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RELIGION AND THE STATUS OF NIGERIAN WOMEN

In the old, old days ... women were more powerful than the men, for to them alone the mysteries of the god and of secret things were made known. By such knowledge they were enabled to keep all males as servants, employing them to do the heaviest work. Especially because of the strength of their limbs and greater endurance were men found useful as fighters ...¹

Now at first women greatly outnumber men upon earth, but after a while the latter began to multiply and in course of time they grew discontented with their lot.²

1. A Preamble

These two quotations give a picture of the power held by women in a part of Nigeria, the former Cross River State to be more precise. There is no doubt that the same could be said of every part of the country. The dominant tradition states that in the remote past women held the sway in religious sphere as well as in the political. In the topic - "Religion and the status of women" - therefore, is implied the inevitability of dualism as a basis of the world order. The cosmological world itself follows a rigid dichotomy between day and night, light and darkness, sun and moon, land and sea, white and black, heaven and earth, and between man and woman.

When we discuss development, we think of the contributions by both men and women whose existence and sustenance as individuals are deeply rooted in the family structure. We cannot over emphasize the fact that the development of a nation is the combined effort of individual men and women as a team. The efforts made by each group may be direct or indirect. There is usually a division of labour; and

1. Talbot, D.A. : *Women's Mysteries of a Primitive People* (London : Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1915), p. 196.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

men are usually credited with the more direct contribution while women play a more subtle and indirect role. Women spend more of their time making life comfortable for the men who are in the majority among those holding scientific and executive positions.

The agents of development which have influenced family structure could be listed as education, urbanization, industrialization, medical facilities, economic progress (trading etc.), culture contact and modern religion. It is in the field of religion that we are mainly concerned and we shall examine the structure of women in religion vis-a-vis their position in the family; the way in which this status reduced the contribution of women to development and the way in which agents of development have affected women's status in religion; their family role will also be explained. But the extent to which women could be exposed to these factors and the extent to which they could participate or contribute largely depends on their status in the family structure. It is very pertinent to mention here that culture is very basic to religion for religion is either interwoven with culture or, at least, coloured by it.

The term "status" is a bundle of rights and obligations, privileges and immunities. According to Max Radin, "status is essentially a legal term and connotes the sum of the legal capacities of an individual, his powers to enforce legal rights and obligations either for himself or for others".³ As we know, various factors ranging from birth, economic class, age, sex, may affect status. But we are concerned with sex.

Lastly, it is appropriate to make some observations here about religion:

1. that religion is a complex of man's interactions with the superhuman powers—a process of vital and reciprocal interplay between the human and the supernatural.
2. that there are two aspects of religion:
 - (a) the objective and external phenomena, and
 - (b) the subjective hidden experience of psychic life although it may be difficult to isolate these two aspects.

3. Max Radin on "Status" in *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*.

3. that religion has a public organization and practises cults recognized by all.

It is with the objective, external phenomena aspect of religion and with religious institutions that this paper will be largely concerned although the subjective helps to bring the actor to the forefront of the drama of religion. For example certain men have charismatic ability to see and hear with their inner eyes and ears what the ordinary man does not see or hear until it is revealed to him: Of priesthood, Bertholet says "Men are unequal as regards their capacity for religious experience; superior capacity inheres not only in priesthood, an institution which derives from the abnormal endowments of certain individuals, but also in founders of religion and in all religious reformers."⁴ With all this background information we can now examine the status of Nigerian women with reference to religion.

2. The Religious Role of Women in the Traditional Society

One major idea we must bear in mind is that the Nigerian society is predominantly patriarchal. Then the question arises: What relevance has family structure to religion? There are definite illustrations to show how religion could act as a determinant of status or of position of authority held by a woman in a family, for example the case of *omu* - Queen of the town - among the Bendel Igbos of Nigeria. This woman wields a politico-religious power obtained through religion and which also turns her into the head of a family even above her father or brother.

The *Omu* is selected by an oracle at which instance her status changes dramatically. If she were a wife, she abandons her husband and children and returns to her natal family where a palace is built for her. She attains a higher position than all the men in the town except the King. She becomes the head of the *Omu* society whose members must be at least 40 years old, even if she were much younger. Furthermore, she plays the role of a man as head of a new family of procreation. In this position she can "marry" as many women as she wishes. The children by these women as a result of cohabitation with secret husbands belong to her, she being their legal father while the unknown men play the role of surrogate husbands. It is very clear that religious

4. Bertholet Alfred on "Religion" in *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*.

status is very much the determining factor for the family authority enjoyed by the *Omu*.

