

# Feminism in Culture and Religion

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**Abstract—** This paper explores ways of establishing liberation for women and making their voices heard. This paper seeks to give women their pride of place in our contemporary society. The realities of gender inequality, and consequently, gender emancipation in contemporary Africa are explored here. This endeavour will seek to shade upon this discourse light from the scriptures that will lead to authentic living and collaboration, for the authentic transformation of society through works of justice, love and the acquisition of rights, equal to those enjoyed by men, and thereafter draw a meaningful conclusion. The Bible teaches that “God created man and woman in His image and likeness...” (Gen. 1:27) and both had to cooperate with God in bearing and bringing forth children into the world. They were also commanded to conquer and have dominion over all other creatures of the earth... (Gen.1:28). God never intends or made suggestion to discriminate on issues of social and gender distinction. If God ever intended that there should be distinction between man and woman, he would probably have created a separate birth channel for the man, so that the inequality will be clearly spotted. This paper has, however, opined that traditional and religious laws stipulate that women should obey their husbands and be submissive to them, to the church and the society. This paper has advocated for the right and total emancipation of women in all aspects of life, educational and professional opportunities that are equal to that of men. This paper insightfully opines that women who live in oppressive circumstances should find consolation in the Word of God, as the Bible provides the solution to their plights. It consoles, nourishes and sustains them in their struggles and brings them hope. This, however, does not imply that women should sit idle and expect God to redress their suppressed status. They are to stand up and insist for the equality of the children of God.

**Index Terms—** Feminism, Culture, Religion, Bible, Gender, Liberation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Highlight Reflection on religion and culture is as old as humanity. However, feminist reflection on religion and culture is a more recent development that poses questions about religious texts, traditions, and practices, often with the aim of critiquing, redefining, or reconstructing the entire field in light of gender studies. Feminist reflection on religion and culture is important for providing a critical understanding of various religious concepts, beliefs, and rituals, as well as of religion as a cultural institution that defines, sanctions, and sometimes challenges gender roles and gender-inflected representations. It promotes the elimination of gender inequality and takes into account the multiplicity of human

bodies, desires, and differences that are mapped onto the site of religion and culture.

From the perspective of feminist critique of traditional religious practices and culture, Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1885 opines that “History shows that the moral degradation of woman is due more to theological superstitions than to all other influences together” (1885: 389). As a form of critique, feminist reflection of religion and culture employs the practice described by Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (1989) of showing the limits of a mode of thinking by forging an awareness of alternative, more liberating, ideas, symbols, and discourses.

Gender bias as it operated in the history of religion shaped the ways in which the traditional problems and orientations of feminism were constructed. Like the cultural phenomenon of religion itself, reflection on feminism not only originated in a male tradition of production and transmission, with a history of excluding and devaluing women, but it was also defined by many concepts and symbols marked as “masculine”, which stood in oppositional relation to those marked as “feminine”.

Feminists argue that religious and cultural reflection can hardly ignore questions of gender ideology when its very subject matter, that is religion, is riddled with misogyny and androcentrism. They point out that, historically, gender bias in religion has been neither accidental nor superficial. Elizabeth Johnson (1993) likens it to a buried continent whose subaqueous pull shaped all the visible landmass; androcentric bias has massively distorted every aspect of the terrain and rendered invisible, inconsequential, or nonexistent the experience and significance of half the human race. For feminists studying the intellectual effects and belief systems of religions, the opportunity to critique and correct sexist and patriarchal constructions in this field is as ample as it is urgent, given the presence of gender ideology in all known religions. Not one of the religions of the world has been totally affirming of women’s personhood. Every one of them conforms to Heidi Hartmann’s definition of patriarchy as relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. (1981: 14)

All sacred literatures of the world display an unvarying ambivalence on the subject of women. For every text that places well-domesticated womanhood on a religious pedestal, another one announces that, if uncontrolled, women are the root of all evil. Religion has thus comprised a primary space in which and by means of which gender hierarchy has been culturally articulated, reinforced, and consolidated in institutionalized form. Religion is hardly the only such space, but it appears to have been a particularly effective way of undergirding and sanctifying gender hierarchy in the West.

