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**THE CHURCH, THE SOCIETY AND THE  
FEMININE QUESTION: A CASE STUDY ON  
WOMEN'S DIGNITY IN WESTERN KENYA (LUHYA  
TRIBE)**

Final Dissertation

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

ABBREVIATIONS .....	5
ABSTRACT .....	8
INTRODUCTION .....	11
CHAPTER 1: LUHYA CULTURAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW ON WOMEN'S DIGNITY.....	17
1.1 Luhya Historical and Geographical Context.....	17
1.2. Political Context of the Luhya people .....	19
1.2.1. Pre-Colonial Period.....	19
1.2.2 Colonial Period .....	20
1.2.3 Independence to Present Period.....	20
1.2.4. Population .....	21
1.3. Religious Context in Luhya Nation .....	21
1.4. Cultural Context of Luhya people .....	23
1.4.1 Marriages .....	25
1.4.2 Birth, Naming, Kinship and Childhood .....	27
1.4.2.1 Kinship .....	29
1.4.2.2 Naming .....	30
1.4.2.3 Initiation .....	30
1.5 Literature: Myth, Proverbs, and Maxims.....	31
1.5.1 Myths .....	31
1.5.2 Proverbs .....	33
1.5.3 Maxims (mentality).....	39
1.5.4 Taboos.....	40
1.6 Women's dignity within the Luhya Context.....	42
1.7 Are women ready for leadership challenge?.....	43
1.8 What does the social bodies say on women?.....	45
Synthesis: Critical approach and Luhya woman's world .....	48
CHAPTER 2: THE CHURCH'S TEACHINGS ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND HER ROLE IN BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE SOCIETY .....	53
2.1 The teachings of the Church .....	56
2.2 Women in Official Church documents .....	60
2.3 The local Church.....	69
2.4 The Office of Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation.....	72
Synthesis: Critical approach and theological predicaments .....	79

CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN’S DIGNITY AND WOMEN’S ROLE WITHIN THE LUHYA ECCLESIAL CONTEXT .....	82
3.1 Women in the Holy Scriptures.....	84
3.1.1 Women in the Old Testament (OT) .....	89
3.1.2 Women in the New Testament (NT).....	92
3.2 Women in the Church and her history .....	97
3.3 World view on women’s dignity .....	106
3.4 Theological perspective on women .....	110
3.5 Role of women within Kenyan ecclesiastical context .....	113
Synthesis: Critical approach and pastoral challenge.....	115
CONCLUSION .....	121
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	130
APPENDICES.....	141
Appendix 1.....	141
Appendix 2.....	143
Appendix 3.....	152

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
Vat. II	Vatican II Council
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA Kenya)
NFLS	The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies
DFE	Desert Flower Foundation
EN	Equality Now
AWO	African Women Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
ACCAF	Africa Coordination Centre for the Abandonment of FGM/C
GG	The Girl Generation
OP	Orchid Project
UNCR	The United Nations Charter on Rights
ACHPR	African Charter on Human and people's Rights
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
CREA	Centre of Rights Education and Awareness
EC	Ecumenical Councils
Gen	The book of Genesis
Mt	The Gospel according to Saint Matthew
GS	Gaudium et Spes
WUCWO	The World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations
LG	Lumen Gentium
Rom	The Letter of Apostle Paul to the Romans
Enc.	Encyclical
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
MWO	Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization
KEWOPA	The Kenya Women Parliamentary Association
CWA	Catholic Women Association
JPIC	The office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
C. S. Sp.	Congregatio Sancti Spiritus
WCC	The assembly of World Council of Churches

GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
Cor	Corinthians
OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
Psalms	The book of Psalms
Prov	The book of Proverbs
UN	United Nations
Jn	The Gospel according to Saint John
Lk	The Gospel according to Saint Luke
Eph	The Letter of Apostle Paul to Ephesians
Pt	The Letter of Saint Peter
Col	The Letter of Apostle Paul to Colossians
Sir	The book of Sirach
Wis	The book of Wisdom
Ex	The book of Exodus
Is	The book of Isaiah
Est	The book of Esther
Kgs	The book of Kings
Judg	The book of Judges
Num	The book of Numbers
Mi	The book of Micah
Ez	The book of prophet Ezekiel
Ne	The book of Nehemiah
CL	Christifideles Laici
MD	Mulieris Dignitatem
BVM	Blessed Virgin Mary
Mk	The Gospel according to Saint Mark
Phil	The Letter of Apostle Paul to Philemon
Rev	The book of Revelation
Ecl	The book of Ecclesiasticus

CWC	Catholic Women's Council
KNCCW	Kenya National Council of Catholic Women
KCCB	The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops
PMC	Pontifical Missionary Children
CYO	Catholic Youth Organisation
YCS	Young Christian Society
CMA	Catholic Men Association
KNHCR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
OHCHR	The office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ICJ-Kenya	The International Commission of Jurists-Kenya
LSK	Law Society of Kenya
TJRC	Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission
UDA	United Democratic Alliance
SRL	Spiritual Rule of Life
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations.
SRS	Sollicitudo Rei Socialis
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighter
RM	The Roman Missal

## ABSTRACT

This work on: *'The Church, the society and the feminine question: a case study on women's dignity in Western Kenya (Luhya tribe)'* is an attempt to enter and understand the women's world. For centuries, women have been considered objects or second-class citizens thus not much counted in both our communities and the Church as it is compared to men. Women have always been regarded as children if I may say so since long and you can confirm this even in the Gospel according to Mt. 14: 13-21. And the same assumption, the discrediting, the downplaying, the degrading, the same despising of women seems not to be only a thing of antiquity but also today as we speak.

This work intends to look at the feminism question both from the Church and an African cultural point of view and try to foresee the future as much as women's position and roles are concerned. We shall be concentrating on African world but most specifically the Luhya tribe of Western part of Kenya. This way, we visit the two worlds; the secular society and the Church and her mission.

As things stand by now, we can ask ourselves a series of queries. The Church being hierarchical, does she seem to contain women? Was the Church designed to use each gift of each member in her mission? Are women valued citizens by the Church? Are they significant in leadership? With their potentials as women, do they have any positive influence on edification of the present and the future Church? We purpose to the Bible in anchoring our discussion on contribution of women who used their skills, abilities and influence to strengthen and protect God's family (Israel). We use the theological imperatives that compel believers to use their gifts in building up God's empire.

Finally, it should be noted that I do not write this work as a feminist or a defender of women but only to express what female gender has gone through for ages now and what the future holds for them. When will it dawn for this gender? When will they become people like their counterparts? Neither am I here to support a worldwide movement called Christian feminist theology, nor defend the fact and obvious truth that women are fully human and are to be valued as such a principle that we may not see it often honoured in the theological tradition. But it should also be known that I am not going to defend the feminist theology that argues that, the Christian community needs to be transformed into a community of the discipleship of equals as a sacramental witness to the vocation of the whole world. In the face of injustices over women again, I am not going to advocate for

women's flourishing in all their dimensions and relationships as an essential element of the redeemed human community that the world misses, this is too obvious and so we need no advocacy. We remain faithful to the matter of concern, the dignity and the future of women. This is not a petition but a simple work on the presentation of what faces women and what is to be done to guard their dignity and vocation.

## **KEYWORDS**

Luhya, the Catholic Church, Women, African Traditional Religion, Dignity, Feminism and Vocation.

## **ABSTRATO**

Este trabalho em curso: *'A Igreja, a sociedade e a questão feminina: um estudo de caso sobre a dignidade da mulher no Quênia Ocidental (tribo Luhya)'* é uma tentativa de entrar e compreender o mundo da mulher. Durante séculos, as mulheres têm sido consideradas objectos ou cidadãos de segunda classe, pelo que não são muito contadas tanto nas nossas comunidades como na Igreja, uma vez que são comparadas aos homens. As mulheres sempre foram consideradas como crianças, se me é permitido dizê-lo há muito tempo, e podem confirmar isto mesmo no Evangelho de acordo com Mt. 14: 13-21. E o mesmo pressuposto, o descrédito, a desvalorização, o degradante, o mesmo desprezo pelas mulheres parece não ser uma coisa só da antiguidade, mas também hoje, enquanto falamos.

Este trabalho pretende olhar para a questão do feminismo tanto do ponto de vista da Igreja como de um ponto de vista cultural africano e tentar prever o futuro tanto quanto a posição e os papéis das mulheres. Vamos concentrar-nos no mundo Africano, mas mais especificamente na tribo Luhya da parte ocidental do Quênia. Desta forma, visitamos os dois mundos; a sociedade secular e a Igreja e a sua missão.

No estado actual das coisas, podemos colocar-nos uma série de questões. Sendo a Igreja hierárquica, será que ela parece conter mulheres? Foi a Igreja concebida para usar cada dom de cada membro na sua missão? Serão as mulheres cidadãs valorizadas pela Igreja? Serão elas significativas na liderança? Com os seus potenciais como mulheres, têm alguma influência positiva na edificação da Igreja presente e futura? O nosso propósito para a Bíblia é ancorar a nossa discussão sobre a contribuição das mulheres que

utilizaram as suas capacidades, capacidades e influência para fortalecer e proteger a família de Deus (Israel). Utilizamos os imperativos teológicos que obrigam os crentes a usar os seus dons na construção do império de Deus.

Finalmente, é de notar que não escrevo este trabalho como feminista ou defensora das mulheres, mas apenas para expressar o que o género feminino tem passado há séculos e o que o futuro lhes reserva. Quando é que amanhecerá para este género? Quando é que se tornarão pessoas como as suas congéneres? Não estou aqui para apoiar um movimento mundial chamado teologia feminista cristã, nem para defender o facto e a verdade óbvia de que as mulheres são plenamente humanas e devem ser valorizadas como tal, princípio que talvez não vejamos muitas vezes honrado na tradição teológica. Mas também se deve saber que não vou defender a teologia feminista que defende que, a comunidade cristã precisa de ser transformada numa comunidade do discipulado de iguais como testemunha sacramental da vocação de todo o mundo. Face às injustiças sobre as mulheres novamente, não vou defender o florescimento das mulheres em todas as suas dimensões e relações como elemento essencial da comunidade humana redimida que o mundo sente falta, isto é demasiado óbvio e por isso não precisamos de defender. Permanecemos fiéis à questão da preocupação, da dignidade e do futuro das mulheres. Isto não é uma petição, mas um simples trabalho sobre a apresentação do que enfrenta as mulheres e o que deve ser feito para salvaguardar a sua dignidade e vocação.

#### **AS PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Luhya, a Igreja Católica, Mulheres, Religião Tradicional Africana, Dignidade, Feminismo e Vocação.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (RM n° 2).

The opening remarks from our Christian liturgical greeting expresses the oneness and one source that gives energy of both living and non-living things. It is all love centred. The above demonstrates clearly that fellowship, community is the primordial design of existence and that all creatures are connected through the indwelling, renewing, moving creator spirit that appreciates everybody. Thus, every individual should and must be appreciated.

### **History of Research**

Everything raised by a rational being has a purpose and direction of its destiny. Therefore, on taking this question on women's dignity and vocation in both the Church and the society, we are taking ourselves to the great ocean waters that in this case we call women. We move to the feminism world, the world of women to discover their life, the purpose of their life, their existence, experience their challenges, feel their strengths and weaknesses and know their vocation. Do they even feel any pain? Who are they before the so-called their "heads"? In this study, the biblical and cultural (specifically the Luhya<sup>1</sup> of Western Kenya) consideration of woman forms the basis. We hear much about women and their existence. Others degrade women, others promote or find a place for them in the society but note that we are not going to devalue or value women in this project. We shall try to express the plain happenings as things stand on ground.

In this project that is both theological and academic, we shall investigate condition of a woman but in line with God's knowledge because she is a creature created by God and therefore, we need the light of the Holy Spirit to understand her. It is in God we contemplate and understand a woman as a person, her existence, her purpose, her position, her gifts and life. For this reason, to understand a woman, we shall focus on the Church's much respected figures like Pope John II who wrote a lot in encyclical called *Mulieris Dignitatem*. This encyclical carries good news for women because it sets out the current positive Roman Catholic attitude for women. In addition, we shall look at other significant

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<sup>1</sup> The names Luhya and Luyia are used interchangeably to mean the same tribe not only in this work but that is how it has been taken since long ago.

figures like Pope Francis who has resurrected the talk on women in the Church and seems to be the new hope in the present world.

The topic for this thesis is neither theological or traditional abstract thing. It is not even near the dogmatic theory but something lived and is still being lived today. I thought of so many topics among them Eschatology, Conversion of St. Paul, Family and Divorce in Catholic Church, Pastoral Challenges in East Africa among many other stunning topics but finally, I thought this will largely contribute to the understanding of everything surrounding human life and justice. I looked back in the community and saw what I will refer to as the virgin forest in waiting for exploitation, I looked back in the Church and I saw those many benches occupied by a huge number of females. And history is clear that on that well decorated glittering chair, no woman has ever sat on. A woman will decorate the chair, for the life of beauty lives in her who is the giver of life but enjoying the same privilege is where we have drawn boundaries. Discussion on women has been limited, the ones that get into limelight are given little attention. Even though she receives little attention, a woman offers life to Church through her commitments like in cleaning.

Among the Luyia community, like in any other African community, women remain relegated while men are given prominence. As part of the Luyia community, I have witnessed and lived this imbalance in the society. I want to write on life of women, the untold story of my mothers, my sisters, and my female friends. It is untold story because in most cases people are not ready to discuss about the oppressions, the injustices and liberty of the same gender. In particular, woman's relationship with God attracts little attention. No one wants to discuss about the relationship between this gender and the Creator. In fact, many think that a woman is far connected from God than men are. But in vision of the Church in the mission of preaching a message of salvation, I thought to stand with the feminist theology that argues, «the Christian community needs to be transformed into a community of the discipleship of equals as a sacramentally witness to the vocation of the whole world».<sup>2</sup> Not discussing these flourishing women in different dimensions is in itself subordination. Having been in contact with different people with different views, different cultures, different classes, different countries, the conversation about women has motivated my interest in studying essentiality of women in both the Church and in our communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Johnson A. *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), 24.

I hope that my study will contribute to understanding of the Luhya community and its treatment of women. I am convinced that people back at Luhyaland after reading this piece, will uplift the standards of women and abolish the culture narrative that mamas (mothers) are weak and they ought not to be considered in anything except in childbearing, kitchen and Church cleaning. Ooh my mother and sisters of the village, I am not here to defend you but to say that you are human like a man.

Hot discussions about feminine question have raised of recent and the whole world is debating. Both the Church and the secular world are in a run to seek the position and dignity of a woman in its person. The stage is full of drama as people try to defend and others try to forget or show no interest in safeguarding a woman in her sphere. Others consider her as a person while others still want to consider a woman as an instrument, a back bencher, or a spectator of events. I seek to investigate the same and express the intimidations and gender-based violence women faced for ages, but also, their future.

While treating this question, I stand out to be understood that I am not to embrace the intimidation of female gender or opposing the feminist ideologies that seem to be seeking an advancement of a girl-child but just expressing my thoughts on women's position and roles in the community and the Church. I hope this work serves many within Luyia community and other African communities. Also, the work takes the Luhya culture as a case study to look at the issue in the Mother Church. Some would wish to see women much active both in the society and the Church and it is here where tension arises. Is it power or service? Is it misunderstanding? What is it that brings this friction? The ecumenical council, Vatican II, a revolution council brought a lot in the Church and among them was paving a way on the question of women in service but we can ask ourselves how the Church has lived and is living this new dawn. Pope Francis has been the great advocate for women but what will come for them in the Church?

### **Challenges**

Taking Luhya culture as our case study, we face some predicaments. Some of these challenges include; illiteracy, way of information transmission—oral and involves myths and tales that may not be clear or even believable. Larger part of this work relied on oral sources (chapter one) and thus contacting these people was not that easy as many feared talking about matters concerning women, others had little to say as they know nothing and things seems normal for them. Fear to discuss the traditions and women was

a big block in knowing the truth of the matter on the ground. Also, it was hard on the side of finance and books, calling people back home on phone, time, and I was also forced some time back to fly back home for more discoveries as I was thinking on the topic before me. This was to meet some people I trusted for interviews. It is also a challenge as women accepts that they are weak and so it is normal for them. Standing for such people is very difficult as they cannot say what is good for them. Another challenge is the culture that is rigid and cannot be challenged.

### **Hypothesis**

The way of life—culture is the main cause of female gender subordination and gender-based violence in Kenya as general and to be specific in Western part of the great Kenya. Culture plays a catalytic role in most aspects of daily societal life of people. Because of this influence from the culture, this work aims at finding out how the Church puts or locates herself in the situation of the society as her role remains safeguarding humanity or ensuring justice and equality for all people as they are all created in the image and likeness of God.

### **Methodology**

We employed both quantitative and qualitative methods in this project. Through various means of communications available, I relied to both methods. Qualitative method vividly came out throughout thus using different means of communications in place, I carried out some interviews. Throughout my engagement with people on the topic, I managed to get some written responses but also recorded voices. At the end of the project, we shall see some of these marvellous written responses though not sequential as per the questionnaire launched. Because the project intended to reveal the state of women in the community and the Church, the questionnaire was sent to different groups of persons and also individuals of different status in and outside Kenya. The recipients of target were different groups of women in the land; priests, nuns, the KCCB, leaders of Traditional religion—Dini ya Musambwa<sup>3</sup>, Church leaders, anthropologists, religious missionary congregations, Muslim religious leaders and other significant individuals.

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<sup>3</sup> Dini ya Msambwa/Musambwa is an African traditional religion practiced primarily among the speakers of the Luhya language of Western Kenya. This religion is labelled as anti-colonial religion as it not only stood against colonialism during the British colonial rule in Kenya but also it was against most of missionary activities in promotion of Christianity in early 1900s and regarded African customary practices

## **Objective**

Women are as great as the opposite gender. Female gender is paramount, it is determinant and it is the future of humanity. In the Church, women play a huge role to the point that ignoring them will only be ignoring our own-self dignity. Their impact is felt even though they are not recognized and appreciated as it deserves. The Church will be truly barren without the active role of women. In acknowledging the immense contribution of women in Church's life, the second ecumenical Vatican council documents (Vat. II Council) and the recent magisterial thoughts have been a leeway for more responsibilities for women. They have given their life, their families, their everything, their love for the Church and so the Church sees no reason not to elevate their place in her (Church) life. But is the suggestion, the opinion, and the talk to promote or elevate women adhered to? Is it honoured or everything remains as verbal promises?

The objective of this study is to examine the dignity, vocation and look into the future of women in both the Church and secular society. We are looking at the divine task pointing out women's divine role; the role of spreading the Good News of Christ to the ends of the world. We shall also pinpoint out among the Luhya tribe of Western Kenya that makes part of Universal Church, how the divine call has been received and if women of that world have that will to participate in Church's leadership roles. Being a student of theology, I try my best to be practical and avoid theories, hence I come down to meet what is currently happening in the village in the light of current theological arguments on the same topic of women's dignity and vocation in the Church and the community.

The Church has her current issues to deal with just as my community has her challenges in her existence. And some of these many issues have a direct impact to the female gender. We shall see all these as I will be elaborating them in this project. But also, we shall be seeing some of the numerous, unmentioned works done by women in the Church. Both the Church and the society are playing blind and deaf and so do not want to hear or see the role played by these women. That is far we have gone in pretending and with our egoism as men and patriarchal societies. However, the objective of the project is also to help the Church in Luhya community look at potentials of these women

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such as polygamy, traditional circumcision rites, and ancestral belief systems as heathen (Cf. Shadrack Amakoye Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos*, 2013, 367).

and not their weaknesses and sins, because all of us fall short of glory (Cf. Rom 3: 23). Women of the zone are not only capable of doing anything appreciable for the society but also the Mother Church. They can participate in pastoral activities on high scope and can be involved in other community building activities.

## **CHAPTER 1: LUHYA CULTURAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW ON WOMEN'S DIGNITY**

So that the world may hear me and know of the significance of this academic work, I pen down my views on this most discussed topic of all centuries on women's dignity and role in the Church and the society. I am neither a fundamentalist nor a feminist but merely seek to bring to light the untold sufferings of women in the world in general and the Luhya culture in particular be it in the Church or community. But if writing this lead someone into thinking of me as a feminist, then define feminism in me «as not about femaleness».<sup>4</sup> I am inclined to the thinking of Joan Chittister who strongly says that feminism should not be about female chauvinism either, or feminism chauvinism, and definitely, it should not be about women wanting to act like men.<sup>5</sup>

Agreeing with the above statement, I would like to define feminism as an act of considering or better still allowing women (as members of human race) to become fully functioning human adults, to make own choices at societal level, to participate in the decision-making that later affects their lives, to be financially independent, to be safe on our streets, secure in their homes, marriages or communities, to have a voice in courts and constitutional bodies of the world and being free to participate in politics. It is simply to enjoy equal human rights as any other human person. It is about bringing to public visibility and public agency, the insights, and the wisdom of the other half of the human race. Consequently, it is about taking theology of creation seriously.

The Luhya people do not have much of written information about their culture. They rely solely on oral form: thus, the older generation passes information orally to the younger generation. As such, in this chapter, we shall rely so much on the writings of Shadrack Bulimo who has done a lot of his research on Luhya people as well as John Mbiti who has also written on several Bantu communities. As you may be aware, there are so many similarities among Bantu cultures.

### **1.1 Luhya Historical and Geographical Context**

The Luhya populate the then Western Kenya and parts of Rift Valley, especially the adjoining Trans Nzoia District. Luhya refers to both the 18 Luhya clans and their

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<sup>4</sup> Joan Chittister, 'We Are at a Crossroads for Women in the Church', 2013, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/where-i-stand/we-are-crossroads-women.>, accessed 10 January 2022

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Chittister.

respective dialects collectively called Oluluyia language.<sup>6</sup> The word Luhya or Luyia in some of the dialects means “the north”, and Abaluhya (Abaluyia) thus means “people from the north”. But also, the word Luyia means fire because Luyia multitude have history of congregating around a bonfire in the evening. In this bonfire, seldom were women welcome—their roles limited to serving food and traditional brew. The Luyia might as well mean a village where people met for serious matters.<sup>7</sup>

The total area of Western Kenya is 10, 796.3 sq. km (4, 168.5 sq. miles) which includes Trans Nzoia’s 2, 487 sq. km. Luhya-land is only 2.2% of Kenya’s total land mass (582,600 sq. km). Out of the total area, 137.2 sq. km is water, and 15% is occupied by non-Luhya tribes- Iteso and Sabaot on the other end according to the 2019 National Population Census.<sup>8</sup>

The territorial headquarters of Western Kenya was Kakamega<sup>9</sup> town but with devolution and independency of counties, each state has her own headquarter in the present Kenya. The indigenous name for Kakamega is *Eshieywe* (the broom) although the colonialists first called it Fort Maxted.<sup>10</sup> However, the origin of the name Kakamega can be traced to the Nandi people who called this area *kikome kaa* (dead homestead), probably because they had abandoned it after Bantu Luhya from Uganda forced them further south into the Nandi escarpments and Uasin Gishu plateau. Although the belief is dying out slowly as people bring in new construction designs, the Nandi, like Luhya, use the spire that protrudes from the roof of a hut to symbolize a homestead with a man. Even if a person builds a bungalow, he must have a small hut that shows the presence of man in a home. It is always that hut that symbolizes life and not the bungalow or riches

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<sup>6</sup> Oluluyia is a macrolanguage spoken by a cluster of closely related tribes with each dialect qualified to be called Oluluyia in *a pars pro toto* context. Attempts to have one standard Luyia has often hit a snag as no one dialect is understood easily by all the subnations. (Cf. Bulimo: Origins, Clans and Taboos. 70).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Shadrack Amakoye Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos*. (Trafford: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 69.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Housing and Finance Africa, ‘2019 National Population Census’, 2019, <https://housingfinanceafrica.org/app/uploads/VOLUME-II-KPHC-2019.pdf>, Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022

<sup>9</sup> A popular meaning of Kakamega, often said is jest, relates to an incident in which a Whiteman or a skeletal stranger was given a meal of ugali. Curious villagers peeped through holes in the hut as the stranger ate. Each time he went for a helping, the people said khakhameka. The khakhameka exploits of the stranger spread far and wide throughout the village becoming a hot subject in local gossip fare. A Whiteman heard people say khakhameka all the time and concluded the people of this place must be known as Kakamega.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Shadrack Amakoye Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos*. (Trafford: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 5.

someone is in possession. Without this symbol, then any homestead becomes a dead homestead despite women's presence.<sup>11</sup>

The principal traditional settlement area of the Luhya is in what was formerly the Western and Nyanza Provinces of Kenya. A substantial number of them permanently settled in the Kitale and Kapsabet areas of the former Rift Valley Province. Immigrants into present day Luhya-land trace their ancestry with several Bantu groups and Cushitic groups, as well as peoples like Kalenjin, Luo, and Maasai. After major migration into Luhya-land was largely completed, only minor internal movements occurred after due to different reasons among them the effects of British colonialism.

Anthropologists believe that the progenitors of the Luhya were part of the great Bantu expansion out of Central Africa. In sharp contrast, with anthropologists, the Maragoli oral history states that they migrated into what is now Kenya from Egypt. However, the majority of other Luhya tribes are mostly from present day Uganda and are diverse in origin. The most powerful centralized kingdom in what is now Kenya was founded by the Wanga, one of the sub-tribes of Luyia tribe. The Wanga incorporated most of the Luhya tribes as well as territories to the east, southwest, west and southwest occupied by the Luo, Kipsigis, Nandi and Maasai but in the question of reigning, women remained men's projects.

## **1.2. Political Context of the Luhya people**

Like any tribe or group of persons in the world, Luyia people organized themselves into different classes. They had their way of leadership and controlling issues on human life. Before this present political context, Luyia people had their political organisation. Therefore, we shall be looking at the three periods: pre-colonial, colonial and independence.

### **1.2.1. Pre-Colonial Period**

Before the advent of colonialism, the Luhya, just as most other ethnic groups in Africa, defined their boundaries based on occupation of territory by a community of peoples with similar language, cultural traditions or under leadership of a particular king or ruler. The Luhya's territory neighboured the Baganda, Basoga and Bagisu of present-day Uganda and the Luo, Teso and Nandi of present-day Kenya. The territory occupied by the Bantu around Lake Victoria and to the North of Lake Victoria was known as

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Bulimo, 6.

Kavirondo. When the British came into the area, they coined the term Bantu Kavirondo to refer to the Luhya and other Bantu communities in the area while Nilotic Kavirondo was used to refer to the Aba Luo.<sup>12</sup>

On the onset of colonialism, the Wanga were ruled by Nabongo Mumia, a name that remains as a title to date. The Wanga Kingdom was and is a derivative of the Baganda. It was the most powerful and centralized kingdom in the region. Other leaders among the Luhya were known as Baami or Mwami, of course no woman was near this leadership as it is purely preserved for men. Mwami is a title translating to king or lord.

### **1.2.2 Colonial Period**

The first European Luhya had contact with was probably Henry Morton Stanley<sup>13</sup> as he voyaged around Lake Victoria. In 1883, Joseph Thomson was the first European known geologist to pass through Luhya territory on foot, and was influential in opening the region to Europeans after his meeting with King Mumia of the Wanga Kingdom.<sup>14</sup>

The Wanga Kingdom, a unique form of government among the Luyias, was very similar to the Baganda Kingdom and other monarchies in Uganda. Mumia was the last sovereign king of the Wanga, and because of ethnocentric British beliefs, was called a chief. Women in this period were treated as kids and thus remained under their counterpart men. They accepted to be submissive to men. In fact, it was taboo for a woman to greet a man while standing. On greeting or talking to a husband, she was to kneel or sit facing down. But also, they could not look into king's eyes whenever they are having a conversation as oral stories indicate.

### **1.2.3 Independence to Present Period**

In Kenyan politics, the Luhya population, commonly referred to as the Luhya vote (Mulembe wave) in an electioneering year, was and remains a deciding factor in the world of politics. The community was known to unite and vote as a block for a specific political candidate without division of mind. But of recent, this kind of mentality is in her deathbed and so there exist nothing like voting in suit as they say. The Luhya people are accepting different political ideologies and every man can direct his family to which party is of his

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bulimo, 2.

<sup>13</sup> He is also known as John Rowlands (Bula Matari-Breaker of Rocks) the first white man to travel Central Africa east to west exploring Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika and the Lualaba and Congo rivers.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos.*, 30.

interest. Politicians scramble for the Luhya vote since it is the most democratic voter in Kenya.

Administratively, Luyia territory is of late divided into five counties<sup>15</sup> or states- Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, Vihiga and Trans Nzoia, of which the former four were formerly in Western Province and the latter is in Rift Valley. These counties are designated with special codes to identify them among the 47 counties of Kenya. Kakamega county is assigned to code number 037, Vihiga is code number 038, Bungoma is coded with number 039, Busia is known as county number 040 and lastly Trans Nzoia is coded 026. This is according to the dictates of 2010 Constitution that saw the necessity of counties for devolution purposes.<sup>16</sup>

#### **1.2.4. Population**

Population is something to be regarded not only among Luhya people but in every culture. In Kenya, population is as sensitive as feminine question bearing in mind that Kenyan politics is characterised ethnically. Due to this tribal politics factor, Luhya Nation has remained on the map in the country as matters population concerns. According to *2019 National Population Census*, Kenya has a total population of 47,564,296 persons, of which 23,548,056 males, 24,014,716 females and 1,524 intersex.<sup>17</sup> The Luhya number 6,012,184 with an estimate of over one million people living outside their native territory. She is the second largest tribe after the Kikuyu, accounting for about 14.34% of Kenya's total population according to Population and Housing Census of 2019. Luhya Nation as it is referred to in Kenya, has been growing steadily and at a notable pace. We can conclude this growth as a respect to women because they are taken as the care takers of homes and the instrument to give birth now and then.

#### **1.3. Religious Context in Luhya Nation**

Like any other community in African soil, Luyia Nation must have believed in God or gods. Religion in this tribe is considered with pluralism and unity thus making Luyia religion a world of diversity. It is unity like in many other religions around it that, «dramatizes its unity in the universal appeal to the spirits that animate all of nature.

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<sup>15</sup> Counties of Kenya are geographical units envisioned by the 2010 Constitution of Kenya as the units of devolved government.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. The Republic of Kenya. "Constitution of Kenya 2010, The National Council for Law Reporting with the Authority of the Attorney-General", 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019 Population and Housing Census, Real Towers, Upper Hill, Nairobi, 2019.

Humans, stones, trees, animals, lakes, rivers, and mountains are conjoined in one grand movement toward the continuation of life».<sup>18</sup> This tells us that the ideas of reciprocity, circularity and continuity of the human community are essential elements in the discourse of religion. At the core of this continuity is the belief that ancestors remain active in the community of the living. No one dies in the community. Almost all other actions on Earth rely on the external community that encompasses the unborn, the living and the dead.

Generally speaking, in Africa, the world exists as a place full of energy, dynamism, and life, and the holding back of chaos by harmonizing the spirit world is principal task of the human being in keeping the nature. It is not a debatable issue that spirits exist. «The existence of spirits that are employed in the maintenance of balance and harmony represents the continuous search for equilibrium».<sup>19</sup> But the presence of spirits does not do away the cultural reality that a creator exists and in fact, African people have lived with the name of a Supreme Deity for as long as their existence commands.

Nothing in ancient culture was more standard and more consistent than the belief in a First Ancestor. The culture accepted the idea of a Supreme Being or a First Ancestor. There is a general belief that the arrival of the First Ancestor was due to arrival of the Supreme Being and the ancestor arrived with first ancestor of a group of people in a region.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes, these two entities (God and ancestor) are the same being and at other times they are separate as demonstrates an Akan saying, «God is the Great Ancestor».<sup>21</sup>

According to African faith (Luyia faith), God does not involve Himself directly in human activities on the universe. But what is believed intensely is that the Supreme Being, who could be male, female, or both, created the universe, animals, and human beings, but soon retreated from any direct involvement in the affairs of humans. This means that He left control with a living or dead livings-spirits. A Luyia community is governed spiritually by the spirits of our ancestors and this you may see it in how people treat the dead ancestors.

There exist shrines where people met to worship their God or gods. But in most cases, it is not the Creator who is most feared but the ancestors. «It is the ancestors who

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<sup>18</sup> Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama, 'The 20th-Century Rediscovery of African Religion', in *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (California: Sage, 2009), 22.

<sup>19</sup> Asante and Mazama, 'The 20th-Century Rediscovery of African Religion'. 23

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Asante and Mazama, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Asante and Mazama, 'The 20th-Century Rediscovery of African Religion'. 23

must be feared, who must be appeased, and to whom appeals must be directed; they are the ones who must be invoked and revered because they are the agents of transformation».<sup>22</sup> This is because the ancestors know people, they have lived among them and have a keen insight into the nature of ordinary lives. It is believed that if he or she does not pay proper homage to the ancestors, this person's life can change drastically.

