based on their good lifestyles. In comparison with the society at the time, Christianity offered women freedom, liberties and respect which the dominant cultures never did. It is one of the factors that women were attracted to the faith which also deepened their spirituality, where with ardent passions; they were ever more willing to pay any price, including the sharing of their blood as Christian martyrology recounts. When Christianity emerged from being a persecuted sect to a powerful religion and later a persecutor of doctrinal deviants, we see that the role of women began dwindling.⁷¹ Women were also persecuted in different forms especially those who had mystical experiences, the very experiences which made some men great spiritual leaders in the Church. Saint Teresa of Avila is an exception in this case. Her experiences were seen as authentic.

At the same time, the Church never lost this sense of the indispensable role of women in the Church or their dignity as humans. This would have been ridiculous on the part of the Church since she is, by all standards, a leading campaigner of human rights and the dignity of all persons (from conception to natural demise) in the world. In this section, I would like to probe into certain encyclicals as well as other documents that treat the role of women in the Church and society. Due to the numerous encyclicals, apostolic exhortations and other documents, I shall deal with a few.

The first document that either treats the question of human rights and dignity directly or indirectly to me is *Pacem in Terris* by Pope John XXIII. There are many things that constitute the rights and dignity of the human person. The most fundamental of these is his or her human nature where he or she is “endowed with intelligence and

⁷¹ Cf. L. SWAN, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 10.

freewill...These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore inalienable”.⁷² These rights and duties with their undeviating consequence of the nature of his or her personhood spoken of here is sometimes forgotten of or in certain circumstances wilfully negated. We witness of late that people are increasingly being informed of their rights and as such they fight for them. It is these rights, be they moral, legal, religious, etc, that reflects the dignity of the person. These have a direct link to the fight for the rights of women in society and the Church as a whole, especially in the Gurusi culture. Likewise in the *Redemptoris missio*, the *urgency of the missionary activity* in the Church is a call to all Christians – dioceses, parishes and pastoral units – to endeavour to see to it that the missionary activity of the Church does not suffer for want of zeal or personnel.

Making reference to the encyclical, *Evangelii Praecones* of Pope Pius XII, Pope John Paul II recalled the missionary character of all the people of God. He lamented the dwindling nature of the full incorporation of the laity, men and women. However, he made a specific eulogy to women in the following terms “How can we forget the important role played by women: their work in the family, in schools, in political, social and cultural life and especially their teaching of Christian doctrine?”⁷³ Indeed, he affirmed that many Churches or communities owe their very existence to the untiring efforts of lay women (and men). The Christian life does not only stay within the walls of the Church in his or her day-to-day life and activities. In the same manner, the rights of women as I discuss here are not only in liturgical and pastoral activities but family life as well. The encyclical *Casti Connubii* by Pope Pius XI on the meaning and dignity of marriage is worth noting here. This calls on Church leaders in the Gurusi area to see how those who opt for the marriage vocation, especially women are accorded the required dignity and rights. As a noble vocation, women in married life contribute a lot to society. The care of family and the education of children as well as society as they go about their work have no measure⁷⁴.

Among the documents of the Church that I am inclined to call the “gospel” for the liberation or emancipation and the valorisation of women in contemporary times is the

⁷² PAPA JOÃO XXIII, “Pacem in Terris”, in P. STILWELL, (Coord.), *Caminhos da Justiça e da Paz: Doutrina Social da Igreja, Documentos de 1891 a 1987*, Rei dos Livros, Lisboa, 1989, (2ª ed.), (no. 9), 200.

⁷³ PAPA JOÃO PAULO II, *Missão de Cristo Redentor, Carta Encíclica «REDEMPTORIS MISSIO»*, Editorial Apostolado da Oração, Braga, 1991, 71.

⁷⁴ POPE PIUS XI, *Encyclical Letter On Christian Marriage, «Casti Connubii»*, Rome, 1930 in <http://w2.vatican.va> (taken on 13-10-2015).

highly acclaimed Apostolic Letter of St. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Before going deeper to treat feminine concerns, this document which pointed out some of the principal ideas in relation to women in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, also recapitulated some of the previous documents that touched on this topic showing the magisterial concern. As mere words or documents are not enough, the Church went ahead to confer the title “doctor” (in this sense, “doctor” is derived from doctrine) on women, a proof that their writings are in line with the doctrines of the Church and can be used for teaching in the Church as well as to refute heresies. We see this title conferred on Sts. Teresa of Jesus and Catherine of Sena⁷⁵ by Pope Paul VI and again upon a request of an Assembly of Synods of Bishops, he set up a special commission with the task of studying the problems and concerns for the “*effective promotion of the dignity and responsibility of women*”. Presenting to the Church *Mulieris Dignitatem* in the Marian year is very significant not only with the timing but the content too.

Taking Mary, the mother of God and our mother as an authoritative reference, going through the Sacred Scriptures to bring out the seemingly forgotten attributes of women and certain passages of Scripture frequently and wrongly interpreted to the detriment of women, one is amazed as to what the Church lost and stands to lose in negating the active participation of women in the Church. This Apostolic Letter is also enriched by the fruits of the Vatican II documents. Basing on the eighth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*,⁷⁶ the Holy Father made an interesting and extraordinary connection linking this “*woman*” to the rest of humanity, from whom the human race continually renews itself, from whom a “*fundamental inheritance is realised*”. This links us to the mystical biblical beginning as Gen 1:27 recounts (MD 2). Every aspect of the life of Mary is studied in detail to show her important role in the history of our salvation. She is the mediator of all graces. This role of Mary is also read about in the lives of women of all ages where women likewise are exalted. A woman is to be found “*at the centre of this salvific event*” as we read in the annunciation account of St. Luke. The self-revelation of God, who is the inscrutable unity of the Trinity, is outlined in *the Annunciation at Nazareth* as St. Luke gives us a detailed picture in Lk 1:31-37.

⁷⁵ Others are St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the greatest saint of modern times and patron of missions by Pope John Paul II, 1997; St. Hildegard of Bingen named doctor of the Church in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI.

⁷⁶ This is titled, “*The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church*”.

We cannot exhaust all these beautiful teachings of the Church presented in this document. Going through the history of Israel, the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Wisdom Literature, the Holy Father showed the indispensable roles women played and will continue to play for the progress of not only in the Church but the human society as a whole. In the NT, especially in the Gospels, women were also at the forefront with Jesus. In times when the Apostles were found wanting for fear or lack of understanding, women were always there.

The Scripture, especially the book of Genesis which constitutes the basis of the Christian anthropology is given a 'new' and 'true' meaning here. The book of Genesis which is also called the foundation of human 'ethos' is rooted in the image and likeness of God inherent in us from the beginning. It is the OT and the NT together that help us to build up that 'ethos', where in the commandment of love, it attains its climax. Together, man and woman are called right from the very beginning to this mutual coexistence, "one for the other" (MD 7). Woman as a helper of man spoken of in Gen 2:18-25 in the Christian sense offers us something new to reflect on. It is not only the woman who is to help the man. The reverse is also true; the man has to help the woman too expressing their undivided unity, a sign of the interpersonal communion which can be likened to the divine communion, the life of the Holy Trinity in which mankind shares. In this way, men and women "discover their humanity ever anew and to confirm its whole meaning...To be human means to be called to interpersonal communion" (MD 7). Putting all these together, we see that a "*woman cannot become the 'object' of 'domination' and male 'possession'*" (MD 10). Christian anthropology which has its roots in the bible explores all these complexities in mankind and the social environment around it.

For this simple reason, one who has a negative vision of any person based on his or her sex, colour, race, religion, health and social status is a mutilated person. Christ is presented as the champion of women liberation among his contemporaries irrespective of their social status, race, creed, health, etc. This sometimes not only scandalises the Jewish authorities but also his own disciples. He had a simple and yet extraordinary relationship with women. For example, his Apostles were marvelled that he was talking to a woman, and worse still a Samaritan (Jn 4:27). The Pharisees could not understand why he could allow himself to be anointed by a sinful woman (Lk 9:37). Correcting the legalistic Scribes about the eternal plan of God of the indissolubility of matrimony, he

defended the rights of a woman in marriage as well as her dignity as a person. But as these Scribes taught they had all legal means to defend their case by quoting Moses as their authority, they received the sword right to their hearts when Jesus referred to their hardened hearts and sent them back to the very beginning (Mt 19:3-10). The gospel is full of many scenes where Christ was always there for women. Women felt liberated, loved, respected and received the dignity they deserved with the truth of Christ even in situations when Christ had to refer to their sinful status. We have never heard in any passage in the bible where a woman left the presence of Jesus unchanged or sad. They even give all for the Kingdom despite being exploited by the religious establishment (2Kgs 17:7-16; Mk 12:42).

Right from the beginning to the end of the earthly mission of Christ, women were always there. The Paschal Mystery is full of scenes where they appear, from the foot of the cross till the dawn of the resurrection:

“women are the first at the tomb. They are the first to find it empty. They are the first to hear: ‘He is not here. *He has risen*, as he said’...They are the first to embrace his feet...They are also the first to be called to announce this truth to the Apostles” (MD 16).

The two dimensions of the vocation of women, motherhood and virginity are highly treated in this Apostolic Letter too, so rich with concrete examples which cannot be fully exhausted. In all the nine chapters of this document, men and women clearly find their proper place which is equality as persons yet holding unto their respective differences and originality which need to be safeguarded by the Church and society. This as I already said, qualifies this document as the “gospel” of women liberation.

The Assembly of Bishops in October, 1987 with the theme “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council”, was to deal among other things the dignity and vocation of women. Among their recommendations was a call to further study the anthropological and theological issues that will aid in the resolution of some problems in relation to the meaning and dignity of the human being, man or woman. Only by starting from these basics that one can have a fuller meaning of the greatness, the dignity and the vocation of women and only after this that one can speak of their active presence in the Church and society.

Coming home to the African soil, I will like to refer to some documents with particular interest on women. I first cite the *Africae Munus*⁷⁷, specifically about the second part of the chapter two. While acknowledging the fact that women enjoy a high level of respect and dignity, Pope Benedict XVI also lamented how in many cases or countries fewer opportunities are accorded women and girls in comparison to their male counterparts. He referred to certain ancestral and cultural practices that are injurious to women⁷⁸⁷⁹ and calling on all people of good faith to fight against these. He called on the Church in general and bishops in particular to spearhead this call for the liberation of women. They are not only to encourage but also promote the formation of women, equipping them with the necessary skills so they can carry out with great satisfaction what they are called to do with responsibility and participate fully in the life of the community, society and the Church. The presence and role of women in the African Church and society is highly noted. They are the “backbone” of the Church, they secure peace, justice and when poverty threatens society, they stand up against it to defend human dignity, family and religious values. Their untiring role in the Church really moved the heart of the Holy Father where he invoked divine blessings on all African women and the content in the following terms: “May the Holy Spirit unceasingly call forth holy and courageous women in the Church, who can make their precious spiritual contribution to the growth of our communities”.⁸⁰

The words of Pope Francis recalled the untiring support of the Magisterium on the cause of women’s dignity and vocation. He mentioned many of the challenging pastoral activities women have occupied which have further opened up new theological reflections on that respect. Among his first press conferences, he spoke of the possibility of doing a theology of womanhood. Quoting *Evangelium Gaudium* (number 103 which is very important in this respect), he said “Indeed, I hope that increasing space may be offered to women for a more widespread and incisive presence in the Church”.⁸¹ While praising women and hoping that their presence is felt more in civil and ecclesiastical

⁷⁷ Cf. POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Africae Munus*, 2011, in www.vatican.va (taken on 23-11-2015).

⁷⁸ Cf. POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Africae Munus*, 2011, in www.vatican.va (taken on 23-11-2015).

⁷⁹ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Exortação Apostólica Pós-Sinodal: Ecclesia in Africa, rumo ao ano 2000*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vaticano, 1995, 121.

⁸⁰ Cf. POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Africae Munus*, 2011, in www.vatican.va (taken on 23-11-2015).

⁸¹ POPE FRANCIS, Address to the Participants in the National Congress Sponsored by the Italian Women’s Centre, in www.vatican.va (taken on 25-11-2015).

fields, he cautioned that this should not override the irreplaceable role of women in the family, where in the Gursi society women actually deserve all the praises from all. Lack of women with their many qualities listed here will sink the human race to an irrecoverable depth. The family is a very important institution; it is the “domestic Church”. It is upon its well-being that the Church and society depend. Women who mirror our Lady:

“Our Lady creates something in the Church that priests, bishops, Popes cannot create. She is the authentic feminine genius...It is clear that the presence of a woman in the domestic sphere is more necessary than ever, indeed for the transmission of sound moral principles and for the transmission of the faith itself to future generations”.⁸²

The question thrown to this congress is worth pondering by all. How can we increase the presence of women in civil and ecclesiastical fields and yet maintain their presence in the family?

2.2.0.0 The Office of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation⁸³

To be able to understand how JPIC is related to the empowerment of women, a brief history of the formation of this organisation is called for. Dating back to the 1930s, this process was a way in which Christians learned to reflect together the question of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The German, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, called Christian churches to organise a council of peace, which unfortunately did not materialise before the Second World War broke out. After then, there was virtually nothing until Vatican II, when the Catholic Church opened her doors to interreligious dialogue, ecumenism and science. It was then that the hope of having a council of Christian churches came live again. Just within this time in the 1960/70s, science came out with a theory that peace, development and nature are inextricably related. In Vancouver in 1983, the Assembly of World Council of Churches (WCC)⁸⁴ met with delegates of the former Eastern Germany (GDR) who proposed a council of peace again. As this was not

⁸² POPE FRANCIS, Address to the Participants in the National Congress Sponsored by the Italian Women’s Centre, in www.vatican.va (taken on 05-11-2015).

⁸³ I am very grateful to Doris Köhncke, an expert in this area who provided me with some materials in this section among others.

⁸⁴ The WCC which was founded on the 23rd of August 1948 in Amsterdam is the central organ of the ecumenical movement. By the end of 2013, it had 345 member churches in more than 120 countries on all the continents. The Catholic Church is not a member but participates in joint Working Group.

possible, the various churches agreed to commit themselves to a gradual council process in a mutual commitment for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In 1990, there was an International Ecumenical Assembly in Seoul, Korea where the Catholic Church participated. In this Assembly, they formulated ten affirmations which were to serve as common base for socio-ethical questions thereafter. Here are a summary of the ten affirmations to which the Catholic Church also appended her signature⁸⁵:

1. All exercise of power is accountable to God. All forms of human power and authority are subject to God and accountable to the people. This means the right of people to full participation.
2. God always stands at the side of the poor. Poverty is scandal.
3. All ethnicities and peoples are equal.
- 4. Men and women are created in God's image and have equal rights.**
5. Truth is at the foundation of a community of free people. The access to truth and education, information and means of communication are basic human rights.
6. The only basis for enduring peace is justice.
7. Creation is beloved of God. We are responsible for the care of creation/nature.
8. The earth is the Lord's. Human use of land and waters should have in mind the protection of the earth. Land is not a marketable commodity.
9. We want to enable children to live in dignity and to support the youth.
10. Human rights are given by God.