By this religious authority bestowed upon her, she confers the title *Inwene*, Spirit of the land, on some women who form an exclusive women guild called *Izu Inwene*, which is almost a social club while the *Omu* society plays a more religious role – performing sacrifices to ward off an epidemic and the *Omu* herself cares for the welfare of the town and its market. The description of a witch, a traditional religious concept which is usually associated with powerful old women who are revered in the society is attributed to her, and with her staff of authority (a broom bound at the handle with cowrie shells) she confers blessings on the men, women and children of the town. Her other attribute is her deep knowledge of herbs and native medicine.

Again in the Cross River and Akwa Ibom States women traditionally wielded great religious powers as could be perceived from the quotations with which this paper is started. Tradition holds that it was because women let out the secret of their cults to men that the latter became superior in every way. This is well illustrated in the *Ekpo Nyoho* – “Ghosts – the destroyers” which used to be an exclusive women’s secret society but is now taken over by men exclusively. Another example of women’s secret societies in the area is the *Iban-Isong* Society – “Women of the land”, the members of which display valour equivalent to that of their warrior husbands by wearing men’s clothes and dancing about all night as sympathetic magic to uphold their warrior husbands’ courage. In addition, the image of the *Eka Ekong* – “Mother of Ekong” is a man dressed as a woman who bestows blessings at the beginning of the new yam season. What has been said is only illustrative of the fact that Nigerian women had relatively greater involvement and higher status in religion in ancient days than in modern times.

In the western part of Nigeria, there is no doubt that there are traditional religious practices that are exclusively for men but which, strictly speaking, do not exclude women. The *Oro* cult is probably the only one which is absolutely for men only. In the case of *Agemo* which is almost in the same class as *Oro*, the exclusive nature of membership is qualified. When the chief priest of *Agemo* goes to his grove *Imosan*, all women must abandon the streets and the open on the pain of death and go into hiding. He must not set his eyes on

even his mother or wife otherwise it would be an unpleasant duty from which he must not shirk to shower imprecations on her and bid her to go home and "sleep" even though he would thereby become an orphan or a widower on his return from the grove. A woman who defies "*Oro*" rules and goes out when she should not, is never seen again; for as the saying goes: "There are no remnants of *Oro*'s victuals". Such is the strictness of the procedure and marks the only similarity between the two cults. But on his return from the grove, the *Agemo* chief priest has an outing dance - women are not only allowed to watch him dance but they use the occasion to pray him for gifts. The barren women, for instance, ask for children but they must not go too close to him; let him alone officiate in his worship.

Egungun is almost an exclusive preserve of men although there is a tradition that women originated the cult. Usually it is men who put on the *Egungun* attire and parade the streets as visitors from the other world. However women have some roles to play here. Most family *Egunguns* are attended by their women folks gaily dressed and singing praises of their ancestors now visiting from the great beyond. Very occasionally women go beyond this praise - singing role and get really involved in the most secret aspects of the appearance of *Egungun*. Usually men are the *Mogbas*, promoters for all the *Egungun* in a locality but there is always an *Iya Agan*, the matron of the cult who participates in all the secret rituals. History has recorded at least one woman *Mogba* - the Eki of Ojowo in Ijebu - Igbo. She was at the height of her power in the late 20s and early 30s. During this time, she was respected and dreaded by all *Ojes* (*Egungun* High Priests) in Ijebu land and beyond. And when she died in 1932 she was accorded such burial honours as no *Mogba* had received before or after her.

Apart from the religions in which men dominate or in which they barely tolerate participation of women, the Yoruba of Nigeria also practise those rituals in which women participate on equal or almost equal footing with men, and they also have rituals which men practise exclusively. Women participate freely in the worship of the community gods and spirits; and in a number of *rites de passage* such as naming ceremonies, youth initiation rites, marriages and burials in which women have definite roles to perform by virtue of their positions in the family. The worship of *Esu* (the trickster god) or of *Sango* (the god of thunder) or of any of the water spirits in the Delta area involved

the full participation of women. They could be devotees and priestesses but scarcely does one find women involved with rituals e.g. sacrifices. According to Sundkler "women are not involved in magic and ritual generally, they seldom become witch-doctors, rain makers or other types of magicians".⁵ But a large majority of the possessed or the mediums are women. Any woman so possessed must not cohabit with a man even if she were married. They are considered talented psychics and Africans generally think that women have mystic powers naturally. Their roles as mothers, protectors, and nourishers make them naturally prepared for taking care of the spiritual or moral life of human communities.