But also, Luhya community adopted some Jewish rites and they are part of the culture. Some of this include circumcision, widow inheritance (according to ancient Jewish law *Halakha*,<sup>23</sup> a man must marry the widow of his childless brother to maintain the brother's line), sacrificial offerings, birth rituals, and dietary prohibitions.<sup>24</sup>

#### **1.4. Cultural Context of Luhya people**

About 10 to 15 families traditionally made up a village, headed by a village headman (Omukasa). *Oweliguru* is a post-colonial title for a village leader coined from the English word "crew". Within a family, the man of the home was the ultimate authority, followed by his first-born son. In a polygamous family, the first wife held the most prestigious position among women but still remained submissive to the husband and to the sons. Among Luhya people, a family is a micro social group consisting of husband, wives (in the case of polygamous family which was normal and common) or wife (in the case of monogamous which was very rare if not absent) and unmarried children as records Bulimo Shadrack.

The first-born son of the first wife was usually the main heir to his father, even if he happened to be younger than his half-brothers from his father's other wives. Daughters had no permanent position in Luhya families as they would eventually become other men's wives. They did not inherit property and were excluded from decision-making meetings within the family. In fact, they were called frogs as going for marriage was regarded as that jumping of a frog. Today, in accordance with Kenyan law, girls are allowed to inherit and own property though the culture may contradict this thus denying them this privilege. The culture of inheriting and owning family property was left for only men.

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<sup>22</sup> Asante and Mazama, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Halakha also transliterated Halocho (Yiddish pronunciation) and Halacha—is the collective body of Jewish religious law, including biblical law (613 mitzvot) and later Talmudic and Rabbinic law as well as customs and traditions.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos.*, 102.

Work adds value to the community and thus people could group themselves to work. In Luhya-land, things seemed different concerning the grouping. Considering sex, «There is an organized system of work and division of labour so that tasks that are traditionally done by a certain sex or age group cannot be undertaken by someone outside this context. [...], it's the wife's duty to sweep, grind grain, cook, wash, fetch water, gather firewood and till fields for planting».<sup>25</sup> Men had different occupations they considered much heavier than the one presented for women. This translates that men were created stronger with muscles for difficult works as women who were created as weak human persons, are for the less heavy works.

From an early age, children are trained in certain way as their sex dictate. Boys are introduced to their work as, girls, on the other hand, assist their mothers with feminine chores, especially fetching water and firewood, gathering vegetables and grinding grain. Preparation of family meal is a mother's job with her daughters keeping a close eye as apprentices. Family meals are segregated; mother, girls and small boys eat together in the kitchen area (mumaika) while the father or the man of the house and sons eat either in the living room (mbweru) or in the yard (mukichi) around a fireplace.<sup>26</sup> Kitchen was a woman's place. Small boys are grouped among girls and this is the only time they sit together because after circumcision, a boy becomes a man and he is not supposed to mix with women any more but stay in mukichi with the men or the father. Circumcision made a small boy a man hence considered more honourable than a mother or a sister.

In any house household, there were kids that united the family. Anciently;

A wife's fecundity bestowed her venerable status in the community, commanding more respect from her husband and his kinsmen than she who suffered barrenness. The respectability gauge grew higher for a wife with more sons than that with only daughters. The issue of children or lack of them is often the main cause for divorce.<sup>27</sup>

Children were a special ticket to cement a marriage but boys were more valuable in any home than the girls. A mother with a boy child was valued more than that with many girls in a family. A boy child was seen as the future of any family and any husband will be happy to die leaving behind a young man as his child.

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<sup>25</sup> Shadrack Amakoye Bulimo, *Luyia of Kenya: A Cultural Profile* (Bloomington, Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 447.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos.*, 152.

<sup>27</sup> Bulimo, *Luyia of Kenya: A Cultural Profile*, 447.

As demonstrates Bulimo;

... under Luyia customary law, a woman has no legal status; she cannot take legal action nor can she be sued. While still a girl, her father acts as her legal guardian, and when she gets married, this role is shared between the father and husband.<sup>28</sup>

She is represented by a man even at her old age despite her reasoning capacity. Despite the harsh theatres, women whenever given a chance, have demonstrated that they can perform extremely better as rational being. For instance, Mrs. Baraza Nancy who rose to become the first female Assistant Chief Justice not only in Kenyan history but Africa at large. After Madam Nancy's rise, more women have come to occupy the positions of Assistant and the Chief Justice of Kenya.

Children serves as a standard justification and of a stock of wealth. Although an even distribution of male and female offspring is appreciated, it is always considered a misfortune if a wife begets daughters only. «The Luyia equate girls to birds; when they fly off (i.e get married), they leave the nest empty».<sup>29</sup> The parents lose not just their daughter but her contribution to the domestic economy of the family as she benefits the other family in every single way.

#### **1.4.1 Marriages**

Luhya culture is comparable to most Bantu cultural practices as mentioned before. Polygamy was a common practice in the past though today with the light of Christianity, it is only practiced by few, usually, if the man marries under traditional African law. Civil and Christian marriages preclude the possibility of polygamy as it advocates for one man, one wife. Monogamy is supported by the creation story recorded in Gen 2: 18-23. The frequency under which any man married different wives depended «entirely on his tastes and whims».<sup>30</sup> In a polygamous homestead where man has his own hut (usually at the centre), «the elderly wife's hut was on the right, the second wife on the left, third wife next to the elder wife, [...], usually in a semi-circular pattern».<sup>31</sup> On contrary, where the man had no hut, the elder wife usually occupied the central position. In such condition, irrespective of who the favoured wife was, it is the elder wife who enjoyed a higher social status. «The bond between husband and his elder wife is stronger than that with subsequent wives. And although he may have a favored wife, her status has no formal

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<sup>28</sup> Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos.*, 153.

<sup>29</sup> Bulimo, 153.

<sup>30</sup> Bulimo, 153.

<sup>31</sup> Bulimo, 155.

privileges and fluctuates according to his sexual whims». <sup>32</sup> For no any other reason, in a case where the mother in-law is dead, or before the other wives establish their homes, they refer to the elder wife as the mother-in-law.

Respect in any family was and remains paramount among all peoples of all ages. «The sons must accord the same respect to the father's other wives as their own mothers. A manifestation of such deference is not to call stepmothers by name; instead, they refer to them as mama with small *m*». <sup>33</sup> However, it is not considered disrespect to call by name your mothers as long as you are the firstborn and eldest son they say. An elder son of an elder wife is under no obligation of calling her mothers, mothers because, «after his father's death, he is free to inherit his junior wife or wives». <sup>34</sup> This is to mean that the firstborn son of the elder wife is free to copulate with junior wives but only after the death of the father. The firstborn son is regarded as the brother to his father. In exercise of this authority, he becomes like a father to his junior brothers, a relationship reinforced by marrying his junior mother. But it is forbidden for a junior wife's son to marry his father's most senior wife.

Traditionally, they practiced arranged marriages. <sup>35</sup> The parents of a boy would approach the parents of a girl to ask for her hand in marriage. If both families agreed, negotiations for dowry would begin. Typically, this would be 12 cattle and similar numbers of sheep or goats to be paid by the groom's parents to the bride's family. Once the dowry was delivered, the girl was fetched by the groom's sisters to begin her new life as a wife. Girls had no big say on whom or not to but parents dictated and chose for them. This dowry though misunderstood as a price tagged to girls for marriage, it was just a sign of appreciation to the parents of a girl after the care they took for their daughter. However, this has been misused leading to the sufferings of women in marriage as men mishandle them saying they gave out dowry thus they bought them as commodities.

Dowry was given to the family where the girl was born but it goes to the specific people in the family. «The first claim to a girl's bride wealth is limited to her full brothers but where none exist, a father reserves the right to apportion the dowry to his other sons

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<sup>32</sup> Bulimo, 156.

<sup>33</sup> Bulimo, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Bulimo, 157.

<sup>35</sup> Arranged marriage is a type of marital union where the bride and groom are primary selected by individuals other than the couple themselves, particularly by family members such as the parents.

who may be ready for marriage».<sup>36</sup> This bride wealth is pooled in the family stock and apportioned to whichever son is in line for marriage regardless of which household he comes from. The firstborn son from whichever wife occupies a preferential position which regard to the father's wealth in cattle form. Such cows are always kept by the elder wife although all spouses are entitled to a share of anything that comes out of them.

Instances of eloping were and are still common. Young men would elope with willing girls, with negotiations for a dowry to be conducted later. Abductions were normal, and in such cases, the young man had to pay a fine. As polygamy was allowed, a middle-age man would typically have two to three or more wives depending on his will but a woman was only entitled to one and one man.

When a man got very old and handed over the running of his homestead to his sons, the sons would sometimes find a young woman for the old man to marry. Such girls were normally those who could not find men to marry them, usually because they had children out of wedlock. Wife inheritance was also practised. A widow would be inherited by her husband's brother or cousin. In some cases, the eldest son would inherit his father's widows as described above. Some of the customs are not practice as most have adopted a Christian culture.

Luhya community had extensive customs surrounding death. There would be a great celebration at the home of the deceased, with mourning lasting up to forty days. If the deceased was a wealthy or influential man, a big tree would be uprooted and the deceased would be buried there. After the burial, another tree *mutoto*, *mukhuyu* or *mukumu* would be planted. This was a sacred tree and is found along most Luhya migration paths, and this mutoto tree could only be planted by a righteous lady mostly a virgin or a very old lady.

#### **1.4.2 Birth, Naming, Kinship and Childhood**

For an African man, nothing counts more than a family; a family that has a much wider circle of members. When we talk of a family we mean not one child, one wife and one husband, but instead we mean the whole world of people related including the departed brothers and sisters and the unborn members as Mbiti writes in his book African

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<sup>36</sup> Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos.*, 156.

Religions and Philosophy.<sup>37</sup> But in this great world called family, where is the individual? What is his or her place?

Traditionally, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. Any individual owes his or her existence to other people. The idea of ubuntu. This is well put by the phrase, «I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am».<sup>38</sup> This phrase defines what a true man is in African world. The same applies to the tribe as there exist many similarities in African cultures.

«Nature brings the child into the world, but society creates the child into a social being, a corporate person».<sup>39</sup> It is always the work of the community to protect a child but this we rarely see on a girl-child. When nature brings, she brings whoever she wants but at the end of the day, the egocentric society creates a child into whatever it wants. The society first of all differentiates children into a boy and a girl then reserves duties or life for them according to their gender, the gender considered to be one weak and one strong. From gender point of view, they classify the kids into those weak and those strong; those who deserve and those who do not deserve; those considered people and those “others”.

Mothers' in African culture are recognized in few occasions although their presence is felt. For example, we rarely hear of women mentioned at home not unless, she is newly married, she is barren (in abusive manner), she is pregnant or she has given birth. «The expectant mother becomes, therefore, a special person and receives special treatment from her neighbours and relatives».<sup>40</sup> Women are just common people and receives common treatment not unless they are heavy. Pregnancy makes her a person and her marriage is only recognized after she has given birth. This is to mean that, «first pregnancy becomes, therefore, the final seal of marriage, the sign of complete integration of the woman into her husband's family and kinship circle».<sup>41</sup> No pregnancy or child, no right of kinship and no right whatsoever. In fact, failure to show your fertility, the mother-in-law will start shouting at you saying you came to fill the toilet in her home. Pregnancy is a ticket to happiness. No any other quality or qualities are looked at in a marriage for not bearing children is like committing genocide.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Norfolk: Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, 1969).

<sup>38</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 141.

<sup>39</sup> Mbiti, 143.

<sup>40</sup> Mbiti, 143.

<sup>41</sup> Mbiti, 143.

In the case of the twins, in Luhya tribe, one or both kids are killed especially when they are the first-borns. They are believed to be a curse to the family. Among these twins, it is a girl child who suffers death as the boy is left to survive. The birth of twins and triplets is an ordinary event among people thus when it happens, they are treated with fear. But the paradox is that, the same twins if are born in between other kids, they are counted as a blessing or luck in the family.

On identifying the gender after birth, the mother screams. The scream is typical of the gender. When she has given birth, «she screams five times if the child is a boy, and four times if it is a girl».<sup>42</sup> The number of screams can easily tell you how each gender is valued right from day one of life. Men are considered more than women. But who is to consider who if the same woman who should scream more for a girl is not doing so? Can we conclude that women are enemies of themselves?

#### **1.4.2.1 Kinship**

Solidarity of members, observance of exogamy, and dwelling on common ancestral land was by then the commanding features of clandom. To avoid confusions, it was a duty of every clansman to know his relatives and to observe appropriate rules of conduct in social interaction with different sets of clan relations. This was mostly in events like weddings, funerals, births and circumcisions where all people congregated.

The use of kinship terms among Luhya people was not merely a formality. It implied specific roles, duties and obligations for the concerned individuals. Calling someone *papa* meant you behave the same way you would behave before your biological father. This means, you had to accord him the same respect, you obey his orders and accept any sanctions which might arise in the course of social interaction. This relationship has served for long in the tribe and so the most enduring feature of clanship.

By defining each individual's roles, «the system offers some kind of social insurance ensuring no individual suffers social or economic privation».<sup>43</sup> With an army around you, each individual felt protected from various misfortunes that loomed frequently. This being so, «if a child's father dies, the father's brothers step in; if they are all dead, half-brothers take over, and after them the clan fathers ensuring a continuation

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<sup>42</sup> Mbiti, 146.

<sup>43</sup> Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos.*, 161.

of clanship».<sup>44</sup> The quotation suggests that a woman had no freedom of either choosing to get married elsewhere or not marrying any more. But also, she remained a clan's property as long as she lived in there.

Names assigned to the affinal relatives had their own degree of respect. As Bulimo writes, Omusatsa, Omusaza in singular or Abasatsa, Avasaza meant a husband or man; Omukhaye, Omukaye in singular or Abakhaye, abakaye in plural meant not just any wife but a well-established wife with children. This commanded respect from all angles. Omukhasi, Omukali in singular or Abakhasi, abakali in plural form meant any ordinary wife. If any lady was referred to as omukhasi then she deserved no respect or she had nothing extra-ordinary to demand for the respect omukhaye was getting on the other side.<sup>45</sup>

#### **1.4.2.2 Naming**

Every individual to a clan in this tribe was named. Each name bore a meaning the tribe knew by itself. By so saying, then we can define a clan as, «a community of shared interests characterized by distinct features and rules to which all members must conform».<sup>46</sup> There are criteria of naming:

Each clan is named after its agnatic founder and in rare and exceptional cases, women whose sons seceded from their original clans. In Idakho for example, Abamanyaisi are named after Anyisi, a woman and so are Abashimuli (Shimuli) and Abakhulunya of Isukha. Such women were of exceptional character and unusual influence... And just like the original nine clans of the Agikuyu were founded by women, men quickly overturned the matrilineal order and Kikuyu society, like Luyia, is largely patrilineal.<sup>47</sup>

Despite lack of proper genealogical records, each sub-nation is named after the tribal ancestor. This might either be real or mythical. For instance, «Babukusu trace their tribal ancestry to Mubukusu, Abanyole to Anyole, Maragoli to Omulogoli, Abawanga to Wanga, e.t.c».<sup>48</sup> In cases of sub-tribes that are believed to have a link, then it goes that they were probably established by two brothers.

#### **1.4.2.3 Initiation**

Whoever is born in a community is obviously and mandatorily introduced to the community. The introduction to the corporate community is usually by rites of birth,

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<sup>44</sup> Bulimo, 162.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Bulimo, 162.

<sup>46</sup> Bulimo, 166.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bulimo, 166.

<sup>48</sup> Bulimo, 167.

naming and childhood. Symbolically, the initiation rites have meaning. Through these rites, a person is introduced to the art of communal living; introduce the candidates to adult life but also have a great educational purpose (the occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated).

It is a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man-woman relationship; ... they join secret societies each of which has its own secrets, activities and language.<sup>49</sup>

Though the government is fighting against the cutting of clitoris in Luhya land, it has persisted as the clitorisodogeny is done secretly in some of the Luyia sub-tribes. Girls are suffering silently but because of secrecy vow, they remain quiet, bleeding from inside. The foreskin of boys' sexual organ is cut off in the process of circumcision. The operation is painful, but children are encouraged to endure it without crying because the dignity of anybody undergoing the exercise lies in this rite and your perseverance towards it is significant. This endurance of the physical and emotional pain is regarded as a great virtue. To boys, this passage gives them a chance to own property and make decisions but to women remains simple objects waiting for marriage. Traditionally, the process is undertaken in an even year that result in various age sets notably, Banyange, Bamaina, Bachuma, Basawa, Bakolongolo, Bakikwameti, Bakananachi, and Bakinyikeu consecutively.<sup>50</sup>

### **1.5 Literature: Myth, Proverbs, and Maxims**

Literature plays a very significant role in both the society and the religious realm. In this sector, we shall be journeying into how the myth, proverbs and maxims that forms part of literature have changed or impacted human life especially in Luyia Nation. Each part has both negative and positive effects in people's life and as we shall see, literature brings out the truth and frames societies.

#### **1.5.1 Myths**

We may not know exactly when man came into existence as both Religion and Science has their beliefs. Traditionally, it is believed that man was created by God. On

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<sup>49</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City: New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1970), 159.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Tambua Africa, 'Luhya Social and Cultural Heritage-Bukusu Circumcision and Ageset', 2021, <https://tambua.africa/luhya-social-and-cultural-heritage-bukusu-circumcision-and-ageset/?amp1>, Accessed 31 August 2022

man's creation, there are many myths in African world; some are similar and others are different. From this similarities and differences, we can create one general picture of the origin of human person. But how do we define myth? According to Mbiti, «A myth is a means of explaining some actual or imaginary reality which is not adequately understood and so cannot be explained through normal description».<sup>51</sup> From the mythical point of view, we can explain something as myth communicate and form the basis for such explanation. In most African tribes e.g Luhya, myths are the most effective means of keeping ideas circulating from one generation to generation. Culturally, myth covers themes and ideas in the society. They are oral, carved on wood, clay, ivory and stone; some are represented in arts and crafts and others are retained in dances, rituals and ceremonies. «Myths help us dig deep into the psychology of human past».<sup>52</sup> For this reason, we cannot dismiss the value and significance of myths even though they vary in importance and duration. Although exists myth about different things in existence, we are going to concentrate on the myth of creation and man.

Several myths have it that the first human beings (man and woman) were created in the sky or heaven and then lowered to the earth. But also, apart from man and woman coming from the sky and being dropped on earth either as a punishment or for inhabiting reasons, other myths have it that God used clay to make the first man and wife thus God is regarded as the potter. Nevertheless, it is believed from other myths that God made the first man and woman in water or marshes and let them come out themselves on to the dry ground. Like a fruit from a tree, first man and woman fall off as it is recorded in some myth according to John S. Mbiti.

Generally, we can conclude that man was created by God; in most cases of myth, two persons were created; man was created lastly after creation of other things. But because man was created last and after him nothing else better came in creation, man becomes perfection of God's work of creation.<sup>53</sup>

On the condition of the first men, the first men were man and female, in one or two pairs. The reason for creation as even told in the Bible was for propagation and children bearing although they were originally ignorant of many things. God was close to them; He was a parent to them. He supplied them with all the things they needed for

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<sup>51</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay Ltd, 1975), 77.

<sup>52</sup> Mbiti, 77.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Mbiti, 79.

survival. As the Bible narrates, myth confirms that first persons were allowed to some things but forbade to others. Man was to live forever thus God gifted him with the gift of immortality, (death was never to touch on the man) gift of becoming young after becoming old and lastly was the gift of resurrecting (even if death touched man, he was to come again).<sup>54</sup> However, due to disobedience, the myths have it that these precious gifts were lost and men began to die and vanish forever. But initially, man and woman were equal, each with his or her responsibility.<sup>55</sup>

### 1.5.2 Proverbs

Culture is a way of life. Culture carries a lot and among the many aspects of culture, proverbs are counted in. Culture is reflected in the livelihood of a society, and their beliefs as expressed in wise sayings. They are part of a given culture and are indicative of features of the society they originate from. Being a way of life, women are intelligently represented in these proverbs.

Wolfgang Mieder defines a proverb as a «plain and solid saying, largely known and repeated and it conveys the truth build on common sense and occurrences».<sup>56</sup> According to David Crystal in his work; *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, proverbs feature prominently in interpersonal language use. He explains that because of the general nature of the human experience, they are available in all lingual's with resemblance in their dependence on vivid images and word amusement.

The Luhya language has distinct words for referring to the two genders. Nangendo elaborates that in the Luhya community, for example, «when one meets a man and a woman one states that omundu nende omukhasi (a person and a woman). When a man dies, it is stated that omundu (a person) has died while for a woman, omukhasi (a woman) has died».<sup>57</sup> The personhood of a woman is never acknowledged in and of itself without invoking the gender. From such narrative, it is manifested that a woman is not omundu (a person) and that is generally accepted by people which reflects the patriarchal nature

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd Ed (Norfolk: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1969), 93.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Mbiti, 80.

<sup>56</sup> Wolfgang Mieder, *The Wit of One, and the Wisdom of Many: General Thoughts on the Nature of the Proverb. Proverbs Are Never Out.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>57</sup> Nangendo S. M, 'Daughters of Clay, Women of the Farm; Women, Agricultural Economic Development and Ceramic Production in Bungoma District, Western Province in Kenya' (Bryn Mawr College, 1994), 129.

of the Luhya community. Gender relations in the Luhya community are thus based on male dominance.<sup>58</sup>

African continent is widely recognized for her traditions and proverbs which are mostly applied in oral arts. Proverbs are known to form part of the formation of social and cultural knowledge and therefore serve as the basis for formulating ideas that govern social interrelations across the tribes in Africa.

Most researchers establish that language in general is an essential device on matter of gender construction but also deconstruction. Proverbs therefore, are equally, a powerful tool that can either empower or demean a section of the populace to a secondary position in a community or association. Also, a study examining the usage of proverbs in characterizing genders reveals that gender hegemonic systems in support of masculine superiority and feminine subordination are found in the gender conceptions in proverbs. Studies on sex discrimination in English and Chinese proverbs by Wang S, reveal that men are considered superior and stronger than their female counterparts. This implies a gender bias in both languages. The same is reflected in Luhya society that male are always stronger and superior compared to their female characters.

An examination of the use of African proverbs in situating an African woman in patriarchal and matriarchal systems in Africa (Luhya not exceptional) reveals that a good number of these proverbs are used as devices to control positions of economic and social influences and thereby limiting women's participation to domestic sphere. In a structure, women are relegated to dependency on men, and thus occupy weaker and low positions both at family and societal level. The study demonstrates reduction of women to objects.

Having a keen exploration on proverbs, we note that there exist strong intercultural and intertextual linkages between proverbs and representation of women's roles, statuses and identity, and we can also conclude that the linguistic resources, as found in proverbs, are used to perpetuate inequality.

Proverbs in Luhya community are part of oral literature that contributes to the socialization process and every day's human experiences. In meetings and cultural

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<sup>58</sup> Barasa N. M, 'Proverbs in Lubukusu and Ekugusii in Kenya: Empowering or Disempowering for Girls and Women?', *Kisii. Africology. The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10 (7) (2017): 158.

activities, proverbs are highly regarded as a high source of language maturity. They communicate, entertain, solve problems and conclude arguments.

Like in other African cultures, proverbs are common features of eloquent communication in Luhya nation and they are said to carry the wisdom of the land, thus used to reinforce meanings and express conventional truths. Luhya people utilize proverbs to touch a wide range of human concerns and activities and concentrate on highlighting the roles of men, women and the youths in the society. Proverbs are used in articulating numerous issues and consolidating the diversified people's views seeking to advance communal values and beliefs. They are used to cement that which protects the identity of the people of Luhya.

Luhya culture and in particular the language though with small dialectical variation is hailed as a source of cultural identity and expression but at the same time, the language is riddled with derogative remarks which potentially oppress womenfolk in the community.

Among the Luhya, there are different words which describe men and women differently. The same is applied in the proverbs that play a role as instruction manuals for warning young women and girls to be submissive but encourage men and boys to be assertive (talking with double mouth). Proverbs are components of language which portray good societal expectations of different genders and at the same time are used by men to exercise their physical power. They manifest women's physical and mental weakness as they exalt men.

There are few Luhya proverbs which describe women in an appraisal manner. Studies shows that patriarchy is entrenched as an ideology which define men as natural owners of power, intellect, and with abilities to rule. On contrary, it is fascinating that women are regarded as naturally submissive and without iota of knowledge on leadership hence always willing to be led by their counterpart, men.

Proverbs by Tim Wambunya inform us of the image of women as they are depicted in Luhya settings. Recognition of the proverbs for this part is based on notions such as; othering (the ways in which women are treated as "others" or excluded by proverbs which give men priority in social, political, religious, economical, and cultural platforms than they do for women); Mothering (based on the biological responsibilities and the way women are expected to give birth and stay at home to take care of the kids);

Gender roles (the way women are placed in the traditionally assumed roles treated as emotional, weak, nurturing, complying among others).<sup>59</sup>

Proverbs go with attitudes. With regard to the status, images and attitudes to African women, African oral literature is an important carrier. This is because literature is persuasive and conveys the values of society in a persuasive and graphic manner. Language, on the other hand, is the carrier of negative labels that are used to pin down women. African proverbs institutionalize negative cultural attitudes towards women. Proverbs have been defined as the kernel of a society's wisdom, culture, value, philosophy and worldview. Although in the contemporary world proverbs may not be an everyday occurrence in certain social settings, the attitudes these proverbs ingrain are nonetheless projected. We have proverbs that convey very negative attitudes towards women. Women are projected as unintelligent, blind in love, undependable, dishonest, careless, coward, weak, and bad tempered. Proverbs that portray women negatively are prevalent and given heavier weight in our culture.

A number of proverbs have been highlighted to bring out the discourse of beauty in the Luhya community. The conception of beauty has been used as a general warning to members of the community—looks and beauty are referred to cautiously. Impliedly, if one marries for beauty, they are bound to be disappointed. If you are to have a woman, look for values. In a sense, beautiful women suffer stereotype that is unfounded, while they are just like other women with values besides their beauty. The framing of a woman's beauty is in an explanation of how truth regimes are discursively framed and reframed and in a patriarchal society like the Luhya's, it is considered true that the beauty of women is a misfortune and something not to be celebrated.

Other proverbs may easily pass for a positive projection of women in the Luhya community, but a deep analysis reveals a negative connotation. The image depicted by the payment of dowry symbolizes commodification of a woman based on her beauty. In the case of marriage, a woman becomes man's commodity once dowry is paid though we claim that it is simply an appreciation. A man is at liberty of marrying another woman should he feel the beauty has fade or even sometimes misuse the lady she has with a claim that he paid for being with her.

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Tim Wanyonyi, *Luyia Proverbs from Kisa, Masama, Tsotso and Wanga* (London: Africa World series, Carolina Academia Press, 2005).

Some proverbs are on the intelligence. The message in this type of proverbs asks if a woman has any intelligence. Like in any other patriarchal society, Luhya men uphold themselves as producers and custodians of knowledge. Men are believed to hold a higher intelligence level as compared to women, and it is on this premise that the husbands are the default custodians of the family estate. A perception has been created and recreated to make the society believe that women would mess if charged with the responsibility of property management. Men are associated with intelligence while women with beauty but with ignorance.<sup>60</sup> And this brings in the idea that women are created to be patient and submissive to their men as they are incapacitated. This has been a habit with the Luyia patriarchal tribe where men use culture and language to perpetuate their power and safeguard their legitimacy at the expense of the other populace.

One of the basic elements that is considered to define the female gender is its vulnerability in this world where physical strength matters a lot. In some of the Luyia proverbs, women are considered the most vulnerable in position. In some of these proverbs, the absence of a male figure portends destruction for women. Some proverbs marginalize women in Luhya community where women are relegated to a secondary position as men stand first. They are nurtured as dependants who hold second place in the community and do not have the opportunity to venture outside their homes due to their restrictive culture.

Some proverbs indicate that widows are hopeless people who cannot provide for their families due to lack of a male figure to direct them. This translates to a widow as a helpless woman ready to be exploited by any man in the society. The implication is that men are the sole providers of the families thus without them, women are rendered useless and even lose respect from fellow women and men. This has led to a rampant inheritance in the area as a widow run away from marginalisation and life's frustrations.

From the conversations I had with different elders from the area, reveals that Luhya proverbs compromise the autonomy of women. The proverbs not only limit the independence of women but also compromise the ability of women to accumulate wealth. All actions of any woman should be under close co-operation of her extended family. In addition, we are reminded of women's responsibilities in the farm and that they need to

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Mineke Schipper, *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: Women in Proverbs from Around the World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

rally behind their family members to offer support. This ensures they stay close to other family members and not advance their own agendas. Proverbs discourage women from making own decisions to save anything without their husbands' knowledge. This can have negative impact on women since they cannot be relied upon to do anything for the betterment of her family and self without the supervision and guidance of her husband.

The research reveals that Luhya proverbs represent women with the discourse of untrustworthy. Women are represented as people who do not keep secrets because of their loose tongues and eavesdropping. They are talkative and gossipers. It is with this that some people say, men discuss issues, women gossip. This image portrays women as untrustworthy. For this reason, women cannot be trusted with powerful positions in the society because of their divisive nature. This leaves women vulnerable and exposed to continued abuse by the male gender. These proverbs present discourse strands of women as promiscuous and evil who can go any length possible to create harm to men. They also create acrimony among women depicting them as evil and enemies of themselves. Generally speaking, women are considered sources of evil in the society. But the perception of women as sources of evil is not only limited to African proverbs but also found in Holy Books like the Bible as we shall see later.

There are other proverbs that constructs submissiveness among women. This relegates women to a position that make them imagine that men are the centre of their existence. A society had a role to play in ensuring that a wife or a woman submits to her husband or to men. Women remains submissive in the community and this is what they are taught.

From a feminism point of view, it can be seen that cultural and traditional conditions experienced by Luhya women demonstrate the patriarchal nature of the Luhya cultural beliefs and values. These beliefs keep women governed by men in both public and private life. Symbolically, this categorization of women confirms the life realities of Luyia women. This way we can concluded that these women carry six mountains on their backs. Such presentation of women in the Luhya proverbs show the African indigenous knowledge systems have been used to convey strong ideas that explained the superiority given to men.

Some shows how women are regarded as objects with reference to young brides. Young married ladies are reminded to start producing children for their families. Tools

for giving birth. In the case of marriage, she was viewed as secondary being as a man was advised to marry and marry. This was to help the man just in case one wife passed on. The woman's wholeness was realised at marriage and confirmed by the ability to reproduce. Failure to which the woman was of no value and this related to slavery where there was a powerful bond linking the importance of a woman while reproducing and farming all together. It was said that a cooking pot produces steam thus a married woman had to reproduce. In Luhya culture, a barren woman was an economic liability. The implication of these was that women must position themselves for service in the Luhya community while their male counterparts were to be served.

Economically speaking, women had nothing to offer to the community. The proverbs have negative connotation towards women as informed by the fact that women were the ones traditionally associated with the market affairs, as such any work that was performed at the market was deemed negative and of no or little worth in the development of the society. As noted by Barasa, the Luhya proverbs are openly used to discriminate, oppress and subordinate women. Socialization process reflects men as superior. Barasa further notes that proverbs promote differential power relations between men and women. This brought forth the inferiority of women and devalued their contribution to decision making.<sup>61</sup>

To conclude, proverbs have been a great source of knowledge on position of women in Luyia land. We end by this proverb, *Nashikoko ashira eshilindwa* (a spinster is better than a grave). This is stereotype spinsters as being comparable to graves. It is worth noting that even in proverbs where animals are used (rats, deer, dogs, snakes), these animals are meant to disparage women and their achievements. Generally speaking, proverbs created a negative image of women.

### **1.5.3 Maxims (mentality)**

Women are weak, women are for the kitchen, women are like children, women cannot lead, and some other phrases are used to depict women as totally nothing. They cannot speak (keep quiet, no difference between you and a woman for you have nothing to tell the society, you are only but a woman). But frankly speaking, they have done better than even men whenever opportunity rise to serve. Although culture may underrate them,

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Barasa N. M, 'Proverbs in Lubukusu and Ekugusii in Kenya: Empowering or Disempowering for Girls and Women?'

it may not see them with priority, may not be calling them to demonstrate, they not only remain a pillar in the human growth but also, in world growth. Despite the mentality, to the women in women's conference in Nigeria, PLO Lumumba confirms against the mentality that;

Women are at the very heart of the proper democratization of a country. Women in whatever form they come as our mothers, as our sisters, as our daughters, as our wives, as our grandmothers cannot be ignored. In any event, the lion's percentage of the population is constituted by women and you have the capacity to ensure that the political class are made to walk the straight and narrow path, the path which only requires those who have the honour and privilege of seeking the public office to do so not for personal benefit but for the benefit of this generation and generations hence to be born.<sup>62</sup>

Women are the future of our planet. Their presence though not acknowledged as it deserves to be, remains pivotal as they do a lot for the growth of the same world that oppress them, leaving them without life even though the world knows that this gender is life itself. After the rise of "Ladies First or Girl Child" cliché, people have woken up in Kenya, Luhya nation included, that they have started behaving rightly when it comes to gender issues. Girl-child brand has awakened the conscience of many, making them realize their rights as people. Women are becoming responsible and now we can see them climbing high but also, we can hear them roaring and oozing wisdom. They have given the world new challenge, and demonstrated that what a man has claimed to be doing and only one with capacity to do, they can do better.

#### **1.5.4 Taboos**

A culture as a sociological construct is a complex phenomenon. It takes time and conscious effort to be able to understand a particular culture. Having been in Portugal, in Catholic University of Porto doing my Masters in Theology, I found it that it is more difficult if one wants to assimilate some elements of the culture into his native one and vice versa. This is to say that cultures are complex and different.