Directly related to this project is the fourth point. Taking Gen 1:27 as reference, this affirmation refers to the creation of both man and woman in the image of God, the basis for a dynamic relationship where men and women transform society. It is the same in the NT as Christ came to affirm the personhood of women and empower them to a life of dignity and fullness. Women felt at home in the community of Jesus and equally felt

⁸⁵ The document containing these affirmations which were given to me by an expert in this field are in papers whose scientific source I am not able to trace. As such, they will be put in the appendix.

the urge to evangelise too. Men and women as St. Paul says, are new creation in Christ (2Cor 5:17) and so must work for a world devoid of all forms of discrimination including sexual debasement. This further affirms the creative power of women to stand for life at all times. For that matter, the Assembly decreed that they resist every patriarchal structure that perpetuate violence against women in their homes, in society, labour and sexual exploitations. A special attention is to be paid to the poor, especially women of poor zones in the world who suffer silently, members of indigenous communities, refugees, migrant workers and women of all oppressed groups. Also this Assembly said it resists other structures of domination that exclude the theological and spiritual contribution of women or deny their participation in decision making processes either in society or in the church. In this way, a new community of men and women with equal dignity and respect is to be realised.

This new community spoken of here is still far from being achieved in the Catholic Church as some women noted. They are excluded in some places from any decision making body or process. The few cases where women are given leadership positions in the Church, they are not able carry these out because leadership is still much connected to the ordained ministry than the laity which should not be. Though priests are trained to carry roles of spiritual, pastoral and managerial activities, there are instances where some of these could be given to the laity so priests could efficiently carry out other activities. This is especially in regions where there are few priests. The laity, including women could be community leaders after an adequate formation. On this part, I spoke with many women from, Africans and non-Africans who giving concrete examples presented how some priests have become managers than pastors. Yet these priests complain of not having enough time. Surely a solution will be to make use of the talents of all the faithful taking the general meaning of the common priesthood of all and being faithful to Vatican II. Women can equally carry out administrative works, in pastoral, leadership, community building, evangelisation and whatever works that does not require the power of ordination.

Also, the question of Justice and Peace are central themes in both the OT and NT. These are among the various attributes of God. In a like manner, God calls us to be just and peaceful not only to those who are our kinsmen or race but to all especially the vulnerable – poor, stranger, widow, orphan, etc. Israel lived this in many ways. We can think of the sabbatical year and the forgiveness of debts. God listens to the cry of the

poor. God turns towards the just but the wicked he is far. Christ came to correct some legalistic attitudes of some Jewish leaders where he showed that Justice and Peace involve the Truth, the Truth which is also life setting us free. The primitive Church lived this out as described by St. Luke in his second book, the Acts of the Apostles.

In dealing with social matters in a very systematic way, we can say the Church did not pioneer this. Many philosophers and sociologists especially the most acclaimed sociologists of all time who influenced social theories, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, did attempt to present guidelines for the human family. Long before the first formal Catholic Social Teaching came out, the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII in 1891, the struggle for social equilibrium was in course. These struggles for rights, Labour, Political, Economic, and Religious Rights have something to do with Human Rights in general. The question of Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation enshrined in the Social Teachings of the Church has multiple dimensions and universal in the very sense of the word. What interest me here is its relation to safeguarding the wellbeing of humanity in general and the dignity and respect of women in particular. There are many commissions, committees, associations, groups, etc, working on various levels in the Church and society who have produced enormous documents. As space will not allow me, I shall be very selective with what to discuss here.

In the Roman curia, we have the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace that is actively involved in many international organisations like the United Nations and its various departments, on continental levels as well as interreligious spheres. In the thirty Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,⁸⁶ we see every aspect of the Church's Social Teachings in it which unfortunately have some interpretations contrary to the gospel in recent times. The Church has never ceased to defend human dignity by protecting human rights as the core of its social role in the world, especially the contemporary world where these rights are under threats. The "*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*", the main document for the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is a "mother" document for both moral and social teachings of the Church. In the evangelisation activities of the Church, the promotion of the wellbeing of

⁸⁶ The UDHR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the 10th of December 1948. A remarkable figure in the drafting and finally putting it right among others is the distinguished former American First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt.

all humanity is an essential integral aspect. When God wanted to enter into covenant with his people Israel, he first set them free as we read in the Pentateuch. It is impossible to enter into a contract or an alliance with someone who is not free. In the same way, faith in God is an act of volition. It is only when we are free that we can have a meaningful and truthful contract. Christ came to redeem our lost human image. He started by becoming one like us in all except sin and in the process he reconciled us to God. He raised us up from our *fallen-ness* to be “co-heirs” with him and so we can call God *Abba Father*. Taking after this model, the Church is more concerned with the liberation of all, an ardent defender of all rights, natural and religious in the world.⁸⁷

The world knows very well that the Church is the most powerful defender of Human Rights even in territories where she is vehemently persecuted. But how does she in the same spirit treat her daughters, I may ask again? Let us reflect on the words of Eleanor Roosevelt in an interview in 1958:

“Where, after all, do human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world....Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world”.⁸⁸

This is precisely what is echoed in the numbers eleven and twelve of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church stating that we begin to fight for these rights first in the Church. There are many places in which the Church fails to treat justly her own children or give them the dignity they deserve. There continue to be many barriers to the progress of women in family and ecclesiastical life especially in the Gurusi society.

2.3.0.0 The response of the local Church

It was not easy getting official information on the response of the local Church to the crisis of women. As such, my presentation on this heading is limited. This silence is not a proof of the absence of something but the presence of something. As the introduction

⁸⁷ Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, to his Holiness, Pope John Paul II, Master of Social Doctrine and Evangelical Witness to Justice and Peace, 2004, 7.

⁸⁸ W. LUBETKIN, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, ATAR Roto Presse, SA, Geneva, 2008, 17.

and the first chapter showed the response of the local Church to this situation need to be improved. Though women must stand up to what is rightfully theirs, there will only be real change when the first move comes from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The diocese of Navrongo-Bolgatanga covers a total area of 31,068 square kilometres with an estimated population of 1.5 million. The female population is higher than that of the male population: 52.4% and 47.6% respectively. As statistics show, the local Church has many women than men and yet, women are the least represented both in civil and ecclesiastical circles. In the 2010 Population and Housing Census, it was revealed that out of the 230 parliamentary seats, only 29 are occupied by women.⁸⁹ It is the same in the Church and sometimes Church committees are occupied by men alone. The domination of women in families, communities and in the Church has been done both consciously and unconsciously. We have seen the many efforts put in place by the Universal Church for the respect of women vocation and dignity, so the Church in the Gurusi area must consciously and effectively be committed to do the same.

The diocese has put in place priests who serve as chaplains to the various women groups. These priests are to accompany them in the daily activities and to also put their decisions before the competent bodies. They also serve as their spiritual directors. In few situations we have women serving freely as catechists, prayer leaders, participate in board meetings and the like. To be able to go further which must be the way forward, there is the need for formation of more women in areas necessary.

2.4.0.0 Conclusion to the chapter: synthesis, critical approach and theological challenges

After all these expositions, can we still say women cannot hold this or that position in the Church?⁹⁰ In all truth I do not intend to write another history other than the one and only one left to us by our Saviour, the Divine Master and the one taught by the Church. His (Christ) wish is that all may be one, expressed in his Priestly prayer according to the Gospel of St. John. He does not only talk of the organic unity of the Church but also within and among her children. It is in this, the evangelist continues, “that the world

⁸⁹ Cf. THE GHANA STATISTICAL SERVICE, 2010 Population and Housing Census, Accra, 2012.

⁹⁰ Except those that refer to the Holy Orders where the Church sealed it off by the Declaration, *Inter insigniores*, 1976.

may believe that you sent me” (Jn 17:21). This verse 21 only has a concrete reality when linked to the next verses 22b and 23a in particular and the rest of this chapter in general. Here we understand fully what Christ meant by ‘that they may be one’: “so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one...” (Jn 17:23). This is one of the greatest signs of authenticity of Jesus’ mission. Having restored to humanity in the person of Jesus, the new Adam, which was lost in the old Adam, God draws us, still unworthy as we are to participate in the Trinitarian unity of love. The resurrected Lord now lives in the Communion of all who believe in him and continually reminds us to leave all discriminatory attitude behind, stop being his deputies telling others based on their sex not to fully participate in this missionary mandate, go teach all nations (Mt 28:19).

Again, depriving those who were the first to experience the resurrected Lord and announced him to his disciples to sit back and watch will be a disservice. I end this chapter by quoting some truths here. It is an undeniable fact, we must agree with the words of Pope Paul VI that in Christianity incomparable to any religion,

“women have had a special dignity, of which the New Testament shows us many important aspects ..., it is evident that women are meant to form part of the living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have yet been made clear”.⁹¹

Reflecting deeply on the passage of Gen 3:16, this document has a very clear reading of Scripture. All without exception are aware of the unspeakable challenges that face women. As there are many ideologies, so are there many different and contrasting views about the rights of women from historical, religious and cultural belief systems in the planet.

⁹¹ POPE PAUL VI address to participants at the National Meeting of the Centro Italiano Femminile (December 6, 1976): Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, XIV (1976), 1017, in www.chch.catholic.org.nz/karlschultz (Paul VI Talk.pdf, 17) (taken on 30-10-2015).

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE WITHIN THE GURUSI ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

“I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:1-6).

This chapter is devoted to the treatment of the dignity and vocation of women in the Church from theological and pastoral points of view. An exploration into Sacred Scripture, Church history and some feminine works (both universal and local), are indispensable in this section. Being the last chapter, the sole purpose of this project, notably the dignity and role of women in the Church as complementarity to men and not as substitution or annihilation of sexes will be acknowledged without qualifications. The Tradition and Teaching of the Church on the ministries of women is often less known, unclear or unexplained by the Church. In this way, women feel shut out of the Church and others are burning with a great desire to “begin a new history” of Christianity or humanity, aspiring to ascend to the Sacred Orders. To me, the Church should be more concerned on addressing these issues of women and their ministries which could go a long way to calm their anxieties.

Going through the dozens upon dozens of publications, especially in the gender-ecclesiastical fields, many try to draw conclusions about how the Church deals with some ministries in the Church (Sacred Orders) with emotion, be they pros or cons of feminism. There is the feeling that many ecclesiological and sacramental questions are either not well understood or not accepted. Once these questions are settled, it could ease many debates and tensions in this area. This is because many do argue that since science, both positive and social sciences, have offered us with proofs that men and women are equal, logically nothing stops women from aspiring or in extreme cases,

being “transformed” into men. This being the case, women can aspire to all offices and positions in society and the Church without exceptions.

We must not forget that the Church as the body of Christ, different and distinct from other States or organisations has her particular way of being as enshrined in her Teachings. So is her mystery that she gives equal opportunities to all yet not democratic in the political sense as many think. Democracy means it is the people who choose who they want and so power belongs to the people. The Church is not of the people but of Christ. In that matter, the sacraments are not given based on the merit or on the principle of democracy. The Church does not give the same thing to women as she gives to men. She gives other better things and attention to women. The problem is how we value it. Instead of putting value on what they have, women will be tarnishing their image and dignity by trying to be like men.

According to many feminist theologians like Elizabeth Johnson, theological discourses are instrumentalised in many “ways to support an imaginative and structural world that excludes or subordinates women. Wittingly or not, it undermines women’s human dignity as equally created in the image [and likeness] of God”.⁹² It suffices to take a careful look at few things that she spelt out: the creed, doctrinal issues, pattern of prayers, liturgical worship, the Church’s vision of mission, leadership, discipline, etc⁹³ confirm her assessment. This is not only true in Christian theology or Catholic Tradition but also in many patriarchal traditions. An example is my culture where most attributes of God are masculine.

Fortunately, many women theologians are engaged in theological debates and reflections to unearth some long hidden mysteries in the Scripture and Tradition which give more room to women. In the light of this, they help shape the right speech about God keeping in mind the aspiration for the emancipation of women as people with equal human dignity. In this work, Elizabeth Johnson is more attentive in asking the painful question “What is the right way to speak about God in the face of women’s newly cherished human dignity and equality?”⁹⁴ This is an open question to all. Her question as well as the answer she gave in this book stems from the unfathomable mystery of

⁹² E. JOHNSON, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1997, 5.

⁹³ Cf. E. JOHNSON, Elizabeth, *She Who Is*, 4-5.

⁹⁴ E. JOHNSON, Elizabeth, *She Who Is*, 6.

God. We do confess that God is infinitely mysterious and this incomprehensible nature makes it clear that we can never fully exhaust this mystery nor can we have a full knowledge of God. In our discourse on God, we need to find a place to honour women as creatures equal to men (Gen 1:27). Each person reflects the glory of God which goes on to also confirm that when any person's dignity is violated, it is the image of God which is violated. The glory of God, says Irenaeus, is man (and woman) fully alive – *Gloria Dei vivens Homos*. What awaits us therefore is to find out how the image of women who as *imago Dei* can be honoured.

3.1.0.0 Old and New Testament perspectives on the dignity of women

The holy Bible is one of the most read books and for that matter, the most misinterpreted book as well. Almost any act or ideology – good or evil – can be justified in it. We only need to look around to see these: the inquisitions, colonisation, political parties, religious conflicts and wars, slavery, emancipation of peoples, human rights, humanitarian aids, etc. All these use the Bible as an authoritative source to justify their beliefs. This is not limited to a particular period or to a group of people. In the same way, it should not be a surprise that we have Christians who either justify the domination or the emancipation of women with the same holy Bible. Going through a number of these literatures, I have seen that both the protagonists and antagonists have almost the same readings and reflections on the Word of God but their conclusions vary. I shall take a brief look into the OT and NT with the objective of seeing how Scripture will help us (re)discover the role, vocation and dignity of women in the Church and how this can be lived out in the Gursi Church without doing away with women's originality.

The holy Bible, as the living Word of God was committed into writing by men and women. Thus we say the holy Bible is the Word of God and word of humanity, since men and women wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit. But each writer was able to put those sacred Words into the pages according to his or her capacity. Thus the holy Bible as the Word of God is also the Word of man as *Dei Verbum* tells us. This being so, its interpretation is sometimes not easy. This problem is not only in today's world. We find these difficulties posed by the holy Bible where it presents obscure passages. We have examples of Daniel questioning the meaning of some of the oracles of

Jeremiah (Dn 9:2). The Ethiopian Eunuch upon reading the book of Isaiah (Is 53:7-8), needed Philip, one of the deacons to help him (Act 8:30-35). The Apostle Peter tells us that no scriptural prophecy is a matter of personal interpretation (2Pt 1:20). With this, Peter goes on to affirm that, some of the letters of the Apostle to the gentiles, Paul, are “hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures” (2Pt 3:16).

