

Following the model of Jesus: Rethinking women discipleship in Catholic tradition

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In the Synoptic Gospels, women are definitely not called disciples. The term female discipleship exists only in Acts 9:36. According to the Gospel of Mark, the important aspect of discipleship is following (e.g. Mk 1:18; 2:14–15; 3:7; 5:24; 6:1; 8:34; 9:38; 10:21, 28); thus, although Mark in this case does not definitely call the women disciples, they can serve as examples of discipleship. With reference to Jesus' approach to women, the stories in the gospel can be one of the resources, they show Jesus' ways of looking and thinking about women. Hence to understand the mission and teaching of Jesus, is to understand the gospel. In such a way though, it is insufficient to understand it literally. In order to transcend the limit of sociological and historical context, a new understanding is needed. This article is a re-reading of the gospel and the Catholic tradition as one way to build further understanding of women and men relations, especially on the issue of women discipleship. By doing this, we can transcend ourselves beyond our socio-cultural, socio-historical even socio-psychological context. Thus, a Christian, especially, who claims to be the follower of Jesus, has more reason to be like Jesus.

Contribution: An innovative exercise to develop a theological anthropology, by understanding the dynamics of human personality, and developing a theology of the women-men relationship in Catholic tradition, especially in this case re-reading the Scripture, to re-think the status of woman-man discipleship in the Catholic tradition.

Keywords: Jesus; woman; Catholic tradition; discipleship; interpretation; feminist; re-reading scripture.

'[T]ruly I tell you what she has done will be told in memory of her'. (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:3–9)

[W]omen of all time have made babies within their bodies. In this sense they are vessels of life. They transform food – bread and wine – into the body and blood of their children. They are the first priests in a very physical sense. (Luckett 1992:18)

Introduction

Issues on women have attracted a special interest all over the world and throughout the history of the world. One of the reasons may be that for a long time, women were fully submissive to men, especially in the patriarchal society, and most societies are patriarchal. Thus, for centuries, it seems a common tradition that women are considered subordinate to men and most of them are surrendered to men's authority. The Scriptures are not the exception for this tradition. The societies dominated by men often exploited; even justice and egalitarian norms in the Scriptures are used for eternalising this male domination. Ruether (2014) said:

[T]he oppressive patterns in Christianity toward women and other subjugated people do not come from specific doctrines, but from a patriarchal and hierarchical reading of the system of Christian symbols as a whole. (p. 83)

This framework for reading, according to her, derives from patriarchal slaveocracies, the social system in which Christianity was born (Ruether 2014:83).

Many developments occurred in the societies, including perspectives on women. To do that, re-reading and re-interpreting the Scriptures are needed. At the same time, the tradition related to women was formulated in the first centuries; although it was based on the scripture, it might be unacceptable for the current moment. Women have many choices, such as to read, reinterpret or reformulate the tradition on the same basis in accordance with the modern condition.

Theoretical framework

Understanding and enlightenment is contingent and is dependent on the context and on people. The same goes for the Bible, each person has the right to grasp and interpret it. For this reason the Second Vatican Council declared that there is no exclusive right in understanding the gospel for celibate men only.

Faith is dynamic – it is not unfluctuating or stagnant – there is a rhythm of negative development as well as a positive growth. The same is with theology which is not static but constantly evolving and that a useful way to approach topics of religion is through understanding how people perceive themselves and the world around them. To use Ernst Gombrich's (2000:363) phrase 'there is no reality without interpretation; just as there is no innocent eye, there is no innocent ear'.

Human beings, as co-creators with God, can change the world. It is in this spirit also that there is a possibility of change within the community. Some past verdicts on women may be viewed as normative, yet with the regular guidance of the Holy Spirit, others will see them as inappropriate or incomplete understandings of the will of God for the present. It is for this reason that changing the Church is possible.

Catholicism draws guidance from two resources: Biblical scripture and tradition. There are a number of factors, by which an individual understands the Scriptures. Sociological, cultural and intellectual circumstances, or what Arkoun (1988:58) illustrates as the 'aesthetics of reception', are critical in determining the forms and substances of interpretation. 'Aesthetic reception' means, 'how a discourse, oral or written, is received by listeners or readers'. It denotes to the conditions of individual perception in any culture as well as a social group in every period of history (Arkoun 1988:58).

Intellectual disposition is another factor in the direction of the endeavour to understand the Scripture which leads to distinctive interpretations of a particular doctrine. In this case, the result can be recovering the true meaning of the doctrine as literally expressed in the text, or discovering general principles of doctrine behind its literal or textual expression.

When interpreting a divine Scripture, let alone the tradition, it is needed to take into account the sociological influences. There is no interpretation which is free of such influence, howsoever honest it may be. In Christian history, for example, the theologians of the 1st century, such as Philo of Alexandria, Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, who have gained great prestige and whose opinions are taken as final in Christian traditions, were themselves not free from such influences. Their expressions, originations, explanations and translations have to be seen in response to the sociological perspective of their time, and cannot be seen apart from these limitations. It can be said that any interpretation of Scripture

and traditions bears marks of the spirit, ideology, culture, code and principle of its own times.

With this argument in mind, we can say that while the Scripture was indeed made known for the whole of humankind and for all times to come, however, to be acceptable to the people to whom it is revealed, it composed something significant for them in their place and time. This required the Scripture to have immediate relevance to them. Thus, one might say that Scripture is contextually determined by their history, cultures and traditions. It goes without saying that the gospels (Swidler 1988) themselves are:

[F]our different statements reflecting at least four primitive Christian communities who believe that Yeshua (Jesus) was the Messiah. They were composed from a variety of sources, written and oral, over period of time and in response to certain needs felt in the communities and individual at the time. (p. 69)

Moreover, as Malone (2001) said:

[N]one of Gospels is an eye-witness account of the events it narrates and it appears that none of the named evangelists was an actual follower of the historical Jesus. Each write from his own church context some forty to seventy years after the death of Jesus. (p. 24)

It is for this reason that one cannot conclude from verses in the Scriptures out of their historical context as constitution or as legal code. It is necessary to have continuous reinterpretation. Historically, Mark, for example, wrote the gospel in the early seventies of the Christian Era, in the time of persecution; thus, his main interest is in Jesus' suffering, unlike John who is responding to a community whose needs are more practical and mystical and offering a correction to some synoptic themes (Crossley 2004:80).

It can be said that early Christians were able to interpret the Scriptures and other sources responding to their context; thus, contemporary Christians should be able to do the same. During the whole of its history, the comprehension and fulfilment of Christianity were persuaded and shaped by the social and political realities of Christian communities.

