

Sexism: A Hermetical Interrogation of Galatians 3: 28 and Women in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The status of women in many Zimbabwean communities has been discussed for a long time. The following questions have been raised: are women inferior, equal or superior to their male counterparts? It is common to find both print and electronic media carrying stories of Zimbabwean women who seek gender equality. Gender issues have been tabled in various constitutional debates. Though many Zimbabwean societies take tradition or culture as the judging line with the understanding that, a genuinely raised woman accepts being subordinate to men. One will then wonder whether the Zimbabwean culture is liberation-centered in nature when it comes to the status of women. Will our society change for the best or worst if we have women as leaders? Why doesn't the situation of women change in most churches when it comes to pastoral leadership positions especially for women who underwent some pastoral training as men? Why are women allowed to sing, dance and lead praise and worship but only told to be quiet when it comes to preaching and occupying leadership positions like pastoral posts or eldership in the Church of Christ? The answer rest in the practice of gender discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping based on a person's sex or gender, focused on women, hence, sexism. In this study people were interviewed in the Church of Christ in relation to the status of women in leadership positions.

Introduction

It is still a bone of contention as to whether the Church of Christ is upgrading or down-grading the status of women. Though the church has been known to be the voice of the voiceless in dealing with critical issues like the welfare of widows and orphans, disabled persons; one wonders what has happened to the case of women on leadership positions. Were they born to be followers of men? It is the assumption of this paper that, patriarchy is to blame on most challenges faced by women. Patriarchy has produced distinctions that alienate women by defining life and determining relationships. Distinctions nurture attitudes of superiority against inferiority hence allowing domination and support of certain groups (Williams 1997:106). Yet for William, distinctions are no more for communities of persons who have clothed themselves with Christ. It is against this background that the hermeneutical interrogation of Galatians 3:28 in relation to the status of women in the Church of Christ will possibly give insight on the implication of Paul's teachings when he said that: "In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free person, male and female". Galatians 3:28 is one of the texts that has not found prominence with the leadership in the Church of Christ. Its lack of prominence is not surprising as all leadership positions in the church are gendered with men as leaders and women as followers. The text is only invoked in circumstances that point to the love of God towards all humanity and not in circumstances meant to change the status of women and mentality of men towards the status of women. In most cases the text is used to support other texts that portray men as predestined leaders or heads of families, for example, Ephesians 5:21-25 states:

²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

²⁴ As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her,

Texts like Ephesians 5:21-25 have found prominence in many Zimbabwean Churches like Church of Christ because of its patriarchal nature. Church of Christ in Zimbabwe has its roots in the reformation times and is also known as the Christian Church. Masengwe, Machingura and Magwidi (2012:186) postulated that the Church of Christ was founded upon the 200-year old declaration of the stone-Campbell movement which was unfortunately meant for an association rather than a church. Foster and Blowers (2004:58) also argue that, this Church is one Church that did not like to be associated with denominationalism and is traced back to the Campbell movement. The Church was against the idea of attaching personal or family name to the congregation. It has stood that test until now. As a result they agreed that only geographical labels would be accepted.

The Church of Christ in Zimbabwe accepts the following doctrines: the lordship of Christ, baptism by immersing in water and the observance of the Lord's Supper. These are the common doctrines accepted in other Churches. However, the Church's doctrine on the roles, responsibilities and privileges of women is found wanting even though they always celebrate the popular statement that, "we speak where the Bible speak and become silent where the Bible is silent". The Church of Christ claim to adapt to the biblical teachings on day to day issues though some of the biblical texts are quoted out of context, misinterpreted or deliberately ignored, for example, texts that put women in good light like Galatians 3:28. Some of the church doctrines on women besides being influenced by what they literally read from the Bible have an influence from the Shona culture.

Patriarchal Dominance in the Zimbabwean Culture: The Case of the Shona

The Zimbabwean Shona culture has to some extent been described by critics and women activists as anti-women, unfriendly and male dominated. However, that position can be challenged as not truly representative and fair to the Shona people as culture. There are instances where women are revered, empowered and respected as: spirit mediums, aunts, mothers and grandmothers. It is however clear that there is an element of the subordination of women in the Zimbabwean Shona culture (Machingura, 2011:25-44; Machingura, 2012:40-68; Machingura, 2013:234-251). Socialization in some cases forces some women to believe that being women imply being voiceless and submissive to men even on issues that jeopardize their empowerment (Chinomona: interview 2012). The assumption is that, the status, body and labour of women belong to men after the payment of *lobola* or *roora* or dowry (Sekuru Bangire: interview 2014). Critics still argue that, even though women are culturally seen as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunts and wives; their status is inferior to men. Corwant (1956:300-1) argues that, the status of women is ever interpreted using male thought patterns. Issues of morality and behaviour are all prescribed by men and this has weakened the status of African women because they are viewed and treated as people of weaker sex as confirmed in most African societies. In addition to that, most of the misfortunes are usually blamed on women.