As a complex reality, as partially mentioned in other sections of this chapter, culture consists of many different elements. These elements are significant to the very nature of that culture and without them such a culture would not have taken the shape it has taken. Taboo as one of the elements, has played a role in shaping the African Religion

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Prof. PLO Lumumba, 'Message to Nigerian Women', accessed 16 January 2022, <https://youtu.be/QrefvkHPSIo?t=86>. (1:34-3:38).

and culture. In taboos, we not only see part of African cultural heritage but also provide a good explanation of that heritage.

We can define taboo as a prohibition about social life in general, concerning religion, social life for peace and harmony and to avoid curse from ancestors. However, it can be defined as «a form of social sanction violation of which is punishable by ritual consequences».<sup>63</sup> In simple terms, I am attempted to define it as a law that is strictly prohibited in a given community thus people need to observe and totems which they consider sacrosanct. It should be subscribed at the back of our minds that, Luyia being a nation on its own, it has several clans and that each clan has certain taboos as they call them *emisiro* or *emisilo* or *emigilu*.<sup>64</sup> They are part of mystical belief system that characterizes Luyia society. Infringement of any kind of customary prohibitions pose ritual danger to either the individual concerned, those with whom he interacts, or both.

Taboos are based on different things—eating certain plants, meat of certain animals, or drink milk of cows of a certain colour. Different people believe differently. For instance, among Bukusu, «it is a taboo for women in menstrual circle to go to a quarry which according to legend symbolizes the place where *Wele* (God) took the clay to make the first man on earth».<sup>65</sup> There exist many other taboos and peculiarities prevalent in Buluyia.

Taboos maybe ambiguous sometimes. They may involve a prohibition of certain activities that are not directly spelled out in the formulation of a taboo. For instance, in my Luhya culture, there is a taboo against shaking hand with one's mother-in-law. What was implied in this is simply an avoidance of any close contact with mother-in-law, which would involve activities like sitting next to or embracing her. What the taboo carries is only the Luhya community that understands. Other taboos include;

While on a journey, you must inquire gender of the first child of the first person you meet. If it is the same sex, the omens are good; if it is the opposite sex, you must either cancel the journey or take your chances. If your firstborn is a son and you meet two boys walking either together or quick succession, the omens are particularly auspicious and vice versa.<sup>66</sup>

It is a taboo to go to the spring well to fetch water after sunset. If it cannot be avoided, a woman must be escorted by a man and a purification rite staged. This

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<sup>63</sup> Bulimo, *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans and Taboos.*, 181.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Bulimo, 179.

<sup>65</sup> Bulimo, 179.

<sup>66</sup> Bulimo, 179.

involves pouring some water from the pot to the ground while uttering an incantation. A woman who breaches this rule is punished by miscarriages.<sup>67</sup>

But also, women are not to sit with men, daughter-in-law is not supposed to enter the bedroom of the father-in-law, women were not supposed to smoke, eating some parts of chicken was forbidden, climbing trees was not allowed for women, looking at one's sister bathing, a young wife planting or harvesting before the first wife.

### **1.6 Women's dignity within the Luhya Context**

From a historical point of view of the Luhya tribe, we can all see the dignity of women. We can rate it to a certain percentage. We can tell the place of women in Luhya tribe. These are several cultural practices that may help us understand the question of dignity of women. On top of voices, women's cries continue to hit our roofs but how do the Church in the Luhya cultural understand women? We ask the Church because discrimination is not only a cultural contextual thing but also tormented a religious world. This is to mean that as we look into what the culture says on women, we extend our search to the religious realm. The question of humanity is evaluated across all the cultures. Culturally, their name is soiled since time memorial.

History does not know women and if it does, then it is at low class. Naturally, culture sees women as no human. No man, no existence of persons but actually to be fair enough, the opposite is true. Women only exist because men exist. Understanding this culture gives us an insight into understanding women's treatment and who they are in the eyes of the world. We observe inequalities and discriminations all over Luhya world. The views that women are incapable of anything except giving birth and taking care of homes, being submissive and being objects is both historical and traditional. Men have used this history and traditions to sit on women. Historically and culturally, women are rated for low status among the Luhya clans just as is normal with many African cultures. We should also note that women are deprived some human rights because they are not considered people.

Many things are still in existence and still put women into second class citizen's position. Politically, culturally and traditionally speaking, women are continually seen as objects. They continually stay slaves in their own humanhood. Despite giving life and being the future of the world, they are regarded as nothing. They still serve as no persons.

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<sup>67</sup> Bulimo, 181.

They remain below the curve and nowhere on the map. In all discussions that make decisions for the tribe, we never hear women's voice or do they participate. Perhaps, they are busy in the kitchen caring for their kids, husbands and taking care of the homesteads.

Despite degradation of women, we can conclude that Luhya women in the name of mission, are doing a lot. They are tremendously contributing to the growth of the world. They have extended their generous hand to the construction of a religious and secular world. But in most cases, their presence is unnoticed. These mothers are the families if I can say from my culture. We hear them saying *it is because of my kids; I will remain here. The way does not tell the woman walking to her marriage*. These regretful words show how women sacrifice and persevere to live under harsh conditions full of contempt but all to see that they raise the life they gave. Motherhood to these mothers is not just anything like cheap profession, to them is a sacred vocation that needs to be treasured as a unique mineral that ever existed.

Finally, from Pope Francis who has been trying to show signs of considering women in the Church, we can confirm that it is their time to be recognized and given the dignity they deserve as people. This gender reminds us all of the image of God, the merciful message of God the Father and equality as brothers and sisters as denotes *Fratelli Tutti* by Pope Francis.

### **1.7 Are women ready for leadership challenge?**

Are these women ready to take up leadership roles in the society to facilitate its growth? According to the cultural structure and men's mentality, women seem ready but they may not be truly ready for the task due to the cultural dictates. Challenging the patrilineal cultural structure will be daring her life knowing the harsh consequences. It is not necessarily men who stand first to oppose or to murmur against women but their own selves. Women prefer to be led by men than women and those in positions will oppress their fellow women to the end. This means women are simply enemies of themselves. The culture has trained their mind that it is only man who can do everything and that women are weak so taking up any leadership position will be deconstructing the nature.

Men are considered strong and carrying along some feminine characters is not regarded as being man—emotions of weakness. Clive Lewis, in his book *A Grief Observed* writes condemning this act. He writes;

... it is arrogance in us to call frankness, fairness, and chivalry 'masculine,' when we see it in women; it is arrogance in them to describe a man's sensitiveness or tact or tenderness as 'feminine' ...<sup>68</sup>

Due to the fact that men are considered strong, they defend their houses to the last minute. They sacrifice everything for the families thus many dies in the process due to different battles to sustain their family. This we see from the large growing number of widows who are now slowly by slowly standing in the men's place of leadership. Life has to continue.

From few women we have seen in leadership, history and experience can record that they can do pretty well as never thought culturally. But to actualize what we see from experience; the tribe needs to undergo civilization. Conscious education for both genders should be facilitated for mental liberation. It is this education that will liberate people from the primitivity of backward thinking that men are all and women are nothing. Education should be provided in all fields for all the people from the tender age.

Without shame, women are not ready to take up leadership roles as long as men exist in their midst. Due to fear of being abused or isolated by the society and by men and fellow women, many are not ready to consider leadership roles. Some say that because of cultural and social views and beliefs, they cannot dare involve themselves in leadership. Daring is for men and few who have dared to go against what cultures believes is a system, have been considered outcasts. As many do not have access to finances to help them educating themselves and others or even help them run around convincing people to trust them, many dreams die in their hearts if at all they ever dreamt of leading the society. But also, the tribe considering women for house chores, taking care of the house, caring for the husband and kids and childbearing, it is proven hard for them taking up any extra position in the leadership of the society. Culture and social ties discourage women in leadership. In some cases, Luhya men have shown joy in demeaning women. Women who try to challenge them economically or politically are either told money and politics know not women thus are for men. In fact, these women are told to go home and take care of their husbands. Whoever goes for political seat, risks losing her marriage. Many are abused to be men in skirts or they are brain-washed by European cultures.

Entrance of women into few positions of leadership, have helped the communities to know that though the culture prioritizes men, but some are incompetent and women

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<sup>68</sup> Clive S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (SanFrancisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 49.

can even do better. Although I would not like to say that what a man can do a woman can do better as many have said, but the truth be told, there is a lot that is done by women, if given to man everything will come to a standstill in the society. We can also conclude that realising their importance in the house, women have decided to sacrifice all they can do for their matrimony. They leave all for their loved families and not because they are weak. A woman is never weak because he is a woman. And in fact, everybody should now be a feminist to promote a woman because feminism is not about making women stronger. Women are already strong as we can see, but it is about changing the way the world perceives that strength.

Women need to wake up and realize that a lot can be done by them and that their involvement in different leadership roles can bring great changes. They should accept that their place is not only in the kitchen as men are also doing better in kitchen. Taking care of husbands and kids should not be the only job they do better but also after giving life, they should lead this life into production. They should know that they have a place in leadership knowing they hold in their hands the future of the society and the Church. But also, as Pope Francis speaks on women in the homily on solemnity of Holy Mary, the homily that was a tribute to all mothers and women. According to Pope's description, women need to value themselves as men change their perspective. He says, «A mother's gaze is the path to rebirth and growth. We need mothers, women who look at the world not to exploit it, but so that it can have life».<sup>69</sup> Pope was only asking the world to promote and protect these women. He added, «How much violence is directed against women! Enough! To hurt a woman is to insult God, who from a woman took on our humanity. He did not do it through an angel; nor did he come directly; he did it through a woman».<sup>70</sup> This is the way and why we should understand and value women. The walk has begun and this is the time the world realized the vitality of women it shows contempt in many scenarios.

### **1.8 What does the social bodies say on women?**

Gender-related questions have ever been the most delicate and sensitive issues in Kenyan cultures that only need prudence and diplomatic measures in solving the equation. In many indigenous cultures, gender question has been a bone of contention and

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, 'Holy Mass on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God', 2022, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2022/documents/20220101\\_omelia-madredidio-pace.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2022/documents/20220101_omelia-madredidio-pace.html). Accessed 5 August 2022

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Pope Francis.

can be heightened especially where there is misinformation and misinterpretations of the cultural values. We see this in many cases especially because researchers or foreign bodies in the matter with them is predetermined conclusions. These premature conclusions are obviously based on false information. Cultures are different and so need deep research or analysis to understand them and not the way we perceive them. And better still, we can emulate what a Spiritan founder said to his brothers whom he had sent to Africa for mission. He asked them to be African with Africans and they will learn how to judge them as they should be judged. He told them to be Negroes with the Negroes, so as to form them into what they can be, not along European lines, but according to their own way of being...<sup>71</sup> For a successful mission of liberation, the organizations should learn the cultures of the natives for them to penetrate into them and bring that change that is regarded.

Many social organs are formed to deal with this gender-based issue. They are national, international, governmental and non-governmental. These organizations not only look at the question at national level but are also down at the grass-roots thus in Luhya rural areas. These bodies in their huge number, have engaged themselves in close relation with cultural systems to help in promoting, defending and empowering women and the vulnerable. Unfortunately, you will hear few moments these organizations being formed for the purpose of men. And this leaves us in doubt of men's future. Does it mean that men are ever strong and nothing endangers their rights and existence? Are women the only ones beings exploited? Or are women really weak? Can women not fight their way out as men have done in history? I see a case where we finish the feminine question and embark on that of men.

Despite their operation in the area and the culture, women remain in the same situation. These organizations have concentrated much on material support rather than empowering women by first educating, giving them formation in order to liberate them. Material support helps yes, but this even their husbands do. The only thing these organizations succeed in is taking videos and photos showing their solidarity in what they think is liberation but is actually the continuity of suffering of a woman if not mockery of their status in the community. They have a right intention but wrong formula is applied to liberate women we can say.

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Christian de Mare CSSp., *A Spiritan Anthology* (Enugu: SNAAP Press (Nig) Ltd, 2011), 287.

I cannot deny the work of these organizations because some are seen. They work a lot to eliminate whatever is bad, to change the face of a woman, to empower women, the vulnerable and those disadvantaged. Their collaboration and presence are felt by the indigenous in the area. But also, the government is working to see her people enjoy their constitutional rights and living a fair life. For instance, the Kenyan Constitution 2010 stipulates very clearly the place of a woman. The Kenya Vision 2030 program and the devolution in counties. All these seek to protect women. The coming of the cliché Girl-child in Kenyan history was taken as a civil movement with a priority to guard and champion women and it truly achieved its agenda as we see women standing up.

Some of the global initiatives that Kenya is part of signatory include; the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies 1985 (NFLS), Desert Flower Foundation 2002 (DFE), Equality Now 1992 (EN), ActionAid UK (1972), 28 Too Many (2010), African Women Organization 1996 (AWO), World Health Organization 1948 (WHO), Africa Coordination Centre for the Abandonment of FGM/C-ACCAF (2012), the Girl Generation (2019), Orchid Project (2011), the United Nations Charter on Rights 1949 (UNCR), African Charter on Human and People's Rights 1981 (ACHPR), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915 (WILPF), FIDA Kenya (1985) and Centre of Rights Education and Awareness 1999 (CREAWKenya).

Kenya as a nation is committed to the cause with enactment of: Article 27(8) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010<sup>72</sup> that provides that the State shall take steps to ensure that not more than two-thirds of members of all elective and appointive positions are not of the same gender, the Domestic Violence Act adopted in 2015, and Counter Trafficking Act in 2010. In addition, Act No. 3 of 2006 (The Sexual Offences Act 2006), Children's Act (2012) 2010, the Penal Code 2010 and the amendments of the law criminalising FGM and anything against a woman are just the other operational bodies in protection of women. Kenyan government has formed mechanism aiming to enhance women and girl's rights as well as creating different platforms where women can attain their justice and meet protection and settle their life scores. As much has been done either by organizations or the government itself to protect her people, much needs to be done to fully liberate women and the vulnerable. As a result of the work done by these organizations in our

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. The Republic of Kenya, 'Constitution of Kenya 2010, The National Council for Law Reporting with the Authority of the Attorney-General', 2010.

societies, things have not gone smooth for women and organizations and thus both have faced oppositions, the opposition that has seemed not to end today.

### **Synthesis: Critical approach and Luhya woman's world**

Like in any other African culture, women have always been alive, present and active, yet their presence remains unappreciated. Things remain silent in their world. They remain generally invisible in published information as it is stipulated for the other gender especially for earlier historical eras. Thanks to the present time both in Church and secular world that has focused on women and their well-being that we can now hear and read about the gender.

As throughout history, women's contributions to family and community have helped shape the contours of marriage life, motherhood, beliefs, agricultural production, artistic creations, political and Church's authority. Though much of the detail of their efforts in the earlier historic periods is difficult to discover as nothing vital is recorded, we can draw from evidence found in linguistic and archaeological research that suggests what ordinary women's work involved. In most cases, we have more information about elite women and those considered lucky women who came into contact with the Europeans.

This chapter has addressed many aspects of life on Luhya tribe. The main objective was to bring the world to an understanding of the Luhya worldview, what the culture has for women and how it comprehends the same person. We have known that the Luhya woman's picture is not that admirable but not all should be interpreted as bad because they are valued to some extent. Taking it as generally negative, will be raping this culture's respect and her people. Women's question as we see remains delicate in both Catholic Church and our societies, Luhya included. However, different thinking needs to be employed to ease liberating process of women. The methods applied have always been short term ways of solving the problem. Perhaps, the only sufficient and reliable way to address the sufferings and demeaning of women can be educating people because education drives out primitivity as persons realize they are all equal.

A debate for women's right is not only today's debating battle as it has been in play for long. It has always been mentioned, the right to a dignified life style, right to participate in political arena, right to have children, right to a white-collar job, right to respect, right to freedom of speech, right to be involved in leadership of our country and

societies and also right to choosing of a husband and to love, right to free worship and serving God as many are not allowed to serve as mass servers on the altar, and catechists in the Church. The list of rights is long.

Humanity has passed through different stages of evolution. Despite the fact that humanity has greatly evolved for a period, we can still see existence of the acts that ruin and contaminate our paths. Many organisations have been created as a result of sufferings of many, women being a great number. Organisations are raised to advance women's agenda. The bad has existed for donkey of years and now it looks normal and right for the culture. It is right for women to be down there without dignity and thus it is normal. They are forced into other people's life because they are women.

At Church level, people have tried to read Scriptures, Tradition and the Magisterium with an intention of knowing the place of women in both the Church and the society. These organizations with the same objective of salvation for all, their point of reference is God, Christ and the Church. Like in any institution, there are some things that cause conflicts between those advocating for women's rights and their antagonists. The Church should be sensitive to what goes around and be guided in it by the spirit of God (that knows no gender) to see how the gifts of her children can be worked upon for the glory of the Supreme. The struggle runs from the universal to the local Churches. But how does the local Church in Luhya context address the problem? How do Kakamega and Bungoma dioceses that settles Luhya people or culture deal with the question at hand? We find the full responses to this in questionnaire part of this dissertation.

Pope John Paul II says, «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 power never hitherto achieved ...».<sup>73</sup> He talks of a moment of a woman and her vocation's recognition. This we can see today with Pope Francis who has just picked Pope John's message and he is now actualising what was long said. Pope Francis has now shown openly the roles of women and the capacity in both the society and the Church. He is walking the talk now as the world witness great transformation. Women are seen on the religious map. And this, Pope Francis decided to practically implement by appointing a religious sister, Ms. Raffaella Petrini of the congregation of Franciscans of Eucharist as Secretary General of the Governatorate. The

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<sup>73</sup> John Paul II, *A Dignidade e a Vocação Da Mulher* (Lisboa: Editora Rei dos Livros, 1998), 7.

position the sister occupies is the second top most work in Vatican now occupied by a woman.<sup>74</sup> Initially, Pope had named an Italian magistrate Catia Summaria as a first woman Promoter of Justice in the Vatican's court of appeal. This is a clear move to empowering women within ecclesiastical structure.<sup>75</sup> After, he appointed a religious nun to the Bishops' Synod, a position held by priests previously. Sister Nathalie Becquart was appointed as an undersecretary to the Synod of Bishops for the first time in history of the Church in a department that prepares major meetings of world bishops held every few years on a different topic.<sup>76</sup> May be this is the time Pope John II had just prophesized about. Or should we wait for a moment tomorrow?

The feminine question is an itching issue with many manifestations that has proved to the society being in its urgency. Going through human history and the release of women, the impacts are as you cannot imagine of them. The force pushing for and against feminine rights are not only with the society but also religions. As we say that one group has achieved what entails to be called human, other group is down the bridge struggling for life. Women remain down in a fight for acknowledgement which is actually their right. They hope in being treated as persons. The knee of cruelty remains bending on their neck and they struggle gasping the last air despite being people like any other. We know the causes for this but human history remains the main cause. The wrong reference to human history without having understood the history of the same. It is natural that they remain behind and that is how everybody including many of them believe.

Time has come when we need to wake up from slumber and challenge this mentality. The world might have suffered but it is time to speak up and take another direction, independence direction. Good people should stand up and speak for many souls as the world suffers a lot. Not because the violence of bad people but because of the silence of the good people as Napoleon puts it. The Church as an advocate of humanity

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Vatican News, 'O Papa Nomeia Religiosa Como Secretaria Geral Do Governatorato', accessed 17 January 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/vaticano/news/2021-11/papa-francisco-governatorato-secretario-geral-petrini-religiosa.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. John Allen Jr., 'Pope's Move for Women's Rights Anything but a Token Gesture', 2021, <https://cruxnow.com/news-analysis/2021/02/popes-move-for-womens-rights-anything-but-a-token-gesture>. Accessed 17 January 2022.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Vatican News, 'Irmã Becquart e Padre Marín de San Martin Subsecretários Do Sinodo Dos Bispos', 2021, [https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/vaticano/news/2021-02/nomeacoes-papa-francisco-subsecretarios-sinodo-bispos.html?utm\\_source--newsletter&utm\\_medium--email&utm\\_campaign--NewsletterVN-PT](https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/vaticano/news/2021-02/nomeacoes-papa-francisco-subsecretarios-sinodo-bispos.html?utm_source--newsletter&utm_medium--email&utm_campaign--NewsletterVN-PT). Accessed 17 January 2022.

should now speak out for innocent women. The so-called good men should stand on two and speak for liberty of the suffering women because that is the truth.

In this work on dignity of women, I urge the Mother Church and the local Church in particular to concentrate on putting in use the talents of women for the betterment of the world. Women at all cost should be moved into taking up leadership roles. All the support should be given to these *mamas* knowing very well that they are the primary caretakers and moulders of our society. Opportunities should be created for women. On government side, we should be knowing that women need to be empowered and with empowerment, women will claim their rights and access to leadership, social and economies grow and prospects are improved for current and future generations. We have also discovered that women's equal representation and participation in politics and socio-economic activities is essential hence desirable for a fully-functioning democratic system. Religiously speaking, the Church should be ready to form women as it does with men in order that they may give their best. In the messianic message, the message of hope in Is 61: 1, should be lead from front as the other worlds follow.

No one doubts women's role in the Church and the society. According to Pope Francis in his address on the Women's Day on 8<sup>th</sup> of March, Pope quoted a woman as harmony, poetry, and as beauty. He says without her the world would not be beautiful, would not be harmonious. In his thoughts, Pope thinks that God created a woman so that all of us would have a mother.<sup>77</sup> Pope adds that, Church is not "the" (masculine) Church, it is "the" (feminine) Church. The Church is a woman, is a mother.<sup>78</sup> This leaves the situation in beauty. Women have a lot for the society we stay in today. They have a very great impact. Pope Francis quotes women to be seeing things better than men although men will tend not to give a damn. Pope advocates for women in the Church as did Pope John II in his encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem*. But what does the Church say on the proposals made to empower women? Or these good words said about her remains a long con to let her stay with her false hopes?

For a long period while a woman has been swimming in humiliations, judgments, and all sorts of degradation, the advocate who is the Church and the human rights

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Vatican News, 'Papa e as Mulheres, "Harmonia e Poesia" Do Mundo', 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/pt/papa/news/2020-03/papa-francisco-mulheres-harmonia-poesia-no-mundo.html>. Accessed 10 August 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Vatican News.

organisations, have remained sluggish in bringing out of shame this gender. But to bring about a needed desirable change, of course, the strategic move that considers the native should be employed. With many unfulfilled promises, Pope Francis during his first press conference on the issue of advocating for a theology of womanhood said that it was a moment for concrete measures to be taken to ensure women are given opportunity to serve in both Church and the society. From a Christian point of view in this work, I can share my thoughts that may help the Church grow as well as give an eye opener to people of Western Kenya. The Church in Luhya society faces numerous challenges that she has to deal with in order to liberate women.

This chapter examined women's roles and place in Luyia society, including division of labour along gender lines, the broad themes of kinship and descent patterns, and gender aspects of religious beliefs. We have seen some slices of women's contributions in the society. The Luhya cultural description carries us to the next page of this work that talks of the Church's teachings on women's dignity and their role in the Church and community's life. We shall be saying how we can talk about the women's ministry in the Church and their roles in the Body of Christ.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE CHURCH'S TEACHINGS ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN AND HER ROLE IN BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE SOCIETY**

If we want a better world, which is a house of peace and not a theatre of war, let us be concerned about the dignity of every woman. Any violence against women is a desecration of God.<sup>79</sup>

This chapter concentrates on the Teachings of the Church on women's dignity and their role in the Mother Church and the society we live in today. This is to say, we shall be largely dwelling on the documents of Ecumenical Councils (EC), Encyclicals, Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation as reference of our information and lastly, we shall see the feedback from the local Church and community of case study and a conclusion to the topic. Looking at the Church Tradition, the Revelation and the Magisterium, we are encountered with the fullness of Truth of what we are looking for about women. The three; Tradition, Revelation and Magisterium are deemed very independent but just as a man and woman, they do complement each other thus each though independent but very significant to the other.

Whenever we are talking of women, we are simply talking of men because of the complementing factor that the two share. In brief, talking of either of the two genders is but talking of human person. On the question of dignity, we should not be debating but taking dignity as it is because that is nature. But having a biased world, we have to debate the issue of genders. Despite being defined with gender, a person is an end in her or himself. The Church through her teachings has laid grounds that check on the dignity of persons. Thus, we see numerous references on the Social Teachings of the Church and other ecclesiastical documents. All this champions for the people's dignity.

In addition, we know that the baseline of human dignity and equality is that what God willed (or the will of God) for all; that is both man and woman He created them (Gen 1: 27). The Church which is considered as an institute to preach this equality, one may ask themselves, why should it not defend this patrimony of humanity in the world? Why should she not give this justice to the daughters that belong to her just like the sons? Or she is like the father who gives his son stones whenever they ask for bread ... (Cf. Mt 7:9). The mandatory assignment of the Church according to Pope John Paul II, what is before us is concerning the dignity of a person, whose care of all sorts is entrusted to us

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. L'Osservatore Romano, "Any violence against women is a desecration of God", 7th January 2020, n° 1.

by God Himself as this is His plan or will. The Pope says that men and women all time of history are responsibly in debt.<sup>80</sup> This social justice affair is only attainable in an environment where dignity of both man and woman is respected unconditionally. In respect of both man and woman, we need not to coil around because in person, the ultimate end of any society in the world is achieved.

This way on the dignity and human value in the world which grooms both genders, we can look at the world everybody would wish to belong. The world where women in the Church would wish they belonged. After a long period of passivity, we have seen the Church in her activeness of recent. Pope Francis is taking the issue of the image of women in the Church with emergence. The Pope said that it is a time the Church embraced not the indifference.<sup>81</sup> This is an urgent issue indeed and needs an address from the Church in uniformity with the Luhya tribe. With care, love, and courage, the Church should consider the matter as urgent because the world and times have all changed and now, we are living in a different time zone. Roles for women are changing and the world's mentality should be changing too. It is open and clear to us that women play a big role in the society and the Church and they have been doing this since long. Women have faced the injustices as people on the opposite side have enjoyed. We hear not the voice of women or if we hear, then it is an ignored cry. They have faced multiple sorts of humiliations, restrictions based on traditions and culture and abuses like rape causing early pregnancies and early forced marriages forcing them out of schools.

Although the Church has never wanted to listen to a certain click of people who claim they are Christians but stand against the teachings of the Church at the same time, she should not ignore everybody speaking the language of feminists. There is something positive from the other side even though known for its radicality. Ignoring everybody is ignoring some good human values that we need to know. In this case, there are two different teams with different opinions on emancipation of women: there are those who are only fighting for women's rights in line of respect and acknowledgement of feminine gift to the Church, but also, there are those of radical views that seek day and night to

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Papa João Paulo II, *A Solicitude Social Da Igreja, Carta Encíclica: SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS*, 2<sup>a</sup> ed, vol. nº 47 (Lisboa: Editora Rei dos Livros, 1988).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. BBC NEWS, 'Pope Francis Backs Women's Roles in Catholic Services', 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55617851>. Accessed 10 August 2022.

have an ordination of women to priesthood among other great positions said to have been reserved for men in the Church.

Reflecting on Luhya tribe, we see many injustices that women and small girls are subjected to in the society. Luhya woman and girl in this case is just an example of women situation both in the Church and our societies. On the part of the Church, this question has been discussed a lot but with no concrete results until recently when Pope Francis started acting upon what were suggestions. Women have done and continues to do more in the world and this we cannot close an eye. They are big players in the life of the Church.

Whenever the question of women is brought up, we run to hide behind our cultures and customs. In my sharing the topic with my colleagues and other people, I came to a conclusion that the question raises a lot of hard emotions. Talking about it raises feelings. It changes the moods of many. Talking of it gives you a name feminist if you are for, and male chauvinist if you are of different opinion. A lot of cultural sayings and half quoted, half-read, and half-understood biblical passages are brought in the discussion to justify dominance over or oppression or submissiveness. And of course, no one uses hard words when talking of injustices women face in the Church, and the society, something that keeps this woman in the same situation of subordination. Using harsh words may awaken the conscience of this woman thus we cleverly avoid them or we are very selective with our words. We always employ sweet words in our conversations to keep them not aggressive, though they need this aggressivity to emancipate and start standing for themselves. Admitting that women and girls face oppression and other injustices in our two worlds is the beginning of addressing the issue.

We all know the call of Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality «... is an art and discipline of bringing Christ into the 'here-and-now' reality of our daily lives».<sup>82</sup> With the call of bringing Christ into people's lives, we may expect that these daily irritating issues be addressed because their existence is not godly. Addressing them needs not quoting the cultural belief system or traditions that has no Gospel spirit. We need to rely on the signs of time and in this case listening to the Holy Spirit and reading signs of times because much has changed.

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<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *The Church Women Want: Catholic Women in Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2002), 11.

Our aim in this academic work is to pinpoint out feminine issues in Luhya culture that calls for our attention. We find a way for rediscovering the role of women in the Church's ministry that can help in valuing and empowering them, women that have a link on pastoral activities and evangelisation of the area. But still, there is need to protect the feminine roles at all human levels. Progressively, the demands of women (religious and ecclesiastical rights) have never been against the Sacred Scripture and Tradition especially when we look at them with a good and understanding spirit. But also, the Magisterium has never stood on the way with an intention of blocking women. It has always highlighted the affairs of women although concrete ways to liberate them is not clearly shown. We understand that we need to overcome or do away with many things in life to face this elephant in the room. We are captured by fear, cultural beliefs and the imaginative walls build around us that a woman should only be at this level and cannot go beyond a certain level. This seems to be the right time to initiate the emancipation struggle. Those women that out of fear of traditions, sit outside the meeting of discussion on their own issues, including ministerial and pastoral activities, then should stand up and pursue the course as other women in the Bible did by surpassing all odds of those early days. It is that time, we woke up from our caves and gave and felt comfortable with the presence of women in leadership position.

## **2.1 The teachings of the Church**

The Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents of Vatican II are the great sources of information we shall rely on for our research in this sector. What attracts us here is the celebration, preparation and the spirit of openness of the Vatican II document. The documents fascinate us because, after a long time of Church's life in what I can say period of passivity and trivialization, women were for the first time in life invited to participate and take part in Church's activities. Just as it seems to be a shock today as Pope Francis choose women for different positions, many were perplexed with an idea of women participating in the Council at that particular time. Due to difference in opinions, this decision caused fragmentation in some parts of Christendom. It was not adding up and we can see discussing the life, the activities and in brief, the reality of the Church when half her members are out.<sup>83</sup> Belgian Cardinal, Leo Jozef Suenens' critical thought would awaken the conscience of many Conciliar Fathers. The Council turned out to be

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Mary Luke Tobin, 'Women in the Church since Vatican II', 1986, <https://www.americamagazine.org/voices/mary-luke-tobin>. Accessed 21 July 2022

«surprising women, a surprising Council»,<sup>84</sup> because of women's invite in the Council. Women playing part as auditors in the Council and many more at a level of larger context of the same Council, brought what pushed the Church to be convinced that she needed to go for reforms as a Catholic Church, a body that seeks dignity for all.

To this far, the Church was awakening to the reality of women's dignity and contribution in the construction of the future of the Church. And of course, in agreement with the *Gaudium et Spes*, on the question of people participating in the Church, women, «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). This is as a result of women participating in the Council (The World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations—WUCWO) and bearing fruits.

One would expect that women would flourish leaving footprints and participating in many more Councils after their participation in the Council of 1962-1965 convoked by John Paul VI but that was never the case. Later, on women participating in liturgy, another contradicting message to the reality of many, dreams aspired for long were to be shut in darkness like before. The message that read, «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».<sup>85</sup> The document seems to derogate the advancement that had been made so far by the Council. It gave room for women to proclaim the scripture readings but with exception of the Gospel, taking care of Prayer of the Faithful, helping as ushers and beautifying the Church for liturgical functions among other functions. The spirit of Vatican II was a championing spirit, a spirit of change, a change that was to see everybody in the Church, a spirit of an open Church to all, a Church where everybody is involved in spite of the hierarchy and status.<sup>86</sup> But the document with this message means it was against the spirit of the

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Gudrun Sailer, 'Women at Vatican II: Surprising Women, a Surprising Council!', 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2019-06/second-vatican-council-women-regina-heyder.html>. Accessed 21 July 2022.

<sup>85</sup> SACRED CONGREGATION ON DIVINE WORSHIP, "LITURGIAE INSTAURATIONES", *Notice to the, Third Instruction on the Correct Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (5 September, 1970) in Vatican Council II: The Post Conciliar and Pot Conciliar Documents*, ed. (Gen. ed) F. AUSTIN (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Russell Shaw, 'What Dissenters Mean by 'the Spirit of Vatican II'', 2012, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/what-dissenters-mean-by-the-spirit-of-vatican-ii>. Accessed 21 July 2022.

Council. In this document, I see the mentality of my many parishes back in Luhyaland. It is in this document that many have learnt liturgical cautions. There still exist parishes where adolescent girls are not allowed to the altar as mass-servers. With no particular reason, girls are left out in an active community of altar servers in Luhyaland. In addition, women for a long time have been missing out as catechists.