In the secret societies women are not admitted as a matter of course. They are not trusted and are considered to be incapable of keeping secrets. A more practical and domestic reason which is basic is that they do not have the time to be committed outside the domestic family. Sometimes, a lone woman who has passed child-bearing age is admitted and given a place of honour with a title bestowed on her. This corresponds to the period when her role in the extended family is increased by the fact that her ripe age and mature judgement now command a lot of respect all over while her roles in the nuclear family diminish correspondingly.

Before we discuss the place of women in the church today, we need to catch a glimpse of what it was at the beginning of the Christian era.

3. The Role of Women in Early Christian Community

i. Paul and Women

A look at Paul shows that he was clearly culture bound. His was a patriarchal society in which a woman had an almost exclusive domestic function – to serve man; being the property first of a father then of a husband. Paul never fully escaped this view although he had glimpses of the radical New Order which had been established in Christ that "there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). By this he meant that with regard to what God had revealed, accomplished and recorded through Christ, men and women are on the same footing.

5. Sundkler, B. *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: O. U. P. nd.) pp. 139ff.

However Paul never even began to relate this vision to the life of the church in its gathered and scattered forms. He did appreciate individual women like Priscilla whom he described as "my fellow worker in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 16:3) and commended to the church in Rome "our dear sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1). But his generalizations about women mirrored only a rabbinic conservatism inherited from his fathers – "women should keep silence in the churches for they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate as even the law says" (1 Cor. 14:34). Krister Stendahl rightly says "the question of women's place in the cult and ministry and in the Christian home and in society is dealt with on the self-same principle: the subordination in creation."⁶

Thus within the writing of one man alone, and him the most influential apostle, we see a profound conflict between two views of women. On the one hand, the cultural view which deemed women inferior, domestic and uninvolved in the political and economic life of the world; and on the other hand, the fully Christian view which claimed for her complete and transforming participation in the new morality. No wonder then Polly Allen Robinson concluded that "the New Testament is confused about women".⁷

But the problem with "Paul" is not Paul himself nor his text but with the way his texts have been applied to modern times. The women's stereotyped place of subordination to and dependence on man has been buttressed by a literalistic use of some biblical texts (1 Tim. 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 11:3, 8-9) according to which "woman is a secondary creature designed to be man's help mate because she was created from the man's rib".⁸ This argument ignores the other text (Gen. 1:27) which highlights the idea of partnership. But even if the text would be taken literally, it is note worthy that she was not made from his foot to be his footbrush, nor from the head to dominate him, but from the side to be his companion, his complement.

One thing people fail to realize is that Paul distinguishes between his experience of Christ and the expression of his personal opinion

6. Stendahl, K. *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 39.

7. Robinson, P.A. "Women in Christ" in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* Vol. xix, March, 1964 No. 3, p. 138.

8. *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register* Vol. LX No. 3 March, 1970, p. 4.

because of the prevailing situation. Hence the need to distinguish between the transitory and the permanent in Paul. Those who took the conservative position assumed that Paul's view could be taken as a generally valid Christian view normative for all times as if the theological and ecclesiastical present is to be determined by the theological and ecclesiastical past. But Paul could never have meant them to be "the law of the Medes and Persians" which must not be changed. Rather, if he asked: "Judge yourselves is it fitting for a woman to pray in public without covering her hair?" he was asking a question which gave the church to whom he wrote the freedom to answer according to their intelligence and vision. The church of England, though unwilling to ordain women, rightly declared:

The Church everywhere and at all times should not be bound by certain injunctions found appropriate to the social circumstances of the Christian Congregations in the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire during the 1st century.⁹

ii. The Gospels and Women

Even though Jesus never established a church but rather left the organization of one to his disciples, the final authority of its administration should rest in his teaching. And going through the Gospels, we discover that Jesus brought many revolutionary ideas and so challenged the pattern of many structures that the religious leaders feared he had come to abolish the law and the Prophets. In the force of the entrenched discrimination, Jesus took a revolutionary stand in His attitude towards women. He was busy breaking down barriers, breaking all the man made laws set up because of sin. In talking to the Samaritan woman, he broke several barriers, - the barrier of sex because the disciples were surprised; the barrier of race, for she was a Samaritan; the barrier of religion, for she was considered a Gentile (John 7:27).