Despite all musings, it is a fact that should not be argued that right from the primal period, women have been playing essential roles both in the family and the society.

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They are often involved in political, social, economic and even religious roles in life. We cannot forget the sterling and noble roles played by Biblical women like Virgin Mary, Esther, Judith, Deborah and other women in human and societal development (cf, Nyoyoko, 2000: 54 – 88).. Unfortunately, these roles have not really been accorded the desired pride of place in the scheme of things by the society as a result of it being a male dominated society.

The Church cannot be completely exonerated from the unfair treatment meted out to women. The activities and roles of women in the Bible and in the society cannot be over-estimated. They are scarcely documented and recognized as though there is nothing remarkable about women and their activities. It is an incontestable fact in all religions and cultures that the awareness of the significant roles being played by women is definitely lagging behind.

Looking back on the issue of feminism and gender inequality, the trend of events as it unfolds itself especially in our local communities concerning women, some of their rights, and what they go through daily in their various communities, we will discover that, society places before them a lot of laws and restrictions, denial of rights and victimization. They are constantly reminded of their place being in the kitchen, and their duty to fulfill their marriage obligations to the man, particularly child bearing. There is the reasoning that this is a man's world and as such women should recognize their place and remain right there. St Paul's teaching regarding the place of women, seemed to have raised a lot of contradictions and inconsistencies and today this same problem has become a global and contemporary issue. Specifically, the place of women in Christianity and indeed in other major religions of the world, its life and leadership, are extremely hot contemporary issue.

In African traditional religion, training of women was regarded totally as a waste of human resources and manpower. In Judaism, women had no part in the Jewish synagogue services; they were shut apart in a section of the synagogue, or in a gallery, where they could not be seen. In Jewish worship, a woman was forbidden to read the Torah to the congregation, for that would mean lessening the honour of the congregation. It was also forbidden for a woman to teach in a school; not even to the youngest children. A woman was exempt from stated demands of the law. It was not obligatory on her to attend the sacred feasts and festivals. In the Jewish traditions, women, slaves and children were classed together. In their morning prayer, a man thanked God for not making him a gentile, slave or a woman.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the woman has lived as 'the second sex' since the first stroke of memorable history. Since time immemorial, most human cultures have tended to take it for granted that man is in the right in being a man, and that it is the woman who is in the wrong for being a woman (Beauvoir, 1953: xviii).. Man, in every age and in every field of life, defines woman not in herself but as relative to himself, thus pushing her to the level of inessential as opposed to the essential. Man makes himself the subject, the absolute, and woman as the other and object. Aristotle, in all his wisdom, maintained that "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness" (Beauvoir, 1953: xviii). For St. Thomas, woman was renounced as an "imperfect man", an "incidental being" (Beauvoir, 1953: xviii). Women were marginalized and disparaged with these

defects and so were expected to put on the popular image of the ideal wife/woman, generally associated with "the Angel in the House". In this way they were expected to be devoted and submissive to their husbands/men just like the Angel, remaining passive and powerless, meek, charming, sympathetic, pious, self-sacrificing, and above all - pure.

The implication in all we have said is that women subjugation has been institutionalized and entrenched into the deepest recesses even of western thought and culture, and indeed into virtually every nook and cranny of human society. From home to office, in business as in religion, from education to politics, in birth as at death, men have everywhere lorded it over women, and this is not because women constitute a minority of humans. Again woman has always been heavily handicapped, and has always been man's dependent, if not his slave and has never shared the world in equality.

Feminist thinkers have criticized and faulted this culture of gender inequality, thus giving birth to women liberation movements that seek to free women from the bondage of male chauvinism. The gender question has assumed an even wider publicity and importance in the context of social justice, activism and the project of global emancipation and human development. Indeed gender inequality has been diagnosed as a socio-cultural malaise for which gender justice is the only panacea. Hence women liberation project with which contemporary humanity is engaged must assume a gender liberation department without which their effort would not be complete.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Feminism and gender inequality culturally and religiously is no longer new to us. Women everywhere suffer inequality, inhuman treatment, and untold hardship and discrimination from birth to death. The notion of the subordination of women in various aspects of our cultural laws and practices has taken a central theme in the discourse and studies on women in development. Women in various ways have tried to fight for their rights and raise their voices against all forms of injustices, inequality and most especially injustices against women in a show of power and resilience. They are unrelenting in their struggle to improve their self-worth despite all odds.