Vatican II showed the aspirations of the Church in revolutionizing her history. The Church was to honour her dormant but treasurable gift. The Church had gotten a chance to reflect on the life of the early Christian communities and that of the Fathers of the Church, using the failures in observation of human person dignity and then reconcile them with the Church's needs in a contemporary world. The Council forever remains a well cemented bridge between old and contemporary world as it is in the worlds of Eva and Mary the Mother of Jesus and Adam and Jesus the new person. The Council was to take the Church from bondage, from a negative mentality of chessboard. The Council shows the past inequalities that should not have been witnessed from the Church as they denied her the privilege of her name as the bride of Christ. Hopefully, the Council looked forward to a promising, a blossoming future which must be demonstrated today.

With the hopes of the Council, St. Augustine describes the Church as both old and new. He says in lamenting that the Church is the beauty not only ancient but also new and has never lost her beauty.<sup>87</sup> Though with her old story, the Church remains squarely old and new. We can relate the old and new Church and still see the beauty in her. The old builds the new in one way or the other. Vatican II document is a document depended on by many including the ecclesiastical tides, women and all those advocating for not only women rights but human rights in general. It is the document to rebuild or reform the Church making it a place for everybody.

But today, how can we rate the Vatican II document in relation to women and the laity in general as the Church keeps using it as her reference? How do we evaluate women's situation since the document was released? As it is known, within the same Council, there are those who sincerely and positively took in an invitation to accept women's role in the Church hoping that things will turn around sometimes for many to hold positions in the Church they were large in terms of numbers and render different

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<sup>87</sup> AGOSTINHO, *Confissões*, (13ª ed.), (x:27) Lúcio Craveiro da Silva, S.J et al (Revisão do texto), (Livraria Apostolado da Imprensa, Braga, 1999). 242.

services. In the same Council, there were those who never liked the idea, they never thought of this change that seemed to be against what they convincingly thought was Tradition left by Christ. Women had participated in the Ecumenical Council but passively as they could not talk like men at the top of their voices.

We know that the chief teachings of the Catholic Church include: God's objective existence; God's interest in individual human beings (salvation); the Trinity; the divinity of Jesus; and the immortality of the soul of each person. But among the concerns of Vatican II, we have the perception of the Church as a mystery and as a sacrament as the paramount Council's ecclesiological principles. In her (the Church) the hidden God's unconditional love is revealed to humanity and also, unites human race with God (Cf. LG 1). The Triune God, God inviting men into a relationship with Himself as mentioned in the Church teachings. Through the Church as a mystery, God is experienced only by those ready to respond to His will and walk in his paths. The Church being a mystery, has continued with the works of Christ, the spouse. Her response is the mission handed to her by Christ until he comes in glory. In summary, human community (the Church), *Lumen Gentium* defines her well as:

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

To conclude, as Genesis creation story narrates, both man and woman were created as rational beings and created in the image and likeness of God. They possess same origin and nature thus redeemed by Christ. Science too affirms the rational part of human person distinguishing him or her from other creatures. Therefore, the rationality and resemblance in image and likeness of God makes them uniquely unique and equally equal. These characters make persons possess same divine calling and destiny, a basic principle of equality which by all means must be recognised and upheld (Cf. GS 29). The Church as an advocate or in the docket of justice and equality has always been in frontline against all forms of discrimination and marginalisation of human persons. God, who willed us to be same not only with Him in image but also among ourselves, calls us to practice love that He is love itself. Man having fallen short of grace (Cf. Rom 3: 23), has encouraged abuses and human violence either knowingly or unknowingly. As we speak,

there still exist injustices against women as many are denied chance to engage in politics, Church leadership, access to education, sexual abuses, forced marriages, domestic violence, among many others.

## **2.2 Women in Official Church documents**

What image of a person do these documents or Popes in their writings reveal in the Church? Literally, we may have a position as a people but how do women recognise themselves in the thinking of the Mother Church? Or which position do these marvellous women occupy in the Church they participate in edifying? What image do these documents paint for women?

To get the image we are seeking from the Church documents, we have to go way long and look at the theology of Creation that is without doubt the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. The affirmation of the fundamental equality between woman and man, as defended and proclaimed by official Church documents, is rooted in the theology of creation of both in the image and likeness of God.

The Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents give further development to the theology of the image and likeness of God. For Pope John Paul II, this means that the person is called to be for others, (Cf. MD 7) since she is created in the image and likeness of a God who is Himself a communion of three Persons. This is the theological basis for human fraternity and dignity, principles which clearly imply the rejection of all forms of discrimination (Cf. GS 29). This means that the equal origin of man and woman in God is the foundation of their equal dignity as personal human beings.<sup>88</sup> Following this, we can conclude that both persons, man and woman are equal thus equal dignity and respect.

Man and woman are considered equal and in communion. The Second Vatican Council speaks to us of union that exists between man and woman, as God created them, as the first form of personal communion.<sup>89</sup> Also, we find in the texts of Pope John Paul II a reflection on the meaning of the creation of man and woman. It confirms to us that a woman was created with the same human nature as man.<sup>90</sup> Both are human beings to the same degree, man and woman, both created in the image of God (Cf. MD 7).

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, '«Declaratio de Ecclesiae Habitudine Ad Religiones Non-Christianas. Nostrae Aetate»', AAS 58 n. 5 (1966): 740–45.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, '«Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis, "Gaudium et Spes"»', AAS 58 n. 12 (1966): 1025–1115.

<sup>90</sup> Giovanni Paolo II, 'Udienza Generale, 14.11.1979', *OR* 262 (15 Novembre 1979) 2 (n.d.).

From these principles, Pope John II develops a theology which he calls «theology of the body»,<sup>91</sup> a theology that constitutes a reflection on equality and masculine and feminine identity. It is stated here that «their homogeneity concerns, above all, the body, the somatic structure».<sup>92</sup> The two are equal because they are both created by God. We see that it is only sexual diversity that marks masculine and feminine identity but dependency is seen. A woman recognises herself as a woman in front of a man and a man recognises himself as a man in front of a woman. It is this being of body and soul for each other that constitutes the ultimate meaning of masculinity and femininity (i.e., sexual existence).<sup>93</sup> For Pope John II, the complementarity between man and woman finds its full expression in marriage (Cf. MD 7). However, no any other elements are put forward to define womanhood and manhood other than these physical elements we see with our naked eyes.

The affirmation of the fundamental equality of the human being before God is always accompanied by the affirmation of the difference between man and woman. In this context, the reflection on the essence of woman (nature) is considered. Human nature reflects the image of God and the distinction from God: according to the second creation story as it is narrated in the book of Genesis, God created man from clay of the earth and breathed into him His spirit (Cf. SRS 29). Human nature is defined as being both corporeal and spiritual and that this nature is not determined by society, or by historical circumstances (Cf. SRS 29). This is because it originates in and from God. This way, it is eternal because God is eternal, and it is inscribed in the heart of human being, because it is creation of God.<sup>94</sup>

Going against human nature we know well is going against God's eternal plan for human person. Respect should, will and must be fulfilled at every level of human life, whether in social, spiritual, family or personal life. But it should not be forgotten that there is that difference. The discourse on equality, difference and inequality, has undergone some changes in modern world as time keeps on changing, but it remains the key for interpreting the position of official Church documents on relationship between women and men. Thus, Pope Pius XI spoke of the existence of a «certain inequality and

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<sup>91</sup> Johannes Paulus II, 'Udienza Generale, 12.09.1979', *OR 210 (14 Settembre 1979)* 2 (n.d.).

<sup>92</sup> Johannes Paulus II, 'Udienza Generale, 07.11.1979', *OR 256 (08 Novembre 1979)* 1 (n.d.).

<sup>93</sup> II, 'Udienza Generale, 14.11.1979'.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. LEO XIII, "'Letterae Enciclica Libertas Praestantissimum'" D3247 (1888); Cf. SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, 'Declaratio de Libertate Religiosa. Dignitatis Humane', *AAS 58 n. 3 (1966): 929–46*; Cf. 'Declaração Da Sagrada Congregação Para a Doutrina Da Fé, "Persona Humana"' D 4580 (1975).

degree» within the family as being «the will of God».<sup>95</sup> Pope Pius XII already affirms the equal dignity and value of man and woman, but insists that they «are not equal in everything», since there are certain gifts, inclinations and natural dispositions more proper to man or to woman. In the same way, «nature has also assigned them different domains and tasks».<sup>96</sup>

Pope Paul VI speaks of the necessity to affirm the «distinctions established by the Creator» as a way of «protecting proper vocation (to women)».<sup>97</sup> However, Pope John Paul II develops a reflection that does not insist too much on the inequality between man and woman in order to define what is specific to them, as on the idea of complementarity. This is based on the biological constitution of man and woman, a constitution which is part of God's plan and which determines the existence of woman for man and man for woman but in respect and dignity.

We know that the constitutive element of femininity is maternity. A woman is identified by the “natural disposition” that her organism has to serve the generation and birth of human being (Cf. MD 18). Thus, complementarity seems to be revealed first of all the physicality. God's will is that a woman be the one in whom the order of love of the created world of persons finds a ground to put down its first root (Cf. MD 29).

Although Pope John Paul II states that «human begetting is common to man and to woman» (MD 18). The Pope adds that motherhood is realised in a more committed way in a woman, since she is the one who brings the child or rather people to the world. With this understanding that «a man must learn his own “fatherhood” from the mother» (MD 18). These texts make some two significant affirmations. First, that man and woman define each other and secondly, that their complementarity is physically determined. However, it seems one can conclude from almost total absence of reflection on the meaning of masculine characteristics for being a man (in the masculine sense of the term), and the most direct association of the definition of woman to her physical determinations.

Nevertheless, the question could be raised as to whether the idea of complementarity runs the risk of reducing man and woman to two incomplete halves. The Catechism of the Catholic Church itself seems to perceive this risk when it says that the

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<sup>95</sup> PIUS XII, 'Litterae Enciclicae, Casti Connubii', AAS 22, 1930, 568 (539-592).

<sup>96</sup> PIUS XII, 'Allocutio Ad Puellae Ab Actionae Catholica Ex Italiae Dioecibus Romae Coadunatas, Anno Vicesimoquinto Exeunte Ab Inito Earumdem Apostolatu', AAS 35, 1943, 134–38.

<sup>97</sup> PAULUS VI, 'Epistola Apostolica Octogesima Adveniens', AAS 63 n. 13 (1971): 401–41.

fact that man and woman are made for each other does not mean that God conceived them as two halves or as incomplete beings.<sup>98</sup> However, it reaffirms the complementarity at the base of their sexual determinations.

The biological nature of woman seems to be extrapolated to her spiritual nature. The texts draw the spiritual portrait of a woman from her condition as a mother: she possesses the love of life, the feeling of cradle protection. She knows the mystery of life.<sup>99</sup> She has the mission of «putting balm on the open wounds of humanity».<sup>100</sup> Since the law of nature is eternal, so also these characteristics of a woman are affirmed as her «perennial essence»,<sup>101</sup> the “truth” about woman.<sup>102</sup> They are «unchangeable and ever relevant in them» (MD 30), since they constitute God’s plan for women.<sup>103</sup>

To the objection that much of what is attributed to the nature of woman may be the product of culture and history, Pope Paul VI replies that «history and nature are closely linked to each other».<sup>104</sup> In this context, the texts of the Magisterium always reveal the fear that movements for the emancipation of women may disregard this order established by God if they fight for an equality between man and woman that seeks to change «what nature requires of man and what nature requires of woman».<sup>105</sup> The Magisterium’s position with regard to the feminist movements follows from the twofold affirmation, that we mentioned earlier on the equality and difference between man and woman. The creation of man and woman from the image of God help us note that the identity of man and woman is established from their condition as beings created in the image of God, therefore equal in dignity.

We also analyse the prototype of woman as a wife and a mother, as described to us by the texts of the Magisterium. Since both images are also applied to the Church, we

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. *Catechisme de L'Église Catholique* (Chatham: Service des Editions/Conference des Eveques Catholiques, 1993), n. 372.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. 'CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, Nuntii Ab E. Mis Patribus Cardinalibus Lecti et a Summo Pontifice Iis Traditi Qui Variarum Socialium Ordinum Personam Gerebant. Aux Femmes', *AAS* 58, 1966, 13–14.

<sup>100</sup> PIUS XII, 'Udienza Alle Partecipanti Al Congresso Femminile Internazionale Dell'Azione Catolica, 15.04.1939', *OR* 90 (15 Aprile 1939), n.d., 1.

<sup>101</sup> JOHANNES PAULUS II, 'Christifideles Laici', *AAS* 81 n. 50 (1989): 393-521.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. PIUS XII, 'Udienza Generale, 24.02.1942', *OR* 47 (26 Febbraio 1942), n.d., 1.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. JOHANNES PAULUS II, 'Ad Episcopos Civitatum Foederatarum Americae Septemtrionalis Missus', *AAS* 81, 1989, 1161–68.

<sup>104</sup> PAULUS VI, 'Lettere Al Presidente Della 59ª. Sessione Delle Settimane Sociali Di Francia, Sig. Alain Barrière', *OR* 153 (5 Luglio 1972), 1972, 1.

<sup>105</sup> 'Sacra Congregatio Pre Doctrina Fidei; Declaratio De Abortu Procurato', *AAS* 66 n. 15 (1974): 730–47.

try to take into account the consequences of their use for women themselves. The issue of maternity is directly linked to the problem of nature of women. It constitutes her essence, the revelation of the meaning of femininity. This is determined biologically though. Pope Pius XII states that the «truth of woman» was «inscribed in the very physical conditions of (her) life».<sup>106</sup>

From the Magisterium texts' perspective, physical characteristics of a woman also determine her psychological identity. The texts define a woman as a mother and describe her psychological attributes along these lines. Pope John Paul II states that a woman, given her condition as a mother, possesses «a subtle sensitivity, a sense of concrete reality and a caring love for what is growing and therefore needs special care».<sup>107</sup> The description also seems to reveal a tendency to idealise the figure of a woman as a perfect mother. Pope Pius XII stated that “a mother is the centre of daily life” in the family, always attentive to its needs and ready to make her children happy. She comes into the world with the mission of being a mother, of spreading joy all around. Without her, «the house goes cold; the home practically ceases to exist».<sup>108</sup> She is both the home and house.

Women tend to be defined only by their role in relation to another: a child. The idealization of this role seems to further empty woman of a concrete identity and existence. The subject of reflection about her identity is always another in function of which the existence of woman herself is placed. This risk of reducing women to their role seems to be aggravated in the texts in question by the fact that there is no equally developed reflection on the role of men as fathers.

Pope John Paul II in his submission states that “being genitors—although common to both—is achieved much more in a woman, especially in the prenatal period”. Therefore, man “is always ‘outside’ the process of gestation and the birth of the child”. Although the upbringing of children is the responsibility of both the father and the mother, the maternal contribution «is decisive».<sup>109</sup> According to the texts of the Magisterium, motherhood is therefore the key to interpreting the meaning of existence for women. As such, it also constitutes their fundamental social role. This identification of the social role

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<sup>106</sup> PIUS XII, ‘Udienza Generale, 24.02.1942’; JOHANNES PAULUS II., ‘Mulieris Dignitatem’, AAS 80 n. 18 (1988): 1653–1729.

<sup>107</sup> JOHANNES PAULUS II, “‘Discorso Al Centro Femminile Italiano”, 7. 12. 1979’, OR 282 (8 Dicembre 1979), n.d., 3.

<sup>108</sup> PIUS XII, ‘Udienza Generale, 24.02.1942’.

<sup>109</sup> JOHANNES PAULUS II., ‘Mulieris Dignitatem’.

of women with motherhood becomes more evident if we consider how the texts view their professional work. Many put the emphasis on difficulty this can cause for the fulfilment of what is specific to women, that is, maternity.<sup>110</sup>

From the perspective of Magisterium, women's essential contribution to society lies in their role as mothers, therefore in a private sphere. The texts consulted assign predominantly to men the public functions and to women the roles directly related to the maintenance of the home and the family as we saw it with the Luhya culture. We can easily see and say that they are the guarantors of the stability of the private domain as men lead in public domain. In his own words, Pope Pius XII, says that the home is «the field and nest of the wife's activity».<sup>111</sup>

Another element of the idealisation of the role of a woman as a mother is her confinement to the private domain. The terms in which the texts describe this identification of women with the private dimension of life reflect the customs of the age that is contemporary to them, precisely with regard to the distribution of social roles for women and men. Culturally, according to some authors, it is customary to attribute the private domain to women and the public domain to men.<sup>112</sup> Thus, the ideal of a woman as a mother is realised in the current social order, that is, in the attribution of private life to women.

It is true that there are more recent texts, the likes of *Amoris Letitia* that is on the family and the apostolic exhortation titled *Christ Is Alive* where Pope Francis questions a Church always on defensive. Apostolic exhortation addressed to “all Christian young people”, Pope Francis calls for an open Church with «open doors».<sup>113</sup> This is to mean that Pope wants a Church that acknowledge past ills done against women and a Church that is attentive to women seeking justice and equality. These documents recognise the considerable importance of the social role of women. But it is interesting to see how the

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. LEO XIII, 'Litterae Encyclicae Rerum Novarum', AAS 23, 1890/91, n.d., 661; PIUS XII, 'Mulieribus Peregrinationis Causa Ad Sanctuarium Lauretanum B. Mariae Virginis e Tota Italia Coadunatis, Ad Fausta Anniversaria Summi Pontificis Pii XII Pie Celebranda', AAS 73, 1981, 577–647; 'Christifideles Laici', AAS 81 n.50-51 (1989): 393–521.

<sup>111</sup> PIUS XII, 'Udienza Generale, 24.02.1942'.

<sup>112</sup>Cfr. Philippe Ariès/Georges Duby (dir), *História Da Vida Privada*, ed. Edições Afrontamento, vol. 1 (Lisboa: Bertrand Livreiros, 1991); Michelle Perrot et Georges Duby (dir.), *Histoire Des Femmes En Occident*, Tempus, 5 vol (Paris: Tempus Perrin).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Chico Harlan, 'Pope Francis Says Catholic Church Should Support Women's Rights', 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/pope-francis-says-church-should-support-womens-rights/2019/04/02/fa7af648-551f-11e9-814f-e2f46684196e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/pope-francis-says-church-should-support-womens-rights/2019/04/02/fa7af648-551f-11e9-814f-e2f46684196e_story.html). Accessed 11 August 2022.

presence of women in public life is described. She seems to construct a universalization and an idealization of her role as a mother and nothing beyond motherhood.

It is irony that the message which the Second Vatican Council addressed to women seems to assign to them the role of saviours of the world: «Reconcile humanity with life. And above all, we beseech you, watch over the future of our species. Hold the hand of man, who in a moment of madness may try to destroy human civilisation». The message ends with the strong appeal that: «Women of the whole universe, believers or non-believers, to whom life is entrusted at this grave moment in history, it is up to you to save world peace».<sup>114</sup> As we said earlier on, women are responsible for life.

The image of the Church is referred to as a mother (Mother Church) in many other texts. The language and images used to describe the relationship of the Church with her faithful and the relationship of the faithful with the Church is often the language used to speak of a motherly and filial relationship. In more recent texts, this image has developed towards comparing the internal life of the Church with life of the family, namely, with the mother's solicited relationship with her children. In this way, the Church is identically and symbolically as the “gestation of life” an essentially maternal trait. The Vatican II Council affirms that the Church «becomes also a mother through the faithful acceptance of the word of God, since through preaching and baptism she begets children, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to new and immortal life».<sup>115</sup> It is a question, therefore, of the association of the Church with the generation of new life. This is symbolized through recourse to the image of a woman as biological mother.

Another element of this description is the recourse to the idea of a mother as the one who nourishes her children. Pope John Paul II describes the Church as one who nourishes the family with her sacraments and the grace of Christ.<sup>116</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church also refers to her as «a provident mother», who «dispenses to us also in the liturgy, day by day, the nourishment of the word and the Eucharist of the Lord».<sup>117</sup>

In the two comparisons of the image of a woman, we can conclude that the role of a woman as a mother not only concentrates on her function of gestation and nourishment

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<sup>114</sup> 'CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, Nuntii Ab E. Mis Patribus Cardinalibus Lecti et a Summo Pontifice Iis Traditi Qui Variarum Socialum Ordinum Personam Gerebant. Aux Femmes'.

<sup>115</sup> 'SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM OECUMENICUM VATICANUM II, Constitutio Dogmática De Ecclesia. Lumen Gentium', AAS 57 n.64 (1965): 5–71.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. JOHANNES PAULUS II, 'Familiaris Consortio', AAS 74 n. 49 (1982): 81–191.

<sup>117</sup> *Catechisme de L'Église Catholique*, 2040.

of the child, but also that with the use of this image, we can refer to the relationship of a person and God, and the faithful with the Church which renders a woman so significant.

The texts of the Magisterium also look and compares the Church with the family. Pope Pius XI affirms that the task of the family coincides with the task of the Church: God gives to both the fruitfulness, transmission of life, education and authority, «the beginning of the whole order».<sup>118</sup> When a parallel is drawn between authority in the family and authority in the Church, the role of the hierarchy is compared to that of a father of the family. Thus, Pope John Paul II affirms that «priests and deacons are to the family as a father, a brother, a pastor and a teacher».<sup>119</sup> Therefore, both in the Church and in the family, authority is found in the paternal line and not maternal line.

Another essential feature of the image of a woman fixed by Magisterial thought is that of a woman as a wife. It appears, however, that the references to the figure of a woman as a wife are not of such relevant content as the references to the figure of the woman as a mother and the references to family life in general.

While one can find quite determined descriptions of the maternal function of a woman, the statements about her role as wife are more blurred, usually talking more about the relationship between wives and their mates (spouses). The present texts show an evolution in language put in use to refer to both the relationship between spouses and to the profile of each of them. Thus, there is a visible distance between the way the subject is approached by the Encyclical *Casti connubii* and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, to refer to some of the most significant documents on the topic. For Pope Pius XI, the “order of love” (an expression of Saint Augustine) consists in «the primacy of the husband over his wife and daughters», as well as «the subjection and the free and voluntary obedience of the wife».<sup>120</sup>

In an agreement with the thinking of the text, this obedience harms neither the freedom nor the value of the human person because «if a man is the head of the family, a woman is its heart».<sup>121</sup> This “structure of the family”, established by God Himself, is therefore unchangeable. The text of *Casti connubii* cites, in this context, a passage from Pope Leo XIII which firmly states that a man is the master of the family and the head of

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<sup>118</sup> PIUS XI, ‘*Litterae Encyclicae Divini Illius Magistri*’, AAS 21 D 3690 (1929).

<sup>119</sup> JOHANNES PAULUS II, ‘*Familiaris Consortio*’, AAS 74 n. 73 (1982): 81–191.

<sup>120</sup> PIUS XI, ‘*Litterae Encyclicae, «Casti Connubii»*’, AAS 22 D 3708 (1930).

<sup>121</sup> PIUS XI, D 3709.

the woman. It is added that this obedience does not harm the dignity of the person because he who has the primacy is the image of Christ and she who obeys is the image of the Church.<sup>122</sup> In both texts, therefore, we see the affirmation of inequality between man and woman (one commands, the other obeys) as being God's will and as being a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Vatican II Council employs a very different and soft language from the one we see in the referred documents. From the Conciliar perspective, marriage means the «intimate union of two persons»; their «mutual self-giving» (GS 48). The text does not refer to the relationship between the spouses as a relationship of authority and obedience thus observing the dignity of persons. Nevertheless, the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* speaks of the family and marriage as a «community of persons».<sup>123</sup> In this context, the equality of man and woman before God is affirmed and condemn chauvinism, which «diminishes women and hinders a healthy development of family relationships».<sup>124</sup>

However, it should be noted that these texts also maintain the aforementioned tendency to attribute the public domain to the man and the private domain to the female gender, since there remains immediate link between the woman's role as a wife and as a mother.<sup>125</sup> The functions are essentially fulfilled, yes, but in private environments. Therefore, we can say that the equality between husband and wife, as beings created in the image and likeness of God, and their different functions are affirmed in parallel.

To conclude, let us try to look at Pope Francis. The election of Francis as the Catholic Pope brought a surprising sense of renewal and hope to the Church and the world at large. His every gesture and word as from where I sit and write this has found a positive reception and an applause from the world and this, we can frankly confirm. From an inward and institutionally self-absorbed preoccupation, we see things systematically and drastically changing to that one of concern and service for every person, men and women, old and young, of all religions in the world. But mostly in this change of tone, we see it with a preferential option for the poor and the needy, embracing all of humanity without measure of gender, status or religion.

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. LEO XIII, 'Litterae Encyclicae Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae', 1880, D 3143.

<sup>123</sup> JOHANNES PAULUS II, 'CONSTITUTIONES APOSTOLICAE, Familiaris Consortio', AAS 74 n. 18 (1982): 81–191.

<sup>124</sup> JOHANNES PAULUS II, 'CONSTITUTIONES APOSTOLICAE, Familiaris Consortio', AAS 74 n. 25 (1982): 81–191.

<sup>125</sup> JOHANNES PAULUS II, 'Gaudium et Spes', AAS 58 n. 52 (1966): 1025–1120.

Because the world received warmly his words of hope, Pope Francis has found it natural to speak in day broad light, to the people, to the entire world, in a direct and unassuming language that all the peoples understand and appreciate. There was least mention of the issue of women that remains at the centre of Magisterial and which serve to define the Church as it is now. Of late, it was at freezing point the ideology of gender until the hope of light came by Pope Francis. We may not expect the Doctrine or the teaching of the Church to change much during this pontificate but so far, we can testify a slide change in the question of women's role and dignity in the Church. The change in tone and the relegation of issues of gender from the core to the periphery of the Church teaching is in itself relevant. But Pope's words on women's roles in both the Church and the society serves as the welcome recipe to the change long awaited moment of women.

The issue of gender was but has never gone in darkness, and the growing gap between Church and secular morality on gender will ever need an address, hopefully tomorrow when the spirit is new. The principle that, *all men and women are created equal* is or has become an ever more self-evident truth, that needs to be actualized and if not, then the task of bridging the gap between the norm and the appalling reality of gender question is likely to the society and institution or the Church.

From Pope Francis' body language, we can note that the Church has or may have successfully addressed the social question but this of gender remains yet to be fully solved. I commend and applaud the Church for her reckoning record she has made on social question but on the gender question we remain theologically challenged as a people of faith. A most renewed Church less self-absorbed in its own clericalism and embracing the poorest and the weakest, must per force pay greater attention to women who remain the poorest, the weakest and the least respected in our societies. Although not the thought of Pope, I hope that lay and religious women will gain greater access and participation in the Magisterium and in the administrative authority of the Church at different levels. And of course, we must thank the Pope for appointing the three in Dicastery as mentioned in the previous chapter for the first time in the Church history. The ways are opening.

### **2.3 The local Church**

In this section, I must confess that it was not easy to get information on the crisis facing women given that I am far from the ground. Relying on what my memory has or I know and on people who know not much as determinant factor, my research and presentation remains limited. Having this insufficient information does not mean that

things are good in the native land. They must be not good and people are only but swallowing their bitter saliva. Building from the previous presentation and chapter, things need to be worked upon and improved for a better participation of women in the society and the Church. The local Church together with her leaders in Luhya society is highly respected and thus this ecclesiastical hierarchy has to play a very big role in defending what is for women but in collaboration with women themselves. This is because the Church in defence of women without women is just but a zero work or wastage of efforts and wisdom.

The two native dioceses in Luhyaland are Kakamega and Bungoma but under the new geographical and political dispensations called counties. The two dioceses are in the five counties covering a total area of 10, 796.3 sq. km (4, 168.5 sq. miles) with a population of 6, 012, 041 million people as we had mentioned in the previous chapter. As it is normal, almost everywhere in the world, female population leads in these two dioceses of the five counties of Western Kenya. The female population is 3, 103, 725 as men takes up remaining figure at 2, 908, 316 people.<sup>126</sup> This is according to the figures of the census report released by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Despite women being many in number, the statistics shows that the same women are least represented both in civil and religious spheres. This is not only a problem of the two dioceses in Western Kenya or local government in the region but also a general human challenge to be addressed in the entire country.

As at 2021 statistics, women held 21.6 percent of the seats in Kenya's parliament.<sup>127</sup> This shows that female representation in the assembly increased compared to the past years, a suggestion that things have at least improved and looking better. This is as a result of promulgation of 2010 Constitution that required no more than two-thirds of the National Assembly to be of the same gender. However, the requirement has not been fully implemented despite the efforts. Women have not come out to fight for positions and have always sat back to be given by men. But also, culture has not accepted fully the idea of women leadership. Due to the culture influence and keeping of the traditions, male gender has never been comfortable with women leadership, only

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Victor Matara, 'Kenya Population Per County-Census 2019 Results', 2019, <https://victormatara.com/kenya-population-by-county-census-2019-results/>. Accessed 19 August 2022.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Faria Julia, 'Kenya: Women in the National Parliament 2000-2021/Statista', 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1248316/proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-kenya-national-parliament/>. 22 August 2022.

believing in thriving of men. According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census, it is recorded that women managed 75 (nominated included) out of the 290 Parliamentary seats. Kenya having held her general elections we have seen a great change. Women went for seats and a great number of them won in different levels. Despite all odds, out of 47 gubernatorial seats, we managed 7 governors (14%), 29 Members of Parliament out of 290 seats (10%) and the 3 senators out of 47 seats (6%) who were elected directly by citizens in the just completed polls in 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022.<sup>128</sup> This has positive impact on gender equity struggles as KEWOPA moves a step ahead in her agenda for women affairs in the country. However, Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation (MWO) admits that they are far from over. It is clear that this year's election was significant as women have broken the barriers on leadership.

The Church which for long period has been known as an example of justice the world seeks today, she is playing an agent of justice though failing sometimes in her war. In Church leadership, we see many high committee positions occupied by the sanctimonious, pompous, self-righteous pontification of men. Women in families, communities and the Church have been dominated by men to be brief. They only remain subordinates to their male partners. We cannot complain or judge that the Mother Church is making great and remarkable efforts for the respect of women's vocation and dignity. It has kept journeying this journey towards liberating women letting them practice their role in respective manner. The Church in Luhyaland is and must effectively be committed to fight for justice and dignity of women as the Universal Church is doing at her capacity. They should implement the objective programs to help in guarding of the vocation and dignity of women in their environments.

To women and groups of the vulnerable in the Church like CWA, Watoto wa Kipapa, Wanalegio among other groups, the dioceses in the land have assigned priests who accompany them spiritually as God-fathers or chaplains. Priests organise groups with their leaders and guide them in their daily Church activities. But most importantly is presenting the groups' grievances to the relevant diocesan authorities for necessary actions or aids. Thanks to God that with time, people are starting to see the significance of the presence of women and are ready to embrace the change in accepting the role of

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. Tony Karumba (AFP), 'Kenyan Women Make History with Record Election Win', 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220816-kenyan-women-make-history-with-record-election-win>. Accessed 22 August 2022.

women. Of recent, I have seen some female catechists accepted on the altar, women participating in the leadership of the parishes, leading in prayers and serving as altar-servers something never witnessed in earlier days of evangelization in these dioceses.

In addition, to promote women's vocation and dignity, there should be proper formation for women as it is set for men. This special formation equips women with proper information and is one way of making them conscious of their capability in the construction of the Church not only in aesthetic sense and offering contributions in form of *sadaka* or listening to the word as it is seen in many places but also contributing to the Church by fully utilising their talents, vocations. Also, the formation gives them a sense of belonging hence proud of themselves as persons and so, boast their self-esteem. There is necessity for women leaders and leadership in the Church and the Luhya secular communities.

#### **2.4 The Office of Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation<sup>129</sup>**

The followers of Christ have been called to peace and justice and for that case, they are generally called for love and to love. This peace and justice are not only possessed but are also made. And to that end they renounce all violence and tumult that may degrade people. It renounces all that is not love and her objective. In the cause of Christ, nothing is to be gained by such methods that involves violence against human person; either woman or man, poor or rich, on grounds of race etc. His disciples keep peace by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others. They maintain fellowship and union where others would break it off. They renounce hatred and wrongs and all bad that may harm human being. In so doing, they overcome evil with good, and establish the peace of God in the midst of a world of war and hate.<sup>130</sup>

The world needed a peaceful environment, she needed tranquillity, she wanted to end both the intellectual and physical slavery, she needed to fight racism, she needed to stop human trafficking, she needed to end gender biasness, she was to stop terrorism, she needed to stop wars, she wanted to stop prostitution and sexual abuse. She needed to end everything that was against the plan of God for His creation and most especially, human persons and the environment. The world needed to eradicate all that was inhuman. And

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<sup>129</sup> I thank Rev. Fr. Vincent Elima Makokha C. S. Sp., an expert in the area of our concern in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in the province of Kenya. He was of great importance in guiding and aiding me in accessing of materials on the topic matter.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'AZQuotes.Com, Wind and Fly LTD 2022', 2022, <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/528704>. Accessed 24 August 2022.

the earth as a home, a life-centred form of ethics and more other things that promote life was to be cared for to avoid her destruction. It is here that JPIC enters for conservation of humanity and his precious environment.

JPIC movements run a variety of programs concerning persons, youths, racism, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, peace, globalization and environment. The Office of Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation collaborates with local, state and national organizations, religious congregations, the associates and Churches to be aware of key issues concerning human life and give them a qualified or reasonable response. The PJIC is an office that we can say, it helps or aids corporately and individually to witness and live the ministry of peace, justice and integrity of creation in varied ways through increased awareness, prayer, presence, advocacy and systemic change. In summary, this office actively participates in sensitizing people on their welfares.