Although there were no women amongst the 12 disciples, there were many who played a prominent part in the earthly ministry of Jesus and whom Jesus used to the limit of their training and ability and as much as the circumstances of the time permitted. Although women were

9. Harold Wilson : *Women Priests? Mes Now* (Nutfield Surrey : Denholm House Press, 1975), p. 10.

by Jewish tradition not allowed near the Sanctuary, it was they who stood nearest to the crucified Lord at the moment of the greatest sacrifice in history. And although no woman was called to be an apostle, it was to a woman that He said "Go tell" (Matt. 28:7). This woman was the first to bear "the glad tidings" and till today priests, bishops and popes are still busy spreading the very news proclaimed by this woman. Besides, with the tearing of the veil in the Temple, both clergy and laity, men and women became one; the distinction was removed and the demarcation wiped clean.

If Jesus and Paul recognised the work of women not just as wives and mothers, but as indispensable in their crusade for spreading the Gospel; why then should "the inspiration of Christ's spirit in matters of church management be supposed to be limited to males?"¹⁰

4. Women and the Church in Nigeria Today

How greatly the church continues to repress women is seen in a decree from the highest authority of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II during his visit to the U.S.A. - "Women will not be admitted to the priestly office because it goes counter to Jesus' intention".¹¹ But how can anyone enlist the intention of Jesus to support this procedure? And in West Africa, the Anglican Church tied on to the apron-string of the Church of England is unwilling to do anything that will jeopardize the relations with Rome and Constantinople because "neither Orthodoxy nor Roman Catholicism would feel warmly towards discontinuing the tradition of an all-male priesthood".¹² But I submit that "we-didn't-do-it-in-the-past" is an evasion not an argument.

In Africa generally today more and more Church meetings are putting on their agenda the question of the role of women in the Church but hardly ever the question of their ordination. The question "where do women come in?" was posed by some participants at the 1976, 10th Annual Conference of the Department of Religious Studies,

10. Mossie Wyker: *Church Women in the Scheme of Things* (St. Louis Missouri: The Bethany Press), 1953, p. 30.

11. Ida Reming "Equal But Other" in *Theology Digest* Vol. 29 No. 1, Spring, 1981, p. 21f.

12. Clifford Langley: "Women Priests Unlikely in this Generation" in *The Times* (London; Monday March 10, 1976), p. 6.

University of Ibadan which considered the church's evangelization task. This naturally led to the debate on the ordination of women. The participants repeatedly said that the church cannot ordain women because Christ had only 12 male disciples. They ignored the fact that neither those barbaric olden days nor even our lethally scientific and relatively advanced age would encourage a woman to become an itinerant missionary. And since leadership does not fall on peoples' lap without their working vigorously for it, women could not expect in those days to have leadership offered them on a platter of gold. So, there is no doubt that the inability of some churches to ordain women has nothing to do with the "maleness" of the disciples. Rather, "behind the debate lies the less admissible thought: if women came in, would they eventually take over? would they want to be bishops or even archbishops".¹³

What is surprising and not a little baffling is that in this century when evangelization involves less hazardous enterprise, women, who constitute more than 75% of the numerical strength of the church, have still not made much progress in sharing with men the leadership of the church as is done in all other sectors of human endeavours. They are nonetheless expected to perform some of the functional tasks of the church, give as much financial support as they care to, prepare church halls, arrange flowers and launder Altar linens; but are, unfortunately, completely ignored or very meagerly represented at Policy Making Levels. Nevertheless, most women are satisfied with their role as "the fuel that keeps the clergy going".¹⁴

It is however generally asserted that the *Aladura* Pentecostal Churches usually give women more room for an expression of leadership abilities than the historic Euro-American Churches. But a review of the involvement of women in some African Independent Churches reveals that the traditional male superiority and male privilege has been reinforced by the refusal of the "historic churches" to ordain women coupled with the traditional biases.