At the birth of a girl-child, she is greeted and welcomed with some sense of rejection into the world, especially if the other children were girls. The woman is treated with scorn and ridiculed, sometimes rejected and denied the right to be happy at the birth of her baby as though the sex of the baby is determined by her. The male child is most preferred in our society, pampered and celebrated at birth, because he is believed to be the heir apparent of the family. They are sent to school while the girl-child is subjected to burdening house hold chores, all in preparation for the societal role of home keeping. Quite often she is given out in marriage at a very tender age to ensure that she is not promiscuous and she is married out as a virgin, thereby exposing her to certain health hazards that go with early marriages. Once married, she becomes inferior and the man's property. She is denied the right to inherit her father's and her husband's property, all in the name of the fact that she is a woman.

Placing our African culture side by side with the Bible, we see that culture, laws, and the language of the Bible treat women just the same as our culture. Many had expressed their disappointment in the Bible basically in the way the Bible is seen to be so harmful to women's wellbeing in certain issues. But for the fact that our culture places a lot of restriction on the women and that according to St. Paul, they should be seen not heard, I am quite certain that some would have gone to the extreme in suggesting that the Bible be thrown away. The case of feminism in recent times has attracted much criticism, especially now that the current issue globally is on women emancipation from gender stereotype or patriarchy and empowerment. In contemporary times many see Paul's teaching on this issue as improbable to be accepted for that would mean accepting the view of inferiority and subordination of women.

The focus for this paper therefore, is to explore ways of establishing liberation for women and making their voices heard. Through this medium, I seek to give women their pride of place in contemporary society, and the distinction between sex and gender is by this fact necessary. They need to be properly treated and appreciated as women. This paper looks at the realities of gender inequality, and consequently, gender emancipation in contemporary Africa. It also endeavours to evaluate, and reflect on the prospects, challenges and fears surrounding the project of gender equality, justice and female emancipation. It will, thereafter, shade upon this discourse light from the scriptures that will lead to authentic living and collaboration, for the authentic transformation of society through works of justice, love and the acquisition of rights, equal to those enjoyed by men, and thereafter draw a meaningful conclusion.

### III. FEMINISM: ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

In my opinion masculinity and femininity are socially constructed, and each culture sets particular standards for men and women. These standards are internalized by men and women in the particular culture. **Feminism** was originally about political equality at the ballot boxes, but challenges began when it moved, whether consciously or unconsciously, into cultural and religious spheres such as the workplace, home, church and temple. In the beginning, feminism fought for giving women the same political rights that men enjoyed.

Feminism must be seen as an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice and liberation for the women and the end of sexism in all forms. However, there are different kinds of feminism. Feminists disagree on a number of things, for instance, they disagree about what sexism consist in, and what ought to be done about it. They also disagree about what it means to be a woman or a man, and what political or social implications gender should have. Challenged by the quest for social justice, feminist inquiry opens up avenues and a range of perspectives on social, cultural, economic and political phenomena. Some of the main concerns of a feminist theory include; class and work, disability, family, Human Rights, popular culture, race and racism etc. These shall be discussed in details.