Being a Spiritan member, I would like to briefly talk about Spiritans and their work on human defence and evangelization for equality. The PJIC being an office in the congregation, has her own vision. The congregation is a semi-contemplative, transformative and has been of prophetic presence and witness in areas of peace, justice and integrity of creation through the living of her charism of hospitality and address of systemic change in solidarity with all life, humans and environment. The Spiritans' charism makes the congregation to recommit herself to the poor, most marginalized and vulnerable persons, collaborating with individuals and organizations that share their values. The PJIC leader in Kenya and his team, work collaboratively with the congregation, leadership, committees, groups, individual priests in different missions, associates and the wider public in identifying, celebrating and calling forth the many ways we practice and live peace, justice and integrity of creation.

The idea of having a Council to deal with the issue of peace will be thought to be a necessity. The German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1930s came through and thought of the perfect idea of having a Council of peace to help in advocating for justice. Bonhoeffer called the Christian Churches to organise a Council of peace. This was way before the existence of Vatican II that will open the doors of the Church, something that will encourage interreligious dialogue, and ecumenism. He died trying to live out and practise the central peace command of Jesus. His contribution was in stressing the disciples' duty and responsibility for the sake of justice and peace in the world. He addresses the question who is Christ for us today? The question is a theme in his theology

and life at time the world was enmeshed in an ecological crisis, the war on terror, economic unfairness, religious and racial conflict as I mentioned in the beginning. His concept of peace has its roots in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, is Christological and ecclesiological. He confessed that peace was the presence of Christ and a command of God thus thought of the Council of peace for the world as a pioneer.

With the coming of Vatican II, the Council of Christian Churches seemed to gain life again. The assembly of World Council of Churches (WCC) founded in 1948 with her central organ in Amsterdam, met delegates of the former Eastern Germany (GDR) in Vancouver in 1983. They proposed formation of a Council of Peace once more after many years of silence on the issue. But still, the idea never sunk into the heads and hearts of many. Those with similar mind, decided to journey one way by beginning of the conciliar process that was committed to the advocacy of peace, justice and integration of creation.

As we all know, in all her being and actions, the Church is chosen and assigned a special mandate of promoting the integral development of the human person in the light of the Gospel of Christ. This is achieved by attending to the question of justice, peace and the care of creation. In this, Pope Francis has adopted it very well and thus has continuously adapted the institutions which collaborate with him with an aim of meeting the needs of the people they serve and the environment. You can notice this in his encyclical: *Laudato Si* that not only cares for human persons but also the environment in which human person and all he cares lives in.

There were several Ecumenical Assemblies that were held before the Catholic Church participating in that that took place in Seoul, Korea in March of 1990 entitled *World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*. Her intention of convocation was to engage member Churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment to what was ailing the world. The affirmation settled on by the assembly included:

- (i) All forms of human power and authority are subject to God and accountable to people. This means that the right of people to full participation.
- (ii) 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.
- (iii) People of all race, caste, and ethnic group are of equal value (in their differences, they reflect the rich plurality of God's creation)

- (iv) *The creative power given to women to stand for life whenever there is death. In Christ's community, women find acceptance and dignity, and with them he shared the imperative to carry the Gospel.*
- (v) Access to truth and education, information and means of communication are basic rights. Everybody regardless should have an access to these basic rights.
- (vi) The full meaning of God's peace. We are called to seek means of establishing justice, achieving peace and solving conflicts by active nonviolence.
- (vii) The world, as God's handiwork, has its own inherent integrity. All creation is good in God's sight.
- (viii) Land belongs to God. Human use of it should release the earth to replenish its life-giving power, protecting its integrity and providing spaces for creatures.
- (ix) The dignity of children that derives from their particular vulnerability and need for nurturing love.
- (x) Human rights are God-given and their promotion and protection are essential for freedom, justice and peace.

For the above well-articulated affirmations, we can say that it has come time for the Church to put them into practice and switched everything in motion now. The vision of all people according to the affirmations, is to have a family where members have the same rights or privileges to wholeness of life. The vision has remained in her spiritual nature for long but her time to be revealed concretely is here with us. It is time everything is put into practice and moved a step away from their theories.

All affirmations of the assembly in whose Catholic Church laid her hand on as a sign of agreeing with them concerns human person's welfare. But it is only wise if we concentrated on this of "men and women are created in God's image and have equal rights". We can rely on the book of Gen 1: 27 as an official reference to the affirmation of the assembly that orbits around the integrity of a human person.

Relying on the wish or theology and life of Bonhoeffer, we are forced to concentrate on the teachings of the NT especially on Jesus. Jesus came for the dignity of human person and because a woman is part of human person, then Jesus came to confirm the personhood of these women and empowering them to dignity. While with and in Christ's community, women felt accepted and also at home. They felt the fire of the spirit of evangelising burning in them too like their counterpart and thus participated by accompanying Christ since the launch of his work to the end at the Calvary on the Cross.

Everybody had a privilege as persons and in the family of persons. Christ, the new Adam, had made everybody new creation as 2 Cor 5: 17 describes that all in Christ are new creations. Being new in Christ simply means standing up against all forms of discrimination and all that is against persons. Being new will simply mean vesting yourself with justice and defending human rights without biasness.

For the sake of justice and peace and care for creation, the assembly agreed to stand against the patriarchal structure or tides that seemed to advocate for any violence against women in terms of labour and sexual exploitations among other several human injustices. Furthermore, the assembly opted to resist other structures of domination that excludes the huge and fundamental theological and spiritual contribution (values) of women or even negate their participation in different Councils or society in decision making processes. The realization of a very new community, new society and new world of men and women who are equal in dignity before each other.

But since that long, much is not realized yet. Pope Francis has tried to walk the talk by emphasizing a lot not through just his writings, for instance, *Laudato Si* that cares for the environment and *Fratelli Tutti* that advocates for equality (brotherhood) among peoples. Pope Francis has tried to make the talk much concrete that it has ever been (Cf. Apostolic Letter, *Spiritus Domini*). He has taken steps in appointing women into different positions of leadership in the Church leadership and also engaging into peaceful dialogues with different political and religious leaders. Moreover, more positive things seem to come by him if he stayed there for long. Women were forgotten on the table of negotiation. Leadership in the Church was understood as in the equation of ordination thus affecting negatively women in few leadership opportunities offered. But also, the leadership is much connected to ordained ministry than the laity. The Church holds many positions that needs formation and thus priests enjoy them much but among them, there are those that even lay people if trained, can perform better.

Speaking to some theologians in Catholic University of Porto, lay men and women within Portugal and back to my native land, I can confirm without fear of contradiction that so many clergy men have forgotten their mission and have become governors than shepherds to lead the flock of God. In fact, they have made lay people wonder if priesthood by ordination is making sense nowadays. And some people will even say “you inspire me to be nothing like you”, an indication that somebody slept on his job. To relinquish these priests from what seems to be a lot of work that they are unnecessarily

involved in, it is better we reduced the hats they are wearing by making use of the talents of all the faithful taking up the common priesthood of all and being faithful to Vatican II. Naturally being equal in person, women like men, can carry out some pastoral activities, administrative works, participating in community building, evangelization and all that do not require ordination certification to be able to perform them.

OT and NT, our Holy Scriptures concentrates on the theme of justice and peace as their role is to solely teach morality. We term God as love hence God is peace and justice. Being created in the image and likeness of God, we are called to be just and peaceful as persons among ourselves. In fact, we are called to be as holy as is our Father in heaven (Cf. Mt 5: 48). Being perfect in this case entail being just and considering peace for all. In our project, we may conclude that being just and peaceful is to simply put into our hearts the poor, strangers, widow, orphans, illiterate, those in need of help, all vulnerable etc in our daily lives. The Bible records that God listens to the cry of the poor (Cf. Ps 34) and He turns towards the just but the wicked He is far (Cf. Prov 15: 29). Christ came for a mission of serving and saving souls, he came to free many from bondage of sins, and to set free his people from captivity. During his time, we can see the wrong attitudes of Jewish leaders that Christ deals with giving people justice and peace and freedom by his message of Truth.

On social question, the thinkers and influential sociologists; Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Herbert Spencer, and Max Weber did some excellent job by presenting guidelines for the human person's family. Despite the fact that the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII (1891), that talks of struggles of social equilibrium was in course, the Church had not in her conscience seriously considered these social matters as weighty matters. Later on, there came *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pope Pius XI (1931), *Mater et Magistra* by Pope John XXIII (1961), *Pacem in Terris* by Pope John XXIII (1963), *Populorum Progressio* by Pope Paul VI (1967), *Laborem Exercens* by Pope John Paul II (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* by John Paul II (1987), *Centesimus Annus* by John Paul II (1991), *Evangelium Vitae* by John Paul II (1995), *Deus Caritas Est* by Pope Benedict XVI (2005), *Caritas in Veritate* by Benedict XVI (2009), and now the new one by Pope Francis, the *Laudato Si* that explores the same social matter. The social equilibrium championed by *Rerum Novarum* as other Encyclicals will do later was in line with human rights in general thus to say that we are for human rights. We are to defend rights in the fields like labour, political, economical, and religious environments. Later on, the first

formal Catholic Social Teaching of the Church came into existence dealing with the theme of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. And this led to formation of many commissions, committees, associations, groups and personalities that are busy working under the umbrella of the Church and society in safeguarding basic wellbeing of humanity, dignity and respect of women in most cases because they are the most affected with cruelty of the world. Many documents have been produced that help us by giving directives on different issues in our daily lives.

The Roman curia has the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace that together or in collaboration with other international organizations like the one well known the United Nations (UN) and its departments in various levels; continental and interreligious levels. The Universal Declaration Human Rights<sup>131</sup> has the thirty articles that carries a message related to the Church's Social Teachings. But in some of them we may notice some interpretations that are contrary to the Gospel in most recent moment. All through the world, the Church is known as the champion in defending human dignity by protecting the human rights as the core of its social role in the world where these human rights are under threat of being violated and capitulated. The pontifical Council for justice and peace, has its main document "The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church". It serves for both moral and social teachings of the Church. The promotion of the wellbeing of humanity is an essential aspect that cannot be ignored in the evangelization process in the Church. God initiates relationship with humanity but He first sets them free. The same acts with our spiritual life that we believe in God because of the freedom we have. Christ knowing that we were free, he accepted to be like us, lived among us with an intention of establishing this relationship so that we may be redeemed. Through reconciliation, Christ made us his brothers and sisters thus allowing us call God, our Father. This way, the Church is always wanting our liberty. She fights for freedom of all from all humiliations, and all inhumanities hence, a defender of human rights.<sup>132</sup>

The Church is the most powerful and prominent known defender of human rights. Even in harsh conditions with its hostility, the Church has found herself in there fighting for the people's rights as she plays the ambassadorial role in matters justice and peace. Representing the Church, we have seen Pope Francis visiting different nations with

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<sup>131</sup> UDHR was adopted on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly. On the document's drafting, the known person for her fighting spirit is an American, Eleanor Roosevelt.

<sup>132</sup> 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.

troubles and meeting political classes in search of peace and justice for the people. But also, the Church through the representation of the religious congregations, we have seen what we may call mission of presence as a result of persecutions of Christians practising their faith openly. As much as the Church and her different organizations are the representation of love, peace and justice and care of creation, how has she dealt with the question of women, her daughters? This question on women is our concern because the Church has failed to treat justly and with dignity of her daughters in some human aspects thus derailing the progress of women emancipation at both society and ecclesiastical level in the Luhyaland and the nation at large. The Church has spoken, written well about women but it has substantively not shown concrete ways of solving the problems facing female gender especially on dignity and vocation.

### **Synthesis: Critical approach and theological predicaments**

Looking at the open Church we have today, is the question still on if women can or cannot hold a position in the same Church?<sup>133</sup> This is based on both divine and Church teachings and from the readings of God's plan for human beings. He intended that we may be one as Christ shows this in his Priestly prayer. Christ talked of a united Church. He not only prayed for organic unity but also within and among her members (Cf. Jn 17). We understand the teachings on Trinity that we have one God in Three Persons. In his prayer, Christ asks that the Father glorify the Son in his death, that God may ultimately be glorified. But he also wanted a united people thus he participates in communion between the believers and the Godhead.

The prayer in Jn 17: 20-26, we can say that it eternally unites humanity with God. Christ's mission was then to bring and re-establish that good and lost relationship between human persons and God. He prays saying that, «so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they perhaps brought to perfection as one ...» (Jn 17: 23). In this prayer, we note that Christ came to restore humanity, giving humans new chance to build a new world. Through Christ, we live or we are invited to participate in the unity of love of three Persons in one God. Christ living in communion with us, calls us to abandon all forms of slavery, abuses and discriminations as these stops many in participating in his ministry or mission. The prayer should be understood that was at a time when disciples wanted comfort and hope, almost the same time when we are thirsty in need of comfort

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<sup>133</sup> Considering positions of Holy Orders that the Church where the Church closed her chapter by the *Declaration, Inter insigniores*, 1976.

and hope in liberating women. With a good and free missionary attitude, all should be left to fulfil what Mt 28: 19 writes on disciples going out to teach all nations. The same can be noted in response of Christ to those who came to him reporting of a mother and brothers looking for him. Jesus says, «he who does the will of my Father, this is my brother, my sister and my mother» (Lk 8: 21). Jesus went beyond boundaries, he does not consider the gender, he forgets the gender difference and invites all to himself, he refers brotherhood to anyone ready to do his Father's will. Everybody as long as he is doing the Father's will is a brother and a sister. According to him, gender has nothing to do with the service delivery but the attitude. And this should be a lesson to learn thus giving space for women to serve.

The Church has received much from the part of women. They overwhelmingly contribute, they are of large population of the entire Church and the world. History of faith having it that they were the first to witness the resurrected Christ and that they were with him all through in his life and death as we shall be seeing in the next chapter, then it will be very awkward and unreasonable to leave them out in the question of serving and being part of the Church in witnessing Christ.

Unlike any other religion, I would like to confess that Christianity has done her best as religion to ensure that all injustices against humanity especially the female gender in the Church are surpassed. Although not fully eradicated but there seem to be light at the end of the tunnel. People are starting to appreciate women. In the eyes of Christianity than any other religion that ever existed on the planet, we can all agree on the appreciation placed on a woman as Pope Paul VI confidently says that;

... from the beginning woman has a special status of dignity, of which the New Testament attests to us not a few and not small aspects. From the unique and blessed function of the most venerated "Mary, mother of Jesus" (Act. 2, 14), ...to the women who followed and assisted the Lord in his life as a public ministry (Lk. 8, 2-3) and benefited from the first apparitions of the Risen One (cf. Mt. 28, 1-10; Mk. 16, 1-8; Lk. 24, 1-11. 22-23; I. \_ 20, 1-2. 11-18), up to those present with the Twelve in the Upper Room at Pentecost (Act. 2, 14) and to the many mentioned by Paul in his Letters for their multiple functions within the first Churches (Rom. 16, 1 -2. 12; Phil. 4, 2-3; Col. 4, 15; cf. 1 Cor. 11, 5a; 1 Tim. 5, 16), it appears to the evidence that woman is placed to be part of the living and operating structure of Christianity in such a relevant way that perhaps not all its virtualities have yet been enucleated ...<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. POPE PAUL VI, 'Address of the Holy Father Paul VI to the Participants in the National Congress of the Italian Female Center (CIF) December 6, 1976', 1976, <https://www.vatican.va/content/paul->

Finally, to show the importance of women, Pope Francis while addressing the women doctors, he said that there exists femininity that is necessary femininity. He says that, «Our world today recognized that the dignity and intrinsic worth with which the Creator endowed them be restored to all women».<sup>135</sup> In this conference, the Pope confidently said that;

... elements that make up that femininity so necessary to the Church and the world,” including “the courage to face difficulties; the capacity for being practical; a natural desire to promote what is most beautiful and human according to God’s plan; and a far-sighted, prophetic vision of the world and of history.<sup>136</sup>

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vi/it/speeches/1976/documents/hf\_p-vi\_spe\_19761206\_congresso-nazionale-cif.html. Accessed 25 August 2022.

<sup>135</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Address to the Women Doctors’, 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-03/pope-teachings-of-women-doctors-can-offer-light-and-hope.html>. Accessed 25 August 2022.

<sup>136</sup> Pope Francis.

### **CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S DIGNITY AND WOMEN'S ROLE WITHIN THE LUHYA 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).

With special dedication, this chapter focuses on the dignity and vocation of women in the Church. The chapter looks at this matter from a theological and pastoral perspective. We shall be looking into the Scripture, Church history and some other works that throws an eye on women to find out on the condition and position of a woman in both the Church and the society. As it is our last chapter, we shall be trying to see the role of women in the Church as complementarity of men and not as halves or their substitution. As we are aware, the Tradition and Teaching of the Church on the ministries of women are rarely known, have been or remains unexplainable by the Church. Ministries of women remains unknown or the most talked about by people but less discussed in the Church or tackled by the Church's authority thus rendering the situation unclear.

Due to coldness felt on the matter, many of the women in and outside the Church feel left out of the Church they make a great percentage as members. Some with all their gifts, talents and energies are still burning in themselves with a desire to "begin a new journey of writing a new history never witnessed before" in the life of Christianity. They are still wishing to begin a new history in human life in the new Church. Women have shown interest of ascending to the sacred orders not to be equal to their counterparts but to render services at their level in the Church. Looking at Pope Francis with hope, I personally think that it would be good if the issues concerning women are resolved concretely. The Church needs to address this question on ministries to reduce that tension on the matter as it is witnessed today. Like they did with social and many other matters, this too can be resolved for once and forever.

Reading from different authors, especially in the gender-ecclesiastical fields, many of them have tried to draw their conclusions on how the Church deals emotionally (humanly) with some ministries. That feeling that many questions on ecclesiology and sacrament are not properly understood or they are unaccepted. Misunderstanding or not accepting these questions has left the situation in turmoil creating tension among women

who are championing their grievances. To settle this, the Church needs to reconsider them as valid questions or necessity for the Church and not radicalism or rebellion from women. From people's knowledge of science, it has been proven beyond doubt that men and women are both equal as persons thus nothing stops either of the two from aspiring to do what for long time had been reserved for one gender. This is just to show the world around us that like men, women can aspire for all offices and positions without any exception or any excuse.

The Church being the body of Christ, is very different from other organizations or institutions in dealing with different matters concerning human being and her life. The Church has her own way of treating issues and all is engraved in her Teachings. This is to say that she gives equal opportunities to all her sons as well as daughters though not in a democratic political way as the world would want it to be. Democracy we may say is for people to decide and it also belongs to the same people but in the case of the Church, the Church belongs not to people but Christ himself. The Church is understood as the body of Christ, she houses the Holy Spirit. This is to say that unlike in political democratic avenues where running tickets and certificates are awarded in line of merits, sacraments in the Church are considered and conceived differently. Sacraments are treated with care and some sort of speciality. In political democracy, everything is availed equally to both men and women. The Church does not give sacraments to men as she would give to women if she was to do it. As much as she seems not to give some sacraments to women, she gives a lot of best and precious things and her attention to them. The problem raises on the value we may give what is given to these women. We trivialize what is given to them by the Church just as we trivialize their personhood.

Women in devaluing attitude, have kept these things low or complaining and seeking to be given what is said to have been reserved for men. They keep rising their eyes on men in a comparing way. They have risen to claim that they are just like men and gone even beyond borders by claiming that "what a man can do, a woman can do even better". It is different with sacraments. Elizabeth Johnson claims that theology is an instrument used in many «ways to support an imaginative and structural world that excludes or subordinate women. Wittingly or not, it undermines women's human dignity as equally created in the image [and likeness] of God».<sup>137</sup> Looking at various aspects of

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<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1997), 5.

the Church, for instance, the Creed, prayers' pattern, liturgical worship, Doctrine of the Church, the Church's vision of mission, leadership, etc,<sup>138</sup> we can confirm Elizabeth's sentiments of injustice of subordination. This truth lived everywhere; in Catholic Tradition, Christian theology and patriarchal traditions among Luhya clans. We can give a cultural example from my own culture where God and angels but also mighty creatures are believed to be of male gender. This means that their attributes are masculine implying superiority for men. It is masculinity that is mighty and nothing else.

Engagement by many in theological debates and reflections, has revealed much of the long-hidden mysteries in the Scriptures and Tradition. This revelation has actually opened closed doors for women in the Church. This way, these feminist theologians and proponents are helping to shape discourse about God keeping in mind the campaign for the emancipation of women as persons with equal human dignity to the opposite gender. Among the feminist theologian, we know Elizabeth Johnson who stands tall with her radical theological question. She asks, «What is the right way to speak about God in the face of women's newly cherished human dignity and equality?». <sup>139</sup> A very fair and open question to everybody of us who has a woman as a person at heart. The question and response given by the same person is retracted from the mystery of God. To human person, God is never fully comprehended and He will remain a mystery forever. In our discourse, in our living with God, in our dealing with God, we must find a place to honour women as equal persons in dignity to men. We must find a place of honour for women (Cf. Gen 1: 27). We reflect upon the glory of God, His own marvellous creatures. This reflection signifies that when a person's dignity is violated, it is obvious that it is His own image that is done no justice. Being an image of God, human person has an obligation of finding away by which women's image is honoured because we are all created from His own image and in His likeness.

### **3.1 Women in the Holy Scriptures**

It is not easy to put the theme of women in the Bible into perspective. This is because it is a written crystallization of a long history and therefore, woman's condition suffers the consequences of evolution of the same history. Women's condition appears different according to the authors and literary genres of their texts in the Scriptures. The sole objective of this sector of the chapter is to try to look into Scriptures and see if we

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. Johnson, 4–5.

<sup>139</sup> Johnson, 6.

can discover what we may call the role, vocation and dignity of women in the Church. But also, we shall be trying to see how the same writings can influence the local Church without interfering with the story of original woman in her true cultural sense.

The most read book in this world today, we can say is the Holy Bible. Others read it out of curiosity, others with faith that it is a revealed or an inspired book of God. Many others take a look into it for the sake of seeking knowledge. However, being the most read, the Holy Bible is without doubt the most misunderstood, understood and most misinterpreted book ever. From this book, many good and bad ideologies have been justified. Many of what we see today has been retracted from the Bible and justified by some biblical verses. To the quote attributed to both President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Bishop Desmond Tutu of an Anglican Church of South Africa that says, «When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible»,<sup>140</sup> is a clear confirmation of the use of the Bible. Many ideas have been gotten from the Bible; the inquisitions set out to punish those committing heresies, the colonisation policies, political or governing bodies, religious conflicts, wars in the world, emancipation of people, human rights principles among many others. All these find their space and origin in the Bible.

The Bible is used in either formation of these bodies or justification of their existence or their actions or decisions. Even when they are against the plan of God, human person will find a way to interpret the Bible to suit the case hence the Bible remains a book of great influence in human world. This way, both emancipation and domination of women is a word game justified in the Bible by some of our Christians with main agenda of not seeing women rise to their position. Male Christians quote the Bible to justify their actions of dominion over women but use the same whenever they want to emancipate women. But also, women quote the same Bible in justifying that they are created to be dominated and under the rule of man. People use this Bible in both bad and good ways as long as it serves their needs.

Those in support of the Bible and those against it, have gone through this book and had a reflection on it as a word inspired by God, or human imaginative and technically

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<sup>140</sup> Wjisen Frans, *Seeds of Conflict in a Haven of Peace, From Religious Studies to Interreligious Studies in Africa* (Amsterdam-New York, NY: Editions Rodopi B. V, 2007), 15.

creative writing about what would have been God's thoughts but their conclusions are always varying. The conclusions vary due to what we already alluded to in the beginning as misunderstanding, understanding and misinterpretation of the Bible. Ambiguity of some verses can be cited in this case.

The Bible, as it is believed by Christians, is the Word of God written by both men and women under the inspiration of God Himself. Having been put into writing by man under inspiration, we therefore conclude it is not only a Word of God but also human word. It is a Word of God because the inspiration was God's and human because the capacity of how to put words and arranging pages depended on man's intelligence power. Man had to put in his creativity in writing this book to serve God's people and His purpose that is sometimes not achieved as the same book is used to corrupt everything.

How will its interpretation be easy if it is both the Word of God and human at the same time? This is where falsity begins. We interpret or understand it humanly and forget Godly side thus arriving at the wrong conclusions whenever it is read. The problem is not only for yesterday but it is as old as the Bible itself. People have misunderstood and misinterpreted it since long maybe for their own benefits or whenever the passage is obscure and they cannot figure out its meaning in their lives. According to Apostle Peter, no scriptural prophecy is a matter of personal interpretation (Cf. 2Pt 1: 20). This is just to tell us that the interpretation should all be Godly and dwell on the guidance of the spirit of God (Holy Spirit) and not human guidance (Science or Philosophy). Still on the question of misinterpretation of the Scriptures, Peter says that on some of the letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles, are «... hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other Scriptures» (2Pt 3: 16).

The Bible faces many challenges in this modern and technologically advanced world as people tend to want to know more than they are supposed to know if we may say. With changes in the world, then Christians with their faith but also difficult life we may say is full of injustices. They say things should have been different and even the same Word of God should have been interpreted differently or according to how they see things or they feel daily. This Word continues to be taken for any other book like my Literature Professor Mukuyia Oyoolo Zadock<sup>141</sup> will jokingly talk of the famous novels

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<sup>141</sup> Prof. Mukuyia Oyoolo Zadock is an English and Literature professor whom we happened to meet; he has remained my good teacher in life—Busombi Muslim Secondary School. He has been an icon and a

by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between* and the Erik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* as the little Bible. This way, there is lack of a proper meaning of a Holy book. People have gone a hinge far to say that this Holy book is anti-women as it is seen or understood not to give people equal status in life. With this wrong fact of anti-women, some people have resettled on not reading or believing that it is the Word of God but a simple "Word of God" that takes man above everything. Some have claimed that these translations of the Bible seem to be anti-feminine, produced by men with an agenda of dominating women or if that is not the case, then it was distorted by the patriarchs to suit their human appetites. But the truth remains that the Bible is not anti-women because it defends both women and men in many cases.

Christianity and to be specific, Catholicism, has been accused several times of a low regard for women and treating them, in effect, as second-class citizens in the Church that claims to represent Christ. While there is no denying that many believers, yesterday and today in history, have been guilty of this to their shame, the view from the Scriptures is radically different. The Scriptures have a very different eye according to moderate feminist proponents. The message in the Bible is presented not only as real, and diverse but also significant. It has a positive message on women but maybe somebody stood in as a stumbling block for women so that their dignity and vocation remain valueless or unappreciated. Someone might have misinterpreted or mistranslated the Bible for the very first time and that interpretation is still being carried on generation after generation, something that still keeps out women. This is especially when we reduce the issue to the question of ministries in the Church. This way, politics of power entered into the game and the Bible was wrongly interpreted and dogmas were passed to or in favour of men. Dogmas and doctrines have since played a role in favouring men.

In addition, there are some people who use the Holy Scripture in defending their project of women domination by quoting it saying that it was a plan of God that husbands should rule over their wives (Cf. Gen 3: 16), wives must be submissive to their husbands as recorded in Col 3: 18, silence is for women in Churches, they are not allowed to speak but be subordinate for thus says the law as is written in 1 Cor 14: 34, men must have the final word in any matter, etc. Human person's history is full of justifications and excuses.

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walking library to many, a champion of equal opportunities for education to village girls and boys. He has set records clear that education sets free any village from primitivity. He is a reference of life.

People are always finding excuses thus excuses are to humanity and humanity is to excuses we can conclude. Because we need authority to make justifiable excuse, the Word of God which is the known spiritual and secular authority is twisted to fit in the case in order to serve a purpose. This way, Christians have failed for long as they quote wrongly the Word of God that was written not to favour one person but everybody. This word is neither for women nor men but for all persons.

With a shallow mind, we confront the Bible and justify what is unjustifiable without faith about women's rights, dignity and vocation in the Church. With shallow reading, we conclude that the Bible is antifeminist and approves dominion of men over women and subordination of female gender. According to the Bible, it is with discipline and guide of the spirit, we know that we are all equal as men and women. As homiletic recommend, whenever we are interpreting the Bible, whenever we are writing or preparing homily, we need to put into consideration some factors: the context, history and the theology. Even with literature world, the same is applied. To understand the author of any literature book, we must understand the environment and condition in which the novel or play is authored. The three above according to homiletic should be looked at in every scriptural passage or else we receive wrong and unjustifiable information from the Holy Bible as an interpretation.

The biblical world stands differently with its perspective on the question of women from all religions and philosophies with roots in the ancient world and our cultures. The biblical view presents both men and women as created in the image of God and thus co-equal in value and dignity as recorded in Gen 1:26-28. Some women were just ordinary and some we can call them prominent women because a lot has been said about them in the building of the Church. When writing the history of the Church, women occupy a good number of pages. In my following sectors, I want us to look at the OT and NT.

But just to conclude on the understanding of women in both OT and NT, we should note that though there exist sameness between man and woman because they both bear an image of God, there exist differences. These differences do not ask a question of inferiority in any sex but a question of appreciating the differences. Kenneth Mathews says, «although male and female hold in common the unique God-given status as image-

bearers, there is an inherent destination within the human family by virtue of their different sexual roles, and this implies that other distinctions are present».<sup>142</sup>

### 3.1.1 Women in the Old Testament (OT)

The book of Songs of Songs contains one of the beautiful commentaries of the Gen 2: 23-25. Both genders, man and woman are considered equal, wonderful by beauty of each other (Cf. Gen. 4: 16; 5: 1; 7: 12-13). We can see the clear crystal value of a woman in her relation to a man even though not in physical aspect because that was not an objective of the book but in the spirituality that you can see in raw language on human love. This book helps us to understand deep relationship that exists between man and woman expressing spiritual and sublime love. She is depicted as intimacy in totality.

One of the positively preoccupying news about the book in relation to our theme, we see it in the fact that the wife searches the husband, against all the norms and good customs of that historical time. We see an unexpected initiative on the part of a woman, eternally relegated to passivism in all the activities of human life.<sup>143</sup> In our world today, a woman approaching a man for love risks to be regarded or accused of prostitution, a prostitute who is seen then as an object of sex or even a tissue.

A woman was classified in the book of Songs on a positive side of love and treaty made between God (the husband) and Israel, his people (woman). In favour of a woman, the book says that; «He who possesses a wife possesses the first of goods, a befitting help and a supporting pillar» (Sir 36: 24). Despite the fact that she is viewed as an object, in her conscience, a woman is recognised as being among the very first good precious things from God, the support and one pivot of help in a man's life. According to the Sapiential books, beautiful are still the appreciations to the woman—mother. For the husband, the ideal of happiness lies in a harmonious and calm family with his wife (Cf. Sir 26: 1-18). Despite the fundamentally negative attitude we might see in the Sapiential books, sages characterise wisdom, not with attributes proper to men, but with female attributes (Cf. Wis 14: 22. 26; Prov. 4: 5-9; 9: 1-6, 13-18). Therefore, women can personify human wisdom, the wisdom that find her source in God.

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<sup>142</sup> Kenneth Mathews, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. I A (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishing Group, 1996), 173.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Martins Ramos José Augusto, 'A Metáfora Esposo-Esposa Símbolo Da História Da Salvação', *BÍBLICA-Séries Científica* (Lisboa, 1993).

Despite male chauvinism, which is a logical consequence of patriarchy present in the Holy Bible, the condition of women comes to the fore in a permanent effort of the faith of Israel to actualise the equality of sexes consigned to the theology of Gen 1-2. Thus, prophethood is never seen as a charism reserved exclusively for one gender but for both genders; male and female. In the OT, we see a number of women serving as prophetesses. Among them is: Huldah (Cf. 2 Kgs 22: 14), Deborah (Cf. Judg 4: 4f), Miriam (Cf. Ex 15: 20) and Isaiah's wife whose name is not mentioned (Cf. Is 8:3).

The prophetic wisdom of women appears in Israel at times of destruction of the gift of the family, of the whole people (Cf. Est 3: 13). While men gave in to the temptation and lost faith and hope, women appeared as saviours of the nation under a threat of destruction. The likes of Deborah, Esther and Judith are examples and paramount figures in this sense in a way they saved the nation (Cf. Judg 5: 7).

In their universe, women might have been great despite the fact that men dominated the world as culture demanded. Some important figures of women break the anonymity, proper to the status of women. They stand out as significant persons, sometimes on a leg with great men of the Bible. This assertion is based on the numerous names of women that are cited in the Bible. On top we find names like: Sarah, wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac thus the ancestress of all Israel (Cf. Gen 17: 15); Bathsheba, who succeeded through her diplomacy in enthroning her son Solomon as successor to King David (Cf. 1 Kgs 1); Athaliah, who occupied the throne of Judah for some years (Cf. 2 Kgs 11); Jael (Cf. Judg 4:17-22; 5:24-27). The wives and mothers of the patriarchs and the wives—mothers of the kings also played an important role.<sup>144</sup>

Some prophetesses also played an important role in antiquity. Miriam, Moses' sister (Cf. Ex 15: 20; Num. 12: 1-2; Mi 6: 4); Deborah was a judge and woman of war (Cf. Judg 4: 4f; 5); Noadiah (Cf. Ne 6: 14); Hannah, Samuel's mother; the mother of the seven Maccabees; and the anonymous prophetesses of Ez 13: 17. Some are known for their beautiful characters. Susanna is known for purity; Judith known for courage; Ruth had a spirit of decision and the Sulamite of the Song of Songs is called for contemptuous

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<sup>144</sup> In the extra-biblical world, the mothers of kings had a theological function: they were thought to have conceived these children from a natural union with some gods, especially in Egypt. A formula similar to Is 7:14: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son".

love. In this way, they break-up the feminine stereotype, transcending the traditional male-female polarization.<sup>145</sup>

The great women of the Bible—especially mothers and prophetesses—are an appeal of the Word of God to all women of today, to the prophetism of a woman. Like men are doing, women are spiritual and willing to participate in the Church. In a woman, mother, prophetess, and Mary of Nazareth, a woman of today finds an open road to follow and a perfect example to imitate in serving the society. A present woman takes a model from the great women in the Bible. She is the end of a marvellous divine pedagogy which begins with the subordinated woman to man, passing through the great women of the OT.