The text and its context have to be continually perceived in the ever-changing form; otherwise, one is certainly not listening to what the text means. When displacements and changes occurred within the text, in particular, when there is a struggle for advancement, new translations and interpretations of the text must be acknowledged. Thus, no single path and movement of any teaching of the Scriptures and traditions should be rendered absolute and be considered unchangeable, allowing it to absorb others. The transformative and changing process of interpretation that makes up the Scriptures and traditions have to persist and sustain today in the same way and approach in which it took place then, in cohesion with what went before, by continuing and protecting the past without mummifying it, being faithful to the past without being limited by it. It is an awareness of the historical

context on which Christianity grew up, which then need to be in our consideration when interpreting the doctrine.

Women in Jesus' discipleship

The origin and creation of women

The problem of creation of humankind is a basic issue in the context of the equality between men and women, especially for feminist theologians. Thus, before discussing the position of women, I will discuss the origin and creation of women.

As a product of patriarchal society, the Bible is shaped by the concerns of men of Israel who were involved in public life. By its very nature, it is a public book, attentive to matters of government, law, ritual and social behaviour. But dissimilar to other writings, the Hebrew Bible does not present any ideas about women as the 'Other'. Without any doubt, the role of women is subordinate, yet the Hebrew Bible does not legitimise the subordination by depicting women as distinct, let alone less important or secondary. The accounts do not indicate that there are any dissimilarities in principles and values between men and women. Neither does the Hebrew Bible mention any plans or scenarios used by women that are in contrast to those used by men who are not in positions of authority (Frymer-Kensky 2002:xv).

It is critical to perceive that, in spite of the fact that patriarchy preceded the Bible, the Bible was not written to establish it. Yet it should be noted not to neglect the reality that despite the fact that the Bible did not establish patriarchy, it also did not disqualify and abolish it.

The question then, Tikva Frymer-Kensky (2002) asks:

[H]ow can a book that teaches the common divine origin of all humanity and the sacred nature of each human being reflect a social order in which women are systematically disadvantaged and subordinated? (p. xiii)

Indeed, the question has its origin in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. At the time God first creates humans in the garden, he does so without bias or inclination (cf. Gn 1:27). Genesis 1:27 said 'And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image of God – creating them male and female'.¹ According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Genesis 1 presents the sacred historian's first report of the arrival of women; a creation of both sexes in the image of God. It is obvious from the language that there was a dialogue in the Godhead and that the masculine and feminine fundamentals are fairly represented (Getty 1988:41; Stanton 1993:14).

Unfortunately, most of the translations of the verse are interpreted in the masculine, so 'God created the human in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'. Certainly, the pronoun 'him' is grammatically masculine, but not anatomically masculine. Yet, according to Nicholson, 'our stubborn history of translating that verse in the masculine has set in stone an ideology in which men are created first and women second',

1. Translation of <https://www.sefaria.org/texts>.

which considered women are supposedly inferior to men, in a social hierarchy (Nicholson & Domoney-Lyttle 2020:706).

Throughout the history of Christian tradition, the creation and the Fall story of human beings in Genesis 2–3 has been suggested as a confirmation for the inferior position of woman to man and male domination. Other biblical accounts have also been used to refute women's equality, such as Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; Colossians 3:18 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15. 'Genesis 1–3 have almost become the prooftexts for the Western Christian image and ideology of woman' (Straumann 2014:124). In addition, the story of Adam and Eve in the garden in the Yahwist, served as the basis for patriarchy and the subordination of women.

Delving deeper into the garden story of Adam and Eve in the Yahwist resource, gives more nuance about gender relationship in ancient Israel, which will help to understand gender relationship at the time. Ronald A. Simkins (1998) in his article titled 'Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth', describes the construction of gender relationship in ancient Israel. Beginning with his critique to the assumption that Israel was a patriarchal society, which considered women as subordinate to men, Simkin analyses the garden narrative as a creation myth that symbolised the ancient Israelites' most fundamental cultural values, especially their understanding of gender (Simkins 1998:32–52). He argues that instead of presuming that the biological differences of sexual recreation as universal facts, gender analysis requires a description on how ancient Israel itself interprets these differences. This alone makes it possible for revealing the relevant cultural framework to find out gender constructions within a specific society. The perception of gender in this narrative is introduced by way of a comparative analogy between procreation and agriculture, and is illustrated with the formative equivocalness 'between *hā'ādām* and *hā'ādāma* (2.7) and between 'is and 'issa (2.23), and by the social roles instituted for the human couple' (Simkins 1998:39).

The story of human creation from the cultivable soil has to be interpreted as a symbol that the man was created from the cultivable soil. Just like a potter, Yahweh forms the human foetus in the womb of the earth, then as a midwife Yahweh brings a living person out of the soil and inhales into his nostrils the breath of life. As such, according to Simkins (1998):

[T]he male *hā'ādām* comes from the female *hā'ādāma* like a fetus from its mother. The wordplay between *hā'ādām* and *hā'ādāma* establishes the relationship between the man and the cultivable land to be like that of a child and his mother. (p. 44)

As described above, there is no legitimate account on subordinating women, yet both bias interpretations towards the account, and interpretations of the bible by men have distorted the truth almost beyond recognition and has made the Bible a means of keeping women in bondage, physically and spiritually. 'Hebrew Scripture is a collection of writings by males from a society dominated by males' (Conn 2014:234).

The images of women in the New Testament are both theologically and socially a 1st-century male-centred religious culture. Pauline letter that should be translated according to its context, which is a kind of temporary status-quo ethic, translated into moral guidelines for keeping things forever the way they are. In this case, the church passed down two disparate reports: the theology of likeness in Christ and the practice of women's subordination (Conn 2014:235). And thereby the customs of domination down through history have been sanctified.

The narrative in Genesis 2 and 3 usually is adopted to designate women as accountable for humankind's sin and evil. The reason why it could be, according to Straumann (1997), is because of two major reasons. Firstly, portraying the Fall in such a way that the women's role in it can be observed as more considerable than the men's. Thus, women are guiltier than men. Secondly, the generalisation, thus, one woman equals to all women (Straumann 1997:55). Besides the traditional thought that identified women with Eros, the influence of Hellenistic thinking also brought about this emphasis, together with the apocryphal stories circulating at the time.

Another account on creation is Genesis 1. In this verse there is only one passage that involved women, that is the statement on the creation of human beings in God's image. According to Straumann, the Hebrew text P (Priestly) uses the term 'Adam' not as an individual, but in the collective sense of man or humankind (Straumann 1997:61). However, because of the misinterpretation of J (Jahwist) text in Genesis 2 and the following chapter, the term 'Adam' is interpreted as a signature name, in Genesis 1. Thus, Adam and Eve are seen as individuals and 'this is why "Adam" becomes an individual in Genesis 1 also through interpretation, and consequently, becomes a man' (Straumann 1997:61).