The status of women in society is an outcome of the interpretation of religious texts and of the cultural and institutional set-up of religious communities (Klingorová and

Havliček, 2015). The role of religion is, obviously, complex and it varies across time and space. Consider gender equality and the emancipation, women as important factors for the economic, social, and democratic progress of the world's regions and for the development of human society. This process is influenced by institutional norms, as well as culture and tradition, which are both largely determined by religion. As the relationship between religion and culture is reciprocal, religious systems are locked in a circle of mutual influence with social norms and patterns of social organisation. Of course, at least one key questions remain to be asked: *How world religions influence on gender inequality?*

In the same vein, the Bible also teaches that "God created man and woman in his image and likeness..." (Gen. 1:27) and both had to cooperate with God in bearing and bringing forth children into the world. They were also commanded to conquer and have dominion over all other creatures of the earth... (Gen.1:28). All are one in God and God never intended or made suggestion to discriminate on issues of social and gender distinction. If God ever intended that there should be distinction between man and woman, he would probably have created a separate birth channel for the man, so that the inequality will be clearly spotted.

**Religion** is a cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations, that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements (Brent Nongbri, 2013). However, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are among the top development goals of every nation. But culture and the social norms arising from it play a significant role in how people perceive women's role in society and can affect the pace at which societies achieve these goals. Gender inequalities likewise exist in all parts of the food system. They are especially noticeable in the status of women as workers, producers, and family members. In many societies, women are (compared with men) paid less, own and control less land, and receive less money and food within than household (regardless of their own contributions towards the household). Gender inequalities belong among the most prevalent forms of social inequality and exist all over the world, with different effects in different regions which is these problems are primarily due to cultural legacies, historical development, geographic location, and, last but not least, the religious norms which predominate in society. Religion as one part of a vital role in the cultural life of different spaces. It is deeply rooted in peoples' experiences and influences the socioeconomic and political direction of societies although, by the social geographic investigation, religion may now be a more important variable than race or ethnicity.

Religion in all world religions today maintain male social dominance within societal structures (Young, 1987). Muslim women have received much attention, there has often been a tendency to represent Muslim women as the 'passive victims of oppressive cultures' and as the 'embodiment of a repressive and 'fundamentalist' religion' in such cases as polygamy which is rooted in Qur'an 4:3.

In India, women bear the brunt of the consequences of cultural attitudes and the impact of religion and politics in their particular. Recognizing the influence of religion and culture on Indian women's lives, man alone has the privilege to transmit his knowledge and powers through a transmission ceremony to

his elder son, and women are not even allowed to witness it. Women should not be allowed to live freely or on their own. She must be always under the care of a male person, father, brother, husband, son or relation, but never a male who is not any of these. Whereas by evidence the religious life (*dharma*) of a man was usually described in terms of his class (*varṇa*; according to his membership of the priestly, ruling, mercantile, or servant class) and stage in life (*āśrama*; according to whether he was a religious student, a married householder, a hermit, or a renunciate), that of a woman-focused solely on the cultural expectations of the good wife (*strīdharmā*). Thus the narrative and prescriptive literature are full of glorification of the ideal wife often startlingly juxtaposed with dire pronouncements regarding the inherently wicked nature of women (*strīsvabhāva*). That, this was a strategy for the control of women is evidenced by the total lack of a parallel opposition between the ideal husband and the essential wickedness of all men. Cultural archetypes reinforce these patterns. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for example, male figures include Rāma (exemplar of the ruling class) and Hanumān (exemplar of the devoted servant). Conversely, for women, Sītā represents the perfect wife, and Kaikeyī stands for the inherent wickedness of women.

Christians who believed in Jesus have challenged the attitudes held by many people towards women as sex objects. There was a Jewish practice (Deuteronomy 21:10–14) that allowed a man to take any woman captured in war as his wife. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:28 against adultery prohibits men to lust after any women in his heart. This means he may not even think about her as a sex object, let alone take her as a sexual possession or trophy of victory in war. So far, in my opinion, the Bible, as many Christians interpret it, indicates that God not clearly intended man and woman to have different roles. Most mainline traditional Christians will affirm those gender roles are not a social construct and will point to specific passages from the Bible where men and women are given different roles by God. In response to these issues, everyone must believe that religious law does exist in real life, but on another side, you must be open-minded to change yourself in order to know about rationality behaviour.