In these Indigenous Churches although men and women are involved according to their God-given charismata and women indeed feature very

13. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

14. Onwurah, P.E.C. : *Christian Ethics with Special Reference to Marriage Among the Igboe People of Nigeria* (an unpublished thesis), Ibadan, 1979, p. 103.

prominently as visioners and prophetesses, and may earn the title *Iya Alakoso* meaning "Superintending Mother", they scarcely have the privilege of administering the sacraments – an office guarded jealously by men; and only few of the churches have women as head. Rather they follow closely the practice of African Traditional Religion (ATR) for the very Africanness of these churches implies that some taboos of the traditional religion have been transferred in the Christian practices. An example that comes readily to mind is the menstruation taboos which are used in A.T.R. to exclude women from religious rituals. Bishop Ore Banjo of the Church of the Lord Aladura is quoted by Turner as preaching that "*menstruation and fornication are deadly enemies to the angels; they fly at the slightest smell of them . . . Both situations cause ritual uncleanness, but whereas fornication can be washed away through ritual, menstruation cannot* (underlining mine).¹⁵ Hence Amba Oduyoye concludes that the Church of the Lord does not know what to say about women.¹⁶

Infact, in the Aladura and some Anglican Churches, menstruating women are advised not to take the Holy Communion. In some churches they are not even allowed to attend services and in others, they are excluded from the main church building and must not as much as wear their prayer gowns. But they can sing and drop in the offerings. If they are considered clean in spirit and their money usable in the church, why should they be excluded anyway? It is because of this factor of menstruation that the Aladura Churches, following the practice in A.T.R. ordain into the ministry of the sacraments only women who are passed menopause otherwise they would appoint delegates during their menses.¹⁷ One cannot help but ask why should the Creator God object to the power of procreation? The fact remains that the church instead of challenging culture, allowed its own life to be shaped up by culture and non-Christian taboos about the uncleanness of women.¹⁸ Thus all these women are used by their male church leaders as their sisters in the traditional religion have always been used – "as the power behind the throne".¹⁹ Howbeit,

15. H.W. Turner, *The Church of the Lord Aladura* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 47.

16. Amba Oduyoye: "Women Theologians and the Church in Africa – A Study of Relevance" – a Paper Presented at the Consultation for Women Theology Students July 24–30, 1978 at Cartigny Switzerland, p. 9.

17. C.G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1982), p. 134.

18. Harold Wilson: *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

19. Amba Oduyoye: *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

some more liberal denominations like the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria have ordained a few women priests, others like the Anglican Church have licenced women Lay Readers while the Baptist and Methodist Churches have a few deaconesses. But this practice has not become widespread. And whereas Captain Abiodun heads a section of the Cherubim and Seraphim, no other woman holds a similar position in the historic churches or in Islam. I am yet to discover a female Canon, Archdeacon, bishop-Patriarch or Imam.

5. Islam and Women

The situation in Islam is not any better. Infact Islam is not as liberal as Christianity in its treatment of women for there is a disability placed on women in the exercise of their faith. They can only pray in a particular section of the mosque. The idea is probably that because women are subjected by nature to 4 or 5 days of "impurity" every month, their presence in certain parts of the mosque would pollute worship. Secondly the fact that the Koran or the religion and practice based on it allows men to marry more than one wife tends to make women less than partners in marriage. What is more, the man who is rich enough, or thinks he is rich enough to afford it, is not only permitted to marry as many wives as he can maintain,²⁰ but he is allowed to keep them in seclusion. This could be a form of imprisonment and unnecessary denial of freedom especially when the man is not of sufficient means to maintain comfortably the unfortunate women in the purdah. This practice of keeping women in purdah in Nigeria hinders both their contribution to economic and political development and it also cuts them from the influence of education and other culture contacts. The teaching of the Koran has been exaggerated as St. Paul's injunctions have been.

Today, the acquisition of education is helping greatly to enhance the status of Muslim women in Nigeria - bring more equality of status between husband and wife in the family setting, but they are still unequal in the religious institution and practice. Although women who have made the holy pilgrimage to Mecca are referred to as *Alhajas* (the counterpart of *Alhaji*), there is no female equivalent of Imam, the accredited spiritual leader of the mosque. And it is doubtful if a woman could conduct services in front of a mixed congregation however vast her knowledge in the Koran or however educated and intelligent she may be.

20. J.A. Hardon, *Religions of the World*, Vol. Two (New York : Image Books, 1968), p. 90.

But before the introduction of Islam to Nigeria, Hausa women wielded not only economic, but also political power sometimes equal to that wielded by men. But the introduction of Islam changed all this and worsened the status of women: for its law forbids Hausa women holding offices or engaging in economic activities on equal footing with men. Rather, they were locked up in the purdah. Thus legally, the Hausa women become minor and absolutely dependent on their husbands or male relatives.