As a result of these problems that the holy Bible poses especially to modern readers, it is normal that some Christians wish things should have been different or interpreted differently. Thus the holy Bible continues to receive many criticisms. It is not uncommon to hear many saying that the holy Bible is anti-women, in the sense that it does not give women the same status as men. Adherents of this position even advocate for new translations of the holy Bible taking into account both masculine and feminine nouns and pronouns or even to invent neutral ones. These people have a strong feeling that the holy Bible being anti-feminine was produced by men with the aim of dominating women or that it was distorted by the patriarchs (androcentrism). Moderate feminists think that the holy Bible have a very positive view of women but it was subsequent Christians who kept obstacles on the way of women thereby ensuring that their equality with men remains checked especially in ministerial terms. Thus politics crept into ministries. In this case we see the involvement of power where the holy Bible is wrongly interpreted with the dogmatisation of certain passages to the advantage of men.

On the other hand, some use Scripture to defend the thesis of the domination of women by saying it is God’s will that things be this or that way: husbands should rule over their wives (Gen 3:16), wives must be submissive to their husbands (Col 3:18), women must be silent in churches, they are not allowed to speak but be subordinate for thus says the law (1Cor 14:34), men must have the final word in any matter, etc. It is an undeniable fact that the history of humanity is full of justifications by both individuals and societies. Rightly, the ability to make excuses is exclusively human. To make any excuse justifiable, we need an authoritative point of reference. It does not matter how we twist the Word of God or God’s name to favour our actions. In this way, we may be acting in a pagan way, falling victims of the wrongly quoted phrase of Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince*, “the end justifies the means”.

These are some of the approaches to the holy Bible vis-à-vis the issue of women's rights, dignity and vocation. When we read the holy Bible and say either it is antifeminist or justify domination of women, we are only having a shallow reading of it. The reverse is true when we do a proper reading seeing the exaltation that it accords women of all ages as well as men. It will be good when we have the three indispensable items in the reading any biblical passage: historical, contextual and theological. This tripod on which rests every scriptural passage should not be overlooked or else we will be having deformed information of the holy Bible.

I stand to be corrected but I feel that the holy Bible is the only ancient literature that affords women a high status in the history of humanity. What will be more exalting than being created in the image and likeness of God and the countless feminine attributes of God? The holy Bible puts this in unambiguous terms. The equality of man and woman was from the very beginning: "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). The subsequent verses to this are the blessings which were showered on them both. Women are created in the image and likeness of God just as men, but their differences (male and female) was also set in the very beginning. The differences here do not invoke inferiority in any sex. "Although male and female hold in common the same unique God-given status as image-bearers, there is an inherent distinction within the human family by virtue of their different sexual roles, and this implies that other distinctions are present".⁹⁵

This particular quotation Gen 1:27 is so particular to me in the way the creation of mankind is repeated. It underlines the special nature in which humanity came about, distinct from other creatures. They are highly exalted. They are the crown of God's creation! This could explain why they were the last to be created, I supposed. It is only man and woman alone who can relate to God in a rational, conscious and personal way. In this, we see that no other created thing; living or non-living no matter how strong their instincts are, can be equated to the weakest human being (if at all a weak human being exist). Right from the very beginning too, man is different from woman, "male and female he created them" Gen 1:27. This immediate qualification is a difference

⁹⁵K. MATTHEWS, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, Genesis 1-11:26 (Vol 1A)*, Broadman and Holman Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee, 1996, 173.

which should not be seen in terms of importance. Thus, sexual differentiation is not to be equated to segregation but a unique gift, valued by God. In this way,

“Every theoretical and institutional separation of man and woman, every deliberate detachment of male from female [and every refusal to recognise this natural differences], can endanger the very existence of humanity as determined by creation”.⁹⁶

The defence and upholding of the originality of humankind is what the Church has fought for through the ages.

The uniqueness, and for that matter, the special nature of women can be deduced from the Jahwist (Y) (Gen 2:4b-25) creation narrative, the first to be written before the priestly (P) account. Till now, we have always been told, “and God saw that it was good” again and again. After the creation of man, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). All the creatures could not in any way be a companion to man. It is evident that in Gen 2:18-23, man is inadequate by himself alone; he needs a woman, an equal companion to share his life with and not a subordinate over whom he can lord himself over.

Man and woman who complement each other were created equally in dignity. Notice the exclamation of Adam: “This one, at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23), affirming Eve’s ontological equality to himself. Though the first actions of the woman recounted in the holy Bible is Eve eating the apple and giving some to her husband thereby invoking the wrath of God, it is Adam who was blamed for the fall and not Eve for some obvious reasons which for the definition of this project will not be discussed here.

Male dominance came later on. The command of God that the man will rule over his wife is as a result of sin. When they turned away from the Lord thereby invoking curses upon themselves, each had his or her punishment. Man to rule over woman was one of the punishments of the woman showing the evil in man and not the will of God. The merciful God would not allow human beings, his beloved creatures to perish as we read in our salvation history. So, he redeemed us thereby nullifying any domination. These stories serve as lessons for us and not to use them as yardstick to oppress one another. We can sometimes read meanings into a statement based on the knowledge we had had

⁹⁶ H. SCHWARZ, *Creation*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, 2002, 176.

of something else. An example is in the case of blaming Eve for the fall. It is actually the Apocalypse of Moses, a non-canonical book that blames Eve for the fall and not the canonical books. In Gen 3:17-19, we have the most blame on man. Adam is the one responsible for bringing death. And so, the new Adam, Christ came to undo what the old Adam did.

The OT, with few exceptions, has a positive view of women. Women were never spiritually inferior to men as they could approach God directly. Rebecca sought the Lord about the struggle of Esau and Jacob in her womb, Gen 25:22-23. Miriam and Huldah were recognised prophetesses commanding respect among male prophets. We have female judges like Deborah. Women were priests serving in the Israelite cult; women took the Nazirite vow as any man with the same requirements. Reading the Mosaic Law with the spirit of the time, we can see that in terms of the treatment of women, it was ahead of other codes of the time. In Lev 20:10, and Dt 22:22, both the man and woman were to be punished in the case of adultery whereas other ancient writings pronounced punishment on only the woman. It was very ridiculous when the Scribes and the Pharisees were only able to catch the woman and brought her to Jesus looking for a way to trap him (Jn 8:1-11).

In cases where there were differences in treatment, it was always to the benefit of women, taking Num 30 as an example.⁹⁷ When a woman was raped, the man was forced to take care of her for the rest of her life Dt 22:28-29, and the women of conquered lands were to be treated with dignity. Jewish daughters could inherit their fathers when there were no sons, Num 27:8. In divorce cases, the man had to write a bill of divorce. This bill was a document that dealt with the question of indemnity to be paid to the woman. In this way, the woman will not have to go begging. If she marries again and her second husband dies or divorces her again with a bill, the first husband is forbidden to go for her again. He may see her now rich and wants to profit from her. These laws are for the protection of the woman (Dt 24:1-4). In fact, God hates divorce as stated in Mal 2:16.

⁹⁷ Cf. L. COSNER, The Bible's high view of women grounded in creation account, in www.creation.com/biblical-view-women (taken on 16-11-2015). It is very interesting to see that, a woman who made a rash vow was dispensed when her father or husband forbade her from carrying it out whereas in the case of a man, there was no excuse.

Regarding purity laws⁹⁸, we should not be quick to judge them as misogynists. These were actually for the benefit of women. Though a woman menstruating is made unclean and anyone who touches her is also made unclean, it is less than other types of uncleanness. As we can see, the Sacred Scripture themselves rendered one impure when they are touched as rabbinic literature show.⁹⁹ Besides, this discriminatory law is for the benefit of the woman. Lita Cosner referred to Hartley as saying “this law is not discriminatory against women because both men and women are made unclean when they have discharges; women are unclean for a longer period simply because their menstrual cycle lasts longer than a man’s seminal emission. This period could be beneficial for the woman, as her husband is prohibited from sexual intercourse with her during a time when it will be more uncomfortable for her”.¹⁰⁰ Again the greater number of days reserved for the purification of a woman when she gave birth to a girl than a boy is not an indication of lowering the social status of women. To show the equality of both male and female children, the sacrifice required was the same. This ritual uncleanness was never equated to be sins as no one could avoid them. The most was to absent from the Temple worship, but one did celebrate the Passover.

We cannot exhaust all the eulogies rendered women in the Old Testament. We have other wonderful stories like the midwives of Egypt (Ex 1:15-20) who received God’s blessings. Rahab, the prostitute, was spared since she helped the Hebrew spies and eventually she became one of the ancestors of Jesus, the mother of Salmon. We have Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David. Esther heeded to the words of Mordecai, her cousin and saved the Jews in Persia. In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is personified as a woman, Prv 31:10-31. With few exceptions like Jezebel and Delilah, women were never portrayed as evil in comparison to men.

I shall move on to look briefly in the NT. Here, the dignity of women is given a new meaning. It is surprising that many see Paul as the author of the subordination of women, a misogynist for that matter. In the *corpus Paulinum*, the proto-Pauline, deutero-Pauline and the trito-Pauline letters, we cannot find any allusion to the mistreatment of women as some will have us believe. No critical reader will use any

⁹⁸ Uncleanness in Judaism relating to women’s menstrual cycle and childbirth

⁹⁹ Cf. L. COSNER, The Bible’s high view of women grounded in creation account, in www.creation.com/biblical-view-women (taken on 16-11-2015).

¹⁰⁰ L. COSNER, The Bible’s high view of women grounded in creation account, in www.creation.com/biblical-view-women (taken on 16-11-2015).

part of his writings to judge women as inferior to men nor is there a nullification of genders. Paul had many female co-workers as well as men and in many instances referred to these as fellow apostles. Just as men, some of these women were community leaders, prophetess, deaconesses, teachers, his messengers, etc. He even recommended some prominent women to other communities like Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2). We have the classical Pauline anthem for gender equality of all the baptised: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male or female; for you are all one in Christ” (Gal 3:28). In this way, neither a man nor a woman is more important. Humanity in this case will be men and women existing in community, and as Christians, prefiguring the Kingdom of God to come. There is no preference in the eyes of God. In Christ we are one (Gal 4:28).

In 1Cor 11:6, women are told to veil their heads and not men. This is not a sign of subordination to men but a sign of their own authority to pray and prophecy. Going further, in 1Cor 11:11-12, it is true that women are dependent on men, just as it also true that men are dependent on women, for a woman came from a man and a man born of a woman. Buttressing the above argument, in the verses 13-16, Paul says that both men and women derive their distinction and dignity from nature, from God. In this way, “It is as shameful as it is unnecessary for women to act like men as it is for men to act like women”¹⁰¹.

In his sermon or letter to the community of Ephesus, many usually quote Eph 5:22 to show how women or wives must be submissive to men or their husbands. The mistake often made is that this verse has an antecedent and a subsequent. The immediate verse, 21 says “Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ”. The verse 22 should not be read alone. Verses 21-33 is a single block of the message the Apostle wants to transmit to the Ephesians. Generally, these letters are responses to questions raised by the receiving communities or certain issues that the writer intends to pass to certain communities or even groups within the communities. It may not be applicable to all communities. The problem is that there is a huge generational gap between us and those of the communities to which these letters were addressed to. The general principle is that, all Christians are to be submissive to one another in humility and serving each other with the same love that Christ manifested to us. When we visit the Pauline world,

¹⁰¹ Commentary to 1Cor 11,13-16 in *The New African Bible*, A. COLACRAI and V. ZINKURATIRE(eds.), Pauline Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2011, 1988.

we see as with other Neo-testamentary letters, that the principle of equality for both men and women are upheld to our surprise.

When we move to the Gospels, one is amazed at how Jesus goes against the mores of the time by exalting women. I start with our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary whose unwavering faith made her to risk everything to bear our saviour. St. Luke in his gospel is very exceptional with the detailed and honoured place he gave to Mary (and other women). With the birth of the precursor of Jesus, John the Baptist, Luke recounts how the barren woman Elizabeth, disproving any scientific findings, conceived. This occurs in the same pattern with certain great figures in the history of Israel like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, the mother of Samson and Hannah. On her visit to Elizabeth, Mary's song, the *Magnificat* is pregnant with meanings beyond recount where she, lowly as she is, as a woman and from the least of the tribes of Israel, pours out her soul in praise to the Lord for his unfailing goodness. Mary who is the prototype of every Christian and faithful disciple, whose faith is compared to that of Abraham, a total surrender to Divine Will is able to tell of the mighty deeds of God whereas the priest, Zechariah, slow to belief is mute.

This analysis of putting the story of Mary and Zechariah side by side is intentional producing an effect. Among the disciples of Jesus, a large number were women who provided for Jesus and his followers though they were never chosen to be apostles. Jesus placed women on the same level as with men. Whether it is single life or marriage life, Jesus stood firm against any oppression of women. In the typical story of divorce, Jesus affirmed in clear terms the holiness of marriage and the rights of wives: what God has joined, no one shall separate (Mt 19:9). In his teachings, Jesus makes clear God's wish for humanity but for human evil which is often put in biblical language as the "hardness of the heart", some Christians interpret things differently to suit their own caprices. The four Gospels are full of praises for women.

There abounds literature in this field that do help us in reflecting on these questions. The work which I may refer to as setting the seed for this project is a book I read almost five years ago by Wanda de Assumpção titled *Mulheres que Tiveram Encontro Pessoal com Jesus*, "Women who had personal encounter with Jesus". This was a spiritual book recommended to me by my spiritual directress for spiritual exercises. In each of the pages, we are invited to journey with Jesus as he went about his mission: meeting

women of all classes, followed by them and teaching his disciples to do the same. This relationship of Jesus with women was very strange at the time. In her introductory words, Assumpção de Wanda says Jesus touched their hearts and lives with a love so tender bringing cure, restoration, freedom so that they could be who he made them to be right from the beginning.¹⁰²

All these women were completely transformed by his touch and words. We see in the Gospels that generally women did understand Jesus better and faster than men. There are many episodes to show this. In the Gospel of John, Jesus had an encounter with a man and a woman in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The great Jewish, aristocratic and Sanhedrin, Nicodemus with a good knowledge of scripture went to Jesus at *night*. At the mention of spiritual birth, he was very much confused which surprised Jesus. In the next chapter, John presents us with a scene where Jesus met a woman at *midday*. Not just any woman but a *Samaritan* woman. Unlike all the wonderful qualities that Nicodemus possesses to his advantage, this woman with *no* name is the opposite and lived the worse kind of life one could ever imagine. This type of person as portrayed here will not be accorded any dignity not even in a liberal society of today.