The term feminism is characterized with problems of meaning and definition. Many give different meanings and interpretations, which often adopt particular characters in a variety of ways. Some writers use the term 'feminism' to refer to historical specific movement in the USA and Europe; others use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices and discrimination against women. Generally, feminism is a term viewed as ideology of women's movement itself, aimed at creating a world for women beyond simply, woman's liberation. The word feminism has a history in English linked with women's activism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. It is pertinent to differentiate feminist ideas from feminist political movements, for in times where there are political movements around women's subordination, individuals have always advocated for the rights, equal treatment, and justice for the women.

The term 'feminism' was used in the mid-1800s to refer to "the qualities of females". It was not until after the first international conference in Paris in 1892 that the term was used in English for a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of equality of the sexes (cf. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-topics>). In the

early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'feminism' was first referred to one particular group of women's right advocates, such as that which emphasized the uniqueness of women, the mystical experience of motherhood and women's special purity (Jagger, 1983). Based on this, many groups and individuals have engaged in projecting women's issues which came to be classified as feminist. The underlying factor for this is the belief that, women suffer injustice and truly so, because, of their gender status. This notion therefore, brought about many suggestions offered by various feminists on the different and best way to handle it. Feminism in this sense is aimed at supporting the equality of women and actively training them to accept non-traditional, standards, laws and taboos that keep women unequal. Hence, there emerged the agitation for women emancipation and freedom from oppressed communities in order to make the world a better place for women, retaining the critical perspective and treasuring diversity. Thus, feminism focuses on improving the world not just for the woman, but for the world as a whole.

The feminist study of gender and religion started in the 1960s and '70s, when some scholars and women began to feel increasingly dissatisfied with the position of women (e.g. Mary Daly) in religion. The notion of gender equality was premised upon realization that the worldwide malaise of sexism and gender discriminations is an intricate part of the problem of social justice and human development. Put otherwise, gender equality has to do with efforts towards gender justice, considering that gender inequality is a crucial challenge to social justice and human development. For further appreciation of the concept of gender equality, it is important to make a few clarifications about sex and gender, and about gender inequality, before attending to the concept of gender equality.

#### IV. NORMATIVE AND DESCRIPTIVE COMPONENTS OF FEMINISM

Feminism in this case involved two sets of claims, the normative and the descriptive. The normative claims is concerned with how women ought or ought not to be viewed and treated and draws on a background conception of justice or broad moral position; the descriptive is concerned with how women are viewed and treated, noting that they are not being treated in accordance with the standard of justice or morality invoked in the normative claims. Both work for the same reason, which is to change the way things are. Thus feminism is not just intellectual but also a political movement. Hence the simplistic definition by the liberalists: normative-men and women are entitled to equal rights and respect; descriptive-women are currently disadvantaged with respect to rights and respect, compared with men. The point here is that this claims focuses on what is the case and not what ought to be the case.

Admittedly, feminist also differ in their opinions of what would count as justice and injustice, what would count as equality and inequality, oppression, disadvantaged and what right should everyone be accorded? What sort of injustice women should suffer, and what aspects of women current situation are seen as harmful or unjust? These concerns were clearly articulated by Jagger (1994) when he said that "disagreement may also lie in the explanations of the injustice: two feminists may agree that women are

unjustly being denied proper rights and respect and yet substantively differ in their accounts of how or why the injustice occurs and what is required to end it". Susan James (1998: 576) also noted that "feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization there are, however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine, or as implying an agreed political program.

#### V. BETWEEN SEX AND GENDER

Sex and gender are very often confused, or treated as if they were synonymous. They are not; sex and gender do not mean the same thing. Sex, is a biological concept, a biological fact. It has to do with certain physical, chemical and emotional difference which naturally occur as a biological givens and on which the distinction between male and female is made. Here we can think of hormonal constitutions, sexual organs, puberty manifestations, reproductive systems, etc. Gender on the other hand, is nothing but a social construct specifying the socially and culturally prescribed roles into which men and women are expected to cast themselves. According to Rose Uchem (2007:3), "gender is a society's expectation of how boys and girls, men and women, in a given culture ought to feel, look or behave". Furthermore as Ekanem (2007:28) has noted in *Gender and Seminary Formation* that "gender often finds expression in roles, which are socially and culturally determined and vary from culture to culture and from area to area". The reality of gender inequality is to be seen as a costume, a mask, a straightjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance. In effect, gender is nothing but a politicization (and a very grossly unjust and culturally entrenched one at that) of the biological facts of femininity and masculinity.