Genesis story of creation (1:27), man and woman were created uniquely from other creatures. Given special place in all creation as they relate to God as rational and in personal manner, they are rated differently. But it should be noted that man is different from woman though created by God. However, the gender difference should not be a way to negligence but a unifying factor thus should be treated with love as it is a gift from God that He intended good for us. Thus, «every theoretical and institutional separation of man and woman, every deliberate detachment of male from female [and every refusal to recognise these natural differences], can endanger the very existence of humanity as determined by creation».<sup>146</sup> It is on this point that the Church stands today. Her commitment remains appreciating gender difference and defending the human person in his originality.

I finish looking at women in OT by contemplating on the words of a French theologian: «If it is dramatically true that, every time a man disfigures a woman, he disfigures himself, also it is true that if there is mutual recognition, it is each one of them (the man and the woman) who becomes greater».<sup>147</sup> By this statement, it is time the Church embraced change and fully recognise in an appreciative way the presence and importance of women in her world. The Church should be open in service and put into usage many talents from women we find being great in both the Church and the society. Many have proved beyond doubt and our expectation that they possess many gifts and

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. Lacoque André, 'Subversives. Un Pentateuque de Femmes, LD,148' (Paris, 1992).

<sup>146</sup> Hans Schwarz, *Creation* (Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eardmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, 2002), 176.

<sup>147</sup> Anne-Marie Pelletier, *Le Signe de La Femme, NRT 113* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1991), 689.

talents that if put into service, they can bring in great positive consequences to the Church and society at large.

### 3.1.2 Women in the New Testament (NT)

When looking at the role played by women as stipulated in the NT, we should first of all look at these women as disciples of Christ in spirit and truth. Christ chose his disciples from among men: the twelve who create a sort of community around him, and the 72 whom he sends out to the towns and villages where he goes afterwards. We can say there are disciples by right, or formal disciples. In the same sense of looking at the surroundings of Jesus, there was a crowd of people who were Jesus' listeners, recipients of his message and concerns. Some women stand out from this crowd, not because of any reason, but because of their absolutely free adherence to Christ's person and the message.

In the book of Acts of the Apostles, we find some examples of stories of women that would have raised eyebrows in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and might or still do the same today in our contemporary world. Women we meet in this book are not a kind to take for granted because in them, we know what diversity means in the Church and the same can be applied to Luhya society where there are some great female figures. With them, we see the badges of household servants, tradeswomen, business leaders, intellectuals and thus regarded very essential to the Church's self-understanding in any culture of any era.

Christ found an institution of discipleship in the sphere of his time and culture just as John the Baptist had done before. The Christ's newness, makes a different kind of discipleship. He encounters an organized religion: reading of the Scriptures on Saturdays in the synagogue; the annual feasts in the temple of Jerusalem.<sup>148</sup> Like many of us strict in masks of our cultures, Jesus follows the cultic traditions of his people. Politically, he finds Palestine under the Roman Empire and says: «Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's» (Mt 22: 21). It is in these realities that Jesus inaugurates the mission, which is not a new socio-political movement or rather a following of a new religion. It is but the advent of the Kingdom of God, which he explains through parables: the seed that sprouts, grows and bears fruit (Cf. Mk 4: 26-33); the hidden treasure (Cf. Mt 13: 44), the yeast in the dough (Cf. Mt 13: 33), among others.

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. R. J Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1992), 662.

Jesus, first of all addresses the neglected, the marginalised, the excluded, the despised, the poor, the powerless, *the hustlers* and *mama mbogas* (a term defining the poor and people of low standard in Kenya) among whom is a woman and a small child. He himself applied the words of Isaiah to himself: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Cf. Lk 4:18-21). He does not despise religious traditions, but he cleanses them of the superficiality, the contaminated system and the routine and opens a new era, an era that looks to value everybody doing the will of God including women in dignity and her vocation.

The Kingdom he explains through parables (Cf. Mt 13; 22: 1-13; 25: 1-30), is a reality involving the person, groups and society, a reality growing from within, made of truth and deep motivation. For this kingdom, under the image of a banquet, nobody is excluded: man or woman, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. This makes Christ the newness that truly creates crowds of simple people and here we shall be seeing some female figures who became part of the new era of liberty. Through these parables, new inclusive journey seems to have begun with no special preference for one gender but for all.

In the following of Christ, women were so significant that the evangelists in recording the events, could not ignore them and their presence. Outside the official group of disciples, women follow Christ in an enthusiastic and faithful way. We see the same enthusiasm in the birth of the Church, as the book of Acts of the Apostles demonstrates. Unlike the official twelve disciples who enjoyed the benefits of the shelter of the institution, and had the formal invitation to follow the Master, women felt protected by him, not discriminated, despite the customs and laws in place. In a spontaneous, discreet and dedicated way, women became disciples of Christ. It was Jesus who had the initiative of calling them together, attracting them by his understanding and liberating message (Cf. Lk 8: 1-3). It is the same initiative, understanding and liberating message he leaves with the Church in the hands of disciples that more women and vulnerable may be liberated.

In his (Jesus') dialogues with women, we see no attacks and counter-defences; we see no underhand tactics of falsehood, no tricky questions from women's side to test the Master, no legal criticism, as often happened with the Pharisees. Women were and remained humble, true, open to the Lord, tender, loving, hospitable and believing to the very last minute of Christ's physical life on earth. Even while carrying his Cross, they

cried for him (Cf. Jn 20: 13-17). On the foot of the Cross, women in love suffered with the Lord as disciples had fled away (Cf. Lk 24: 10).

Discipleship in spirit and in truth is what defines Jesus beyond social institution that gathered disciples around their Master. Christ's newness was in spirit and in truth. It is in that dialogue with the Samaritan woman, that Jesus not only frankly reveals that he is the Messiah, but also the nature of the Kingdom he announces (Cf. Jn 4: 21-23). He never intended to do against places of worship. He went to the synagogue and visited Jerusalem on great feasts. Jesus introduced a new worship, more human, spiritual, more transcendent, and not confined to the material dimensions. Through incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, we see the great meeting place between God and man. A woman, with no social status to define her, freely follows Jesus to Calvary. She has nothing to lose because society gives her nothing. Her free and gratuitous witness becomes an invitation to stay with the Master for the rest of her life in the world.

Women are seen as proclaimer of the Good News of Christ. In the Gospel, woman appears as the receiver of the Good News, as the interlocutor of Christ who reveals profound truths to her in an atmosphere of serenity. Through Christ's dialogues with women, the Gospel give us admirable teachings. The Samaritan woman—receives Jesus' message, recognises his life and becomes an apostle. Jesus, at Jacob's well, asks the Samaritan woman for water; in their conversation, he reveals himself to her as the awaited Messiah, «the living water that flows to eternal life» (Jn 4: 14). And because Jesus recognizes her as a sinner, she frees herself from her sin, believes in him and goes out to witness to the nearby town with such conviction that many come to Jesus and believe in him too. The disciples themselves are amazed to find Jesus conversing with a Samaritan woman. In this dialogue, Christ reveals who he is, teaches what faith is as a spring of living water and explains who the true worshippers of the Father are (Cf. Jn 4). It is through a woman that this is revealed to us.

Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, offered hospitality to Jesus in their hometown, Bethany. At the death of their brother (Lazarus), Martha's challenge provokes in Jesus a miracle of Lazarus' resuscitation preceded by an admirable dialogue in which he reveals his saving strength (Cf. Jn 11: 21-27). It is not by resuscitating Lazarus that we know saving strength of Christ but through the sister that all is revealed.

The Canaanite woman pleads with Jesus for the healing of her daughter. Despite the Master's words that suggests an opinion of refusing the request, she does not give up (Cf. Mt 15: 28) but instead persists in her begging for healing. The sinner, in all simplicity and openness, publicly expresses her grateful love. In the Pharisee's house, she whom Judas the betrayer was jealous of and criticized of wasting the expensive perfume, poured perfume on Jesus' feet with tears of tenderness and repentance and using her hair, she wiped him with love (Cf. Lk 7: 47).

Without fear of shame and reprisals, women publicly show their compassion for Christ carrying the Cross on the way to Calvary (Cf. Lk 23: 27). At the foot of the Cross, they are there with Mary (Cf. Jn 19: 25). Veronica with great courage had risked wiping Christ's face (Cf. Lk 8: 43-48) as other several women (daughters of Jerusalem) cried seeing the suffering Christ (Cf. Lk 23: 27-31). After his Resurrection, the first witness and announcer of the same is a woman. Having gone to the sepulchre very early to embalm the body of Christ, she is the first to hear the news of Resurrection of the Lord (Cf. Mt 28: 6).

Mary Magdalene looked for the dead Christ but met the risen one (Cf. Jn 20: 13-18). Women are placed as first witnesses of the Resurrection event and sent by Christ himself to communicate it to the Apostles by the Evangelists. They are constituted by him Apostles of Apostles, witnessing to the fullness of the Paschal Mystery. At the foot of the Cross, witnessing Resurrection and present at Pentecost, women are at the very origin of the Church. Women who had followed and supported Jesus during his life-time on earth, who had borne witness to his Resurrection, did not simply vanish after he ascended into Heaven. They were present in the upper room with the eleven Apostles, part of a larger group of disciples, the first formal gathering of the Church in her history. Among these women, we see Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She and other women are engaged in corporate prayer with the rest of the Church's choosing a successor of Judas Iscariot. It is a rare, down-to-earth snapshot of Mary in later life, participating in the work of the early Church (Cf. Acts 1: 12-26)

Tabitha also known as Dorcas is a woman disciple due to her acts of kindness singled out to her community. The sole and primary focus of her ministry was to the poor widows, for whom she made tunics and other items of clothing. Like Barnabas and other early disciples, Tabitha was evidently a person of means, able to clothe the poorer women

of her community at her own expense. But hers was a hands-on approach, devoting her resources as well as her time and labour to a life of practical service (Cf. Acts 9: 36-43).

Consequently, before the coming of dedicated Church buildings, the Church was hosted by a woman named Mary, the mother of John Mark (Cf. Acts 12: 6-19). But also, Acts 12: 6-19 records another name of Rhoda the servant girl of Mary the mother of John Mark. The house was marked by an atmosphere of warmth and good humour, as exemplified by her servant girl, Rhoda. Among Rhoda's duties, it was her job to answer the door whenever visitors called, much like a maid or personal assistant might do today. Through these two women—a kindly rich widow and her slightly flighty servant girl—Luke preserves a slice of early Church life far removed from the stern, patriarchal caricature of popular imagination.

Another great name with great characters is that of Lydia of Thyatira (Cf. Acts 16: 11-40). She was prominent, wealthy woman who continued to play a vital role in support of the Gospel. She is the first Christian convert in what is Europe of today according to history. Once she was converted to Christ, she placed her home and considerable resources at the disposal of Paul and his ministry team, even after they had been released from prison. In doing so, she provided a bridgehead for the apostle's mission. Damaris the Areopagite (Cf. Acts 17: 16-34); she accepted the faith after Paul's speech. Damaris and her colleague Lydia ensured that the Gospel reached beyond the poor and disenfranchised to everyone, regardless of gender or social class.

In addition, there stands «Priscilla and Aquila» (Acts 18: 1-28). After meeting and working with Paul, the well-travelled duo became valued members of the Apostle's missionary team. Though Priscilla and Aquila are always mentioned together, suggesting that they were both equal partners in the mission. It should be noted that Priscilla is almost always named first, indicating hers' was perhaps the higher-profile role within the Church.

1 Cor 11:6 considers women veiling their heads. This though understood as subordination to men, it is obviously not but is a sign of their own authority to pray and prophecy. Furthermore, 1 Cor 11: 11-12 records dependency of women to men but it is also true that men claim the same dependency on women. This is because a woman came from man's rib and a man is born of a woman. In 1 Cor 11: 13-16, Paul argues that both

persons; man and woman get their difference and dignity from nature. By saying so, we confirm the respect to gender question that a woman should be a woman and a man should be a man. Each person should be responsible as commands the gender. Thus, «it is as shameful as it is unnecessary for women to act like men as it is for men to act like women”.<sup>149</sup> Our genders are not a subject of contention but something to appreciate as a gift from God.

To conclude, we consider the purity laws.<sup>150</sup> These laws are mostly understood negatively as discriminatory laws against one gender. They these laws were seen as being against women, but they were for women. Any menstruating woman and any one touching her are considered unclean. The belief is carried to date. But this consideration (uncleanness) is not that harsh compared to other filth situations. However, it should be noted that touching menstruating woman is not discriminatory because both men and women are made unclean when they have discharges. Women are unclean for a longer period simply because their menstrual cycle last longer than a man’s seminal emission. This period we can consider it beneficial to women as their husbands are prohibited from sexual intercourse with her during a time when it will be more uncomfortable for them (women).<sup>151</sup> In addition, women given more days of purification whenever they gave birth to a girl child. This was not down grading women. And also, there was no discrimination between girl and boy child. To show equality, the sacrifice given for both was the same. Children were the same thus equality was expressed in everything.

### **3.2 Women in the Church and her history**

They are everywhere, all over the Church. They are as old as existence is concerned. Their work is magnificent, not to be hidden from the eyes of this world. We can pretend or ignore mentioning it but it remains there as we watch their footprints. They have played a big role in the growth of the Church. Not mentioning them in this work, will be betraying my mothers and sisters who simply mean life. They are the heart of the Church thus her life.

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<sup>149</sup> Angelo Colacrai and Victor Zinkuratire, *Commentary to 1 Cor 11: 13-16: The New African Bible*, ed. Angelo Colacrai and Victor Zinkuratire (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2011), 1988.

<sup>150</sup> Concerns misogynistic notions (uncleanness related to a woman’s menstrual cycle [Lev. 15:19-24] and childbirth [Lev. 12]) in Judaic world and Rabbinic literature.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Lita Sanders, ‘The Bible’s High View of Women Grounded in the Creation Account’, 2010, <https://creation.com/bible-view-women>. Accessed 2 August 2022.

The Catholic Church has made a long journey since her establishment. This journey makes a great history of events. The Church history is as old as human history. Talking of human history in the Church, we simply mean the history of both man and woman. For both, their history, activities, roles and contribution in the construction of society and the Church is noted. Women as our persons of interest, have done a lot in the reformation of the Church as describes Isabelle Poutrin.<sup>152</sup> This work is not only significant because it presents women's history in Christianity and society but also it presents a detailed and reliable description of these women's lives and their contributions to the society and the Church. These efforts from these paramount figures we can say that the Church has failed to appreciate as she has been largely doing for men.

For many centuries, women have had numerous limitations in both spiritual and secular world and all is as a result of their femininity. But they have continued doing fine in their lives contributing immensely in the edification of the Church and their societies. Women are seen in matrimony and religious life something celebrated by the Church though she does it without mentioning women as the real material in the game. Isabelle Poutrin among other authors of women history in the Church have tried to draw a historical picture of women along the time. We can talk of them because together with others, she has put his notes in writing. In her writing, we see a very clear study that demonstrates a theological and legal evolutions that are aiming at the re-definition of women's role in Christianity.

From the book, "Las mujeres en el Siglo de las Reformas Religiosas", we find to read about women lives before the Protestant Reformation. Women were either in marriage or in convent as history tells. From time memorial, it is undoubtable that women have had a lion's share in the history of Christianity. They take a larger percentage since the time of Christ. Women have been seen both in numbers and actions. We see Mary Magdalene who gave Christ water at the well, later on she would accompany Christ with the Cross and she will visit the tomb and finally break the news of the resurrected Christ; Martha and her sister who loved Christ; Veronica wiped Christ despite the risk and shame that watched her; many women cried for Christ as he suffered with the Cross; and when disciples flew leaving Christ alone, women were there to watch Christ to the last minute.

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. Isabelle Poutrin, *Las Mujeres En El Siglo de Las Reformas Religiosas: Historia Del Cristianismo (=Estructuras y Proceso. Serio Religión), III: El Mundo Moderno* (Madrid: Trotta: en el Coord. Antonio Luis Cortés Peña, 2006).

But also, there is the story of the prudent virgins (Cf. Mt 25: 1-13), who never got tired of waiting for Christ. These women (daughters of the Church) like the prudent virgins, have never gone off or given up or left the Church alone even when they are faced with limitations caused by the Church herself. In all atmospheres, these women have never lost their hope and support but have continued to give a hand in the construction of the Church. The great writings and documents of the Magisterium about women and also the writings of D. Antonio Couto<sup>153</sup> can testify this as articulated previously.

The Church that is referred to as the bride of the lamb, is also considered virgin like Mary the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, being like Mary, the same Church is a mother or compared to a mother. Having these feminine characteristics; bride, virgin and mother, the Church proves to be a perfect and a carrier of life. She communicates life to her children of both genders without biasness. As we know and as it is said, a woman is life. This being the case, all women have continually communicated life both inside and outside the Church. The character of life belonging to women, we see the reason as to why women are seen steadfast even when things have seemed hard for them. They carry on their shoulders bringing their lives and the future of their people. They bring all their joys and hopes. They bring the blessing of the earth and all its fruits as alludes Pope Francis.<sup>154</sup> They have not been appreciated like their counterparts but they have remained focused, with high spirit, and give themselves for the Church and society.

They are not part of the Church ministerial hierarchy but they manage to preach and share the Word of God. In their humility, generosity, forgiveness, readiness, love among other values and virtues, they preach the Word of God. They are the source of spirituality. We rarely see women on the pulpit with microphones in the name of delivering service but they have done a lot especially looking at the three characters (motherhood, bride and virginity). These characters qualify a woman as a source of life,<sup>155</sup> model, an example, thus, has a right to call those preaching her sons meaning she participates. Neither is she on the holy altar for holy Mass sacrifice but she serves.

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. D. António Couto, *As Mulheres Nas Cartas de São Paulo* (Lamego: Alêtheia Editores, 2020).

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, 'Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay, 5-13/7/2015', 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150709\\_bolivia-omelia-santa-cruz.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-omelia-santa-cruz.html). Accessed 8 August 2022.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Courtney Mares, 'Honor the Dignity of Women for a Better World in 2020', 2020, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/43182/pope-francis-honor-the-dignity-of-women-for-a-better-world-in-2020>. Accessed 8 August 2022.

To contemplative sisters, Pope Francis asks, «without you what would the Church be like, or those living on the fringes of humanity and ministering in the outposts of evangelisation?».<sup>156</sup> How will she look like without woman figure that is seen to be a flower flowering and making the Church a living place? People will always mention a father figure as that important but no one cares for the mothers'. Who cares for women's presence? Indeed, the Church is beautiful because there is a flower in it. The Church must be esteeming their life of complete self-giving; she must be counting on them for prayers and their self-sacrifice to bring today's men and women to the Good News of the Gospel.

The Church needs these women. From the look of things, women are doing tremendous job. We can say they are the mitochondria of the Church and the society. They seem to be bringing in the needed flavour, the needed characters, the pillars that carries the heavy weight of the society and the Church to the end everybody will wish to reach. This beauty of women in the Church was not seen until after the Vatican II, that brought in women bringing to the thought of Church thinking of women in her mission. Participation of women in Vatican II was the beginning of many victors of women and clearly stated how significant it is for women to be fully involved in the pastoral and ministerial activities of the Church. But it should not be forgotten that even before Vatican II, women existed and they did well though in their silence.

Adriana Valerio in her book *As 23 Mulheres do Concílio, A presença feminina no Vaticano II*,<sup>157</sup> describes this presence and its effects. They had begun a new journey in the life of the Church. They were to write their own history, a history that will help in them serving the Lord and their struggle for emancipation. If water is life as is mostly said, then women are another different form of life to both spiritual and secular worlds. They give life to the Church and the society. They are the backbone of the Church and we see them playing a very vital role today. They are participating fully in every activity undertaken by the Church. We see them in Ecclesiastical boardroom, as teachers, as catechists, as directors, as godmothers, as spiritual directors among many other important

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Holy See Press Office, 'Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere* on Women's Contemplative Life, 22.07.2016', <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bolletino/pubblico/2016/07/22/160722a.html>. Accessed 8 August 2022.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Adriana Valerio, *As 23 Mulheres Do Concílio; A Presença Feminina No Vaticano II* (Rome: Carocci editore S. p. A, 2012).

positions. Today, with the election of Pope Francis, doors in the Church are being opened and we can now see women in the Dicastery of bishops holding senior positions.<sup>158</sup>

With the Synod of 2023, much is expected to happen. This being a very unique Synod, prepared in a different way, very open to everyone, the Church seems to breathe a very fresh air and set a culture of inclusivity. The theme of the Synod itself (the very nature of the Church, the specific way of living and operating as a Church together)<sup>159</sup> speaks volume revealing to us a very bright future for everybody in the Church. The Synod is guided by the main three verbs: to meet, to hear and to discern according to Papa Francis<sup>160</sup>. Good is expected because preparation for the same Synod has been an open field where every Christian mattered and their views were noted. But also, we expect something good to happen in Portugal where the Church is holding the World's Youth Day 2023. The Church is expecting a lot on the side of the youths, and probably the role of female youth to be discussed a little bit. These events guided by the Spirit who implants into persons the gifts, have made the Church to remain as young as ever.

The Church in Africa, in Kenya and in Luhya to be specific is vitally propelled forward by ministries and pastoral activities carried out mostly by the lay men and women and the young generation. In Africa and more so among Luhya people, the Church and her activities are much respected and valued than anything in life. Talking of the Church in Luhya land, brings some serenity and calmness to people because of respect people have for the Church. A Luhya person as an African, is a religious person thus respecting the Church and her pastoral activities and ministries is a custom. Mbiti says that wherever an African is, there is his religion. He carries his religion to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the party or a funeral ceremony. And if he is educated, he takes it with him to the examination room at school, a politician takes it to the National Assembly.<sup>161</sup> He or she who goes against, calls for a curse. Mbiti John says that, «to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Deborah Castellano Lubov, 'Pope Names Three Women to Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops-Vatican News', 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-07/pope-francis-names-three-women-to-vatican-dicastery-for-bishops.html>. Accessed 8 August 2022.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Parent's Blog, Synod 2021-2023: Communion, Participation, Mission, 2022, <https://www.cdsbeo.on.ca/synod-2021-2023-communion-participation-mission/#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20initiated%20a%20synodal,operating%20as%20a%20Church%20together>. Accessed 10 August 2022.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, Encontrar, escuchar, discernir: três verbos do Sínodo, segundo o Papa Francisco 2021, [www.ihu.unisinos.br](http://www.ihu.unisinos.br). Accessed 10 August 2022.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1970, 2.

life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion».<sup>162</sup> This is a clear indication that cultural life is deeply in religion and her activities.

We sometimes joke that we are more religious than those who brought us Christianity for we had religions before. In this case I refer to Europeans who brought us Christianity. As much as the culture of permanent deacon is not much known or is not known, lay persons back home keep serving the Church more less like these deacons I see in Europe. I have seen lay people playing the deacons' role especially where we lack personnel and they perform it diligently and accordingly. With all respect, these lay men and women have exercised this role. Vocation of the laity has been unique to them. In this mission of the laity, we agree with St. John Paul II when he says that, «is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well» (CL15). They serve the Church by performing roles within the parishes, in its various ministries and in its liturgical life, and this active participation is indeed important to the Church's mission. It should be understood that we are living in modern days where the Church is not reduced to sacraments, liturgy, priests, deacons and rituals and if it is reduced to these, then it is still a closed Church like it was many years ago. The Church is nowadays more open, without walls and is more than sacraments, liturgy, priests, deacons and rituals. She is an evolved Church that is not restricted to one single aspect of her life but an open Church to any aspect of human life. The Church needs more and more lay persons in her dealings. This will not only serve but also save her for existence depends on her daughters.

We can say there is urgency in the Church. The Church needs to be open for everyone to enter and do something despite person's gender or status. Our own Christian destiny should always be transforming the world thus need to confront the state of affairs. St. John Paul II declares that;

A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so. It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle (CL 3).

Women have lived life that serves as a mirror to generations. Many have lived life good enough to be emulated in a context anybody will wish as they are examples of good women of all times. These women have lived exemplary life and so they inspired not only

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<sup>162</sup> Mbiti, 2.

their world but also our modern world. The Church recognises four women out of 36 whom it calls doctors of the Church.<sup>163</sup> The four passed through many trials of life but also numerous triumphs. And their bravery and intellectual prowess opened the door for new discussions of the role of women in the Church. They are our examples and intercessors in life. For many years, the Church never gave any woman saint the title *Doctor* despite the many women's good writings, works, prayer life, simplicity and their dedication, competence and commitment to the service of humanity and God. But today, the Church has attributed the doctor's title to four women among the 36 doctors she has in total and she has also attributed many other titles to many other women she has as daughters. Together with a series of studies in the Church's history and other related Church studies, Pope Francis who is on business of liberating and promoting women, we may end up having more women saint doctors. This is but my hopeful assumption as I cling to hope.

In the Church's history, we also had deaconesses who served the Church and in the Church. The book written by Laura Swan<sup>164</sup> describes well the roles these desert Mothers played. Like those desert Fathers, these desert Mothers had a fabulous contribution to religious and monastic life. They had a role to play in liturgical and pastoral functions within the Church. In addition, they contributed in preservation and spread of religion, culture, morality, spirituality, education and had a hand in civilization.

Women were not considered that much in the Church and no one counted on them or paid a keen eye on them despite their endless efforts. It is only after and with Vatican II that women started appearing into the history of the Church. Vatican II was to bring into existence a new era. It was dawning for women's world. From a negative to a positive history. From unknown, dormant and passive history to a very active history. Women were officially assigned some roles thus from their performance, their roles multiplied at family, society and Church level. After a great contemplation on this great question of women, the Church saw something precious in women. The feminine question would later on serve a catalytic role in both secular and ecclesiastical worlds.

*Gaudium et Spes* (GS), the document of Vatican II recognised and called for greater pastoral roles for women in the Church. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity

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<sup>163</sup> These women saints are Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Therese of Lisieux.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001).

(*Apostolicam actuositatem*) is another document that recognises the roles of women in the Church. These two special documents show how the Church was setting herself to have an open, robust and candid dialogue with modern and the changing world. It presupposes to call upon men and women of good will to fully participate in the evangelization with their God-given talents and gifts. This came as it dawned for the Church that the Gospel or the Word of God does not only pass-through ordained ministers but also through the laity. The laity like ordained ministers, are used as instruments for the same purpose. The laity being close to the people and understanding better their world, they would do better than many ordained ministers for they have in most cases been swallowed by events and have forgotten that they were ordained to serve people of God. Most of them are lost in what I may call secretariat work or the priests of the airports because if they are not in offices, they are in airports travelling. You will rarely see this kind of priests taking care of pastoral activities in the regions they are appointed in. The laity stood and they still stand a better chance of evangelizing their neighbours than those put in place for this special service.

The address made to the congregation of women in the final document of Vatican II,<sup>165</sup> invites women to set things in motion or make things happen in the Church as they had great potentials and the will to do it. It was their time to enter into the game and participate as main players and not the spectators watching, cheering and jeering from outside the pitch. With these documents, the way for women had opened and what will follow is success in women's studies that knew no boundary. Much was found and is to be found on and about women as time will pass. Today, we are called upon to have a reflection on the fruits of the presence of women who have for so long time existed but their existence is passing unnoticed and unappreciated. *Mulieris Dignitatem* of John Paul II, calls every person for a thorough discernment on the question of women. It calls us to reflect on the dignity and vocation of a woman we have ignored all through in the history of human person subjugating her in her entire life. St. John Paul II writes in the Marian year, «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» (MD31). This demonstrates how powerful and

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, 'Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Address of Pope Paul VI to Women 1965', 1965, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19651208\\_epilogo-concilio-donne.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651208_epilogo-concilio-donne.html). Accessed 8 August 2022

important woman is in the life and history of the Church. *Amoris Laetitia* carries the same message, a message seeking to save the Church and her history at family level.

Through a woman, the BVM, our Saviour Jesus came into the world to bring us salvation. Redemption was to come but through the most gracious, Mary. Mary, who is the new Eve brought in new Adam beginning for us a new race of humanity. We should remember that this Lady is well known as our Mother, apostle of new humanity, disciple of Christ, the exemplary catechist of the Church. What did she have in special? A very young fragile girl and inexperienced. And she became more eulogized woman in the history of the world and salvation than any other woman. The only woman mentioned in the Quran, a Muslim Holy book. She actually received her trophy of the mission before she began the mission itself. But she also never falls of pride and contempt. Neither was she frustrated nor distracted with what God had chosen her for. She was the blessed, a virgin, a saint and a happy woman in life despite the cultural background she was brought up.<sup>166</sup> Mary, our Mother, the Temple of the Holy Spirit never belonged to the hierarchical structure of the Church but that of the devotion where women's dignity and vocation is seen. From BVM as an example of a blessed and most gracious, women in the Church draws their gift of giving-life. This shine brightly by giving new life in the world hence enriching humanity. These women as Mary did accept the mission, they do exactly the same for the Church.

Religious associations of women also played a role in the Catholic Church revival. Chief of these was a group of unmarried women and a few widows under the direction of St. Angela Merici. These "Ursulines", so called because of their dedication to the legendary St. Ursula, lived in their own homes and worshiped in their own parish Churches, but pledged themselves to lead a self-denying life of obedience to superiors and of charitable activity, above all the religious education of young girls. Though Angela intended her foundation to be a lay association without monastic vows and enclosure, the company was gradually transformed into a full-fledged order. They later in their existence achieved prominence in the education of girls.<sup>167</sup> The famous member of the order is Marie Guyard ("Mary of the Incarnation", 1599-1672).

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. Augusto Cury, *Maria, a Maior Educadora Da História: Os Dez Princípios Que Maria Utilizou Para Educar o Menino Jesus: Uma Visão Da Psicologia, Psiquiatria e Pedagogia Sobre a Mulher Mais Famosa e Desconhecida Da História* (São Paulo: Editora Planeta do Brasil, 2007).

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Williston Walker et al., *A History of the Church*, 4th ed (St. Edmundsbury: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1986), 504–5.

St. Monica whom the Holy Church celebrates her feast on 27<sup>th</sup> August, and St. Josephine Bakhita (the African flower/black mother/little brown sister) of South Sudan celebrated on 8<sup>th</sup> February,<sup>168</sup> stands as women to reckon on when it comes to matters of faith in African world. They are good examples of women in a place in a Church that we may say rose from the turmoil of life since their childhood (one in early marriage and the other in slavery) to become what the Church can look at and say, yes, women can do good in Church.

St. Augustine narrates in his Confessions;

And Thou sentest Thine hand from above, and drewest my soul out of that profound darkness, my mother, Thy faithful one, weeping to Thee for me, more than mothers weep the bodily deaths of their children. For she, by that faith and spirit which she had from Thee, discerned the death wherein I lay, and Thou heardest her, O Lord; Thou heardest her and despisedst not her tears, when streaming down, they watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed; yea Thou heardest her.<sup>169</sup>

### **3.3 World view on women's dignity**

Theological course undertaken with all her researches, shows and it is real that more than any religion, Christianity and more than any institution, the Catholic Church has tried to accord women their value and their dignity and holds them dearly. The Church has ever tried to respect women in her dealings. Like men, women have needed to be given hope, they have required to be empowered, to be appreciated, to be given freedom, to find happiness, dignity, respect, love, podium etc., but instead, they have had the opposite all through the history. As a reward to their expectations, they are given humiliations, left in despair, taken for a ride and traded into human slavery. They are left in the world's oppressions, others abandoned, many are divorced, others forced into marriages and to men not of their age and choice, others abused and harassed sexually, and living under the harsh hook of rule that prioritizes men as their superiors over everything including her decisions. Submissiveness is her portion. But keenly looking at women, our goal has always been to try and understand her mystery and role in both the society and the Church.

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. Catholic Online, 'St. Josephine Bakhita', accessed 23 August 2022, [https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=5601](https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=5601).

<sup>169</sup> Ph.D Philip M. Parker, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Webster's (San Diego: Icon Classics, 2005), 40.

Many and different disciplines have tried to look into issues concerning women in Luhya tribe. All these studies bring to light the feminine question which is our topic of concern. Anthropological study, sociology, feminist theology, patristics, psychology, history and African theology and Teachings of the Church have all eaten into the question of women, her position and her role in both the society and at the Church level. Like in many African cultures, it is hard to find out whether Luhya women identify themselves or not as everything on their side is in passive state.