It is not surprising that, issues of barrenness are blamed on women; worse still giving birth to a girl child or a child with some form of disability (*The Chronicle*, 12 July 2014; *The Chronicle*, 22 August 2013; *The Herald*, 29 March 2011). It is such experiences that make women become objects of shame. Failure to have children in marriage is usually blamed on the woman and not the man. The infertility blame claims are usually not supported by medical tests. According to Pastor Chipso (interview, 22 December 2014), our African societies are patriarchal and have created certain standards where whatever a woman does must have the approval of men. Equally disturbing is the issue of social status. In many rural areas of Zimbabwe where the power of patriarchy reigns and manifests; women and children are known to be labourers in fields but the person given credit for the good harvest is the man by cultural virtue of being owners of land.

Women rarely own land in most African cultural settings, even in cases where women could be partners in their respective households. Nyakuwa (interviewed: 8 January 2014) reiterated that, it is not surprising that women are treated like foreigners or strangers in situations where they are partners. The marginality of women has become a universal concern that needs attention. Ruether and McLaughlin (1979:334) commented that the, “marginality” of women in both the Jewish and Christian society means that only few sources exist for judging their positions and those that exist were generally recorded by males and displayed male bias. The marginality of women and the status of the girl child also become so challenging when interrogated in most African Independent Churches especially apostolic ones or white garment churches (Machingura, 2012: 185-210). Girl child marriages and forced marriages have become the order of the day. According to Beecher (1991; 39), puberty just like birth rites focus on communal and covenantal dimensions and not bodily functions. Some girls are far too young psychologically but they are expected to reason like young adults on social issues. According to Mrs Mabhuto (interviewed, 13 October 2014), forced marriage is depicted when the girl child or the woman is being forced to marry elderly men without their consent. Media reports have confirmed such sad developments that expose young girls to abuse.

Forced marriages in African societies have a long history and are also covered under the blanket of the African tradition, for example, if a boy or man delays his girlfriend during courtship. The man is forced to marry the girl. The views of the affected girl aren't considered at all in such circumstances. Mrs. Mabhuto further reiterated that the main contribution of women to the family is her sexuality which is regarded as the exclusive property of her husband. Oduyoye and Kanyoro (1997:89) argue that, women in many Zimbabwean societies have no say on marriage issues. Lack of legal status in the African traditional system implies that, women are seen as second class citizens where women would not give evidence in the traditional court or *dare*. Corwant (1956; 30) further postulates that throughout history men have continued to treat women as inferior. In most Zimbabwean societies, it is a serious issue for a woman to be suspected of being unfaithful but it's not a big deal if this is done by men. It is not surprising that, there is an upsurge of married men having mistresses (*The Herald*, 22 February 2012; Kwayedza, 29 April 2013; *The Sunday News*, 16 June 2012; *The Financial Gazette*, 07 November 2012; *The Herald*, 20 May 2011; *The Sunday News*, 01 September 2012). The blame is always put on women when their spouses seek for sexual gratification outside marriage or in circumstances where the man is promiscuous (Machingura). In some cases the Bible is unfortunately evoked to support the superiority of men and the subordination of women (Machingura, 2011: 119-154). As a result, the Bible and culture become accomplices in offering ideological ammunition that legitimize the exploitation of each other (with women as victims) using the dividing walls of racial, sexuality, gender and class.

On issues of property inheritance in African tradition and culture, women are not even mentioned, an indication taken by critics to imply that women are inferior. It is then not surprising that, the issue of property inheritance has also lowered the status of women.

Corwant (1956:302) argues that, property inheritance is the privilege of male children and it's on rare occasions that the girl child (especially amongst the Shona people) is given a fair share of property. Ownership of property or wealthy is still the prerogative of men. Many women live on hand to mouth with regards to issues of wealthy. An environment is created that causes women to solely depend on men. Had women been given equal access to credit, access to adequate resources and access to leadership positions they would not live under the mercies of their male counterparts (Machingura, 2011: 119-154). As a result, the status of women to a greater extent depends on men hence being viewed as the property of their husbands. According to Pastor A Sibanda (interview, 30 November 2014), in the Shona culture if a husband found some indecency in his wife, he could freely discipline or divorce her in an embarrassing and denigrating manner though the reverse could not happen to the man. Mrs. Mhora (interview 12 December 2014), argues that in the Shona culture, women still suffer from physical, psychological, economic and emotional violence. The woman is expected to be understanding, even in circumstances where the husband beats her. Emotionally women are forced to respect men even with regards to decisions that touch on their sexuality, welfare, privacy and personality. It is not surprising that, the general portrayal of women in most African societies manifests again in most Churches.