Besides, 'All previous interpretations of Genesis 1–3 assumed that God's first creation (*ādām*) was male', and it was continued to Genesis 1:26–28. Yet in Genesis 1:27, it is clearly said that both man and woman are created in the image of God (*Gottebenbildlichkeit*):

[I]f God created man and woman in God's image, then male and female must also be embodied in God's image, and both are entrusted with rule over the rest of creation. (p. 143)

It is then clearly impossible to value man more highly and let him 'rule' over woman (Straumann 2014:143).

In fact, Yahwist's creation myth illustrates that when created the first woman (Eve), Yahweh performs distinct way of process. Unable to create a proper assistant for the man (Adam) created before, Yahweh takes one of the man/Adam's ribs to form an entity resembles to him. Thus, woman (Eve) was created, and by creating the woman, Yahweh brings up differentiation within the group of humans. As we can see, humankind is divided into man and woman. The terminologies for describing this distinction are clearly social

and not sexual orientation, such as, man as husband and woman as wife. Both man and woman are originated in human creature *hā'ādām*, thus they display a complementary part of the human creature (Simkins 1998:45).

Besides the androgynist tradition in early Jewish exegesis, which produced a theory of male superiority, there is also a rabbinic interpretation denying the God-like nature of women. Women display God-likeness only when together with men in these interpretations, while men possess God-likeness on their own and outside this tradition (Straumann 1997:62). The change of object in the last sentence of the verse 1:27 from a collective meaning of the singular Adam and its development to male and female also led to a negative interpretation for the women.

In addition to the above description, Paul's combination of the ancient interpretation of Genesis with his Christology also makes the status of women worse. He introduces the typological pair of the opposites: Adam-Christ, first human and perfect human, first human brought sin into this world, the latter brought salvation. Seeing from Paul's construction of 1 Corinthians 11, it can be said that he does not use the original Hebrew passages from Genesis, but the Greek translation, the Septuagint. Thus, Paul uses this interpretation, because it fits to his Adam-Christ nicely (Straumann 1997:63). For Paul, Eve is the traditional image of sin, and she is easily seduced.

Women in Jesus' context

To acknowledge and welcome how profound and essential the perspective and behaviour of Jesus is towards women depicted in the gospels, it will be helpful and appropriate to see the condition and position and culture in the period when Jesus lived.

Dating from a remote period, women, both in Jewish and Greek society, were generally expelled and kept out of public life. Socially, legally and religiously, they were less important, less valuable and less worthy to men. There is a traditional prayer for man, a passage in the rabbinic prayer book that prevents woman from reciting it, 'Blessed Are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a woman' (Paludi & Ellens 2016:xxi; Tabory 2001:107–138).

As generally held, the Old Testament is predominantly patriarchal, which means normatively ruled by men, and androcentric, normatively male-focused in nature. It can be seen, for example, in their desire for male children only. Male children were considered blessings from above and only the names of males were enrolled in the Old Testament genealogical list (Baby 2003:25).

There are many rabbinic sayings about women which demonstrate the negative status of women. 'At the birth of a boy all are joyful, but at the birth of a girl, all are sad'; 'When a boy comes into the world, peace comes into the world, when a girl comes, nothing comes' (Hershon 2013:15). Thus,

it is not surprising that the position of women in Jewish society, the culture where Jesus lived was especially low. Their legal position was little better than that of a pagan slave. They also considered inferior to men before God. They were excluded from learning and doing the law of God which was considered to be the most valuable in their society (Jeremias 1969:363–371). In the relationship with Yahweh, for example, a ritual purity became rigorously affirmed. 'This overemphasis on ritual cleanness sometimes kept women away from the sanctuary mainly because of the impurity associated with the menstrual cycle and childbirth' (Baby 2003:27).

In the Hellenistic period, Yahweh's rule was firmly established and the Torah dominated the lives of the Jewish people (Baby 2003):

[A]lthough both men and women were called to observe the God-given laws, the rabbis of the period declared women exempt from nearly all positive precepts whose fulfillment depended upon the specific time of the day of the year. (p. 29)

Thus, women were exempted from the yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, and so on. In sum, because of the menstrual impurity women were excluded from several activities, either social or religious. Women also were not allowed to study the Scripture. It is reported that a rabbi in the Yerushalmi to have (Danby 1933:296; Hauptman 2018) that:

[I]t is better to burn the words of Torah than to hand them over to women [...]. If any man teaches his daughter Torah teaches it is as though he taught her lewdness. (pp. 22–23)

Indeed, there were a number of positive status concerning women, such as mentioned in the rabbinic literature that both the mother and the father should be treated with respect fairly. The Mishnah teaches us that both parents are to be esteemed, respected and loved justly and equitably as God is revered. The Talmud as a collection of the Jewish law and tradition says that a man is to love his wife as he loves himself and to appreciate, dignify and honour her more than himself. Those can be said that women also enjoyed a certain degree of equality. Nevertheless, as a whole they were considered inferior to men.

Jesus' attitude and behaviour towards women

Jesus was born into the above context, especially in this case, the predominating attitude towards women, where they counted little in society. In the Jewish tradition, women are completely secondary or subordinate to men. 'Husbands are advised not to talk much even with their own wives, far less with the wives of others. Women withdrew from public life as much as possible' (Kung 2001:2).

Disregarding the Jewish tradition, Jesus talked to women and allowed a woman of the street to wash and anoint his feet in a public place (Mt 26:7ff.). Jesus' proscription of divorce was significantly reinforcing the position of women in society of his time. The Gospel of Mark also portrays Jesus' behaviour towards women. This attitude indeed was in astonishing

contrast to the common attitude of rabbis at the time. Jesus never said nor did anything as a sign of behaving disrespectful towards women or considering women as a second-rate to men. Jesus indeed connected, join, and be friend with women openly and easily without restriction (Mk 1:30–31; 3:31–35; 5:25–34; 7:24–29; 15:40–41). Women were admitted as well as men in Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching and healing. These examples of inclusion of women by Jesus in his ministry were a fundamental shift from the perspective of the time. Jesus also acknowledged women clearly when he discussed the costs and rewards of discipleship.²

With respect to Jesus' attitude towards women, the story of the Samaritan woman can be one of the references. There was a rabbinic teaching concerning woman and the uncleanness of the Gentile in that time. In contrast to the teaching, Jesus talked to and helped the Samaritan woman. In fact, from the earlier time, Jesus already demonstrated his care for women and his readiness to disregard a common view of Sabbath and the existing law about the uncleanness of sick person. Namely, the story illustrates Jesus' persistent elimination of certain Old Testament and rabbinic distinction of clean and unclean and various Sabbath rules that hinder him from helping women and others in need. It also discharges the rabbinic foundation for belief and action on suspending women from synagogue and temple worship and periodic feast and functions of faith.