It was scandalous in Jesus' time. However, in the Gospel of John, this was the very first time ever Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah, the Son of God to someone, to this nameless woman. Without hesitating, she believed and went quickly to call others. We see his Apostles lacking comprehension at this. After his resurrection, it was first to a woman, Mary Magdalene that he revealed himself to (she went to the tomb). We can see the love and confidentiality that Jesus had in women¹⁰³ and vice versa. This fifteen-chapter book of Assumpção de Wanda with carefully selected female figures reveals astonishing results as to how women easily embraced the Word of God and the special relationship that Jesus had with them.

Jesus was a revolutionary in many things including the treatment of women. One of the missions of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Luke is “to bring glad tidings to the poor...to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4:18). Women in the Jewish culture at the time of Jesus just like many cultures today, the Gurusi culture being one of them, fit perfectly in this. Jesus

¹⁰² Cf. A. WANDA de, *Mulheres Que Tiveram Encontro Pessoal com Jesus*, Mundo Cristão, São Paulo, 2007, 9.

¹⁰³ Cf. A. WANDA de, *Mulheres Que Tiveram Encontro Pessoal com Jesus*, 10.

went against unjust norms of the day set by the three main religious groups: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes.¹⁰⁴ He treated women just as he treated men by calling a woman a daughter of Abraham something which has never been said when he cured her (Lk 13:16). Within his inner circle were a great number of women (Lk 8:1-3). He went against the purity laws by letting himself touched by a woman with haemorrhages without being contaminated and ended up calling her “Daughter” (Mk 5:25-34). He spoke with foreign women and learnt from them; he was always attentive to them. He taught women against the norms at the time. Women were forbidden to study the Torah which is at the heart of Judaism, expressed here in the words of one of the great rabbis of the first century, Eliezer: “Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity (Misnah Sotah 3, 4)”.¹⁰⁵ Jesus was the defender of widows; he was against divorce and so on and so forth. There are few occasions where we may say Jesus acted differently but could be for reasons best known to him alone. An example is the choice of the Apostles where he chose only men.

To crown it all, he gave us Mary as our mother while hanging on the cross. He is the bridegroom of the Church, his people. This alliance entered into between God and his people goes on to say that God never looked down on women his creatures. In the light of the above, we cannot say the Bible has a misogynist language as some may want us to believe or that Jewish patriarchy, for cultural reasons wrote it to favour the masculine rulers of society. It is the way we interpret it to suit us.

3.2.0.0 The role of women in the Church throughout Christian history

World history in general and Church history in particular have presented us with many events among which is the history of women and their dignity and role in society and in the Church. Among the many literatures that I have come across in this field so touching is that of Isabelle Poutrin, *Las mujeres en el Siglo de las Reformas*

¹⁰⁴ Cf. L. SWINDLER, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*, the Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1979, 152-153. In page 153 of this book, the author quoted Philo, *Hypothetica* 11, 14-17 to show how the Essenes saw women.

¹⁰⁵ L. SWINDLER, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*, 154.

*Religiosas*¹⁰⁶, “Women in the Age of Religious Reformation”. This is a very important work which does not only present the history of women in Christianity and society but most importantly a detailed description of their lives and their contributions in the life of society and the Church which history has failed many times to pay them the due tribute in comparison to men. Before the 20th century, the mere fact of being a woman had many limitations both in secular and ecclesiastical spheres. Despite these limitations, women have excelled in many areas which Isabelle Poutrin, gathering impeccable ideas from great scholars (in the areas of matrimony, religious life as well as other forms of spirituality and holiness) tries to paint the true historical picture of women of the time. In a way, it is a comparative study to show the theological and legal evolutions that are at the base of the redefinition of the role of women in the Catholic and Protestant Churches.

All these presented in this book before and after the Protestant Reformation have shown the reality that women lived. The lives of women at the time could be vividly described as in between *maritus aut murus*, either in marriage or the convent. Since the time of Jesus till now, it is an undeniable fact that women have formed the bulk of Christianity. Not only are they visible in numerical figures but in action as well. These faithful daughters of the Church like the prudent virgins (Mt 25:1-13), have never put off their lamps for want of oil. In all spheres of life, they have held the banner of the Church high. Even under oppressive regimes and situations, they never give up. This is very much recognised by the Church in many documents some of which have been captured in the second chapter.

The holy Church, the bride of the Lamb, in the likeness of Mary, is not only Virgin but Mother as well. Possessing these two glorious feminine qualities, she is perfect and fruitful communicating life to her children. In a like manner, all women, married or single communicate life to others too. This sense of life communication to others which is characteristic of women makes them persevere and generous, hardworking, determined, sacrificial, understanding, etc. in their lives. This self-giving is also for the very men and society who oppress them. Women may not be part of the ministerial hierarchy like priests, bishops or popes but they are equally able to communicate the

¹⁰⁶ Cf. I. POUTRIN, “Las Mujeres en el Siglo de las Reformas Religiosas” in *Historia del Cristianismo* (= Estructuras y Proceso. Serie Religión), III: *El Mundo Moderno*, Coord. Antonio Luis Cortés Peña, Madrid: Trotta, 2006.

spirit and Word of God to others. Women may not preach from the pulpit (of course they can preach), but beget children by their teachings in many places and are proud to join the chorus with St. Paul singing that “for in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel” 1Cor 4:15. Again women could still say with St John, “my children”, “my beloved” (1Jn 2:1; 7). Better still, they could say with St. Paul “My children, for whom I am, again in labour until Christ be formed in you!” (Gal 4:19). Women are the powerhouse, the engine propelling the Church and society towards their desired end. If this was not recognised early enough, at least, it was recognised by Vatican II, which celebrated the many victories of women and clearly stated how important it is for women to be fully involved in the pastoral and ministerial activities of the Church. Women are certainly the backbone of the Church and we see many roles given to women both within and outside. Women are Eucharistic ministers, readers, teachers, rectors of pontifical institutes, catechists, community leaders, serving in ecclesiastical boards, and the like.

These ministries and pastoral activities among others are very important and are almost what move the African Church, Ghanaian Church and the Gursi Church forward. Also, these ministries and pastoral activities have greater respect and value in Africa than in Europe and North America. I could compare the roles played by lay people, especially women, to what permanent deacons do in Europe and North America, and in fact more than that. Gone were the days when the Church was reduced to sacraments, priests, rituals, and liturgy. The life of the Church is more than just that. What we need, in the words of the Irish prelate, Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick is the

“question of understanding more clearly how discernment works in the life of the Church which involves bishops but also involves prophetic characters who may not be ordained – lay men and women. How do they get involved in the discernment moments in the Church?”¹⁰⁷

We have the exemplary lives of women who have inspired the world by their writings, works, prayers, simplicity and dedication. Others actually changed the course of events for good in the world. The four female doctors of the Church¹⁰⁸ mentioned earlier on attest to this. Until the 1970s, no woman saint was given the title doctor but the Church

¹⁰⁷ Irish priests’ statement calls for free, open discussion of church’s exclusion of women, in www.ncronline.org/news/global/irish-priests-statement-calls-free-open-discussion-churchs-exclusion-women (taken on 07-12-2015).

¹⁰⁸ These saints are Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Thérèse of Lisieux and Hildegard of Bingen.

has now recognised these women and given them these titles among others. As serious studies are ongoing in Church history and other related Church studies, we could be having more women saints as doctors. Mention was also made of the various deaconesses who have done so great for the Church. Laura Swan¹⁰⁹ has recounted the wonderful roles played the desert Mothers in very simple but significant way. These desert Mothers like the desert Fathers contributed a lot to religious and monastic life as well as the preservation and spreading of religion, culture, morality, spirituality, education and civilisation.

Through a woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary, our saviour came into the world. She the mother of our saviour and ours, the Temple of the Holy Spirit never belonged to the hierarchical structure of the Church (the Apostleship) but that of the charismatic. We can see women and their dignity and vocation here. Women draw from this fountain of the Blessed Virgin that knows no drought, the gifts of life-giving. They are filled with the Holy Spirit in a complete and unique way. The model of the Blessed Virgin Mary for women to live out their faith is so enriching for humanity.

With Vatican II, the history of women took a different and positive turn. The role of women in society, family and Church increased greatly. When the Church reflected on women as always ahead of any institution, it served as a catalyst not only in ecclesiastical circles but in all spheres of life. Among the documents of the Vatican II that recognised and called for greater roles for women in the Church are the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) and Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam actuositatem*). These are very important in the sense that the Church sought to have an open dialogue with the modern world, calling on men and women of good will to be fully involved in the process of evangelisation with their various and varied talents. The spreading of the gospel does not only pass through ordained ministers but the laity as well. The lay people are sometimes very much closer to the people in their day to day activities than some priests and bishops who are occupied with secretarial work. Be it at home, offices, work places, families, etc., women are better able to evangelise than the clergy. In fact, in certain cases, evangelisation is only possible and effective with the laity (women).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. L. SWAN, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 2001.

In the final document of the Vatican II¹¹⁰ which has been cited in the previous chapter, we see the eulogy made to women, so beautiful inviting all women to herald many things in the Church. It is no longer the time that women must be spectators but actors. Thereafter, many studies on women flourished knowing no boundaries, with amazing findings to the astonishment of all. In the *Mulieris Dignitatem* of John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women, we are called to reflect on the fruits of the presence of the women in the Church which have not been acknowledged for long. The Holy Father writes,

“The Church desires to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the ‘mystery of women’ and for every woman – for that which constitutes the eternal measure of her feminine dignity, for the ‘great works of God,’ which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her” (MD 31).

However, the Church still needs to open up in many ways to fully enjoy the fruits of the laity and their leadership like women. The phrase of one of the most influential figures of the Church, the French Dominican friar, Yves Congar, who was equally an influential personality of the Vatican II, has the following to say of the Church in relation to the laity.

“We are still far from drawing the consequences of the rediscovery of the fact that the entire Church is one single people of God and that the faithful compose it along with the clergy. Implicitly, unwillingly, and even unconsciously, we have the idea that the Church is composed of the clergy, and that the faithful are merely their beneficiaries or clientele. This horrible conception is inscribed in so many structures and customs that it appears to be set in stone, unable to change. It is a betrayal of the truth. There is still much to be done to de-clericalize our conception of the Church”.¹¹¹

This fair critique of the Church prior to the Council was really at the back of the minds of the Council Fathers as they began opening up and actually producing documents to this effect including the laity in the structure of the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* faithfully reflects the spirit of these words of Yves Congar by calling all the faithful, the people of God and doing away with so many elitisms. Yet there is still more to be done in this area.

¹¹⁰ Cf. POPE PAUL VI, Address to Women, Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, December, 1965, in <https://w2.vatican.va> (taken on 30-12-2015).

¹¹¹ Y. CONGAR, *Pour une Église servante et pauvre*, Cerf, Paris, 1963, 135-136.

3.3.0.0 Global and local perspectives on women's dignity and their role in the Church

As a result of this work and other related works done in the course of my theological studies, a lot of investigations have been made and nothing comparable in any religion, institution or group of people, not even modernists' ideas, have accorded women the value the Church defends and holds dear for them. The concerns of women have been appreciation, hope, real joy, dignity, respect, the need to be loved among others. What in many places women have received instead is despair, humiliations, slavery, oppression, poverty, loneliness, over above other unjust situations that make them live under the shackles of men. The goal has been to understand the mystery of women and their role both in society and in the Church.

The study of anthropology (theological, cultural, and social), history (civil, Church, religious), sociology, psychology, feminist theology, African theology, patristics, and the Teachings of the Church, to mention only a few, have brought to light many issues concerning women in the Gurusi tribe. In the Gurusi culture, just like in many African cultures, it is often difficult to understand how women perceive their own dignity, never mind society rendering it to them. Most times, one needs to ask the question, how do women understand themselves, their rights? What are their desires? Are they willing to actively participate in society and Church? Do women seek to have their voices heard? On the other hand, one will equally need to respond to these questions: how do society and the Church see women? How does the Church respond to their needs? How is society or the Church organised? How does the Church, in faithfulness to the Gospel, liberate women, defend their rights, dignity or create ways for women to express their views and feelings? A sincere analysis of these questions is sometimes saddening or even scandalous. But to me, this is indispensable.

One cannot hesitate but to subscribe to the thesis of Adolphus Amadi-Azuogo, that it is as a result of the politics of power that sometimes women are barred from leadership roles in the Church, when we see in certain quarters of the Church some unfortunate things happening. In three of his books¹¹² which I have read, he did a very good

¹¹² *The Empowerment of Women in the Church Today: The Relevance of the New Testament Charismatic Churches*, Outskirts Press, 2007; *The Politics of Power and the Ordination of Women*, Xulon Press 2007

exegesis which shows how unfortunate gender issues are often treated in the Church. He went on to say that the involvement of ecclesiastical power means ruling is also involved. And so, the altar then becomes the throne where only men rule.¹¹³ However, let me be quick to say that I do not go totally by his hyper sentimental treatment of this topic where he throws everything aside: he even destroyed the very foundation of Christianity in these works. The very issue of Christian ministry as service is often misunderstood. If the Church had always understood ministries, especially the ordained ministries, as service, as shepherds, and, to use the phrase of Pope Francis, ‘shepherds living with the smell of the sheep’, and not as wielding of power to rule, women would not have been aspiring to it nor some ordained ministers using it as power in the name of God to rule others.

Again, we do not need to have new translations of the holy Bible using neuter genders nor introducing double nouns and pronouns simply because we want to achieve gender equality. To do this will not be exegesis but eisegesis. Roles in the Church do not go along gender lines, but that does not mean admitting women to the Sacred Orders. In fact, priesthood is neither the only ministry in the Church nor the most important one. One does not receive it also because he is spiritually perfect. What we need to do or to know is to explore more of the roles in which women can fully utilise their God-given talents to the full. Perhaps, the theology of womanhood spoken of by Pope Francis should be an area deserving attention.

Advocating different roles for different sexes does not demean or devalue the other. We actually devalue others in eliminating sexual differences given to us by the Creator from the beginning. There is a very big difference between Christianity and radical feminists who may be seen as fighting for women but in reality, they are for the destruction of women. The difference here is that for radical feminists, “women and men are interchangeable (except that men are bad!); to the Christian, they are both indispensable”.¹¹⁴ In close attention to the Gursi culture, if something near this is attempted, the whole process of dialogue for the voices of women to be heard will be history. This is attested to by many respondents to my questionnaire. In many cases,

and *Women and Gender Equality: The Attitude of the Apostle Paul and the Church Today*, E-Book Time, LLC, 2007.