And on this question, we may ask ourselves a number of questions. How do these women see themselves in their worlds? How do they rate themselves as persons in the society? Do they deserve dignity we are talking about? Are women enemies of themselves in both the society and the Church? Do they know their rights as persons? Are they ready to speak up about themselves? Are they consciously willing and ready to take part in construction of the society and the Church? What are their aspirations? Many of this type of questions we see them in the questionnaire set for cross-examination and also engagement with the people. Reciprocally, we have to read into the lines and respond to a series of questions that involve a relationship between the Church and society to women. How does the society and the Church view women? Does the Church respond to their needs? We know with the spirit of the Gospel, Church is for defence of her children, women as her daughters included. But in the same line, how does the Church work to emancipate and even set free women in the sense of liberating and not fighting for equal rights, promote her dignity and pave ways for women to speak and be heard like any other person? Your guess is as right as my guess. That is to mean that the research and response to these questions, is not impressive at all. We see the responses to these many questions in the questionnaire part.

According to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o,<sup>170</sup> it is politics of power and culture tides that are reasons sometimes women are not involved in leadership roles in the Church and the society. However, thesis of Adolphus Amadi-Azuogo<sup>171</sup> presents the same ideology on lack of women in Church leadership. Some inequalities are happening in the Church but also in the society. In some of their works; Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Adolphus Amadi-Azuogo, make a very attractive analysis of the gender-based issues, culture and beliefs.

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<sup>170</sup> Cf. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1965).

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Adolphus Chinedu Amadi-Azuogo, *The Politics of Power and the Ordination of Women; Gender and Power in the New Testament and the Church Today* (Milton Keynes: Xulon Press, 2007).

But also, they look at the relationship between the Church and the cultural persons. In this, John S. Mbiti entertains us with his African thoughts on culture and the Church too.

To be brief, I would neither side with Ngugi nor Adolphus Amadi-Azuogo because the two dwell much on the culture, devaluing Christianity and her values. These authors were in defence of their cultures against what they termed an erosion from the colonialists or the intruders. They trivialize the question of ministries in the Church in the name of Christ. Adolphus Amadi-Azuogo is clearer on this of playing safe for his culture. In this, ministries should be understood as service and not as power to rule. Any ministry should not be an instrument to rule because doing that would be misusing a chance given to serve as ministering is all about service. If this would be understood then women would not be aspiring to it and some ordained shepherds using it as a tool of power in the name of God to rule over others. Women and men seem to have misunderstood the real meaning of the ministries thus confusing power with service and vice versa.

People have advocated for new translations of the Bible putting into consideration of double nouns and pronouns simply with an intention of achieving gender equality. The pure logic of languages is in play and it seems to bear a solution to the gender war of tag. But I think there is no need to do that. We know the roles or services in the Church do not go with gender politics and what a failed radical feminist keeps teaching out there. But it should be clear that by saying this, I do not mean that women should be admitted to the sacred orders. There are many ministries in the Church where women can fully participate in delivering services to the Church they love and admire to serve so much.

Sexes play a role when looking at the roles of people in the Church. It is with respect that we look into the sexes when it comes to the question of roles of women and men in not only the Church but also Luhya society. Christianity has valued women and their sexes and always tried to promote them. Contrary to Christianity, we have the radical feminists who are on top of their voices, through a lot of writings and campaigns and seem to be fighting for women place in the Church but the substantive truth is that this group is working tirelessly to bring down women or leave them in their low places in the Church. The work of the two groups is believed to be defending and promoting but I stand to be corrected if I went too far from the truth, they are different though seem doing the same job. According to Lita Sanders, there is a difference between these two groups—Christianity and radical feminists. There is a difference, «women and men are interchangeable (except that men are bad!); to the Christian, they are both

indispensable».<sup>172</sup> With this affirmation, Luhya culture is a radical feminist's advocate as per responses to my questionnaire. In many proven scenarios, women suffer in the ruthless hands of men. We have those groups or people who are trying to defend and empower them but from outside their jurisdiction. This kind of defence without understanding the cultural backgrounds bring things into confusion or cause more sufferings. For instance, there is this programme in *Radio Jambo*<sup>173</sup> called *Patanisho* that plays a reconciliation role on air, it has caused threats to women. As much the program is reconciling some, but a larger number of marriages are being broken, homes are brought down into ruins. The cultural values need to be respected while these new changes are being introduced or else, women continue to suffer under these cultural systems as they counter what men call corruption of culture by the intruders.

We know that any movement comes with its merits and demerits. In this case of effects of feminism, we have got a lot to learn from the Holy Bible especially from Christ himself. The Bible teaches us that it is possible to submit to another without any inferences of ontological inequality. In Christ's history, Jesus submitted himself to Mary and Joseph (Cf. Lk 2: 51) and also submitted to the will of his Father (Cf. Lk 22: 42). Despite obediently obeying, Jesus is never mentioned as less person to his Father. The words in the letter of Apostle in Eph 5: 22 for wives to submit to their husbands does not have anything to do with inferiority but they mean responsibility. Women in Luhya culture serving their women while on their knees, not looking directly into men's eyes meant nothing like submissiveness or inferiority but it was respect.

The Church through Vatican II documents, recommends a lot about women and their place in the Church showing their greatness as women. For this reason, *Inter insigniores* issued in 1976 by Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the question of admission of women to the ministerial priesthood and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* an apostolic constitution by Pope John Paul II in 1994 in which he discussed the Catholic Church's position requiring the reservation of priestly ordination to men alone remain clear and perfect in serving the Church. The two have nothing against women but only pave them a way to function perfectly in the Church.

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. Sanders, 'The Bible's High View of Women Grounded in the Creation Account'.

<sup>173</sup> Radio Jambo is an FM radio station in Kenya that is running this reconciling narrative on air as from 8a.m. -10a.m on weekdays. It had a purpose but I think it should not be taken as something of reconciling but entertainment and a recipe of chaos and divorce. Patanisho is a Swahili word meaning reconciliation.

### 3.4 Theological perspective on women

In Paul's metaphorical writings, he takes a community comparing it to the body of Christ, that is one community but with many members (Cf. I Cor 12: 16-47). But practically speaking, if a community he meant is compared herself to Christ's body with her parts so active, then women unlike men, remains with a passive pure attitude of this same community. According to some theologians, the principle of essential equality between man and woman consecrated by Christianity and defended by St. Paul in Gal 3: 28, would not apply to the representation of women in relation to Christ, with regard to ministries. Can we say that incarnation of Christ as a man was to play an advantageous role for men representing Christ? The response to this question shows the clarity of the Doctrine of the Faith of October 15, 1976, «Inter Insigniores».<sup>174</sup> It follows the material model of Christ and not his internal symbolism.<sup>175</sup> Christ presenting himself as the defender of women does not open to them, however, any new perspective of equality in relation to men, as far as ministries are concerned. This way, we can theologially conclude that because of the sex, women are excluded from ordained ministries.<sup>176</sup>

This argument does not hold water. It says that a woman is not a symbol of Christ but a man is that symbol of God incarnated. The Orthodox theologians follow the same path in affirming the impossibility of ordaining women, because this would mean ignoring the symbolic and iconic values of male priesthood, which represents both the masculinity of Christ as «the paternal function of the Father in the Trinity».<sup>177</sup> In this case, one falls into a vicious circle. According to the Bible, God is not sexual, but was represented with the image and anthropomorphic characteristics of a Father (Cf. 2 Cor 6: 18; Ps 103: 13). The symbol is always the crystallization of a certain cultural value and this apply to all biblical symbols. Thus, we can use any new symbols from our cultures to express the theological realities that the Bible intend to transmit or portray.

This theology also fails when it focuses priesthood too much on the eucharistic cult and not on the presidency of the community, of the Church. It maintains an umbilical relationship with the sacramentalist position of the Church during and after the Reform.

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<sup>174</sup> *As Mulheres e o Sacerdócio*, Lisboa, 1993. A document published in the form of Declaration means that the question is left open for further study by theologians and exegetes.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Anne Carr, *La Femme Dans L'église, Cogitatio Fidei 173* (Paris, 1993), 152.

<sup>176</sup> In this regard, Schillbeeckx note: "In a way that we might consider pre-Conciliar, the relationship between the Church and ministry is again broken in favour of the relationship between Eucharist and ministry (the power to celebrate)". In *El Ministerio eclesial*, Madrid, 1983.

<sup>177</sup> Maximos Aghiorgoussis, *Women Priests?* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1976), 5.

It should not be because one consecrates the eucharistic bread that one has the right to preside over the community. According to the theology of Vatican II, participation in the sacraments comes to the Christian—man and woman—from their condition of baptism and not from their priestly ordination.<sup>178</sup> The sacraments depend on the Church, are of the Church and not the Church of the sacraments as said earlier on about the difference between power and the service. In the political and economic communities, a woman presides, guides, has even become head of state and are engaging in both rural and national politics seeking leadership positions. Why can she not preside, by delegation of the bishop, even in a parish?

From the position of president of the community, it would be easier for the people of Christ to accept that a woman president of a community could also exercise other ordained ministries for the good of the community. It was perhaps with this ideal in mind that the synod of bishops of 1985 pronounced its opinion: In recent years there has been frequent discussion about the vocation and mission of women in the Church. The Church should strive to have women so that they can exercise their gifts in an adequate manner for the service of the Church, and take a larger part in the various fields of the Church's apostolate.<sup>179</sup>

According to the doctrine of two undue associations, which takes into account the writings of the NT, the foundation of every theological reflection, all ministries, in principle, should be open to men and women. For all this starts from a basic theological idea: ministry is a service and not show of power as is misunderstood. Basic knowledge of the Church history shows clearly the association and confusion of the ministry and power, however sacred it may be (Cf. Mk 10: 35-45; Jn 13: 1ff). He is not lord or king of the community in the manner of the lords or kings of civil and military society. Jesus assumed himself as the servant per excellence and demanded from his own followers the same attitude of service (Cf. Mt 23, 8-12). Paul defines Christ and, consequently, Christianity in a kenosis, which has nothing to do with power but attributes of service (Cf. Phil 2: 5-11). On the other hand, the ministry is ordered to the community, to the

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<sup>178</sup> The text of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy reads this way: "It is the ardent desire of the Mother Church that all the faithful attain the full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations which the very nature of liturgy demands, and which is, by virtue of Baptism, the right and duty of Christian people, 'the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the chosen people' (1 Pt 2, 9; cf. 2, 4-5)" (Pope John Paul VI, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM" [SC 14])

<sup>179</sup> Manuel Bernardo, *A Mulher Na Sociedade e Na Igreja* (Porto: Editorial Perpétuo Socorro), 69.

growth of the community and not the community to the ministry. What is most fundamental is the community and only afterwards come the persons who serve the community, with their gifts. These charisms are gifts of God, given by the Spirit, not for one's own benefit, but only for the service of the community (Cf. 1 Cor 12).

Visiting the creation story in Gen 1: 27-28a, both man and woman were created by God and in His image and likeness. By the fact that both were created by God and in His likeness, then it is only logical to say that they are both equal. It is against God's thought and reason therefore to take women as second-class citizens and men as first class. Both man and woman deserve to be treated with dignity and their sexes should not decide if they receive respect or not but the person in them. But also, there exist in modern world female thinkers and female theologians who in their rightful mind think of the paternity and maternity of God. In addition, through Israel's women, in form of mediation, we see God revealing Himself to the world.

Mary is spoken of as a woman full of Grace (Cf. Lk 1: 42; Jn 2: 1; Rev 12: 1) and the Church always understood as the wife to Jesus is simply the bride of the Lamb (Cf. Rev 19: 7; 21: 9). These verses and many others of the same nature, resuscitates feminine theology in our world reflecting on the maternal image of God. But also, OT conceives God in feminine sense where He is treated as the God of magnanimity who is felt as a spirit. Hence, God is regarded as a mother who loves her children without measure (Cf. Ps 83; Ecl 4: 10). All these descriptions on theological and biblical foundations reveal to us support of dignity of women.

Having seen this, we have no single reason to look with contempt at the theological role of women and their dignity. Ignoring women is standing against the very image and plan of God Himself. With biblical foundations, and many female theologians, the Church has managed to produce a lot of theological reflections on women's vocation and dignity beyond cultures. Pope John Paul II and Emeritus Benedict XVI are always mentioned on this.

There exist many theological reflections on women. Apart from the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents, there are the *Redemptoris Mater*, the Mariological encyclical of Pope John Paul II (1987), the *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), Pope John Paul II letter to women (1995). Pope Francis seems to be driving the agenda to the right direction thus much is expected from the Church. Numerous synods have been called and many

commissions formed to see into the matter of women in theological and pastoral fields. As God's creation, women have dignity whether is observed or not recognised because they are created by God Himself. Also, dignity is with women because God's attributes are described as feminine qualities. Since the beginning of history, women have shown great talents in both society and Church. These talents in women needs acknowledgment and a necessary support from the Church and society.

### **3.5 Role of women within Kenyan ecclesiastical context**

From the high office of Catholic Women's Council (CWC) which is a global umbrella organisation of Roman Catholic networks working tirelessly for the full recognition of the dignity and equality of women in the Church, we have a special network for Kenyan woman. With an approved constitution by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), the Kenya National Council of Catholic Women (KCCW) working in partnership with Laity Council both of which are under the Department or Commission for Pastoral and Lay Apostolate. Some of the roles of the KCCW include: enhancing the spiritual growth of Catholic women, enabling women participate more effectively in the evangelization and sanctification of humanity. This is to mean that it empowers Catholic women spiritually, morally, socially and economically for the purposes of evangelizing families and society at large—peace, justice, health and education. The commissions engage themselves in activities at grassroot, national and international levels, where issues of women and Church are discussed. KCCW is a member of the World Union of Catholic Women Organisation (WUCWO) where national and international matters are dealt with.

A day of St. Monica who is a patron saint of the CWA, a group much active and always seen in Kenya in the KCCW, is set for as a feast day in Kenya. This day gives them these ladies a chance to plan, evaluate and carry out some activities in line with their mission in the Church. They have their own special attire that is used whenever they are meeting (white with blue colour with an image of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine). Together with the entire laity, these women have and continue to collaborate with the hierarchy as channels through which the Church moves and survives in entire Kenya. Despite the fact that KCCW contributes in construction of the Church, the Church in Kenya is doing a lot to help associations especially in the capital but not at personal or individual level. The Church has funded the associations' projects and ensures that women are empowered through formation and leadership training programs. Women

making a larger percentage in the Kenyan Church, are given ear through this KCCW. With the association of women, we find groups like, CWA, PMC, Widows Association, Children of Mary, Legion of Mary, Catholic Youth Organisation (CYO), and Young Christian Society (YCS). All these are for women, the vulnerable, and children's benefits.

These associations, engage into different spiritual activities as this is part of their task. They venture into pastoral and evangelization activities. With a generous heart, the associations have played a role in formation of priests by dipping into their pockets and help parishes and other societal projects at different levels. The Church progress in our families and societies by the support of this vibrant women groups. Thus, Kenyan Church and to be specific in Luhyaland, is kept alive by women and the youths though CMA, men's group, is in existence too for men's welfare.

Many good things can be said about women, their positive vibes, talents, gifts, service but challenges have never ceased facing them. As much as they finance the Church projects, women carry the burden of their native families. Many are not able to earn something at the end of the day thus being hard for them to further personal businesses. The challenge of finance faces these groups especially in the interiors of the regions where poverty has enjoyed the habitants. Virtually, the Church does nothing to help them come out of this situation though she gives her theories in a way to try offering a solution. Illiteracy and poverty in rural areas is unbearable for women as the questionnaire shows. They suffer sexual harassment and other violence. There is little in terms of pastoral work to help women apart from monthly Masses at the parish level. Women have little when it comes to decision making. Many are mostly excluded and sometimes limited representation in decision making tables in families, parish councils, diocese and the country at large. Your guess is as right as mine that, if women are allowed on those tables, they would have made excellent decisions at the end. The Church and the civil sector have had the same problem of no or minimal female representation.

For cultural reasons, women in Luhyaland if not Kenya as a country, are seen as inferior or less person to men. Women are not to speak before men, not to decide for anything and not to lead. Basically, women in those cultural practices and belief systems are considered as second-class citizens who offer a lot but receive no appreciations in return. These women end up being house wives receiving inhumane treatments in their houses and marriages.

To conclude, we can only say that the Church for long has misunderstood or has not appreciated the women, her dignity. The moment women's physical appearances have been valued more than their competence; they have been taken as objects. Kenyan government has put in place some measures to do away with violence acts against women. There are bodies or organizations that deal with rights—Commission of Human Rights, FIDA, KNCHR, OHCHR, ICJ-Kenya, TJRC, Kenya Anti-Rape Organization, Kituo Cha Sheria, Law Society of Kenya (LSK), Legal Education and Aid Programme, Peace Foundation, and Public Law Institute. As women fight this in civil sectors, the Church on the other hand, has formed units to help women out of dangers and risks they face as women.

It is worth thinking of a missionary Church, an open Church as wishes Pope Francis. This will advocate for her who has remained vulnerable in life. It is good we went back to the words of Vatican Council II that talks to us about discrimination: «must overcome and eliminate itself, as it is contrary to God's will, any form of social or cultural discrimination with regard to the fundamental rights of the person on the basis of sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion must be overcome and eliminated as contrary to the will of God» (GS 29, 2).

But also, is said that;

Just as discrimination in the area of natural rights is contrary to God's will, so also is discrimination in the area of spiritual rights. All persons should have the right to spiritual freedom. Certainly, the Bible teaches that both women and men have the right to know God, the right to act on that knowledge, the right to learn about God, and —once regenerate—the right to serve God as He calls. Discrimination is any act that restricts those spiritual rights and thus harms or diminishes a person's spiritual standing or limits a person's opportunities to serve God.<sup>180</sup>

### **Synthesis: Critical approach and pastoral challenge**

Our point of conclusion of the entire project is at hand. We conclude the third and last chapter of our project by tackling the pastoral dimension question. We have been reflecting on pastoral issues that touches on women. In this conclusion though in brief, we can see into what can be done to draw people's attention, and the authorities both the Church and government to help in giving back to women of Luhyaland and Kenya in general what has always belonged to them, what makes them see themselves as equally created by God like men, their counterparts. We cannot achieve this without looking into women's rights hence pastoral view is very vital in this chapter.

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<sup>180</sup> Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve* (Revell: Old Tappan, N.J., 1987), 230.

Pastoral dimension has had a positive impact in the life or history of the Church in Luhyaland. The question of women expects more effects from the pastoral dimension. From the interviews undertaken, different conversations held, different chats we had with community members and the responses from questionnaires received from a sample of people on the topic of concern, I have received so much friction but also support. All this was just to make sure that the work's objective is achieved. This issue being the most debated in the Church and the world and being considered most delicate and as it touches on the doctrines of the Church, people were never ready to talk about it with an excuse that this is sensitive in the Church, and tribe's culture. But those with open mentality recommended the topic as an interesting one. Many seemed to have been yearning for someone to bring up the topic but due to fear, they remained in the world of silence. Others for fear of being called feminists, others for fear of being seen as standing against the Church teachings and others for fear of rising the conscience of women who stay blindly obedient to the culture. They feared revolution that the waking of sleeping conscience would cause in the society and the Church.

At the moment because of this dissertation, I have left many not only discussing the question but also me. They ask among themselves; but why women? Is he becoming a feminist? Why not any other theological theme or question? The Church listens, discerns this we should not forget or ignore. With the coming of Vatican II, the Church opened herself for such questions and responds to them adequately even if we see nothing concrete done in our environments. She reads the signs of time and thus she has of recent become the Church of all, an open Church. The Church through her Vatican II did a recommendable thing by allowing other studies into religious and secular sciences.

The Church was condemned for taking theology or any study to do with God as for men priests only. If it forbade, it was for good reason because it wanted to avoid heresies and misunderstandings of the Scriptures and God among her members. When talking of responsibilities, is it that we are saying women should assume a responsibility of proclaiming the word? They took the word in Holy Mass but without any official faculty of reading or even the first and the second readings.<sup>181</sup> Thanks to Pope Francis

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<sup>181</sup> The Code of Canon Law forbids women from being ordained: "only a baptised man can validly receive holy ordination" (Canon 1024). All women are therefore automatically excluded from access to the category of *ministri sacri*, simply because they are not "male". Women have no status in liturgical ministries. Not even as readers and acolytes. These ministries are conferred only on "male laymen ..." (C. 230/1). Only, "by occasional deputation" may a woman, like any "laity", "perform" the liturgical functions of lector; likewise, all laymen may perform the functions of commentator, and others, according to the norms of law (C. 230/2). In this field, a woman is always a simple "layman", but with fewer powers than

who has opened the door for special ministries where everybody qualified with the permission of his or her bishop is allowed to participate in the same. The laity can now be catechists and serve in other ministries of the Church.

Lay people are in the modern world studying theological studies, equipping themselves with knowledge to read and interpret Scriptures. With their involvement in matters of theology, we can testify that it has brought to better decisions and understanding of humanity, the Church and her needs and the world system. Women have always had a vision of God like men. They carry same vision of the Church even though they might be seeing it from a different point of view. This aids in the growth of the Church and society. The search for equality for all and not for women and those vulnerable is an urgent and necessary thing among us. With understanding, dialogues, honesty, readiness to learn and accept the new reality, and spirit of agreeing to disagree, the agenda which is to struggle for equality is taken to a different and most wished level.

The search for every truth on every aspect that touches human person should be continual because what we lived yesterday is not what we are living today. And it is quite probably that it would not be tomorrow and days to come. Times are changing and so our mentality should be changing too. It should be clear in our minds that we need to have a well-formed conscience and understand the notion of real human person and civilised values. This will help us fight for proper equality and not fall into traps of those who in the name of equality, fight for destruction of women and the vulnerable in our vicinities. With the proper life conscience, we avoid what political class deceive multitude for vote hunting.

Women have proved their strength in the Church and the society by acting. They have demonstrated beyond our imaginations their wish to rise from where culture and traditions placed them for long. Their life is exposed to many perils, yet they fight going ahead to give life and secure humanity and ensure continuity of their societies. A woman is life. This being so, all tools for emancipation of women should be used to see to it that this creature is treated uniquely as it is done for the opposite side. It is time they are helped to achieve their dignity as people and also their rights.

Education as the main instrument for emancipation process is called for to aid in my Luhya society. First of all, on education, the public needs to be educated on the value and significance of women in the society. It is good that men or slave masters knew the

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the male "layman", that is, a second-class layman. (Should be noted that this is the Canon Pope Francis made some amendments allowing women to the lector and acolyte ministries).

contribution women make for the development and construction of a society. But also, to meet on the same table of discussion with same minds, to carry ideas, to be free in their conscience, our women need to be allowed or given chances in academic fields. It is said that if you want to negotiate for something with people, then you are advised to come with your own chair. It is the chair that is your ticket to joining the table of negotiation according to Luhya sages. This calls also for women to have their chairs of which the community is aware that they have them.

Also, as says Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, “If you educate a man, you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family”. One woman belongs to two families. Women bring discipline and dignity in every area they work upon. They look upon our homes and ensure healthy environment for families. If educated then she can turn everything as she has the power of multiplication as many say about her. The education to women should be known to be a turning point of women empowerment because it gives room to respond to challenges, confront their traditional role and change life. The proverb aimed at parents taking their kids to school without biasness and it achieved its aim to a certain level as the society is seen educating girls nowadays.

Nevertheless, we may blame the world while forgetting our responsibilities. We take things for granted believing that they are known. For instance, the truth of faith. The experts need to engage into this issue of faith to build a better believing world for everyone. The ecclesiologists, sacramentalists, the liturgists and all pastors of the Church should fully venture into teaching of faith to Christ’s followers. There has been that confusion as we said between service and power. Some shepherds have confused service for power thus ruling and not leading people. They want to be served and not to serve people like their Master did by serving and not being served even though he was great beyond human imagination (Cf. Mt 20: 28; Mk 10: 45). John 13: 13-17 records a story of washing of disciples’ feet. Christ shows a great sign of a servant despite being a Master and a Teacher. From a radical feminist point of view, we can see a point which women are advocating for or are considering in aspiration for ministry by ordination.

In secular world politics, we have seen women rising to high positions of leadership. For example, in Kenya, we have seen women being voted in as governors, as parliamentarians, as Woman Representative, assistant Chief Justice and of recent to position of Chief Justice of the land, a position held by a woman for the very first time since independence. We also cannot afford to ignore the activist, Wangari Muta Maathai,

a Nobel Peace Prize winner of 2004 for the contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. She is actually the first African woman to win this peace prize. Looking at these women with the confusion of service and power and also, what Christ talks of in Jn 13: 13-17, then it is obvious that women will end up claiming an ordination simply because they have shown positive results and Christ in request after washing of disciples' feet gives them an opportunity in ordained ministry. Understanding the request of Christ with such mentality is a wrong image we depict as advocated by radical feminists who seem to understand things literally.

However, we should not forget that women have responsibilities to take care of themselves. As much as the process of emancipation is taking shape, they should help in coming out of their own prisons of slavery. We have seen them engaging in prostitution where they are used as instruments by their own wish, in the name of modelling, they are of recent very busy mutilating their bodies willingly. They are also busy walking half naked as they want to be regarded as sex. Respect begins with a person him or herself thus they should command the dignity they deserve.

The Kenyan body (KNCCW) representing all women groups in the country, has never considered radical ideas in promoting for women rights. The purpose for radical feminist is to reach to radical rapid changes of status and this has never been the desire of women council. Every person is created by God in His own image and likeness as the book of Genesis describes but under vocation (ministry) for both men and women are uniquely different. Women have distinct and original vocation proper for them as men have theirs too. The two, man and woman complement each other thus the two cannot complete something singularly. Women walking shoulders high will be boasting radical ideas sponsored by feminists. Women need to achieve education that may be emancipated. They posse many dreams in life both at personal and societal level. Education for girls and women is vital not only as a matter of respecting a basic human right but also as a powerful force for economic development and achievement of social goals. Education remains playing a role in protection of women and their rights.

The laity councils (parish or diocesan) and other community committees which have had men leading in senior most positions or with a few numbers of women, but the majority of members are women should be rechecked, re-discerned and be addressed as it is a serious cancer eating into women's dignity and potentiality. As we mentioned in the first chapter, women are forced to remarry to brothers-in-laws if at all the husband dies. To such rites, they should be scrapped off the case, a man loses his wife, he is not

forced to marry a sister-in-law but chooses whomever he wants from anywhere and at any time. People should read the signs of the time and decide to cut off some rites that are inhumane. Entertaining them is entertaining slavery of thought, slavery of some people.

Women alone cannot fight for their rights as men alone cannot do for them but a joint effort is required. No man is an island they say. This is because few women have gone to school and known who they really are as persons. But also, culture tides are a big block that does not allow this breakthrough. Therefore, just as a Kenyan parliament has sort a way to include women in leadership by amending article 27, clause 3 that states that women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres.<sup>182</sup> It is here we get an appeal of three-quarter gender rule giving chances for women in leadership. At political parties especially this electioneering period, have signed Women and Youth Charters 2022 (UDA party) and also considered women in their formations and manifestos.

It is upon the KCCB to find a way to defend and promote women in the Church and the society. Having few women who consciously know themselves and where they belong, and KCCB need to take more women for formation. Forming more women will enhance the process of emancipation of more and more women hence freeing the world. But failure of women to avail themselves, they remain in prison forever despite campaigns by the Church. In a Christian way, some rite matters should be treated with care because they involve morals and human ethics. But this does not mean that all rites should be encouraged because they are not all that are fit for human person in Christ. Other rite like female circumcision, and inheritance of women should be left out of human life.

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. The Republic of Kenya, 'Constitution of Kenya 2010, The National Council for Law Reporting with the Authority of the Attorney-General'.

## CONCLUSION

And now it is to you that we address ourselves, women of all states—girls, wives, mothers and widows, to you also, consecrated virgins and women living alone—you constitute half of the immense human family. As you know, the Church is proud to have glorified and liberated woman, and in the course of the centuries, in diversity of characters, to have brought into relief her basic equality with man. But the hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is under-going so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling.<sup>183</sup>

Coming from Kenya and especially Western part of it, I am fully aware of the ordeal women are subjected to in their life. They face much but in hope that one day things will turn to favour or blessings. In rural places where formal education is still staggering, the situation is even worse. It is here where most men are favoured by cultural beliefs, small girls are being raped at their tender age because of poverty and they take the cases as normal, it is in rural villages that we witness many of early pregnancies and early marriages, tradition has values but traditional activities are exaggerated, schooling for girls is not guaranteed as it is counted as wastage of resources because a woman herself is a resource and many activities for women are limited with the theory of age.

Having knowledge in part of families in African Tradition Religion, Christian Religion and Islamic Religion, the religions lived in Luyialand, I know what life is lived by these mamas and what treatment they receive. Despite low murmurs from some informed people, no one has ever raised the head high to question the mistreatments subjected to women. The murmurs remain to us the crocodiles' tears. This is because of the strong walls of the culture people live in. For the intruders who have questioned these cultural structures, have not managed to rescue women though had the intention to rescue them from the situation as expected because they lack knowledge of the functioning of the system governing the structure. The life and condition of women in Luyialand remains normal after they have lived in subjection.

Domination and abuse against women and the vulnerable is a rule accepted. I witnessed and lived this and for all my life in my tribe, I understood it as it was “normal”. It happened this mistreatment against women and nobody questioned including women themselves. The silence from women themselves inform us that it was normal in their

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, 'Address of Pope Paul VI to Women on the Closing of the Second Vatican II Ecumenical Council', 1965, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf\\_p-i\\_spe\\_19651208\\_epilogo-concilio-donne.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-i_spe_19651208_epilogo-concilio-donne.html). Accessed 12 August 2022

world and nothing was wrong if men dominated and subjected them to torture. For this, I never did something different from the rest of men as culture was understood to be above all. For the education I have received and having interacted with other cultures, I can say there is need to revisit my judgments and conclusions about my culture and her trends.

Our Spiritan Missionary Congregation mission and vocation in the Church is to serve the people of God and serve the society. We are designated to evangelize the “poor”. This mission and vocation force us to go down to the people and societies who may have not yet or have partially heard the Gospel, to those whose needs are the greatest, and to the oppressed (SRL 4). The Charism of the same congregation is linked “to respond creatively to the needs of evangelization of our time” (SRL 2). With this spirit of the congregation, I thought this was a nice debate or project to engage in as it is about the marginalized or the vulnerable in our world today. The Church being an image of good and loving God, I thought from my ignorance that women are given that respect as people and support than what I would see with the culture and other religions. Things were different and the image I thought of the Church, remains a mask. Investing a lot in this scientific work, I will discover a lot that no one will want to imagine of even in the Church. There is much to be rectified especially on the question of women’s dignity in the Church.

In this entire work, we had a very productive project journeying in the magnificent world of women. We have been looking at how the dignity and vocation of women in the Church and society is understood in the Luhya tribe in Kenya. We have understood the dignity of women in the said culturally organised tribe by use of anthropological, and historical perspectives. Through anthropological perspective, we got to understand the dignity of women in Luhya culture and historically, we have known how women’s life is organised and how they have lived the same life. This took me far to look into their vision and dream. Who are they? What are they for the society? Will they be persons tomorrow?

Many believe and know that an African person is a religious person. But also, he is a social person thus a communal being. To an African man or woman, religion, social, political and cultural lives are inseparable. A person in African culture is a religious, social, political and cultural, are treated not as independent but each depends on the other. As John Mbiti puts it. In such situation, we get idea of how people understand themselves in the community. Both man and woman understand themselves in their different environments looking at the religious, social, political and cultural factors they subscribe to in their conscience.

In the second chapter, we looked more into the teaching of the Church on the dignity of women and their role in the same Church. From the teaching of the Church, it is easy to see that the Church must have received a history that was never positive on her vision for women and thus struggling to create and write a new history that promotes or defends women as equal to men before God. But as much as she struggles in defending a woman, it is discovered that culture and history subjected women to subordination, but she did contribute to her own subordination.

Since the time of Vatican II, it is thrilling to see how the Church has been so attentive to women's question of dignity and affairs. The Church has remained fighting to change her face in relation with women. Even though many Church documents have shown some efforts to rescue women from where she sits but no document is giving concrete ways on how to solve the problem for once and for all. But also, another challenge to the question is how we interpret and apply what the Church is saying or wishing for women. Most of the directives are left sleeping in books for their lack someone to implement these good and beautiful ideas and wishes.

The last chapter took a theological approach. We dwelled much on our Holy Scripture and what the message it passes to us. We have noticed that it is not the Tradition or the Holy Scriptures or Magisterium that in strict sense so to say forbids women from ministering in the Church and also in the society. But there are still some blocks stopping these women from serving. As it is said by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Adolphus Amadi-Azuogu, it is the philosophy of politics of power and not service. People have forgotten to serve and now searching powers. They dream of serving but when have a chance, they confuse it with power and end up not serving but ruling. Due to being drunk with power by men, we have had situations where women are not given chances.

This topic remains of importance to me and many people who may visit this work. We can see its significance not only because I am writing on it to have an academic document, but because some other people have worked and done research on it and we have all worked with an aim of finding the way forward for our daughters, mothers and sisters. In addition, the Church is working on it and speaks much on the dignity of women in her life and the life of the society. Apart from some academician, and the Church showing their interest on the matter, we have some NGOs who are working on the same thing to rectify the situation. Being specific to my western region and to be more categorical, to the two dioceses within the region—Kakamega and Bungoma dioceses, I can confirm that has not been any official teaching or proclamation on this itching issue

to how one can help women come out of what is facing them as persons. The same could be said about the entire country.