The Samaritan woman is considered as 'those who best understand his message'. Accordingly, following Jesus means following him (Ruether 2014):

[I]n his mission of liberating the oppressed and affirming the despised of the dominant society and religion. But this also means following him in risky witness that might lead hands of those who seek to shore up the existing systems of power and religion. (pp. 93–94)

The resurrection event also illustrates that women were the only audience of Jesus' appearance and message. It is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew that there were two appearances of the risen Jesus, one of them is Jesus' appearance to the women who worshipped him and in which he told them to inform the disciples that they will see him in Galilee (28:9–10). Jesus is also the one who takes initiative to meet and greet the women in the story of the rising Jesus (Gl 28:9a). Women who left the tomb are met by Jesus whom they recognise immediately and grabbed his feet and glorified him. Women's action here also refers to the *Leiblichkeit Jesus*. It means 'that the risen Jesus has a body that can be touched, and thus, identifying the risen Jesus with the same Jesus who lived his earthly life' (Baby 2003:191).

Moreover, Jesus also gave an order to the women to tell the disciples whom he called 'my brothers'. These stories in the Gospel of Matthew can be seen as principle characters and duties that women take the part of action in the gospel, that

²Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or land for me and for the gospel, who fail to receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecution, and in the age to come, eternal life' (Mk 10:29–30 NRS).

they are the first to come to see the tomb (Mt 28:1), the only audience of the angel's resurrection message (Mt 28:5), the first to be invited to see the empty tomb (Mt 28:6), the first to be commissioned by the angel to communicate the resurrection message to the disciples (Mt 28:7), the first to set out to spread the resurrection message (Mt 28:8), the first to recognise and identify the risen Jesus and the first to be sent by the risen Jesus (Mt 28:9–10). Such portrayal of Matthew points to the dawning of a new age of equality among women and men in Christ. 'Matthew presents the women as the catalyst, the first announcer and the first Christian missionaries of the resurrection message' (Baby 2003:202).

The resurrection stories in the gospels can also tell us about Jesus' standpoint and approach towards women. Indeed, the resurrection stories carefully engage women as part of Jesus' ministry. The first account was of the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mt 9:18ff.; Lk 8:41ff.). The second was the raising of the only son of the widow of Naid, 'And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep,"' and the third account was on the resurrection of Lazarus at the request of Mary and Martha. The first and the only case of resurrection is the case of Jairus' daughter, in which Jesus touches the corpse. Making a physical contact with the corpse made Jesus ritually impure and contaminated. In other two cases, though, Jesus did not have a physical contact with them. He simply said, 'Young man I say to you raise', or 'Lazarus, come out'. It may bring us curiosity, why Jesus prefers to disobey or break the laws for ritual purity in helping a woman, but not a man.

Other witnesses of what Jesus did as illustration for his attitude towards women was his approach to women not as an object of sex, and as such it is the opposite attitude of the tradition of the time. Jesus was invited for dinner at the house of a Pharisee (Lk 7:36ff.), and a disgrace woman set foot in and cleaned Jesus' feet with her tears and rubbed them with her hair and consecrated them. Unlike the Pharisee who saw her as an evil woman, Jesus scolded the Pharisee, and addressed about woman's love, also about her sin and her being forgiven, and her strong belief. Jesus talked to her as a human being saying, 'Your sins are forgiven [...] Your faith has saved you, go in peace' (Lk 7:50). Jesus did the same thing for a woman summoned to Jesus as someone committed adultery and to be stoned to death. Jesus treated woman well and said to the accuser, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be first to throw a stone at her' (Jn 8:7) but said to the woman with kindness and empathy, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemn you? (Jn 8:10)' She responded, "'No one Lord.'" And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again"' (Jn 8:11).

The subordination of women in the history of Christianity

In its earliest years, Christianity showed a remarkable openness to women as exemplified by Jesus, and women also held positions of leadership as prophets, teachers and

evangelists. Priscilla is an example. By the end of the 1st century, however, this spirit of inclusiveness was diminished by strong anti-women sentiment. The church grew and evolved into an attitude in favour of man. 'The pseudo-Pauline letters to Timothy and to the church at Ephesus were accepted by orthodox Christian as genuinely Pauline' (Spong 1992:68).³ In fact, the conflicting Jewish tradition on whether both woman and man were equitably created in the image of God is indicated in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, which says, 'But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife and God is the head of Christ' (1 Cor 11:3).⁴ For Paul, this hierarchical order of headship is the reason for his perspective that woman (but not man) has to cover her head. 'For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but the woman is the reflection of man' (1 Cor 11:7). Paul continues to maintain, in the next verses, that:

[M]an was not made from woman but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason, a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head. (vv. 8–9)

Even though he then changes, and says that woman and man are complementary.

In this case, a modern, democratic and unbiased reading on Paul looked at him mess up bounded by 'his pre-Christian views of gender hierarchy and the "true line" of his thought in Galatians 3:28', which says that by baptism in Christ all the hierarchies (race, class and gender) are visibly moved, 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'. 'These hierarchies exist in a fallen and sinful world, but have been overcome in the redeemed order in Christ and so should no longer exist in the Christian community' (Ruether 2014:84).

More recent authors in the New Testament, though, worked to deal with the issue by maintaining that equality in Christ is spiritual only, thus does not diminish the existing power of masters over slaves, husbands over wives and fathers over children. The first epistle to Timothy, which says 'For Adam was formed first and then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became the transgressor' (1 Tm 2:13–14), is used as a foundation for women's subordination in the church and at the same time disproves that baptism in Christ has diminished this subordination. According to the above text, women were created secondary to men and blamed as sinners and evildoers. It is for this reason that women enjoy no power and control in the church (1 Tm 2):

[L]et woman learn silence in full submission. I permit no women to teach or to have authority over a man. She is to keep silent [...]

3. Although some authors believe that they are Pauline original. Thus, they are questioning the ambiguity of Paul's attitude towards women for his statements in other letters, such as Galatian.