¹¹³ Summary at the back cover to his book, A. AMADI-AZUOGU, *The Politics of Power and the Ordination of Women: Gender and Power in the New Testament and the Church Today*, Xulon Press, U.S.A., 2007.

¹¹⁴ L. COSNER, The Bible’s high view of women grounded in creation account, in www.creation.com/biblical-view-women (taken on 16-11-2015).

women suffer more under men because certain individuals from other cultures, sympathising with women, try to ensure a swift change of things. The best thing to do is cultural values must be respected while introducing change gradually.

For both pros and cons of feminism, there are good lessons in the Bible that can be learned. In the life of Christ, we see that it is possible to submit to one another without any inferences of ontological inequality. Jesus submitted himself to Mary and Joseph (Lk 2:51) but no orthodox mind will say Jesus was inferior to them. Jesus, the second Person in the Holy Trinity submitted himself to the Will of the Father (Lk 22:42). It will not be said that he is inferior in any way to the Father, except in his humanity. In the same way, the words of the Apostle in Eph 5:22 for wives to submit to their husbands invokes no inferiority. The good news is that the Church in Vatican II has corrected some of these errors and discovered women's potentialities never thought of. Surely, the Bible and the Church have done more for women and humanity than their secular counterparts. For this matter, *Inter insigniores* and the *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* have nothing negative against women.

3.3.1.0 Theological perspectives on women's dignity in the Church

How shall I talk about the dignity of women from the theological perspective? Here, my point of departure will be from the Creator. It is not a human being who will give his or her fellow this dignity, though we have a duty to honour, respect and safeguard it wherever this dignity is threatened. Once again, I will revisit the story of Genesis: "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created. God blessed them" (Gen 1:27-28a). Here we can see that the two sexes were created in the same day, implying their equality. Therefore, it will be a scandal to put others as lower human beings, not deserving dignity for whatsoever reason, not even on the base of sex. Apart from this, God continues to reveal himself through great women of Israel in the form of mediation or revelation and we have (female) theologians who reflect on the paternity and maternity of God.

We see many feminine concepts used both in the LXX and the NT. The maternity of God is Israel's inheritance where maternal-feminine images help us to speak of God when we speak of Israel. For example in Ezekiel's prayer, Israel is a Virgin (*a betulah*)

of Zion, the daughter (*bat*) of Jerusalem (Is 37:22; Lam 2:13). Jerusalem as a city is God's habitat which he defends as he chose it for himself; Yahweh is seen as the God of Justice and Goodness here (Ps 84:7; Is 60:14). He is defined in Ex 34:6 as a "compassionate and gracious" (*rahum wehanûn*) God. His love and mercy are such that, they can only be compared to the uterus (*rehem*) and grace, a favour (*hen*). And so, he is God of *ruhama* (Hos 1:6; 2:3.25), of the compassionate community, visceral and "uterinally" loved as well as chosen by Yahweh. The great King David himself implored the *rêhêm* (compassion) of God despite his sins (2Sam 24:14).¹¹⁵

In the NT, Mary is the woman full of grace (Lk 1:42; Jn 2:1; Rev 12:1). The Church is the bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:7; 21:9). These among others are the blue prints that have reactivated the feminine theology, reflecting about the maternal and gynaecological image of God. The God of the OT treated as the God of *hesed* (of magnanimity) whose active presence is felt as spirit *ruah* also is conceived in the feminine sense. For that matter, God is faithful as a mother who loves her children without measure (Ps 84). Wisdom (*hokmah*), a feminine personification of God is translated in the LXX as *Sofia*, who was present when the world was created and assists God in his creative activities. She is sought and loved as a companion by all rulers (Wis 8:2-3). She sustains the just and the wise (Prv 8:23-31). From the above, we have seen how the theological and biblical foundations can be deduced for the support of the dignity and vocation of women.

Having gone through these, there is not an iota of reason to downplay the role of women or their dignity. Doing so would be against the very image of God himself. Being nourished by these quotations with recent critical and deep studies of the scripture by theologians of good will, especially female theologians, the Church has produced a lot of theological reflections on the dignity and vocation of women which go beyond the boundaries of the Church. Among the many magisterial pronouncements, Pope John Paul II of blessed memory and Pope emeritus, Benedict XVI will forever be remembered. The book, *Pope John Paul II Speaks on Women*, edited by Brooke Williams Deely, is a wonderful piece in this area.

¹¹⁵ Cf. CARVALHO, José – "A mulher nova na Sagrada Escritura: Uma interpretação para o século XXI do feminino bíblico de Deus". *Estudos Teológicos*. 12 (2008) 37-62.

We have so many of these theological reflections (sadly, there are few who really read them or apply them) that we cannot even mention a quarter. Apart from the Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents on women, we have the *Redemptoris Mater*, the Mariological encyclical of Pope John Paul II given in 1987; a year later, the *Mulieris Dignitatem*; Pope John Paul II letter to women (1995); and the then Cardinal Ratzinger's Letter to Bishops (2004). Many Synods both local and universal ones have been formed as well as many commissions to see to the situation of women in theological and pastoral fields. Theologically speaking, women have their impeccable dignity first as the creatures of God. Secondly, God's attributes are seen in feminine qualities. They have for over the years exhibited their great talents in both society and ecclesiastical fields which we need to acknowledge and give them the necessary support.

3.3.2.0 The role of women within the Ghanaian ecclesiastical context

The body that oversees all activities of women in Ghana is the National Catholic Council of Women (NCCW) with an approved Constitution by the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference,¹¹⁶ working in close relationship with the National Laity Council both of which are under the Department of Pastoral Ministry and Evangelisation. Some of the areas of operation are the promotion of evangelisation, justice, peace and development, health and sanitary works as well as education. They engage themselves in many activities at the local, national and international levels, where issues of women and the Church are discussed. The NCCW is a member of the World Union of Catholic Women Organisation (WUCWO) where national and international matters are also discussed.

To make their presence felt, since 2003, Holy Trinity Sunday is set by the GCBC as their feast day in Ghana where various activities prior to this date are carried out. They have a particular cloth that is won by all on this feast day. Apart from their personal contributions to society and their roles in the Church, the NCCW have a fund called the Lilian Fund, a Swedish NGO that they use to support physically challenged children in Ghana from birth to age 27. With the rest of the laity, women collaborate with the

¹¹⁶ I am very grateful to Fr. Emmanuel Abbey-Quaye at the national Catholic Bishop's secretariat, for his swift response to our mail providing us with the information about women in the national level.

hierarchy as effective channels through which the Church in Ghana moves. The Church in turn ensures that women are empowered through formation in the various diocesan, provincial and national levels as well as leadership training programmes and also approved that on their feast day, Holy Trinity Sunday, the offertory should be for them to help their numerous activities. As said in the previous chapter, women constitute the majority of the population of Catholics in Ghana, about 65%. One could enter some Churches and find out that, three quarters of the congregation is made up of women or even all women with children. Under the umbrella of NCCW, we have Ladies of Marshall, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Society, Christian Mothers Association, Catholic Women Association, and Catholic Charismatic Women Renewal Ministry. The others are Ladies Auxiliary of St. John International where middle age and elderly women belong. We have Legion of Mary, Children of Mary, Catholic Youth Organisation, League of Tarcisians, Young Christian Society which are for young women and children.

They have spiritual exercises like holy Masses, Eucharistic adorations, novenas, fasting and prayers, crusades, pilgrimages, Bible studies, recitations of the rosary, retreats and recollections; they lead community prayers and service of the Word as well as Communion services. They move within or outside the communities to teach catechism, teaching religion in schools, sanitary projects, visits to the sick, orphans and widows or the poor. They organise themselves to work on each other's farms and on those of the poor in the communities, in health sectors, orphanages, not forgetting their good role as marriage counsellors. Apart from these, they are very generous and, as a result, they have some income-generating mechanisms by which they help seminaries, hospitals, prisons, schools, orphanages, parishes and other societal projects. Women are very vibrant in the Church and actually contribute for the progress of the Church both in the family and society. Thus the Catholic identity in Ghana and particularly the Gurusi area to some extent is kept alive by women.

Despite all the many positive things that can be said about women, they are faced with enormous challenges which the GCBC in last year's annual (2015) report to the Vatican recognised. On the area of finances, women in most cases are the breadwinners of their families. They are loaded with all types of family burdens single-handed. Few are able to earn something at the end of the month. Yet with the little they have, they are still able to contribute their widow's mite (Mk 12:41-44). The Church does little to help

them. Most are illiterate and live in rural areas where life is unbearable. These women are the ones who suffer more violence. Apart from monthly Masses where the priest visits these areas, there is little pastoral work to help these women. They are mostly excluded or have limited representation in decision-making in families, parish Councils, and at diocesan and national levels. The result is that, these meetings may come out with excellent decisions reflecting the minds of the participants, but in final analysis, they are full of defects because there is little or no feminine representation. The picture is not different in the civil sector.

It is a fact that women in Ghana for cultural reasons are considered inferior to men. Some of these cultural practices and belief systems that humiliate women are mentioned in the first chapter. Apart from being seen as “second class” citizens, other cultural practices like *trokosi* (a case where young girls are taken to shrines to serve as slaves for the sins of their families. They end up becoming wives of the chief priests), certain puberty rites as well as some inhumane treatment are some of the things that should be frowned at by all.

In all these, has the Church in the Gurusi area thought of women of all generations – past, present and the future – acknowledging how the Church misunderstood or has not duly appreciated the dignity of women or has subjected women to certain prejudices that devalued their dignity? There have been situations where their physical appearances have been valued more than their competence or intelligence. In these cases, they are often subjected and reduced to objects of appreciation by men, and – excuse me to say – they are treated like material things. The government of Ghana has put in place certain bodies to curb these acts of violence against women. We have the Commission of Humana Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of violence against Women (DEVAW), the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU), the Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU) among many others. Women in the Church and the civil sector are fighting against all these injustices. Pastoral units formed to help women out of these situations must be intensified. Without this help, the measures put in place by the government and the Church will fail.

3.4.0.0 Conclusion to the Chapter: synthesis, critical approach and pastoral challenge

Before setting out on any journey, one has to know his or her point of departure, what is expected of the journey, what is needed for the success of the journey and finally the point of arrival. As such, I am now coming to the point of arrival for this project which is its pastoral dimension. I have tried to reflect on pastoral issues and at this point, I will try again to see what can be done though in a very small way to draw people's attention (men and women), ecclesiastical authorities as well as other people who are in some position to help give back to the women of the Gurusi area (and beyond) what is duly theirs as equally God's creators and fellow citizens of this planet just like men. Thus this work will not achieve its aim without the practical pastoral dimension.

I have no doubt on its positive effect on the life of the Church in the Gurusi area, if not now at least in the future. At the same time there is bound to be reactions to this project which I foresaw upon embarking on it. Already, there are agitations as a result of the questionnaires and many interviews I did to see how best this work could be produced. Many did not want to talk about the issue as stated in the introduction for fear of trespassing on "no-go zone" of the culture. Some have also yearned for something like this to come up but in silence. It is already an issue being discussed by various groups as a result of these questionnaires. There is the need to listen and to be attentive to the signs of the times. One of the most important things the Church in modern times did, especially with the Vatican II, was the opening up of studies into the religious and secular sciences.

The Church has long been criticised for "chaining" the Bible, prohibiting especially the laity from reading it, though for a good reason. Lay people, (men and women) can now go into higher studies, especially theological disciplines that equip them to be able to read and interpret the Bible. With their participation in theological discourses, there are better decisions made and a better understanding of God, humanity, Church and the world is arrived at. Women definitely have the same vision of God and the Church but from a different angle which enriches all. The fight for equality and rights by women is a very pressing issue for all. However, this struggle should be a well-defined area. We need a good understanding; openness to dialogue; readiness to learn and accept new things; humility as well as a conscious and sincere continual search for the truth with an

open heart. Not all “equality” means necessarily equality. We need to have a good and well-formed conscience and notion of real human and civilised values so that the equality fought for in society and the Church is not a false one.

Women must have the will to arise. It is an undeniable fact that women are very strong. Their lives are always in danger, yet they strive ahead to secure humanity and the society. For this matter, education, which is one of the greatest tools for the emancipation of women, is an area to be addressed in the Gurusi area. Two types of education are called for here. The first type of education is to get people to know the value of women in society. The second type of education is where girls or women are equipped academically so as to be able to rub shoulders with men in society. One of the Ghanaian statesmen, Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey, is accredited with the phrase that “if you educate a man, you simply educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation”. These were magical words to parents to undo the fears and biases they had on the girl-child. It helped though in a small way to get girls to schools. In a nutshell, there is the need for people to be formed and be informed.

People need to be educated about their faith. It is the task of ecclesiologists, liturgists, sacramental theologians and all pastors to educate the faithful. In certain instances, one wonders whether some ordained ministers understand what they are called to do. Do they see this ministry as power demanding authority or as service in the words of the Divine Master: I came to serve and not to be served (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45) or better still, when Christ gave one of the biggest signs by washing the disciples’ feet and said,

“You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow...If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it” (Jn 13:13-17).

Could it be the wrong image of the priesthood portrayed that women also aspire to be ordained?

If this wrong image is shown, surely there will not be any differences between the ordained minister and the princes of the world. In that case since in the world women are political deputies like parliamentarians, speakers of parliament, inspectors’ generals, presidents, or any office one can dream of in the world, they could as well be ordained. After all in some cases women are ten times better than men. If this sacrament is seen

as a vocation, a mission and service like other vocations in the Church, women who are doing so great in many other areas will not downplay theirs, abandoning their other equally valid vocations to be ordained nor will they be saddened thinking that priesthood is the only way to spiritual perfection or to exercise their ministry. By way of ending this chapter let us reflect on these words: The Christian faith is not a “religion of the book”. Christianity is the religion of the “Word” of God, a word which is “not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living” (C.C.C. 108).

The NCCW as a whole who represent all women groups in the country, are not seeking for radical changes or go by radical feminist ideas. Women have their distinct and original vocation which is proper to them. A woman needs a man and the vice versa. Women cannot champion everything as they spoke up, shunning radical feminist ideas with passion which to them are in the true sense enslavement. They need education: both formal and informal which can equip them to realise their dreams in society. Laity councils and other committees which are made up of only men or with few women, whereas the majority of the congregation are women, should be addressed. Certain practices like widowhood rites, FGM should be abolished. In widowhood rites, the reason is that, when a woman loses her husband, in the name of culture she is forced to endure these rites making her suffer a lot of pain, humiliations and psychological traumas. Then why is it, some of them asked in tears, that when a man losses his wife, nothing of the sort is carried out? Some women who never passed through these rituals are nonetheless sympathising with their fellow women.