With time Hausa women found solace in the cult of Bori spirits. This cult is, in a nutshell, one of being possessed. The spiritual leader is generally a woman and is called *Magajiya*. She has a number of assistants both males and females, the former being predominantly messengers and juju consultants. Both the Muslim and the Pagan Hausa have definite beliefs in the existence and power of the Bori spirits which inhabit the bush and other similar places like the Greek and Roman gods which in addition to inhabiting Mount Olympus were also to be found in strange places like the woods, the waters and the groves. Michael Onwuejeogwu quotes Ahmadu Bello as saying: "They believed that the bush, or certain parts of it, was haunted by spirits, most of them evil. We were frightened of them too, but more of the great wind devils".²¹

The great significance is that the Bori cult gives the women an opportunity to obtain privileges and respect that were denied them in the normal domestic or religious (moslem) circumstances. This is because "women are more susceptible than men to spirit possession... Husbands treat wives who are possessed with a deference and submission that are totally absent in their normal relations".²²

This is a clear case of enhanced status as a result of religion.

6. Women in the Scheme of Change

As a matter of fact since Jesus released women and used them in the ministry, He intended that they should continue to "grow in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). By their service to the church as "Marthas" and by the ministry of the "Marys" in so far as the "Marys" are allowed to serve, women

21. Onwuejeogwu, M. in *Man in Africa* (edited by Douglas and Kaberry, 1969), p. 289.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

are daily growing in favour with God. It is only at the point of growing in favour with men that women have been most discouraged, that is within the church or the mosque. Women consequently are restless. They know that the church or the mosque is the last stronghold of male domination. Indeed no other profession is so extensively closed to them.

That they have resources of spiritual power and inner security to assume initiatives in their communities should not and cannot be doubted. It is evident that women organizations in the Christian Churches in Nigeria are more efficiently and energetically run than the male counterparts if and where the latter exist. With the result that a church leader who falls out with the women in his congregation is definitely in trouble. How else could women demonstrate their ability to administer the church of God. "We cannot therefore" suggests Edwin T. Dahlberg, "afford to have a system of perpetual purdah in the Christian Church, imitating women of the church to quiet influence behind the ecclesiastical screen".²³ Theology is clearly deficient if it excludes the insights of a section of humanity for any reason whatever. Women should not therefore "just be allowed certain opportunities, admitted to certain privileges and not be accepted as having rights - a situation which makes the question of their status in the church, (or mosque), a matter of expediency not of principle..."²⁴ (brackets mine). In the words of Rev. Fr. Wijngaards "excluding women from the church's ministry is *Prime-facie* a clear form of ecclesiastical discrimination".²⁵

The question is much more than one of opportunity for women to take their just and rightful place in the church. It is concerned with the total economy of spiritual gifts as developed in 1st Cor. 12; It was the church which put women down and it is essential for the church to revise its understanding of itself and radically change its structures so that true partnership may be achieved in the mission of the church leading to a divine harmony to which both men and women must learn to contribute their full share and range of talents for the social and spiritual growth of the people.

23. Mossie Wykker : *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

25. Fr. Wijngaards in "Should Women be Ordained Priests?" in *Sunday Times* (a weekly Nigerian Paper) August 31, 1986, p. 16.

7. Conclusion

It is definitely only a short sighted observer who has not known that a great shift is occurring in all contemporary societies about the traditional relationship associated with the comparative status and place of women and men.²⁶ We are today living in a time of social upheaval and it appears that we are entering upon a new state of human evolution. Characteristic of our age is the breakdown of class distinctions which have persisted since the human race moved from its infancy into its adolescence. Those class distinctions have been expressed in hierarchical patterns of society in which all lived out their existence in fixed roles, more or less modified according to the circumstances and individual disposition.

This hierarchical vision of the world was reflected in the structures of the church and justified by her theology. These structures still remain. But living in an age in which women have gained access to nearly all the professions the situation within the church is anachronistic! Since most Christian communities only came into Nigeria in the mid-19th century, the fetters of Euro-American traditionalism in theology and church policy should not be allowed to be a stumbling block to women's involvement in the church; neither should the negative elements in African traditional beliefs and practices be allowed to cripple the legitimate struggle of women to be themselves.

26. Robert Hendersen "Reflections on the Ordination of Women" Study Encounter SE/O2 Vol. vii, No. 1, 1971, p. 1.