Also, some of the governmental and non-governmental organisations have employed some methods to solve some problems eating up women in the region. Unfortunately, these methods, as a native and from the reports I have as per now do not work because of lack of that co-operation from the natives and these organisations. Due to cultural beliefs, it is hard to suggest or impose new world of ideas from outside and expect a change overnight or soon. People are hard and reluctant to accept the introduction of what we may call new culture as they fear erosion of their own old culture. Though with good intentions, if these ideas are injected in without caution, they may end up changing to something else. And the natives claim that they may lose their identity as Mulembe people.

Culture defines and actually makes these people. It is everything for them and whatever is done in there, is done in line with respect to culture herself. Not understanding why things are done in a certain way in a certain culture is the baseline of every problem to be encountered as a result before. People resist or accept what is newly introduced to them in respect of their culture. For the fear of losing their identity, they may end-up to resist any change. Because of this fear, both genders have joined their hands in making sure that nothing from outside interfere with culture. For instance, both government and NGOs have deployed mechanism of rooting out culture of circumcision for women in some clans of Luhya tribe, but some women stand against the safe directives. Nevertheless, in the third chapter, it was my aim to find and see how women are given their dignity and respect in ecclesiastical world. But also, I aimed at seeing how women can participate totally in the ministry.

Having come from a vast and polygamous family, I must be having a lively experience I keep with me as part of memories of my culture. A lot is happening behind the curtains and much is against women who have contributed greatly in the society. I have witnessed some injustices against women both in the society and the Church. It is time I thought I would render my service to the emancipation process of women in my tribe and Kenya in general. I would wish to do it as a missionary through theological, ecclesiological and pastoral reflections on dignity and vocation and role of women in the society but due to some limitations, the thought might not be effective at the end. But this work remains free, and if somebody met it in Kenya, can correct where possible and use it in the processes of helping women regain their lost dignity, that is emancipation from

humiliations, mistreatments, and all sorts of injustices. I would not have any objection if this work was used for a good purpose. But also, people can join me in this campaign.

For the time I have been undertaking this academic work, I have come to discovered a world of bubbling ideas. From the documents of the Church, different books from different authors and writings from different organisations, I can confirm that much is being done only to change the image and understanding the society has for a woman. All these writings also, suggests or confirms the injustices women have suffered under the masculine world, the world that has for long time not acknowledged, known and recognised a woman. But the existence of these documents, authors and writings on defence of women's dignity, does not mean that the opposite is not in existence. There are many books I have met and read that devalue and degrade women. This books and authors continue painting black the image of a woman in the society as somebody inferior and somebody for subjugation.

An address made by Paul II on the closing of Vatican II, is a qualified example of documents expressing much about women. The words in this address especially the quoted ones in the beginning of this conclusory part, they best describe the Luhya women's daily life. My sisters, my daughters and my mothers need to read, need to hear these words that tell them how the Church remembers them in her life. The address with such soothing and consoling words is a real comfort to women. The same words I can say if a Luhya woman reads and listens to the message of the address, they can be conscience awakening.

Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Mulieris Dignitatem* which we can call the "Gospel of Women" reminds us that nothing is out of fashion or is out of the thoughts of the Church on women emancipation from the injustices inflicted on them. The document inspired by other documents, emerged to advocate for respect and dignity of women in both the Church and the society.

From my assessment, the vital issues and challenges facing women are not so much about them becoming clergies but the hierarchical humiliating decisions. We had mentioned that some women stand as obstacle to their fellow women in different activities. For this case, the blame on humiliation or disrespect to women does not only go or caused by men but also there are some in same women's organisations who cause confusions. Many organisations, many communities, many mushrooming Churches, many cults, the Catholic Church stands out as the one with women at heart. The Church has led in most moments on the questions of women's affairs than any other institution

or organisation. As the Church has had an open agenda of defending women, other institutions have not always had their agenda on women that open. They have hidden behind the campaign mottos: “we are fighting for women’s right or women’s emancipation, or equal rights for men and women, etc”, when in their true sense, they are aiming at the continuity of men dominion or the complete destruction of feminine figure originality. They disfigure the very dignity as a person created in the image of God. The future of the generation is in the hands of women thus losing them with their qualities of life, then we shall be losing human race completely. Women are the world thus should be held, protected, loved, raised, promoted for her survival.

The world should embrace humanity and humanity should pay homage to women for it is the world because of existence of human race and human race is as it is because of both man and woman. The Church in her rebirth has always recognised this and holds women and men as her children with equal rights. John Paul II in his encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem* puts it well that for 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 today’s world, what does it mean to be a woman? Looking at my culture, it may be hard to give response to this sample of question. Putting it in the light and knowledge of Luhya culture, then our response would not be that attractive or helpful in the struggle for emancipation. But theologically, deep with the light of the Word of God, then we can give the correct answer because both man and woman are equal before the Supreme as they are both created in His likeness and image. Every woman matters in the Church thus the Church has tried always to consider them. It should not be forgotten that women’s dignity is affected negatively by the history we might have inherited. They might not be progressing as a result of this inherited history that never acknowledged women in their life. The culture side-lined women in society making them slaves of men and families. The Church as a beneficiary or promoter of this culture in her earlier days, Paul II was remorseful on behalf of the Church for what the Church had done or contributed to the enslavement of women. As we said earlier on, Christ shared love with all and had respect for women hence the Church as a representative of love or Christ was to serve as a model of justice and not the opposite.

Pope Francis is credited for his efforts since his first year of his pontificate in helping change the image of women in the Church. Through him, we can see the

importance of theology of Womanhood. He serves as an important instrument on matters women are concerned. In his response about the presence of women in the Vatican, the new Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium*, which reforms the Curia; and about which Dicastery could be entrusted to a lay person in future, the Pope told the Reuters Senior Correspondent Philip Pullella in an interview that, “I am open should an opportunity arise. Right now, the Governorate has a deputy governor ... Now two women will be going to the Congregation of Bishops, on the commission to elect bishops. In this way, things open up a little bit.”<sup>184</sup>

Perhaps, the above quotation or decision of appointing female figures in Dicastery of Bishops is simply actualising what he had said in 2013 while on return flight from the XVIII World Youth Day on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, in his press-conference. It was in response to journalist, Jean-Marie Guénois that the Pope said;

A Church without women is like the college of the Apostles without Mary. The role of women in the Church is not simply that of maternity, being mothers, but much greater: it is precisely to be the icon of the virgin, of Our Lady; what helps make the Church grow! But think about it, Our Lady is more important than the Apostles! She is more important! The Church is feminine. She is Church, she is bride, she is mother...the role of women in the Church must not be limited to being mothers, workers, a limited role...No! it is something else! ... but I believe that we have much more to do in making explicit this role and charism of women. We can't imagine Church without women, but women active in the Church, with the distinctive role that they play ... I believe that we have not yet come up with a profound theology of womanhood, in the Church. 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.<sup>185</sup>

According to Pope Francis, the Church is compared to barrenness if it has no these active women. He compares her to the Apostles without Mary, the Mother of God. With this understanding of Pope Francis, we face a pastoral challenge that the Church needs to invest in a lot to keep the women active and active. A way must be found to engage Luhya people in their place of jurisdiction especially women and this should be through formation programs in the Church and formal education so that they may grow as active persons in the Church. The interest should always be the growing in love of Christ and

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. Vatican News, ‘Pope Francis Says He Will Appoint Women to Dicastery for Bishops’, 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-07/pope-francis-says-he-will-appoint-women-to-dicastery-of-bishops.html>. Accessed 14 August 2022

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, ‘Press Conference of Pope Francis on Return Flight from Rio de Janeiro XVIII World Youth Days 28 July 2013’, 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-conferenza-stampa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-conferenza-stampa.html). Accessed 24 August 2022

humanity. Being full of love and humanity, the generation after generation grows as it receives what is all good, the love of God. Women might be more important as lay people than when they are ordained.

Luhya women are seen very active, industrious, outgoing and relevant thus their history though described as bad, all is never bad. There is a star in their darkness. The culture has painted them as bad, not able, without potentials., female who are vulnerable in anything, devil, worst of all but the truth remains that women are not as they are described. She keeps her value and the value despite intimidations, down playing and grading, a woman remains a valuable treasure that needs to be kept. We see these women in our families, taking care of homes, making sure of the continuity of families, taking care of kids and husbands, educating the society. Women are valued more than everything in Luhyaland but this does not come out clearly due to fear among many for association with the fact. Because culture has for long dictated contempt and described women as a daughter of lesser God, they seem valueless. But to say the truth, Motherhood is everything for a society. This is why is said that the best gift anybody can have in life is a mother. Nothing in life supersedes a mother. A mother is irreplaceable in this life. This is why a mother is a world, a source of life and all happiness.

To this point, can we say that human person understands themselves? Do people understand the will of God for all of them? Do they know they are equal before God as they are created in the image and likeness of God? We all know that according to the plan of God, we are all equal with dignity. We have a special vocation with us to carry the mission of God which is to spread love that is Himself. God bestowed His grace on us equally thus He had no bias when distributing His grace.

His preference was humanity. Oppression was not God's plan and thus He has never left the weak, the vulnerable, the poor, the marginalized alone but He is always with them in equal measures. God has a good plan for everybody regardless of the gender or our status in the Church or society because we are all equal before Him. We should start thinking differently. Saying that women are for the kitchen and all dirty jobs in the world, for prostitution, for object use, among other low-profile jobs. We are all equal as persons and so no one should stand out and say he is more equal than the other person.

It has been much debated and it will be for long debated. Both the Church and the secular world will debate the question of women and their role as she appears to be on the margin of the two worlds—the Church and the secular world. But looking at Christ's mission, we need not to reduce this matter to the sacrament of ordination as many are

doing, neither should we take as a human right question as feminist proponents are doing in the name of “we fight for women”. Limiting it to ordination or human right struggle is rendering it to opaqueness that will never have an ending. But also, it is making it look like other laymen’s ministries are of no importance or contribution to the salvation mission or construction of a saved Church of both men and women. The mission has nothing to do with gender but only each gender knowing her role in the construction of the Church. The mission like Christ would say needs commitment, self-sacrifice, self-convincement, total dedication, readiness to risk, discernment, attitude, mentality of service, humility, decisiveness, faith and many more values. All these attributes have no genders but an affirmation of readiness to follow Christ as his disciple. Following and serving has nothing to do with gender of the person, priesthood through ordination. He called all without limitation. However heavy the work could be, he expected everybody to come out willingly and do the necessary. It was an option, you either accept or deny the Cross thus not a reservation for one gender.

Due to necessity of the mission started by Christ without considering gender factor and her implications, Christ thus says;

Then he said to them all: Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ... Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (Lk 9: 23-26).

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## **APPENDICES**

This part carries supplementary material (information) just as a matter to make clear what has been already discussed especially on Luhya nation. This is helpful in providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem which remains the dignity, vocation and the future of women in both the Church and the Luhya people.

### **Appendix 1**

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

##### **Introduction**

My name is Christopher Wamuchwa Shamba from the Catholic University of Porto, Portugal. This questionnaire is part of the scientific study into the study of, “The Church, the Society and the Feminine Question: a case study on women’s dignity among the Luhya of Western Kenya”. This is to help us understand how the local Church lives the reality of place and role of women and way forward in finding solutions to some of the challenges faced, promoting and the future. As such, the responses to the questions are to be used only for this work. Privacy of the respondent is respected thus personal information is treated with confidentiality and respect. Necessary cautions are considered to safeguard each respondent’s identity.

Thanks in advance for the collaboration.

##### **1. Luhya people and the culture**

- a) What do you understand by the term “Mulembe Nation”?
- b) Among the various ethnic groups and their dialects are there noticeable cultural differences?
- c) What are the occupations carried out by the Mulembe Nation?
- d) Are there cultural practices in the Luhya culture that enhances women’s dignity? What are they?
- e) In your own opinion, what do you think of the Church in her relation with women? Do you think she has provided women with more opportunities of growth and emancipation than other religions or institutions (Islam and Traditional African Religion)?

##### **2. The Church, and Kenyan society**

- a) What is your conception of the question of women, dignity and vocation?
- b) Are women’s dignity held high in Kenyan cultural set up?

- c) What are the solutions you suggest to help women in their emancipation's struggle?
- d) Are women in possession of some values in the Church and society?
- e) To what extent is Mary a role model to women in the Church?
- f) Do women have rights? If yes, what are some of the rights you think are not culturally and religiously respected?
- g) In what ways are women involved in apostolate ministries in your parish?

**3. Women and Leadership**

- a) Are there chances for women to lead in both the Church and the society?
- b) Are women willing to take up leadership roles in presence of men? Do they show co-operation?
- c) How are women viewed in both the Church and the society?
- d) Has the presence of the Church in the centre of the community brought any change in quest of women?

**4. Ministerial Roles**

- a) Do you know of any ministerial roles of women in the Church?
- b) Are women willing to take up ministerial roles in your Church?
- c) Do you think that women are deprived of power in Kenya and the Church?

**5. Women in the Church**

- a) The Church is said to be chauvinistic. Do you agree?
- b) How does the Church see women in power?
- c) Do you think it is time women are allowed to the sacred orders?
- d) What do you say of the teachings of the Church regarding women and their roles in the Church?
- e) Mention some roles women play in today's Church?

**Personal Information of Respondent**

NAME (Optional): .....

GENDER: .....

AGE: .....

ETHNIC GROUP: .....

EDUCATIONAL STATUS: .....

RELIGION (SECT): .....  
PROFESSION/OCUPATION: .....  
VILLAGE/TOWN: .....  
LEADERSHIP ROLE  
(CIVIL OR CHURCH): .....  
POSITION IN CHURCH/COMMUNITY: .....  
BORN A CHRISTIAN OR CONVERTED: .....  
MARITAL STATUS: .....  
DATE: .....

## **Appendix 2**

### **Questionnaire's Responses**

Different and specific people were targeted in collection of this important information for our project. I considered men and women across the board. I selected lay men and women, married and single men and women, consecrated men and women, literate and illiterate persons, young and old, priests and seminarians, the Luhyas and non-Luhyas, those living within and without, neighbours and far friends and many others within Portugal. Despite difficulties, I gave out the questionnaire and followed up through emails, texts, phone calls and on WhatsApp. To those unable to read and write, I made direct phone calls to harness the crucial information I wanted from them. 52 people were chosen for the exercise and some of them this direct call would serve the purpose. Only 41 people responded positively to the questionnaire. Eleven persons did not render their responses despite the follow-up I made.

Unfortunately, among them who failed to submit anything for the project were either former priests or the priests working in the two dioceses—Kakamega and Bungoma. Any failure to this project can be therefore attributed to their failure to respond or mobilize some Christians. Their responses to my plea would have aided us a lot in seeing the women's world and what faces them in passivity. These priests failed my trust. But with much information we got from those who responded to the tedious work, we see something presentable as an image of a woman in the Church and the society in general.

According to some respondents, questions were many and difficult thus they did not respond to all the questions. They responded skipping some they thought were so difficult or so touching and responding to them was almost contrary to the culture of the land. Due to the reason that some questions were very common, I would not pin down what people said about them.

Despite the restrictions to the ministry of priesthood, women have remained active and committed to what they say is their mission—construction of the Church and serving souls. We see them serving the Church in different capacities. In different positions we have noticed their presence. For instance, some of them are catechists as others serve as mass-servers on the altar. Some are leading as chairs of different committees in their respective parishes, as some have positions in the parish pastoral councils. But also, many are helping in the docket of extra ordinary ministers of the Holy Communion, sacristans, administrators, lay readers (acolytes) and leading in their various groups. They remain vibrant despite the insurmountable challenges.

Kenyan Church has never failed women by not respecting them in their totality. They are respected and given support in different ways. Those in leadership and common faithful women are all respected by the same Church. Women are known for their servants' attitude thus they are respected for that attitude. To show respect, the papal honours has been bestowed upon some individuals for their dedication and exceptional service to the Church. These female figures have performed fine for the Church and offered outstanding Christian witness in a generous and sustained way—in education, religious life, philanthropy, profile and vocational work, social ministry, among other apostolates. Some women are named Dame in the order of Saint Gregory the Great, the Cross Pro Ecclesia, Benemerenti Medal among many others. The respondents went far to mention these persons: Dawn Chism, Anne Healy Ayella, Chinh Dinh, John J. Donnelly, Marie Joseph, Sheila Longworth, Brian G. McElwee, Damon Owens, Mr. Manuel A. Beltran, Sister Maureen Crissy, RSM, Becky Espanol, Kevin L. Hughes, Ph.D., Sister Patricia Kelly, MSBT, Brother Richard E. Kestler, FSC, Mr. Jose L. Lozada, Matthew McCloskey, Sister Anne and Patricia Myers, SSJ, Sister M. Edward William Quinn, IHM, Thomas W. Smith, Ph.D; Dame-Scott M. Browning, Mary Anne Burke and Mr. Arthur Burke, Anna Davis and Mr. Gerald T. Davis, Patricia B. Holloway and Mr. Gary M. Holloway, Donna McCloskey, and Joseph J. Sweeney.

Women face a lot in their life. Many obstacles stand their way and these the world watch and remain mute. The respondents from their evaluation and observation, we note some of these drawbacks. Women witness lack of maximum cooperation from their fellow women as well as men, lack of proper formation for women leaders, lack of sufficient capacity and financial muscles to execute their plans, lack of knowledge of Church's teachings about their roles and vocation, ignorance of the reality, lack of sufficient awareness, culture barriers, inadequate leadership skills, family responsibilities, poverty, poor communication, inadequate support from the community, marital/family problems, some husbands do not allow their wives to attend to Church matters.

On the problems observed, the respondents suggested some solutions. The solutions included: the Church and the society to transcend above their limited cultural spheres and become acquainted with global development. They applauded the inculturation that is being practised by the Church today. The parishes were asked to encourage their members to join adult classes to educationally equip themselves. They suggested schools within Western Kenya like Bungoma Adult Secondary, Getway Adult Learning Centre, and Mumias Adult and Continuing Education Centre. Financially, women should come up with some income generating projects. They also suggested that the dioceses should try to organize workshops and also enlighten women on leadership.

Despite all the problems facing women, they never fail to continue with their mission of construction of the world. Women empowerment established in cities and villages have helped many utilize their potentials, the poor and underprivileged have been successfully helped in their states in rural and slums in big cities. The few enlightened women's journey is now the journey for many. These few footsteps have been the few foot springs and their liberation and better dreams for a better future has remained a force to changing their world. Women have managed to play a reconciliation role and many have led the Church into Lenten peace and justice campaigns in their organisation (CJPC).

Women plays many roles in Luhyaland and the Church as stated before. They actually do everything as guided by the teachings of the Church. But due to concentration on the formation of men, women remain like lame ducks in the two societies. For efficiency in their roles in the Church, special formation should be done like it is for men. Many should be formed for active participation in the Church.

Through their associations, these women have managed an income generating projects in entire Kenya but also resorted to solving their own problems as women in their marriages and social life. Their participation in formation of the young ones is excellent. This mentorship remains something to be encouraged in our societies—religious and secular. Though staggering, women have wholeheartedly given themselves for the service of the Church. Their support is something we cannot downplay. The Church at national and parish levels is feeling their weighty support from their thin pockets.

Women are respected. Dignity is given to them as they play a great role of mothers. Each culture respects women for their capacity of taking care of the family. They are considered as the advisors to the family. Though not in public, but the role of advising the husbands and children on different matters is left for them. Respondents suggested that if the role of motherhood is seen, then women should have a chance in nurturing the future. Nurturing their children is actually nurturing the village and so the entire world. They had an opinion that these responsible women should be honoured, respected and be given opportunity in public. But rooms for formation should be left open for many to be equipped for the task of mentorship ahead of them.

On what Mulembe Nation might be meaning, the respondents uniformly said that it is a form of greeting, an expression of peace. They defined it as a people who live and like peace. In fact, it is said that give a Luhya person a chance to speak, and you will hear them sending greetings to the loved ones. Because of peace that exists among them, they are nicknamed Mulembe Nation.

There are similarities noted among different subtribes of Luhya people. The similarities might have been because of their origin. These people almost have the common cultures and traditions. They also intermarry though marriage is prohibited between the immediate brothers and sisters. Agriculture is the backbone of their economy though some few engage in businesses. They plant maize, sorghum, millet and sugarcane. They have different dialects but they understand each other as the difference in them is minimal.

I come from Matungu region where my subtribe is not well known as we are minor who found their way there but we actually do almost the same activities like the Wangas who are dominant in the region. In fact, our dialect is swallowed by the Bukusus and the Wangas surrounding us. Birth, marriage and death are most pre-occupied things in life of

my people. You will fail not to see them celebrating people on the three. Being a meeting platform, many congregate for the functions. It is here that life is celebrated and honoured.

Dignity to women is as significant as to men though the world may understand them differently. Luhya people are known for the dignity they give people. This dignity is not only accorded to old people but it begins from a tender age, immediately one is born, to marriage and even in death. No wonder the dead is respected more than we may imagine. Women are expected to respect their husbands and elders including the parents of a husband. A virgin girl and an elderly lady are much respected than any other lady. But also, a woman with boy-child has her dignity reserved. Virginitiy is a measure of dignity in the community. Despite dotcom life, a woman with tattoos, smoking, drinking, body shaping (modelling), nose-ringing, giving birth while still at home among many other things was accorded no respect despite her level of education or intelligence. In fact, giving birth before marriage was considered as prostitution if not because of extreme cases like rape. In today's world, you will see young kids carrying their certificates (kids) as they call them. They say no one leaves the college without having a gun. Having a kid before marriage assures you of fertility but also has heroism in it.

Some respondents agreed to it that it is true culture has encouraged bad or harmful marriages in the name of respecting parents. Girls have been forced into early and corrosive marriages just to maintain dignity that existed between families. As a sign of respect and obedience, small girls have ended up accepting their parents' requests and commands for marrying old men thus entering into polygamy. They marry not men of their choice and age but their fathers' choice. They end up not living well as many get neglected, or divorced or left as widows at a very tender age. This way, what we see is not obedience but oppression of girl-child.

Respondents suggested that women should be left to make their own choices like men. They should be left to choose husbands of their choice, study where they will and to the level they wish, buy their heart desires, go to Church and participate in the Church activities and deploying their talents in any way. But all this, they should be left to do as the Church teaches and also under the guidance of the Holy Spirit because if they are left alone, they might end up misusing their liberty.

Dominion over women. The Church has not put women above men as is described in the Bible which is a Holy Book. The respondents had an opinion that no one is hit when

he or she is down but women are. This way, the traditions (African) do not openly rebuke or radicalize women in few places they hold but they do. Those criticized openly are full of themselves and lack respect to the elders in their societies. But however, other religions in the area might put women in second position, Catholic Church gives them a chance.

The Bible records women's history since creation to the time of Christ. Since the time of Eve to the time of Mary the Mother of our Lord Jesus. All those women in the OT and NT have had their own beautiful history. We have seen the judges, mothers of prophets, examples of life, Christ's disciples and many others. These women remain extraordinary according to different respondents. Perspectives change and women were left with small jobs. We do not see them as the bearer of life, and controller of many activities. What is left for them is preparing the altar, beautifying and cleaning the Church, participating in choirs. Some are only prepared to ululate. Our religious nuns are known for washing priests' vestments in the parish, parish's secretaries and taking care of the Church and kids around. They also pray and act as acolytes. In some areas, it is even worse for these nuns as they are taken for entertaining instruments for priests.

Respondents affirm in their answers that women can do better if given opportunity to serve in the Church and the society. The culture of women serving in private domain if ended, women can do marvellous. The respondents testified the work of women in the Church whenever they are given chances to lead. Many know themselves and what they can do to change the world they are given to lead. Some are so competent in different Church commissions. But because of the culture and mentality created long ago, women remain seen as incapable of anything. And women have strongly believed thus letting men thrive over them. Men under look women but also because of mentality and attitude towards each other, women underate themselves.

Some respondents said that according to the Genesis creation story, women having been created after man, they are considered second thus they are subject to men. Man has used the theory to rule over women. And this is not only in family set up but also in other environments. Despite qualifications, women are denied chances in many instances simply because they are women. In instances men are threatened by the presence of women, they keep criticizing them using the creation story and culture. They use the Bible in justifying the subordination. But this is simply misunderstanding it.

Many respondents agree that the Church is chauvinistic. The modern world has risen to challenge everything and the Church is opposed in the process. With education, it is very hard any reforms to be made in the Church. What the Church is doing is questioned and this make me as individual say that the Church is not chauvinistic. If it were chauvinistic as some respondents claimed, many changes would have been reached at only to favour the same Church. Remember people are involved in many conversations and meetings only to see that when the decision is made, it favours the faithful. Whatever change or decision the Church makes, it is of human and God's wisdom. It favours humanity. In fact, everything is in focus of salvation of souls. People seem to criticize anything that seem not to be in their favour at that moment. The Church in her wisdom has made changes that remains criticized today. The Church guided by the Holy Spirit, has transformed herself for the interest of her faithful discriminated. It is men who are hiding in these reforms that they love each other. The mission of the Church being a representative of God, is to equally spread love. Discrimination is a vice hence all reforms brought by the Church are in favour of humanity and love for all.

To conclude, the most pregnant question asked in the Church today is whether priests will be allowed to marry or not. But also, there is this of women's ordination. We have those advocating for priests to marry and women be allowed by the Church to enter into ordination equation something the Church has ever been clear on. The Church is clear on the two issues; priests marrying and women being ordained. The Church is not speaking of the women's ordination but the radical feminists are bothered. The Catholic women seem to be okay for they understand their roles thus there is no competition for priesthood is not only the role in the Church. And also, priesthood is never about power but service. This is to mean that women can serve at their capacity as men play a role in service too.

Before pasting some of the handwritten and scanned responses from a respondent and a map showing the Kenyan country and her 47 counties, I went far looking into the Muslim world and their perception of a woman and this is what I got.

## **MUSLIM RELIGION ON WOMEN!**

- 1. How does Islamism or Islam religion view a woman or address the feminine question?**

A woman in Islam is taken as equal to man in terms of Acts of worship. Sahih International: "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer, We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do". Q16:97. She is given the full assurance and the question of feminism doesn't arise. In the normal society of the Luhya they are obliged to follow whatever has been prescribed for them by God. And the teachings of the prophet.

## **2. What is a woman's place in Islam religion?**

A woman in Islam has different positions. As a mother she is honoured. The prophet has said in hadith who is the best of people you are supposed to stay with well he answered your mother 3t times and the fourth He said the father. She has been described as the one the children should obey for them to attain paradise.

As a daughter her price is high and the prophet has said Whoever raises up a daughter and marries her off, he will be among those blessed. She is allowed to inherit from the parents.

As a wife she has a position first she must be paid her dowry exclusively to her. She has equal rights with the husband. Her maintenance is to be provided for by the husband. She is allowed to own property inherit and do with her wealth as she wishes.

## **3. What are some of the policies put in place by Islam Religion to safeguard the dignity of a woman?**

In Islam she is supposed to cover herself and not show any of her beauty to any man who can marry her this in the eyes of non-Muslims seems backward however it is a policy to safeguard her respect and dignity. She is supposed to be married off by the father who has experience with and in this if followed well prevents the man from infringing on her right. She is allowed to inherit whether as a daughter or as a wife or a mother this gives her dignity.

From your understanding of the Bible, is man and woman equal?

Man and woman are equal according to the Bible teachings. By the fact that both man and woman share in one unique commonality which is humanity, then they are equal. However, the creation story in the book of Gen 1; 27, is recorded that both man and woman are created in the image of God thus they are equal. Moreover, the difference in gender do not in any way make either man or woman in a higher rank. The difference in the gender should be a way of understanding man and woman as relational beings.

What the Church should do to uplift woman?

In the spirit of synodality, the Church should allow women to participate in the decision making. It is through this that women will speak on what affects them directly or what hinders them from participation in the construction of the Kingdom of God. She (the Church) should give women leadership positions, should frequently organise for seminars with an aim of sensitizing people on the issue of women and their vocation, should also think of coming up with a special synod and finally, should try to educate girl-child in areas where the girl-child is forgotten.

Ministries in the Church that women can participate

- They can be acolytes and lectors.
- They can participate in the choir.
- They can facilitate and run youth based programs in the Church.
- They can take part in the work of ~~evangel~~ evangelization. E.g leading devotional groups, charity organizations.

Some of the roles of women in the Church  
Women can play the roles of evangelisation as any baptised Christian.

They can be catechists, can conduct liturgy of the Word, they can conduct funeral services, they can aid as secretaries, they can work in the board of advisers at the episcopal level, they can play the role of forming other lay people as well as seminarians intellectually.

Ordination of women into priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church.

I am not for the ordination of women. Our Church is founded on the inspired Tradition. And in the Tradition, we do not find women being ordained.

### Appendix 3

#### The respondents' data.

Below is the list of those who responded to my set questionnaire: Name, Place and Occupation and the date of Interview.

<b>NAME OF INDIVIDUAL</b>	<b>STATUS/OCUPATION</b>	<b>DATE OF INTERVIEW</b>
Mdm. Maneya Machio	A mother, my own mother	22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2022
Mdm. Josephine Musenya	Kakamega county police, Kenya	24 <sup>th</sup> May 2022
Bro. Felix Munyao	Theology student at the University of Porto (Kenyan)	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2022
Bro. Joseph Mahimbali	A religious in the congregation of the Holy Spirit, Tanzania	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2022
Fr. Elima Vincent	The parish priest—Kiti parish Nakuru, Kenya	5 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
Fr. Wambua George	A Spiritan Spiritual Director in Theology house of formation Nairobi, Kenya	6 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
CEPAC	An organisation serving the immigrants at Lisbon, Portugal.	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
Fr. Luis Irineu	A Spiritan priest serving in Mozambique	7 <sup>th</sup> Aug. 2022
Sr. Jentrix Andeka	A religious nun in the congregation of .....	2 <sup>nd</sup> Aug. 2022
Mr. Kalibo Fredrick	A young married man working in Nairobi diocese, an accountant.	08 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Mdm. Maureen Shiundu	A lady teacher, (Assumption Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Eldoret)	8 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Bro. Waswa Felix	Franciscan Vocation Director, Kenya	9 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Mr. Nandi Daniel	Office messenger, Tom Mboya, Kisumu	8 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022

Juma Francis	Theology student in Tangaza College/University, Kenya	9 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Mr. Masinde Rajab	Imam at Matungu sub-county, Kenya	10 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Sgr. Jackline Nafuna Barasa	Kenya Defence Force	10 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Prof. Zadock Mukuyia Oyoolo	A tertiary educator in Kenya and Tanzania	10 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Mdm. Jacklyne Lishenga	A primary school teacher	10 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Madre Rosemary Nduku	Mother Superior of Carmelites, Spain	13 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Mdm. Francelina da Silva Dias	A mother from Irivo, Porto diocese (Adminstrator)	15 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Mr. Mapesa Albert	A teacher in secondary school	16 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Tr. Catherine Milimo	A teacher in secondary school	15 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Doc. Teresina Mukanda	A nurse, Kenya	15 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Village elders	A committee of elders in the society.	17-20 <sup>th</sup> Sept.2022
Tr. Anthony Barasa	A senior teacher serving in Bungoma, Kenya	18 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Deac. Pedro André	Spiritan deacon in Angola	18 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Sr. Anne Ojier	A religious nun, Kenya	19 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Fr. Thaddeus Nyaenya	A religious priest, Germany	20 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Sgr. Lenard Watako	Kenyan police, Kenya	21 <sup>st</sup> Sept. 2022
Mdm. Agnes Kitema	A teenager, Spain.	21 <sup>st</sup> Sept. 2022

Adv. Leonida Barasa	An advocate, Kenyan High Court	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2022
Fr. Paul Waswa	A religious young priest serving in Angola	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2022
Mdm. Shamim Ibrahim	A teenager lady from the village	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2022
Sheikh Rashid Kokonya	A sheikh serving in Kakuma refugee camp, Northern Kenya	23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2022
Sr. Lucy Akinyi	A religious nun serving in Uganda (Teacher)	23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2022
Catholic Women Association (s)	Women in Kakamega and Bungoma dioceses.	22-24 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
Pst. Lenard Nyongesa	A pastor in a Pentecostal Church, Kenya	23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2022
The Media Council-Kenya	A group of media personnel	22-23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2022
Mr. Camilo Gomes Ferreira	A Christian from Irivo, Porto diocese, an accountant	16 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022
The World Vision Kenya	A Christian, relief, advocacy and development organisation.	8-10 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
Mdm. Everlyn Barasa	Works with Criminal Investigation Department, Kenya	25 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 2022

The list of all the 47 counties of Kenya—2022<sup>186</sup>



<sup>186</sup> Cf. Simon A. “List of all the countries in Kenya in 2022”, <https://www.tuko.co.ke/277256-list-county-numbers-kenya.html>. Accessed 17 August 2022.

### **A Prayer to the Creator**

Lord, Father of our human family,  
You created all human beings equal in dignity:  
Pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit  
And inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,  
Dialogue, justice and peace.  
Move us to create healthier societies  
And a more dignified world,  
A world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.

May our hearts be open  
To all the peoples and nations of the earth.  
May we recognize the goodness and beauty  
That you have sown in each of us,  
And thus, forge bonds of unity, common projects,  
And shared dreams. Amen.

(Cf. Fratelli Tutti, 287)