It is up to the GCBC to see how they can form more women in some areas of society and the Church who will in turn help their fellow women. Issues like marital ones need the collaboration of women for a successful marriage. The priest is well formed to handle this but in the counselling process; a feminine touch is called for. Cultural practice like puberty rites should be “Christianised”. There is the good aspect of it to inculcate morals in the youth but other aspects that are unnecessarily demeaning should be discontinued. While recognising that women can be engaged in many ministerial positions and activities in the Church, the women in the Ghanaian Church do not think it is only in the ordained ministry that they can do their work. So, they do not even dream of seeing women admitted to the Sacred Orders.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

“...women in trial, who stand upright at the foot of the cross like Mary, you who so often in history have given to men the strength to battle unto the very end and give witness to the point of martyrdom, and them now still once more to retain courage in their great undertakings, while at the same time maintaining patience and an esteem for humble beginnings. Women, you do know how to make truth sweet, tender and accessible; make it your task to bring the spirit of this council into institutions, school, homes and daily life. Women of the entire universe, whether Christian or non-believing, you to whom life is entrusted at this grave moment in history, it is for you to save the peace of the world”.¹¹⁷

I have a very good knowledge of the ordeal women are subjected to in my country, especially the Northern part of Ghana. This is even more pronounced in rural areas or places where formal education is yet to pick up. I have also had an experience of how women are treated in the three religions (African Traditional Religion, Islamic Religion and Christian religion) found in this area. As the culture is so strong, rarely does anyone question these structures. Those who have tried to say anything are mostly outsiders but for lack of knowing how things function in the day-to-day life of the people, they produce few results. Almost everyone sees the domination of and abuses against women as normal. The fact of bringing these points up does not mean I acted differently. But as I came into contact with other cultures and see how things can be different, I started to question my own judgements.

As a missionary who belongs to a religious institute, Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans) whose charism, among others, is “to respond creatively to the needs of evangelisation of our time” (SRL 2), I saw that this is equally one of the areas where I could also contribute. Again, our Spiritan Mission and Vocation in the Church is to evangelise the “poor” which forces us to go especially to peoples, groups and individuals who have not yet heard the message of the Gospel or who have scarcely heard it, to those whose needs are the greatest, and to the oppressed” (SRL 4). My initial notion about women in the Church was that they are accorded more dignity and support than what goes on in the African Traditional and Islamic religions. This investigation

¹¹⁷ Address of Pope Paul VI to Women on the closing of the Second Vatican II Ecumenical Council, in <https://w2.vatican.va> (taken on 31-12-2015).

did open my eyes to certain things I did not think would be going on in the Church too. There are still many negative things going on in the Christian religion, for example contempt for women.

This three-chapter work is a rudimentary project to see how the dignity and vocation of women in the Church and society is organised in the Gurusi tribe. The anthropological perspective on the dignity of women in the Gurusi culture made me understand in a little way the worldview of the said culture, and from a historical perspective how their life is organised, and then led me to the question of the vision of women. The Gurusi worldview is an indispensable area because for the African, religion and the socio-political and cultural lives are inseparable. In this case, one cannot treat an issue of any kind without taking into account all these factors. It also gave me some idea of how women understand themselves in this environment. The second chapter is more on the teaching of the Church on the dignity of women, not forgetting their role. The Church has inherited a history that has not been so positive on her vision of women. At some point of her history, the Church equally contributed to their subordination.

But all is not lost. It is surprising how the Church has been so attentive to women especially from the time of Vatican II. The only problem as we can see is how the various ecclesiastical communities interpret and apply these. Many are the times where these orientations are kept in the corner. In the last chapter, which takes a theological approach as well as from scripture, we have seen that neither Sacred Scripture nor Tradition nor the Magisterium prohibit women from ministering in the Church. If there are still obstacles in their way, what are their origins? It is in this line that I am tempted to go along with Adolphus Amadi-Azuogu when he says that the problem has to do with the politics of power. Instead of serving and allowing others to serve, we have situations where some men neither serve nor allow others to serve.

Among the simple reasons why this topic is of great importance to me is that some NGOs are working in these very areas with the very problems listed here. But the methods they use to me are sometimes not the best. There is the need to engage the local people, understand their worldview and allow them to come out with ways that can help. Those who are seen as “suffering” should not always be offered fish but be taught how to fish. Again, in the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese, to the best of my knowledge, there is no official teaching or proclamation on this issue to see how best

one can help lessen the burden of women. This could be said of the whole country. Secondly, some governmental and non-governmental organisations employ methods to solve these problems which, in my assessment as a native of the area, are sometimes off the track. This is a sensitive cultural area, and so imposing certain ideas to change things overnight in these immemorial cultures, without extreme caution, could be disastrous. Instead of helping these people, there will rather be a destructuralisation of the culture.

Culture as stated above is the bloodline of the people and when one does not fully grasp the whys of doing things in the said cultures, the result will either be a revolt against what is being given or a total assimilation of what is given, whereby they will end up losing their identity. In this case, another problem, maybe a worse one, will creep into the culture. There are even cases where women will lead the revolt against their own emancipation. Thirdly, my aim is to see how in the ecclesiastical life, women can be accorded their dignity and respect, as well as how they can fully participate in the ministry of the Body of Christ. Last but not the least is my personal experience. I have seen and witnessed these injustices both in the Church and in society meted out to women. I feel I could in a small way give my little contribution to this process of emancipation with some theological, ecclesiological and pastoral reflections, confessing my limitations in these areas. I would be happy if someone could take up this work, correct it if necessary and use it to a good effect.

I was really surprised, during this academic excursion, when I found out, from the numerous documents in the Church and in other organisations, that conscious and determined efforts are being put in place to redeem the image society has of women. Of course, there are equally other texts which degrade women. An example of these documents is the last two paragraphs of the Letter of Paul VI on the closing of Vatican II, expressed in the beginning of this conclusion. The daily life experience of women in the Gurusi area can be best described with these very words. Women in the Gurusi tribe need to hear these words which will be very comforting and letting them know that they are always remembered by the Church.

The encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which I termed the “gospel” of emancipation the women and which drew inspiration from other texts, shows that this struggle for a respected and dignified life for women has not escaped the ears of the

mother Church. On this heated topic of women's rights as human rights which have taken a different turn

“Consequently, even the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in biblical words ‘He shall rule over you’ (Gen 3:16) must not under any condition lead to the ‘masculinisation’ of women. In the name of liberation from male ‘domination’, women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’. There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not ‘reach fulfilment’, but instead will *deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness...*” (MD 10).

The many important issues and challenges that women face, according to my assessment, are not so much about becoming priests, bishops or popes. The argument is that, the decisions coming from these hierarchies sometimes continue to humiliate women. This is partly true because in organisations that only women run, there are some women who feel unsatisfied. Though there are still some areas to be treated especially in the various local churches and communities, the Catholic Church can boast of one that has women at her heart. More than in any religion or organisation, the Church has the leading role on questions of women's dignity, rights, vocation, etc. There are certain protests under the banner of women's rights. Deep down, they would rather lead to the destruction of the originality of the feminine figure, debasing her very dignity as a person created in the image and likeness of God. Certainly, if the world loses woman with all her qualities, the indispensable qualities which we know very well of, the human race will certainly fall. Women actually hold up the world and should be encouraged and supported to enhance this.

Humanity should pay homage to women. The Church recognises this and so holds her dear in every aspect. John Paul II writes in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, that the holy mother Church

“desires to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the ‘mystery of woman’ and for every woman-for all that constitutes the eternal measure of her feminine dignity, for the ‘great works of God’, which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her” (MD 31).

In our time, what does it actually mean to be a woman? Many of us may not be able to truly answer this question. Surely, we cannot answer this considering her dignity and

rights if we do not place these in the light of the Word of God, the Word who creates and redeems. Every woman no matter her state in life – mother, wife, sister, daughter – who works, who is consecrated, single, healthy, sick, rich, poor, Christian or not, is esteemed by the Church. It is also true that we have inherited a history that has not always been fair towards women, placing obstacles on their ways to progress. We have situations where their dignity has not been acknowledged and sometimes what is rightfully theirs has not been given them. They have often been kept on the margins of society and turned into slaves of men and society. The Church is culpable in this area and Pope John Paul II asked for forgiveness in the name of the Church with a contrite heart. The attitude of Jesus was of love and respect for women.

Once again, the theology of Womanhood that Pope Francis spoke of is very important. Just in the few years of his pontificate, he is already looking for ways to help change the image of women in the Church. During a return flight from the 28th World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, in his press-conference, Pope Francis said the following in response to the journalist, Jean-Marie Guénois:

“The role of women in the Church must not be limited to being mothers, workers, a limited role...No! it is something else!...I believe that we have much more to do in making explicit this role and charism of women... All we say is: they can do this, they can do that, now they are altar servers, now they do the readings, they are in charge of *Caritas* (Catholic charities). But there is more! We need to develop a profound theology of womanhood”¹¹⁸.

Without the active presence of women, the Church goes barren, says Pope Francis. To him, and for the whole people of God, a Church without women is like talking of the Apostles without Mary. A pastoral challenge as well a possible area for future research will be how to engage the people of the Gurusi area, especially women and girls, through effective programmes of formation in the Church and formal education so that they may grow in love for Christ and the Church with the right human values. In this way, they may effectively pass on to others the Catholic and human values. Women are more important for who they are than for being ordained. Not everything is dark for women in the Gurusi culture. In many cases, it is women who secure the family and society. Motherhood is a value that the society values even above fatherhood. It is

¹¹⁸ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, On Board Return flight from the XVIII World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, in www.vatican.va (taken on 16-09-2015).

always said that, no matter how one tries, he or she can never pay a mother for what she is. This explains why the curse of a mother is not easily broken.

This existential question being addressed here which no one can escape is more pronounced from the nineteenth century onwards. It is my wish that humanity may come to fully understand the will of God for all (men and women) who are created in the image and likeness of God. It is God who has equipped all with equal dignity and vocation to carry out his mission on earth. He has no preference but to the one with a human heart, a heart of flesh as the prophet Ezekiel proclaimed (Ez 36:26), he bestows his grace upon. He hates oppression of all kind. He is always by the side of the poor. He wills for society as its sole end the happiness of man and woman, the crown of creation. One of the classical examples of the abuse of women is the case of the Gambaga witches camps. These poor women are literally accused without any trial. The many sufferings which these poor women go through in their respective husbands' houses before being thrown out into these "concentrated" camps, can hardly be put in words.

The ministry of the diaconate or priesthood should not be overemphasised to the detriment of other evangelical ministries like the lay ministries. The body as St Paul tells us is made up of many parts. These different parts have different functions (1Cor 12:12). We must not cut off other parts nor stop them from working. A healthy body will be one whose members and faculties are all working. It my hope that this Jubilee Year of Mercy of God to Man and woman should be reflected in the way men and women relate to each. It should be able to produce some fruits in this related area.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Introduction on the questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of the scientific study into the study of ‘The Church, The Community and The Feminine Question: a case study on women’s dignity among the Gurusi of Northern Ghana.’ It is an effort to understand how the local Church lives this reality and the way forward. As such, the responses to the questions are to be used only for this work. Personal information will not be revealed or given out to others as the privacy of every respondent will be respected. I admit it is a sensitive issue and as such, caution is taken to safeguard each respondent’s identity.

Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

1. About the Gurusi people and culture

- a. What do you know about the words “Frafra” and “Gurune”
- b. What are the various dialects of the Gurusi people?
- c. Are there cultural differences among these different dialects? If yes what are some of them?
- d. What are the main occupational activities in your area?
- e. Are there cultural practices in the Gurusi culture that promote the dignity of women? What are they?
- f. Are there cultural or traditional practices that oppress women? What are they?
- g. What cultural or traditional practices do you recommend to continue in relation to women?
- h. In your opinion, do you think the Church has given more room to women than is found in other religions (Islam and Traditional African Religion)?

2. Women and Gurusi society/Church

- a. What is your conception of “the dignity of women”?
- b. Is the dignity of women held high in the Gurusi culture?
- c. Are there social bodies in the Gurusi area that fight against women domination? Can you name them?
- d. What do you know of the teachings of the Church about the role of women in the Church? Are you satisfied with these teachings? Which ones are you satisfied with?
- e. Any values of women in the society and Church you know of in comparison to men?
- f. What are the rights of women which you think are not respected in the culture and the Church?

3. Women and power or leadership positions

- a. Are women willing to take up leadership roles in the presence of men (both in the church and civil sectors)?
- b. What is the population of your Church: women and men? How many women are in leadership roles and how many men in leadership roles?
- c. What is the population of your Church: women and men? How many women are in leadership roles and how many men in leadership roles?
- d. Within the leadership structures of the parishes, outstations, how many women and men are in leadership positions?
- e. In the diocesan level, how many women and men are in leadership positions?
- f. How do society or Church members see women in power?
- g. Do you prefer women or men in leadership positions in your society and Church? Why?

4. Ministerial roles

- a. Do you know of any ministerial roles of women in the Church? Are there some of these roles you think women can do better?
- b. Are women willing to take up ministerial roles?
- c. Do you agree with the saying that women are given less power in society and in the Church?
- d. Do you think that deliberate obstacles are placed on women's way? What are these obstacles?

5. Women in the eyes of the Church

- a. Do you agree with the saying that the Church is chauvinistic?
- b. How does the Church see women in power?
- c. In your opinion, is it the Church or NGOs that champion the emancipation of women in the Gurusi area? Can you justify it?
- d. Do you think women should be raised to the sacred orders? Why?
- e. In the light of the sacred scriptures, what do you say of the teachings of the Church regarding women and their roles in the Church?
- f. What should be done in the local level or universal level regarding the question of women in the Church?
- g. Anything to add?

Personal Information of Respondent

NAME (this is optional. You can put or omit it):.....

GENDER:.....AGE:.....

ETHNIC GROUP:.....

EDUCATIONAL STATUS:.....

RELIGION:.....

OCCUPATION/PROFESSION:.....

WHERE DO YOU LIVE (VILLAGE OR TOWN):.....

DO YOU HOLD ANY LEADERSHIP ROLE: CIVIL, CHURCH OR BOTH?:.....

POSITION IN CHURCH OR COMMUNITY:.....

WERE YOU BORN A CHRISTIAN OR GOT CONVERTED?:.....

MARITAL STATUS

DATE:.....