The eminent French feminist philosopher Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986) has in her book, *The Second Sex* (1953), attempted an inquiry into the origin and nature of this unruly politicization of sexuality and the consequent fact of gender inequality. She opined that men's subjugation of women is not a biological fact but "a historical event". She further linked the birth of the gender issue with male notion of superiority (based on male ferocity in mankind's earliest warfare) as well as with the female physical and emotional disabilities that come with periods of pregnancy and maternity. Women are women, she says, only "in virtue of their anatomy and physiology". She admits that "they have always been subordinated to men throughout history; hence their dependency is not the result of historical event or a social change, it was not something that occurred". Thus the reason why their subjugation seems to be an absolute, she says, "is in part that it lacks the contingent or incidental nature of historical facts...a condition brought about at a certain time can be abolished at some other time..., natural condition is beyond the possibility of change". This gender phenomenon has got itself nursed and nurtured all through history and has so negatively pervaded every facet of human society and culture that it has long seemed untouchable. It is today globally identified as an enemy to be combated and

conquered. It is labeled gender inequality, to which we now turn.

#### VI. GENDER INEQUALITY

By gender inequality we mean the reality of sexual stratification in our cultures and societies within which females appear generally subjected to male domination, so that the female is on every matter rated, in comparison with the male counterpart as nothing better than "the second sex", the subordinate sex. The claim of recent gender studies is that in the overall social atmosphere women are seen among the very poor, deprived and most exploited group. Caste systems, class discriminations and racial segregations are all light-footed compared to the burden women bear from gender inequality, which has nothing of its like in normal life experience.

Almost every human culture is observed to have institutionalized a certain kind of "male privilege" which not only presupposes male superiority in the mindset of the males, and of course of women also, but is also actually lived out in every facet of daily life, beginning from the bedroom, to education opportunities and career choices, to employment opportunities, to ownership of property, to social security, to political participation, and even to religious rights and obligations. In the words of Simone De Beauvoir (1953),

*Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as men, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognized in the abstract, long standing custom prevents their full expression in the mores. In the economic spheres men and women can almost be said to make up two castes; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than the new competitors. In industry and politics men have a great many more positions and they monopolize the most important posts... At the present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is a world that belongs to men...*

In 1980, the United Nations summed up the yolk of this inequality thus: "Women, who comprise half the world's population, do two thirds of the world's work, earn one tenth of the world's income, and own one hundredth of the world's property". To be sure, we know that family resources in most

cultures are owned by men, with women left out as their dependents, too powerless to afford participation even in matters of family decisions. Many cultures pay women far less for their labours, even when they obviously do equal jobs with the men, or even do more. Otherwise, women are simply presumed incompetent just for the reason that they are women, or denied employment opportunities for fear of maternity leaves. They are similarly excluded from formal education, and that is why women illiteracy continues to redouble men's. Women suffer even more alienation in the political arena, where they have traditionally been judged incapable, and made unwelcome. Little wonder even in America, which now claims to be the seat of civilization, it was only in 1920 that women first exercised their right to vote.