4. All the translations are from The New Revised Standard Version, and any exception is indicated.

Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith, love and holiness with modesty. (vv. 12, 15)

A related passage was added into Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians by another author (Ruether 2014):

[A]s in all the churches of the saints, women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, even as the law says. if there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husband at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (1 Cor 14:34–35). (p. 85)

There is no certain reason for women's subordination, but why does it exist? A possible explanation is that Christianity began to move up the social ladder from the lower to the middle class. 'In the lower classes the labor of anyone able to work was needed, so the value of the women could not be ignored' (Spong 1992:69). The idea of menstrual impurity has also been taught by some churches. The school of philosophy called Manichaeism with its teaching of dualism entered into Christianity, most specifically by way of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo who has been a Manichaean philosopher before his conversion.

Kung in this case mentioned that besides his great achievement, Augustine is also responsible for the development of the Latin Church, such as the theology of grace, the sacrament and the doctrine of the Trinity, including sexual morality, which for Kung is highly problematic (Kung 2001:12). As stated by Augustine, because of the Fall, human beings have been debased and sinful, thus they inherited original sin from their birth. Consequently, every human being has been infected by the original sin made by Adam. Furthermore, with his experience of the power of sex and his Manichaean past, Augustine associated the transferal of the original sin with sexual acts. In this case, said Kung, Augustine is accountable for sexual restriction both in the Western theology and Western Church. For Augustine, spiritually man and woman are equal, but physically women are subordinate to men (Kung 2001:30).

Thomas Aquinas, who is known as the *Doctor Communis* [General Doctor] and who was a very influential theologian and philosopher in the Catholic tradition, seems to highlight and clarify some of Augustine's statements, which can reinforce the perspective of women's subordination. Aquinas refers to the biblical story about creation and opines that man is the beginning and end of woman. In addition, he believes that woman is a man who for some reason is deficient and unfortunate. In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, he entertained that ordination of women is illegitimate and invalid. The same is also applied to women's preaching. In his *Summa Theologiae*, he definitely resists a position of evangelising and sermonising for women (Aquinas n.d., q 177, a 2, p. 6354).

Karl Borresen, the Norwegian Catholic historian of theology who has investigated the anthropology of Augustine and Aquinas, concluded that both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas indeed promote an androcentric anthropology, which emphasises a masculine point of view. In this case,

male is identified with an ideal sex, while the nature and the position of female is understood in terms of him. Instead of a reciprocal and complementary relationship, the relationship between man and woman is based on superiority and subordination (Borresen 1981:313).

Jesus initiated and emphasised the equality of human beings regardless of their sex, race, tribe and nation, and advocated individual allegiance to God only. It is very unfortunate that women have often been delegated a secondary role in the history of Christianity. The authoritative theologians such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, as mentioned before, have also delineated women as a sexual danger and being inferior to men. 'Aquinas adopted Aristotle's view that woman is biologically defective physically and mentally' (Ruether 2014:86). The power of procreation is owned by men only, and women simply contribute the element shaped by the male seed. Just as the male seed forms female matter, a male is created, 'but when the female matter partially resists this formation, a defective human or female is created'. As a product of deficient growth, women are 'inherently inferior in body, mind, and will, and so are incapable of autonomous existence and must under male subjection' (Ruether 2014:86).

Under those circumstances, the history of Christianity seems to be an unending process of gender shuffling, where women have never been noticeable in the history. The Catholic magisterium seems to intensify the condition. 'The teaching and even the very existence of the Roman Catholic magisterium made Scripture reading unnecessary for the Catholic faithful' (Malone 2001:23). The perception is the result of the belief that it is perilous for lay people to read the Scripture without guidance of the authority. Certainly, re-reading Scriptures will bring a new and radical progressive life. In particular, by re-reading the Scripture, in this case, woman may discover about the equality between man and woman in their calling for discipleship or apostleship. They may also find out the inherited structure of dogma, theology, creeds, liturgy and commandment in Christianity that built on the foundation of the assumption that woman's fidelity and wisdom are irrelevant for these issues. Consequently, by comprehending their new perspective of the involvement of women in the teaching of the Scriptures, they will realise that much of Christian traditions have to be reevaluated.

Women as disciples

The Twelve were all men and other individuals called to discipleship in the gospel were also men, the question then, are women not to follow Jesus? May women be disciples and partakers of the Kingdom of God alongside men?

The coming paragraphs will look thoughtfully at the gospels and identify how they illustrate women in relation to Jesus.

Service is one of the essences and natures of the discipleship. There are at least two accounts on woman in the gospel of Mark, where Jesus appreciated a woman for her service. It can be seen in this gospel how woman's actions attracted

attention and became the only instance of services in which Jesus grant his explicit approval. The first account (Mk 12) is:

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on'. (vv. 41–44)

It can be inferred from the above story how Jesus formally summons his disciples to point out the good example of the woman and to teach them that her gift was in fact greater than the gifts of all the other people put together. While the rich have given only their surplus or remaining, the woman in the account gave all she had, she genuinely has given herself. 'Mark presents the widow as a model for discipleship' (Dewey 2006:26).

The second account is Mark 14:3–9, which tells the story of a woman who anointed Jesus' head with her expensive small bottle of ointment of pure nard.

A related account is mentioned in Luke, which is also mentioned before, about an inarticulate woman whimpered on Jesus' feet. Because of her despair, with her hair she instantly anoints Jesus' feet, an act of both violating rabbinic custom of morality and the laws of clean and unclean. Yet, Jesus disapproves the host, a Pharisee, for the absence of generosity, saying (Lk 7):

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment'. (vv. 44–46)

Both stories above illustrate how Jesus fought for the women and told the crowd to leave them alone. Jesus commends the women's acts as beautiful and pleasing. The stories, especially in Luke, introduce women as people who, in extraordinary ways, incorporate social uncertainty and elimination with a self-ruling spirit, strength, resourcefulness and ability. Luke in this case portrays a woman as a representative of an exercise and action or movement 'from social marginalization and impurity to social integration and purity'. Jesus makes women noticeable to others by openly declaring and affirming their trustworthiness and excellent nobilities. Thus, Jesus was being 'a conduit of change in the lives of women (and men) by challenging boundaries that had been created by notions of women's sinfulness (Lk 7:36-50)' (Pillay 2005:448).

The stories also were very transparent illustration and lesson of an act of reversing, where a sinful woman is blessed so as to neglect of and corresponding to a 'good' Jewish man. It is

worth noting that woman's actions in the stories were authentic and fascinating acts of service. Those are also set as a comparison to the habitual piety of the male disciples.