APPENDIX 2

Responses to questionnaire

There were various methods used to pass these questions to specific people I intended to get my information from. As part of the objective of this project, some things were taken into account in the selection of the people to answer the questionnaires. I selected men and women across the cultural divide: lay men and women, married unmarried men and women, priests, consecrated men and women, literate and illiterate men and women, Gurusis and non-Gurusis, those living in the Gurusiland and those outside and so on. In some cases, the questionnaires were sent and a follow up through phone call, Skype or email. In most of the cases as a result of illiteracy, the only means was through a telephone call. I selected forty people to whom I sent the questionnaires as well as through direct communication through a telephone. Out of this number, thirty-three responded. Seven did not respond and most of those who did not respond were native priests from the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese or working in it, whom I had trust on to respond to the questionnaires. I also made many follow ups on these since I thought they could be of great help to me.

Not everyone answered all the questions as they appear here. Almost all answered selectively and as some were obvious, I had to jump some of the questions because there was not enough time as well as the resources to go through them all.

The selected few written responses to the questionnaires are:

Apart from the Church's law that prohibits women in the Church from ordination, women can play all the other roles in the Church, including serving at Mass. They are chosen Chairpersons or members of the Parish Pastoral Council, some of them are Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion, lay readers, sacristans, administrators and of course they lead the various women groups.

They are respected and given the free hand to work. The Church in Ghana does not fail to respect women who play leading roles in the Church. No. They are acknowledged at gatherings, they are called to welcome people, they are given citations to honour them, and some have been given papal honours like the Knighthood of Gregory the Great, Benni Merenti, Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice, among others.

Challenges - lack of cooperation from fellow women as well as men, lack of formation for the women leaders; lack of funds to execute plans; lack of in-depth knowledge of Church's teachings etc.

Achievements - women empowerment, some have succeeded in helping less privileged people get schools to attend and work to do; women's work have sometimes brought peace and reconciliation in Churches, etc.

For now, I do not think there are more roles because I stated in my introduction, they play virtually all the roles available in the Church. What I think is that the time has come for the Church to train more women to play the roles in the Church since invariably you find a few women very active in such roles.

Formation of the young people especially Sunday School Children, mobilization of the women in the Church, fund-raising activities to give employment to the women and sometimes the men. For example, the Catholic Women Association has income-generating activities in almost all dioceses in Ghana; the Christian Mothers' Association has a functioning Micro-Finance company, etc. Above all, the mentoring they give to the young especially the girl-child cannot be overemphasized. They also support the activities of their parishes and the Church on the national level with their money.

In all cultures of Ghana, women are accorded respect and dignity because of the role they play in raising children. Above all, some are appointed Queen mothers and serve as chief advisors to kings and rulers as well as choose chiefs for the various localities. I think on the basis of this, we can also give women in the Church more room to work and respect them and honour them. But the bottom line is that we need to train them and form them for their work.

The word Frafra is a form of greetings, i.e., is all well, all is well etc. It's also a greeting of welcome. I think strangers visiting the area and hearing the same words, called them the frafras.

It has come to stay. The Grunsi, frafras & other tribes might have immigrated to their present locations together hence their common cultures, traditions and they intermarry. The people of the northern and 2 upper regions are farmers. They cultivate corn millet groundnuts on the land around their houses or huts. The grunsi speak kasem among other dialects.

My home town is along the Togo border yet we have the same occupational activities like the frafras & grunsis because we fall within the same savannah belt. Marriages, births & funerals are the activities that occupy the villagers and most importantly the weekly market days.

Dignity of a woman is very important among these people. It all starts from childhood till marriage. A woman must respect her parents, elders and be useful in the community. This means a lot and virginity comes top of the list. Despite modern day civilisation, a woman who smokes and drinks does not have respect and therefore no dignity even if she has many certificates. Child birth before marriage is seen as prostitution except if it is a rape case.

Tradition has created a lot of bad marriages in the name of respect for parents to maintain dignity. Young girls are forced to marry old men they have never seen and who have 2 or 3 previous wives. This usually brings divorces when the girl grows to understand the trap into which she has been lured. This practice is very discouraging and oppressive because love is not part of the issue.

A woman must be left to make her choice but guided by the church. A strong and understanding relationship between mother & daughter must prevail to advice, guide towards marriage through the tradition and to avoid early & unwanted pregnancies.

Islam has put a woman at the 3rd position in families where there is a son (you know the position of the church- Bible).

Women domination: Since the church-Christianity does not put women above men according to the Bible, the African tradition does not openly criticize women holding position except when a woman's behaviour is insolent to the elders because of their illiteracy or unknown to the society.

The Bible has mentioned many women, from Eve though Mary the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ and all the women who followed him throughout his ministry. They were all useful either cooking for the apostles & disciples or any other jobs they did to help. Today, women are left with small jobs like laying the altar, arranging flowers & candles not forgetting preparing of the communion then singing in the choir. Nuns and sisters in

convents can do better than praying and reading the Bible. I don't know any society in particular that fights against woman domination.

Apart from the positions held by women I think they could be given bigger posts. I've attended conferences and meetings of the church where the main speaker beside the Bishop is a woman who knows what she is about. I have not read enough to know if there are specific roles of women but I think some are more competent than men. For the fact that a woman remains a woman, men have the tendency of underrating them. This is easily justified by the creation of woman after man. To broaden our knowledge about the role of a woman in the society and church, we have to rely on our learned theologians to guide us.

We are all equal yet women are considered a lesser creation of God (this behaviour is from man to enable him dominate) thus paying a woman lesser for the job done even with qualifications. Since men are reluctant to give leadership roles to women both in the church and the civil sectors we usually criticize them for what we lack. This discourages some women.

Our church gets full on occasions but I'd say 60 percent is female while 10 percent for children & the rest the male folk. I am talking in the neighbourhood of between 100 and 200 people. Women are the majority in every group. I'm a member of the EAP (*Equipe d'animation pastorale*), a group of 6, of which 4 are women, we are used to seeing women in positions so this does not worry us anymore.

There are women as regional coordinators and this is a very big position in the church. Chauvinism of the church----Education has given rise to challenge and the church is constantly opposed. This makes it impossible to make reforms and changes without first consulting and outwitting the doubting Thomas's. Any declaration made by the pope should not give rise to any questions. So far all is well. Did Pope John Paul II not say in his 1st address, " Do not be afraid" or " Do not fear"? Fear what? The unknown? " A non Italian pope? Communism? Change of the catholic doctrine etc? " If the church were chauvinist as people say, drastic changes would have been made to please the church. But whatever change the church makes, has humanity and God as its central focus.

Some great changes made by the church has been criticized even till today, the Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday (the Lords day) Jesus did not come to fulfil the continuity of the Jewish tradition but to set up his kingdom. His resurrection on the 1st day of the week was the beginning of his church. Were the disciples not meeting on Saturdays and Sundays? It is clear that they did not respect the Sabbath very much.

People shun reforms that do not favour them but the churches reforms are in the interest of all for duration as well as its consequences. Discrimination is the work of men. God created man and woman with love and equal rights. Let's call a spade a spade. People expect the Pope to openly declare that priests can now marry. As if the present problems of paedophilia in the church can be wiped out with such a move. We are all at the mercy of the devil and his temptations.

Priest or not, many theories and, arguments have been formulated: were the apostles and successors of Peter not married? That is one question which bothers people. The other is about women and priesthood since some churches ordain ministers of the church. This is a big question for the church on the shoulders of the Pope. He might ask constantly if it is time for the church to move in that direction. Are our female folk complaining? Why has it become the concern of outsiders? So many things make the Catholic Church unique. One of them is the non ordination of women. Our Lord Jesus Christ finished his ministry before leaving. He did not include ordination of women. To patch up the lark of priests, married deacons fill the empty space left. Courses for women who can help upgrade the standard of catechism in the Church.

NGOs must be encouraged with defined roles. I hope I've not bored you with my ignorance.

CAN WOMEN BE ORDAINED AS PRIEST, DEACONS & BISHOPS

* The principal obstacle is that women have not been ordained as deacons in the Western Church for at least 800 years. In current canon law women cannot be ordained as anything. It is as simple as that.

(A) WOMEN MINISTRIES SHD. WOMEN & GUIDA

- * Women who have sound theological background can have an effective ministry in counselling.
- * Music ministry.
- * Sunday school department.
- * Church libraries.
- * Women can help to stabilize and unify the church family
- * Teaching ministries
- * Ushers
- * Women can be deaconesses.

② WHAT THE CHURCH CAN DO FOR WOMEN

- * Husbands to appreciate wives
- * The dignity of women is to be respected.
- * Women be given ~~es~~ recognition in real equality of rights with men.
- * Women be offered full opportunity to fulfill their roles in all sectors and at all levels in society.

③ SAFE GUARDING WOMEN DIGNITY & VOCATION IN CHURCH

- * Women be granted the privileged position in the economy of redemption.
- * Women be made fully aware of the greatness of their mission.
- * Husband shd. love their wives, as themselves.
- * The church shd. welcome and care for the oppressed.

CONT.

DIGNITY & VOCATION OF WOMEN

- * The church needs to encourage forgiving and receiving forgiveness as life long processes.
- * The church is intended to reflect be a place where women who are hurt and damaged may find healing and wholeness.

① ROLE OF WOMEN IN CHURCH

- * Women role in church reflects the original act of creation in which man was first created.
- * Woman's role in the church reflects that, it was the woman who was first deceived by Satan and fell into sin.
- * Women were among the earliest members of the church and an important part of its life.
- * Women show hospitality to strangers
- * Women relieve the afflicted.
- * Women bring up children
- * Women provide financial support
- * Women help to provide for the needy & express serving love which is to characterize the church as the family of God.

* Women can be deacons.

⑤ ARE MEN & WOMEN EQUAL IN THE BIBLE

* Romans 2:11 — For God shows no partiality

* Proverbs 20:10 — Unequal weight & unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

* Galatians 3:26-29 —

For Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Christian hope is a resistance movement against fatalism.

We want to share this hope with all people. We want to join with them in the same movement. We want to learn from their experience and from the hope by which they are sustained in their struggle.

6. Sing to the Lord a new song

This invitation means more than using a new tune. The psalmist urges us to celebrate the new things God is doing in our midst. We are invited to be open to the future, and ever anew to interpret the signs of the times. As we reflected on today's response to God's covenant we realized how quickly the world scene is changing and accordingly new challenges emerge. The truth of the Chinese proverb became apparent: It is usually later than we think. There is therefore need for staying together in the process of mutual commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and for being prepared for new vision, commitments and actions.

At the beginning of his ministry, in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus, quoting the prophet Isaiah, proclaimed the "acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19).

The expression refers to the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25) which was to be celebrated by Israel in intervals of fifty years as an occasion to redress injustice and oppression which had occurred and to recognize the limits of human claim on God's creation. Jesus proclaims a permanent jubilee and thereby confronts the church with the constant task of witnessing to the demands of justice, reconciliation and the dignity and rights of nature.

The covenant community is a jubilee community in the service of all.

AFFIRMATIONS ON JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Introduction

In this world marked by injustice, violence and degradation of the environment we want to reaffirm God's covenant which is open to all and holds the promise of life in wholeness and right relationships. Responding to God's covenant we profess our faith in the Triune God who is the very source of communion.

Our response to the covenant today leads us to make the following affirmations on urgent issues where justice, peace and the integrity of creation are at stake. They represent firm convictions that have grown out of years of ecumenical dialogue and struggle.

We make these affirmations as Christian people being aware that many people of living faiths and ideologies share these concerns with us and are guided by their understanding of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. We therefore seek dialogue and cooperation with them, guided by a vision of the new future which is necessary for the survival for our planet.

We can only make these affirmations as we acknowledge our shortcomings and failures and commit ourselves anew to the reality of God's reign. This means to resist in thought, word and action the powers of separation and destruction and to live in active solidarity with the suffering people.

AFFIRMATION I

We affirm that all exercise of power is accountable to God

The world belongs to God. Therefore, all forms of human power and exercise of authority should serve God's purposes in the world and are answerable to the people on whose behalf they are exercised. Those who wield power - economic, political, military, social, scientific, cultural, legal, religious - must be stewards of God's justice and peace. In Christ, God's power is demonstrated in redemptive suffering, as compassionate love which identifies itself with broken and suffering humanity. This empowers people to proclaim the message of liberation, love and hope which offers new life, to resist injustice and to struggle against the powers of death.

Therefore we affirm that all forms of human power and authority are subject to God and accountable to people. This means the right of people to full participation. In Christ, God decisively revealed the meaning of power as compassionate love that prevails over the forces of death.

We will resist any exercise of power and authority which tries to monopolize power and so prohibits processes of transformation towards justice, peace and integrity of creation.

We commit ourselves to support the constructive power of people's movements in their struggle for human dignity and liberation, as well as in achieving just and participatory forms of government and economic structures.

AFFIRMATION II

We affirm God's option for the poor

The poor are the exploited and oppressed. Their poverty is not accidental. It is very often a result of deliberate policies which result in the constantly increasing accumulation of wealth and power. The existence of poverty is a scandal and a crime. It is blasphemy to say that it is the will of God. Jesus came that we should have "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10). In his death and resurrection, Christ exposed and thereby conquered the powers that deny the poor their right to abundant life (Luke 4:16-21). God shows a preferential option for the poor. The glory of God is reflected in the poor person fully alive (Archbishop Romero). In the cries of the poor we hear the challenging voice of God.

Those whom society treats as "the least" are described by Jesus as his sisters and brothers (Matthew 25:31-46). While we support the need for diaconal services and urgent response to emergencies, we recognize in our time that the needs of "the least" can only be met by fundamentally transforming the world economy through structural change. Charity and aid projects alone cannot meet the needs and protect the dignity of the world's poorest billion people of whom women and children are the majority. The solution to the debt crisis can only be found through a just, equitable world economic order and not in palliative measures like the re-scheduling of debts.

We affirm God's preferential option for the poor and state that as Christians our duty is to embrace God's action in the struggles of the poor in the liberation of us all.

We will resist all forces, policies and institutions which create and perpetuate poverty or accept it as inevitable and ineradicable.

We commit ourselves to be allies of those organizations and efforts which are dedicated to achieving the eradication of exploitation and oppression.

AFFIRMATION III

We affirm the equal value of all races and peoples

In Jesus Christ, all people of whatever race, caste, or ethnic descent are reconciled to God and to each other. Racism as an ideology and discrimination as a practice are renunciations of the rich diversity of God's design for the world and violations of the dignity of human personality. All forms of racism - whether individual, collective or systemic - must be named sin and their theological justification heresy.

We reject the perversion of the language of human and peoples' rights to assert so-called "group rights", an assertion which is divisive and seeks not to liberate but to preserve economic exploitation and political privilege by powerful minorities.

Therefore, remembering the Covenant of God who declares "All the families of earth are mine":

We affirm that people of every race, caste and ethnic group are of equal value. In the very diversity of their cultures and traditions, they reflect the rich plurality of God's creation.