A new platform of gender inequality has recently developed in the name of information and communication technology (ICT). Linuxchix Africa (cf. <http://www.africanlinuxchix.org>) has been lamenting that gender inequality has assumed a new dimension in the form of what is called "a digital divide", in which case the ICT, which presently rules the world, is also allowed to be male dominated. Meanwhile feminist theologians have likewise criticized what is considered as the male exclusiveness of the church and its traditions. They reject the androcentric bias in which, in the words of Richard McBrien (1994:144) "*God is imaged and conceptualized as male, male experience is assumed to be normative for all human experience, women are identified with the carnal and irrational, and are held responsible for the entry of sin into the world*". Represented by women scholars such as Phyllis Tribles, Mary Daly, Teresa Okure, Catherine Mow La Cugna, and Elizabeth Johnson, Pauline Eboh, Tina Beattie, etc, theological feminists not only reject theological androcentricism, but together with all patriarchal structures that have flowed from it down the centuries into the Church. Above all, gender inequality has over the years grown into a culture of domestic violence against women and children. Here we consider obnoxious cultural practices like female circumcision, and female femicide and infanticide, a woman being tagged as unclean because of her natural process of life, like menstruation and child birth, the older women not receiving Holy communion when they are menstruating, a nursing mother is termed as unclean until her child dedication where she will undergo a ritual cleansing. This in fact is the origin of child dedication, she is not allowed to go to the stream on a certain day, she cannot drink wine on a forbidden day, she cannot split colanut in the presence of men, she must be seen not heard etc. There is also noticed in our Nigerian society cases of outright femicide where housewives, teenagers, and college students have overtime disappeared and later been found naked, disemboweled, dismembered, sexually mutilated, beheaded, and dumped in abandoned pits (cf. Aaron, 2003; Agbu, 2003; Angye, et al. 2004; Asen, 2004; Booth, 2003; Chukwuma, 2005; Ezeilo, 2002; Ezeilo, 2003; Nwankwo, 2003). One can say that these have become cases of gender atrocities and not just a question of inequality (cf. Madunagu, 2009; McDonnel, 2003; Nwankwo, 2002).

The African woman not only shares in all the aforementioned but also assumes an even more unpromising lot in daily existence. Ekanem (2007:44) has articulated this quite vividly; he maintains that "the African woman has a lot

to contend with daily, be it her being battered by her husband, or the jealousy of co-wives, or working daily under the scourging tropical sun with not much to show for it, or the excruciating pain of circumcision and its after effects, trauma of rape and other abuses, or daily having to put up with domestic violence in all its ramifications". It is against the backdrop of the foregoing scenario of gender atrocities that the concept of gender equality has evolved.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has thoroughly opined that women are generally subservient to men. Certain laws both traditional and religion, place certain restrictions and taboos on the path of women. Their traditional and religious laws stipulate that women should obey their husbands and be submissive to them, to the church and the society. For the past years, gender issue has become a global concern, a burning issue of concern culturally and biblically, within and outside our culture and religion. It has become such a growing concern that, from the beginning of human history Biblically and culturally, women have always been at the receiving end. They are pregnant for nine months, brought forth and suckle their babies, attend to the needs and cries of the baby while at the same time attending to the men's needs. In summary, women are alive to take care of the men and remain subordinate to male authority; they are largely excluded from status occupations and from positions of authority. Leadership roles are restricted for the males. Mostly in the Catholic churches, the Priestly ordinations and the celebration of Holy Eucharist are roles reserved only for males. Many leadership positions in the church are considered as men position. Quite often, women roles in the traditional religious settings have been mis-represented and misunderstood, and the position of women in our contemporary society is at its very low state.

Feminism is an ideology or social movements that advocate for the right and total emancipation of women in all aspects of life. It seeks to establish educational, professional opportunities that are equal to that of men. Right from the early days, women have been subjected to second position by the man of the house. In most of the society, women are only seen, not heard, according to St. Paul, they must not teach in public places or in the church (cf. 1 Timothy 2: 11 – 12; 1 Corinthians 14: 33 – 35). They are often greeted with deep rooted laws and taboos that impede their liberation from both their culture and Biblical enslavement.

Socio-culturally, women are listed as the property of the man, his personal inheritance because he paid her dowry. Religion on the other hand is not helping matters; it was believed that religion should give the women their pride of place, fights and provide for the rights of women, is mostly accused or seen as promoting violence against women and inequality, teachings that sees women as subordinate. Women, who live in oppressive circumstances, find consolation in the Word of God, because they believe that the Bible provides the solution to their plights. It consoles, nourishes and is capable of sustaining them in their struggles and brings them hope. This, however, does not imply that women should sit idle and expect God to redress their suppressed status. They are to stand up and insist for the equality of the children of God.

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