A general agreement on the Gospel of Mark asserted that the male disciples' performance is a bit depressing. They often misunderstood Jesus' instruction and message about the genuine character of his mission, including of their own discipleship (Beirne 2003):

[B]y Contrast, the Markan Women, who are genuine disciples by gospel's own definition (they follow, minister and 'come with Jesus'), often take the initiative, and consistently demonstrate bold and active faith. (p. 5)

Indeed, the Gospel of Mark narrates women's companionship to Jesus since the beginning of his spiritual leadership to the end, nevertheless, nearly all Jesus' interactions and conversations with them are inappreciable. In this case, said Fiorenza, we may assume that the Markan universal statement referring to the wider ring of devotees such as 'those who were around him' (4.10) and 'the crowd' necessarily means consisting of both male and female (Fiorenza 1995:320; Kinukawa 2001:175). In addition, when the Gospel of Mark mentioned the discipleship of women, especially their 'following' and 'serving', this could be implied within Markan inclusive narration of what the meaning of disciple conveys.

Another report of the act of women discipleship can also be found in the story of Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke 10:38–42. Contrary to the Jewish tradition on the relationship between men and women, the Gospel of Luke on the account above impels a compelling objective. Despite the fact that both Mary and Martha could associate with other disciples in listening from Jesus, in a society where it is not allowed for women to study with men, the story shows how Mary adopted a not so conventional performance of a disciple, Martha, diversely, is committed to provide hospitality for Jesus as her guest. In this narrative, Martha was portrayed as whining and blamed Mary for not helping her when she needed assistance. Jesus' reaction and assertion were neither aimed to ridicule Martha's reception, nor to criticise a conventional tradition on women, 'rather He defends Mary's rights to learn from him and says this is the crucial thing for those who wish to serve him' (Almirzanah 2011:126; Witherington III 1984:101).⁵ It is clear from this narrative that, for Jesus, the primary task of both women and men is to be a good and suitable disciple; thus, they can be appropriate ladies of the house. It is also clear that this story is not an issue about comparing an active to a contemplative life; instead, it is about the difference between the imperative of listening to and learning the word of God and any other. In this account, the Gospel of Luke illustrates Mary as a disciple sitting and learning at the feet of Jesus.

Women were involved in the community of discipleship as a follow up of Jesus' call, which underlines the marginalised. The Gospel of Luke acknowledges women as Jesus' followers,

⁵For further discussion on the interpretation on Mary and Martha, see Almirzanah (2011).

they are also considered as missionaries (Ac 8:8, 26). They went together with Jesus for the ministry (Lk 8:1–3). Strictly speaking, if discipleship required pursuing Jesus physically, then women were disciples. A particular example was Joana, Chuza's wife. She was with Mary at the tomb and the upper room; consequently, she served as an eyewitness of what was happening, then she followed and travelled with Jesus.

In addition, women were also the witnesses of Jesus' crucifixion (Lk 23:49) and Jesus' resurrection (Lk 24:10). Each gospel tells of women testifying to the male disciple about resurrection, each also tells about the appearance of the risen Jesus first to the women; without them there will be no witness accounts. Unfortunately, the later generation of the church seems to have been blind to these testimonies and recounted the stories with the male disciples as the main character, by restricting women's role in the church. Because 'the stories had been interpreted, preached and officially taught only by men, so the women had retreated to play only minor and conventional role' (Malone 2001:56).

The Gospel of Matthew with its Greco-Roman background 'struggles to incorporate women moving from the periphery to greater involvement and from being victims and survivors to being disciples and leaders' (Baby 2003:46; Kopas 1990:13–21). Certainly, in this gospel a woman is a substantial figure, such as Rachel who is portrayed as a representation of Israel (Mt 2:18); women with leaven are an image of God (Mt 13:33); women as daughter of Zion (Mt 21:5); and Jerusalem as a Mother (Mt 23:37). On women discipleship, the account in the Gospel of Matthew portrays them as witnesses for the death of Jesus. They are a number of individuals who pursue Jesus physically from Galilee (Mt 27:55–56). It is the one and the only source in Matthew that addresses distinctly concerning woman as Jesus' 'follower' (Keener 1997:689). In this case, Matthew applies the same word for women 'follower' with the male 'disciple'. 'Whether Jesus called the women to follow him or not, their action of following Jesus resembles the male disciples' action of following him (4:20, 22; 9:9)' (Baby 2003:129).

Despite the fact that there is no direct call from Jesus, but the reality that woman continued to pursue Jesus physically indicates that there was essential feature of discipleship in it. This can be justified by two considerations: first, the place where women set up to follow Jesus (from Galilee), so they are Galileans, and then from the word 'to service' (Baby 2003:129).

Baby argues that Nazareth of Galilee was both the place where Jesus from and started his ministry, calling his first disciple. John 1:46 and 7:52 speak of the Jews (Jesus original community) lived in Galilee as secondary to the pious Jews of Jerusalem. In such a way, Jesus' disciple of Galileans is considered to be insignificant, even marginal. The same were the women who came after Jesus from Galilee. Donald Senior, argues that discipleship consists in taking part in the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, (Senior 1975:331) and women have come after Jesus starting from Galilee up to

Jerusalem. In this way, women may be equal to name as disciples. What is more is, that the existence of women at the cross and later at the tomb explained that they followed Jesus frequently. 'Although Matthew does not call them disciples, unmistakable discipleship implications are certainly undeniable. Following of Jesus is fundamental to the discipleship of Jesus' (Baby 2003:132).

The second essential element of discipleship is service. To follow Jesus implies to serve him till the end; and women disciples have done it for Jesus. Service demonstrated the authentic characteristic of follower of Jesus (Mt 20:27–28). On this account, it can be assumed that, though there is no term for woman as disciple, and neither does the Evangelist, yet their insistent and endlessness in following Jesus grant them certified qualities of discipleship. Likewise, the burial narrative account in the Gospel of Matthew on verses 27:57–61 also contains elements of male and female discipleship. Looking from different angle, the women who were sitting in front of the tomb can also be called as the examples of the faithful disciples. The account of Matthew on Jesus' discipleship is not restricted to the Twelve only, including Matthew's description about a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, who was addressed as a disciple of Jesus.