We will resist the denial of the rights of human beings who are members of exploited and oppressed racial, ethnic, caste or indigenous groups. We will resist attempts by dominant cultures and groups to deprive them of their cultural identity, full citizenship and equal access to economic, social, political and ecclesial power. We will resist the oppression and exploitation of women and children who are the most painfully affected.

We therefore commit ourselves to work against the forces of racism, ethnicism and casteism and to stand in solidarity with their victims and their struggles.

AFFIRMATION IV

We affirm that male and female are created in the image of God

In God's image God created male and female (Genesis 1:27). This creation in God's image is the basis for a dynamic relationship between women and men for the transformation of society. Christ affirmed the personhood of women and empowered them to a life of dignity and fullness. Women with men, as "new creation in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17) must work towards a world where all forms of discrimination are eliminated. Therefore, as we remember the Covenant of God:

We affirm the creative power given to women to stand for life wherever there is death. In Jesus' community women find acceptance and dignity and with them he shared the imperative to carry the good news.

We will resist structures of patriarchy which perpetuate violence against women in their homes and in a society which has exploited their labour and sexuality. Within this we pay special attention to the most vulnerable women - those who are poor and/or black, Dalits, members of indigenous communities, refugees, migrant workers and women of other oppressed groups. We resist all structures of dominance which exclude the theological and spiritual contributions of women and deny their participation in decision-making processes in church and society.

Therefore, encouraged by the persistence of women in their struggles for life, all over the world, we commit ourselves to seek ways of realizing a new community of women and men.

AFFIRMATION V

We affirm that truth is at the foundation of a community of free people

Jesus Christ lived a life of truthfulness. In living God's truth he got into conflict with the values and powers of his society. He communicated his message of truth to the people, teaching and preaching with simple language, images and examples.

People's abilities to communicate and learn are among the greatest gifts of God. They relate and bind individuals together into communities and communities into the one human family. Communication and education in the service of justice, peace and the integrity of creation carry an awe-inspiring responsibility for the future.

"These are things you shall do; Speak the truth to one another and make for peace, tells the prophet" (Zechariah 8:16).

Today, new technologies offer possibilities of wider communication and education for all. At the same time their misuse threatens the true purpose of communication and education. Ignorance, illiteracy, propaganda, misinformation and sheer falsehood face us; therefore, as we respond to the God of the truth that sets us free:

We affirm that access to truth and education, information and means of communication are basic human rights. All people have the right to be educated, to tell their own stories, to speak their own convictions and beliefs, to be heard by others and to have the power to distinguish truth from falsehood.

We will resist policies that deny freedom of expression; that encourage the concentration of the communication media in the hands of the state or of economically powerful monopolies; that tolerate the spread of consumerism, racism, casteism, sexism, chauvinism in all its forms, religious intolerance, and a disposition to violence; and that acquiesce in increasing illiteracy and reducing educational facilities in many countries. All this applies to every section of church and society.

We commit ourselves to create means by which the neglected and vulnerable may learn and the silenced may make themselves heard. We will seek to ensure that the truth, including the Word of God and accurate representation of other faiths, is communicated through modern media in imaginative, prophetic, liberating and respectful ways.

AFFIRMATION VI

We affirm the peace of Jesus Christ

The only possible basis for lasting peace is justice (Isaiah 32:17). The prophetic vision of peace with justice is this:

"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
but they shall sit every (one) under (their) vine and under
(their) fig tree,
and none shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:3-4).

Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers" and "love your enemies". The church as the community of the crucified and risen Christ is called to a reconciling role in the world. We have to discern what it entails to be makers of peace: the conscious acceptance of vulnerability.

In Jesus Christ God has broken through the bonds of hostility between nations and peoples, and even now offers us the gift of peace with justice. No wound, hostility nor sinfulness is beyond the reach of the peace that passes understanding. For biblical faith, true peace means every human being dwelling in secure relatedness to God, neighbour, nature and self.

God's justice is to protect "the least" (Matthew 25:31-46), those who are the most vulnerable (Deuteronomy 24). God is the defender of the poor (Amos 5).

There can be no peace without justice. Such a peace cannot be obtained or guaranteed through narrowly conceived doctrines of national security, for peace is indivisible. True security must be based on justice for the people, especially for those most at risk, and on respect for the environment.

We affirm the full meaning of God's peace. We are called to seek every possible means of establishing justice, achieving peace and solving conflicts by active non-violence.

We will resist doctrines and systems of security based on the use of and deterrence by all weapons of mass destruction, and military invasions, interventions and occupations, as well as doctrines of national security which are aimed at the control and suppression of the people in order to protect the privileges of the few.

We commit ourselves to practice non-violence in all our personal relationships, to work for the banning of warfare as a legally recognized means of resolving conflicts, and to press governments for the establishment of an international legal order of peacemaking.

AFFIRMATION VII

We affirm the creation as beloved of God

As Creator, God is the source and sustainer of the whole cosmos. God loves the creation. Its mysterious ways, its life, its dynamism - all reflect the glory of its Creator. God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ reconciles all things and calls us to the healing work of the Spirit in all creation.

Because creation is of God and the goodness of God permeates all creation, we hold all life to be sacred. Today all life in the world, both present and future generations, are endangered because humanity has failed to love the living earth and the rich and powerful in particular have plundered it as if it were created for selfish purposes. The magnitude of the devastation may well be irreversible and therefore forces us to urgent action.

Biblical statements - i.e. "to have dominion" and "subdue the earth" - have been misused through the centuries to justify destructive actions toward the created order. As we repent of this violation, we accept the biblical teaching that people, created in the image of God, have a special responsibility as servants in reflecting God's creating and sustaining love, to care for creation and to live in harmony with it.

We affirm that the world, as God's handiwork, has its own inherent integrity; that land, waters, air, forests, mountains and all creatures, including humanity, are "good" in God's sight. The integrity of creation has a social aspect which we recognize as peace with justice, and an ecological aspect which we recognize in the self-renewing, sustainable character of natural ecosystems.

We will resist the claim that anything in creation is merely a resource for human exploitation; species extinction for human benefit; consumerism and harmful mass production; pollution of land, air and waters; all human activities which are now leading to probable rapid climate change; and policies and plans which contribute to the disintegration of creation.

Therefore we commit ourselves to be members of both the living community of creation in which we are but one species, and members of the Covenant community of Christ; full co-workers with God, with moral responsibility to respect the rights of future generations, and to conserve and work for the integrity of creation both for its inherent value to God and in order that justice may be achieved and sustained.

AFFIRMATION VIII

We affirm that the earth is the Lord's

The land and the waters provide life to people - indeed, to all that lives - now and for the future. But millions are deprived of land and suffer from the contamination of waters; their cultures, their spirituality and their lives are destroyed. Peoples indigenous to the land and its historical caretakers have particularly suffered and still suffer oppressive separation from their land - by government policy and by violence, by theft and deceit, and by cultural and physical genocide. They await the fulfilment of the promise for the meek to inherit the earth. When there is justice in the land, the fields and forests and every living thing will dance and sing for joy (Psalm 96:11-12). Therefore,

We affirm that the land belongs to God. Human use of land and waters should release the earth to regularly replenish its life-giving power, protecting its integrity and providing spaces for its creatures.

We will resist any policy that treats land merely as a marketable commodity; that allows speculation at the expense of the poor; that dumps poisonous wastes into the land and the waters; that promotes the

exploitation, unequal distribution or contamination of the land and its products, or that prevents those who live directly from the land from being its real trustees.

We commit ourselves to join in solidarity with indigenous communities struggling for their cultures, spirituality, and rights to land and sea; with peasants and poor farmers seeking land reform as well as seasonal agricultural workers, and to have reverence for the ecological space of other living creatures.

AFFIRMATION IX

We affirm the dignity and commitment of the younger generation

Jesus actively upheld the dignity of the younger generation. His indication that unless we become like little children we cannot enter into the kingdom of God (Luke 18:17) and Paul's call to Timothy not to allow anyone to despise him because of his youth (I Timothy 4:12), implies a challenge to society to build human communities which, with wonder and curiosity, playfulness and vulnerability, with heart, soul and body, ensure the continuity of generations in the love of God. Poverty, injustice and the debt crisis, war and militarism, hit children hard through dislocation of families, forcing them into work at an early age just to survive, inflicting malnutrition upon them and even threatening their survival. Millions of children, particularly the girl child, have no security in order to enjoy their childhood. The increase in unemployment, especially among young people, causes despair. Therefore:

We affirm the dignity of the children which derives from their particular vulnerability and need for nurturing love;

the creative and sacrificial role that the young people are playing in building a new society, recognizing their right to have a prophetic voice in the structures that affect their life and their community;

the rights and needs of the younger generation as basic for establishing educational and developmental priorities.

We will resist any policy or authority which violates the rights of the younger generation, and which abuses and exploits them. The human right of conscientious objection must be fully respected.

We commit ourselves to our responsibility to support young people in their struggle for self-actualization, participation, and a life of hope and faith; and to create conditions which enable all children to live in dignity, and where old and young share experiences and learn from each other.

AFFIRMATION X

We affirm that human rights are given by God

There is an inseparable relationship between justice and human rights. Human rights have their source in God's justice which relates to an enslaved, marginalized suffering people in concrete acts of deliverance from oppression (Exodus 3:7b). We recognize with contrition that we as churches have not

been in the forefront of the defence of human rights, and many times through our theology have justified human rights violations.

The term "human rights" must be clearly understood to refer not only to individual rights but also to the collective social, economic and cultural rights of peoples, including those with disabilities, such as the right to land and its resources, to one's own ethnic and racial identity and to the exercise of religious and political freedom. The right to sovereignty and self-determination for peoples to work out their own models of development and to live free of fear and free of manipulation is a fundamental human right which should be respected, likewise the rights of women and children to a life free of violence in home and society.

We affirm that human rights are God-given and that their promotion and protection are essential for freedom, justice and peace. To protect and defend human rights, an independent judicial system is necessary.

We will resist all structures and systems that violate human rights and deny the opportunity for the realization of the full potential of individuals and peoples; in particular, torture, disappearances, and extra-judicial executions and the death penalty.

We commit ourselves to actions of solidarity with organizations and movements working for the promotion and protection of human rights; we will work for the acceptance and full implementation of human rights standards through effective instruments.

We further commit ourselves to work towards the full social integration of persons with disabilities into our communities through all possible means, including the removal of economic, religious, social and cultural barriers, particularly ensuring access to buildings, documentation and information, which prevent them from fully participating in our communities.

ENTERING INTO COVENANT SOLIDARITY

Introduction

1. We have made the foregoing affirmations in responding anew to God's covenant. They represent the basic direction which the Christian commitment to JPIC is to follow. Yet our response to God's covenant must go beyond the general renewal of commitment which is part of these affirmations. It must lead to concrete action out of renewed faithfulness to the covenant.
2. The following "Act of Covenanting" provides examples of such faithful action which is required today if the brokenness and violation of life and the division of our communities is to be healed. They translate the response to God's covenant into acts of mutual commitment within the covenant community. The building of links of solidarity around specific issues and concerns, of networks of communication and support, is the most urgent priority for action today. This underlines the fact that the human response to God's covenant is a corporate act.
3. The cause and consequences of injustice, violence and the destruction of the environment are intertwined. They affect people in an inter-connected way. Therefore our form of action should also reflect this inter-connection

Appendix 3

Data of Respondents

Below is the list of those who responded: name, place and sometimes what the person does.

Name	Status and Location	Date interviewed
Norbert Atia Atanga	Tertiary education, development worker, assistant prayer leader, Yorogo – Bolga, Ghana	17-10-2015
Felix Afanaam	World Vision, Ghana	29-11-2015
Mrs. Elizabeth Apprey Pobee	National Secretary, NCWA, NCCW, Ghana	09-12-2015
Miss Justina Kuntaa	National Peace Council, Cape Coast, Ghana	01-12-2015
Rev. Fr. Dr. Rudolph Alumam	Rector, St. Augustine Millennium Major Seminary, Tamale, Ghana	15-10-2015
Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Abbey-Quaye	GCBC secretariat, Accra, Ghana	29-10-2015
Miss Doris Köhncke	JPIC, Spiritan Province Europe, Germany	10-12-2015
Alexander Kwame Adjei	Retired educationist, Ghana	25-12-2015
V. Rev. Mgnr Roger Abotiyuure	Retired Catholic Priest and Educationist, Ghana	02-10-2015
Rev. Fr. Dr. Samuel Atinga	Formator in St. Augustine	13-09-2015

	Millennium Major Seminary and Master of Ceremonies in the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese, Ghana	
Mr. Alexander Agyei	Parish Animation Team, Strasbourg, France	30-11-2015
Mrs. Dorah Agyei	Strasbourg, France	30-11-2015
Dr. Agnes Apusigah	Lecturer and Dean of Studies, University of Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana	20-11-2015
Dr. Rose Mary Amenga'etgo	Lecturer, Religious Studies with focus on African Indigenous Religions, Gender and Development, Ghana	19-10-2015
Mrs. Beatrice Anderson	St. Anthony Guilds, retired nurse, Church elder, Ghana	19-11-2015
Mrs. Melanie Kassise	Sacristan, retired educationist, church elder, Ghana	19-11-2015
Mrs. Victoria Akayeti	Bishop's Secretariat, Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese, Ghana	06-12-2015
Mr. Matthew Akayeti	Afrikids, Bolga, Ghana	06-12-2015
Village elders	Bolga, Bongo, Kasena Nankani, Tallensi, Nabdan,	10-11-2015 to 23-12-2015

	Ghana	
The NCCW, Ghana	Accra, Ghana	29-10-2015
St. Therese of Child Jesus Society	Dioceses of Accra and Navrongo-Bolgatanga, Ghana	29-10-2015
Christian Mothers Association	Dioceses of Accra and Navrongo-Bolgatanga, Ghana	30-11-2015
Rev. Fr. Patrice Gasser	Geneva, Switzerland	11-10-2015
Catholic Charismatic Renewal	Accra, Ghana	10-10-2015
National Laity Council	Accra, Ghana	10-10-2015
Sr. Isabel Banga	Philippines	12-10-2015
Mrs. Mary Apambila	Bolga, Ghana	01-10-2015
Mrs. Juliet Kuniba	Agricultural Development Officer, Ghana	21-12-2015
Rev. Fr. Pedro Fernandes	Rector of theology house, Porto, Portugal	16-12-2015
Miss Julia Pedreiro Correia	Law student, Germany	21-9-2015
Mrs. Evelyn Nabia	Provincial WIP Coordinator, (ECOTAPS), Tamale, Ghana	24-11-2015
Rev. Fr. Edward Flynn	Vivat International/HRC, UN, Geneva, Switzerland	25-07-2015

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