Indeed, the Gospel of Mark explains that after Jesus' abduction, the Twelve escaped; after Jesus had been condemned, Peter denied him; after Jesus was crucified and died, he had his women disciples by his side (Mk 15):

[A]nd also, women were watching (the crucifixion) from a distance, among them Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and served him; and many other women who come up with him to Jerusalem. (vv. 40–41)

It is noticeable that since the beginning of his ministry in Galilee, women have been among the large group of Jesus' disciples. The Gospel of Luke 8 mentioned Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna, even more. They are introduced as the women from Galilee. Like the Twelve, these women were members of the bigger body of disciples who have very obvious characters and personalities. Similar to their male disciples, they 'left behind houses, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children and lands' (Mt 19:29; cf. Lk 14:26) to wander and make a journey with Jesus. Nevertheless, dissimilar to the male disciples, the women of Galilee did not betray him, and did not flee when Jesus was imprisoned. These women remained loyal and obedient to Jesus. 'They stayed with Jesus during his crucifixion and accompanied his body to the tomb', to give Jesus the last service, they know how to do the proper funeral ceremony. Dissimilar to the male disciples, these women were the first witnesses of the empty tomb, and Matthew 28:9 mentions that they are the first to notice that Jesus was raised from the dead. These women of Galilee 'are the ones who carried the good news of the empty tomb and the resurrection to the remaining members of the Twelve on Easter Sunday' (eds. Brown Tkacz & Kries

2022:192, 193). 'In the absence of male disciples, Matthew presents the women headed by Mary Magdalene as true discipleship models. They have followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him' (Baby 2003:207). It follows that, when the world had shifted into obscurity, and all others fled from Jesus, women remained faithful to him. Those were Galilean women who accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem. Here, the Gospel of Mark selects the word 'following' (*akolouthon*), a technical biblical word for discipleship. This account is about an entire group of women who fled from their homes and country to accompany to Jesus to the end, as stated before. Luke 8:1–3 seems to confirm Mark's account on women disciples who accompany Jesus. Thus, the women of Galilee produced significant evidence that they were Jesus' disciples who accompanied him since the beginning of his public ministry. They had been with Jesus and the Twelve all over his mission in Galilee, and they belonged to his 'inner circle' (Lk 8:1–3).

It can be said that the gospel contributes a constructive portrayal of women as disciples. It shows that women disciples are equal to their counterparts. The gospel constantly illustrates both women and men as partners, as disciples, in official, pastoral, clerical and ecclesiastical leadership, and as forces inspiring the fundamental objective of the gospel. The fourth gospel characterises women and men disciples as ideal in their faith, vision, wisdom, testimony, devotion and fidelity. The fourth gospel does not differentiate between characterising leading men and women believers about their ability to perceive, their sharpness, or reaction. Women and men are a team. It may be inferred that the fourth or Johannine Gospel maintains the originally inclusive discipleship, without exception. It 'maintains gender difference but demonstrates "equality" by the structural balancing of male and female characters' (Beirne 2003:9, 33).

In such a way, the teaching and action of Jesus, including his relationship, the facts, and circumstances surrounding his death and burial guided to the approval of women as authentic eyewitnesses and legitimate disciples of Jesus.

The status of women and their function in ministry

As concern about the issues of women discipleship, the coming pages will elaborate on the status of women in the Catholic traditions, including the issue of their ordination.

The above description of Jesus' teachings, perspectives and attitudes towards women sounds challenging, as it varies and deviates from the dominant view of his day.

1 Corinthians 12:12–13 says, 'all ministry is a sharing in Christ' ministry, the many ministries of the people of God are one', and based on the Gospel of Matthew 28:19 and 20, and John 20:22 and 23, ministry as a commission both to prophecy and to exercise the office of the priest, were given by Jesus to

companies of representative of the church, including women as well as men. The verses are as follows:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt 28:19, 20)

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (Jn 20:22, 23)

The above commissions were given not to men or women separately, but to the church itself. Thus, the great commissions are directed to those representatives of the whole church, both men and women and the evangelistic charge, that is Matthew 28:16–20 was delivered to a crowd, which included women.

Unfortunately, what happened in the church until recently is different with what was stated in the gospel. There are statements saying that the apostolic commission recorded in John 20:19–23 was delivered to men, and the evangelistic charge narrated in Matthew 28:16–20 would appear to have been delivered to the eleven disciples.

If God gives this vocation for ministry, yet it is the church's duty to discover who has the vocation to authorise them to exercise it. 'The calling is from above, and the church recognizes it and bestows the grace of Holy Orders' (Royden n.d.:159). So, ideally no man who has no real vocation should be ordained. The question is then, whether women have such vocation and not whether the church may choose to deny their exercise. It is not what the church wants, or what the public likes, but it is about what the Holy Spirit is doing for them. If it is the rule, the church will be protected from having ever made a mistake in ordaining men or women who had no real vocation and from omitting to ordain men or women who had.

Christian history recorded examples, especially found in the Pauline corpus, about women ministry. 1 Timothy 3, 11, for example, clearly signifies women's active role in ministry. Paul even greets 26 persons in Rome 16, in which nine of them are women. First, Poeba, who was called *diakonos*, and specifically important is Junia whom Paul described as 'distinguished among the apostle'. Paul also speaks of missionary co-workers, and they were not subordinate to him, neither dependent on him. They were equal to him. Paul calls them 'hard workers' for the gospel. While the three women Paul calls by their names, Euodia, Syntyche and Prisca, are not subordinate to him, four fellow male workers, namely, Erastus, Tymothy, Titus and Tychius, are described as subordinate to him, serving him and being subject to his instructions (Baby 2003:54).

Nevertheless, again, commentators have attempted to reduce the significant role of woman, such as Phoebe who owns the title 'deacon' and 'prostatis' to make her a kind of helper or servant of Paul. She is given by Paul the same authority as

the male deacon he names, but it seems that the Christian church has not been familiar with such an authoritative woman. Thus, if in the first decades of Christianity, the leadership of women seems to have been celebrated, at the end of the 1st century it is challenged and then, the renewed patriarchalisation of Christianity is almost complete. Then, bridal imagery in the section of Ephesians has been beloved of male Christian writer throughout the centuries (Malone 2001:80). The Vatican's official forbiddance on women priests seems to be based largely on arguments made from tradition, natural resemblance and this bridegroom imagery.

With the consent of the Pope, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued on 15 October 1976, a document on the prohibition of women ordination titled the *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*. Several points can be inferred from the Document: the principal reason against women ordination to the priesthood was the tradition of the church, and that there has been no event in the Roman Catholic Church where women were 'ordained' to the priesthood. In addition, the word 'ordination' is itself ambiguous, for there are no unchallenged historical indications to men being 'ordained' in that period, and certainly not women. 'In the patristic period women were deaconesses, and there are solid reasons to speak of this diaconal status as one which was consecrated by an ordination' (Osborne 2003:353).

Referring to the first point, Fiorenza said that the Declaration appears to infer the indistinguishable between the Twelve and the Apostles. As there is no woman who was appointed as a member of the Twelve, so there is no woman in apostolic charge. The New Testament contains several different conceptions and no single interpretation of the meaning of apostleship. For this matter, there is a disagreement on the perspective of the origin and derivation of the term 'apostle' in Christian, and debates about a member of the apostles (Fiorenza 1977:135). Besides, the New Testament frequently adopts masculine language in general sense to embrace and talk to women. Accordingly, by insisting that all masculine forms in the New Testament should be confined to male, its doctrines and reports would be inherently sexist (Fiorenza 1977:136).

Fiorenza gives another argumentation that women also could include in the circle of apostles by looking at the Gospel of Luke. According to her, the Gospel of Luke classifies the apostle into the Twelve, and also defines the moral code, such as to have assisted Jesus since his baptism to his ascension and to be an eyewitness to his resurrection. 'According to Luke's tradition women have fulfilled these criteria and function of apostleship' (Fiorenza 1977:136).

Another reason for preserving male ordination laid on the problem of serving in the Eucharis. The priest in the Eucharist is traditionally seen as standing in the place of Christ. Having women stand in the place of Christ raises the question of whether a woman can represent Christ. It seems it is impossible to imagine if women do it. The only reason is

because if Eucharist is not served by male, it has no natural resemblance, *in persona Christi* (Swidler 1977:43). Thus, only man can adequately symbolise Christ in the sacrament, and only him can become priest. The declaration states that the incarnation took place in the form of the male sex and that this cannot be disassociated from the doctrine of salvation. Fundamentally the argument runs, Christ cannot be symbolised as women because the historical Jesus was not a woman.

This point of view can be argued that claiming that the Eucharistic celebrant must be of the same gender as Christ, denies the universality of Christ's redemption. It also implies that Jesus' maleness is a necessary factor for the meaning of the incarnation. In this case it creates a false emphasis on male genitality. Conflating maleness with the incarnation subjects the divine to the limitations of the created world and because men and women were baptised by Christ, both sexes were saved by Christ, and it follows that women as well as men are equally qualified in representing Christ for the role of the priest (Norris 1976:69, 76, 78). This equal justice and inclusive sanctification constitute the revelational basis of the movement of early Christianity (Bianchi 1993:36). Thus, in prohibiting women from acting *in persona Christi*, Vatican is also preventing them from acting *in persona ecclesiae*, that is from representing the church as Christ's body (Raab 2000:52).

Another point of the Declaration is that the practice of the church has a normative character; it is an issue of perpetual traditions all over the history of the church. Likewise, the declaration was approved by the Pope on 15 October 1976. Thus, what we are facing now is a problem of the so-called 'infallible document'.

Contrary to popular understanding, papal infallibility does not mean that *all* of the pope's enunciations are without error. As historian of religion Huston Smith explains, this doctrine does not assert that the pope is free from sin, cannot make mistakes, or is endowed with superhuman intelligence. 'The pope can make mistakes. He can fall to sin'. Only in sphere of faith and morals can the pope speak infallibly, and only after expert consultation, it is believed, that the Holy Spirit protects him from the possibility of error (Smith 1991:349).

The issue in the discussion now is whether women ordination is a matter of doctrine or a church's order? Edward Schillebeeckx (1996:10) stated that the faultlessness of the declaration is 'dogmatically impossible', seeing that it is about a church order, 'not the core of our faith'. Sandra M. Schneiders poses a similar question, which is about a norm and a principle in establishing in which context Jesus' actions and attitudes were considered as the church's predicament. On the issue of women's ordination, the point at issue develops into (Schneiders 1977):

[O]n what grounds has the Sacred Congregation decided that Jesus' behavior in the matter of choosing the Twelve constitutes a norm binding Church in the matter of ordaining priest? And

on what grounds has it decided that the behavior of Jesus in the matter of choosing the Twelve is binding in so far as it touches on the sex of the Twelve but not insofar as it touches their race, ethnic identity, age, or other characteristic? (p. 227)

There is wide consensus that in the time period in the history of the New Testament, there was no Christian priest; hence, definitely no one was ordained by Jesus. In sum, 'the all-male composition of the Twelve is irrelevant to the question of any future ministry in the Church, including ordained priesthood' (Schneiders 1977:130–131).

In this case, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that the notion of clergy in the traditional Roman Catholic Church is a historical construct that developed regularly throughout the church history. There is no indication that the notion of the ordination of a clergy has been carried out in Jesus' era. It is impossible to conclude a norm as a standard of correctness in behaviour solely from the long-practised traditions, but we need to review, criticise and study critically to follow the norm of the Reign of God (Ruether 1977:235). Certainly, we value some qualities of the previous system as spiritually constructive, and simultaneously we also recognise the demand for innovation and transformation of our comprehension and exercise and application of tradition called 'papal primacy', based on theology of the Holy Spirit. In this view, 'God is immersed in the historical process, helping us continually to rethink and reform the shape of the church' (Bianchi 1993:35).

Conclusion

To be a Christian is to pursue and act in accordance with Jesus Christ as the Way (*immitatio Christi*). It means to go after him where he is and to act, behave, bear and manage our lives like him. Orthopraxy or correctness of action has a preference over orthodoxy, but both have to be performed contextually.

With reference to Jesus' perspective on women, the gospel accounts elaborated above reveal that Jesus advocated equal rights for both women and men. Jesus' revolutionary approach to women with equal treatment to men might have shocked the masculine bias of his disciples.

Like any other religion, Christianity is not a monolithic religion, it is a polyinterpretable religion. In understanding Jesus' mission and teaching, it is insufficient to interpret the gospel literally. It is also necessary for a new understanding to go beyond the sociological and historical limitations.

Neither the words of Jesus nor his acts justified the elimination of women from any spiritual office. The principle and guideline are accessible in the gospel and the model of Jesus. Instead, the elimination of women is imposed on the magisterium or in the declaration, which, we can say, is polyinterpretable. Hence, a good way of creating an advanced and empathetic understanding about women and men's relationship is going

back to the Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus. By doing this, we are able to go beyond our limited socio-cultural, socio-historical and socio-psychological context.

Jesus was not a Christian; he was a Jew and was acting on the Jewish tradition respectively. It is fascinating that Christians claim to be Jesus' followers, when in fact Jews do not. For that reason, Swidler said, Christians 'had far more reason to be like Jesus [...] But they failed miserably' (Swidler 1988:73).

Life is always an encounter and engagement between women and men. Sexual differentiation is understood in the category of relation (Schimmel 1997):

[W]hen the iron and flint unite, for example, out of the 'union' of these two components arises something higher, namely fire. It is only when the masculine and the feminine elements collaborate and work together that life can ascend to higher stage. ... A Yang element and a Yin element are inseparably linked, like analysis and synthesis or like science and love. (pp. 21–22)

It is essential to build a creative work to develop a theological anthropology, by investigating the dynamic of human traits and character, and a theology of the women–men relationship. Jesus had introduced a model of the individual obedience to God regardless of sex, race, tribe and nation. Jesus stresses fairness and equality for all before God. Hence, Jesus was a great model, and we all need to strive towards being like him.

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