Church of Christ and the Status of Women: A Replay of the Shona Culture

The status of women in the Shona culture is not much different from what one finds in the Church of Christ. This is despite the fact that, they preach about equality as part of the salvific message of Jesus Christ. Further to that, the status of women in most Church denominations in Zimbabwe has suffered from the conflict and charisma which women often display against the bureaucracy created by men (Polema 1989:13). The few women who by chance are in leadership positions are affected by appeals made by the Zimbabwean society on traditional gender stereotypes which demand that women be submissive to men. What is interesting is that, the stereotype doesn't spare women who have trained to become Christian leaders as pastors. In fact there are three camps with three different positions when it comes to the status of women in the Church of Christ:

- There is first camp that shares the same position with the generality of Christians in most Zimbabwean Churches that women must be forbidden to speak in all the services let alone occupy any leadership position.
- The second camp would appreciate seeing women publicly participating in Church activities as well as occupying any leadership positions of authority in Church.
- The third camp wants a situation where women can occupy leadership positions as deacons and elders but not as pastors, bishops or women of the cloth.

It is important to note that, the number of women heeding Christ's call to ministry is so promising considering the number of women going for training in theological colleges but the problem arises when it comes to getting assemblies to lead as ordained female pastors. Men find it so easy to be ordained as pastors and get assemblies than their female counterparts. According to Sister Kina (interview. 14 August 2014) who has worked as the bursar at Zimbabwe Christian College for the past 12 years,

This is the only college that train Church of Christ pastors in Africa, the college is over 30 years old yet the college has trained less than 30 female pastors. Unfortunately none of them is solely heading any congregation except for Pastor Chipso Katsande who is an associate to Pastor Chimbuya at Harare Christian Church.

For Kina, it is clear there are factors that contribute negatively against women in Christian ministry. The Church applauds certain biblical teachings as well as setting mechanisms that negatively work against women intending to get into full-time ministry. This is confirmed by one of the female pastors in the Church of Christ. Pastor Chipso (22 December 2014) said,

I have served as an associate pastor for seven years now but not getting an opportunity like my male counterparts who become autonomously assembly pastors. The only highest achievement I have had as a woman is being an associate pastor. What is interesting is that, some of the congregants still struggle to call me or regard me as a pastor. As a result of frustration, I am actually doing another degree programme that gives me other opportunities than continuing in this church that doesn't appreciate my services as a pastor. It's now seven years in ministry but there is no talk about my ordination but male pastors are ordained soon after serving the Church for less than two years. I find it very painful that the Church does not realize that women constitute the majority in Church and can contribute positively to its growth.

For Pastor Katsande, the church has forced her to believe that being a woman means subordination to men in every aspect of life including Church ministry. In the Church of Christ the status and role of women in Church ministry is still a challenge. Pastor Chipso further lamented about her salary which is three times less when compared to her male counterparts.

From the four Church of Christ pastors who were anonymously interviewed on this issue revealed that, "female students training to be pastors are wasting their time because the church does not want or is not prepared to have female ministers of the word". For some critics, Pastor Chipso is by chance an associate pastor at Harare Christian Church because of her parents who were influential at that church.

Other critics argue that, the negative attitude towards women in general and women in ministry are clearly shown by the fewer number of female lecturers at Zimbabwe Christian College, a clear indication of what the Church generally thinks of women. According to Pastor Bandera (interviewed, 3 December 2014),

There is fear of the unknown amongst the Church of Christ leaders as such that they cannot state exactly why they are reluctant in ordaining women. Most of the leaders in the Church of Christ don't want to be known for having advocated for the cause of women let alone the ordination of women during their time as office bearers.

It is clear that, when it comes to leadership positions, the average women do not dream to ever become one of the leaders in Church (Goodwin 1994:33). Women in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe have been forced to play a second fiddle because of the set conditions that make men become automatic leaders and pillars of the Church who are believed to carry on with the tradition of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. According to Mrs. Useni (interview, 29 January 2014) whose husband is a pastor “even if your husband is a pastor; the wife is disregarded even though it is us women who make our husbands’ ministry successful”. If the husband is an elder or deacon, this does not mean the wife holds the same position. In the Church of Christ, women are made to believe that it is not important to become leaders. It is that monopoly of the pulpit by many Churches like the Church of Christ that needs to be overthrown for securing to women equal participation and positions with men. There is need to grant them full equality in ministry as men. Critics particularly from Pentecostal churches justifiably argue that, the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe lacks relevance by leaving out women on leadership positions even though women generally constitute the majority of Church congregants. Women only declare their presence by the colorful regalia they put on.

The status of women in the Church of Christ is also defined by the Church regalia or uniforms. It is the dressing that has qualified the identity of women in the Church of Christ (though a common feature in most Zimbabwean Churches). Their uniforms declare the presence of the Church of Christ in the Zimbabwean public market. Ladies in the Church of Christ are known for putting on red and white uniforms. In essence it is another form of women denigration as men are not required to do so. Only ladies put on uniforms and if it is for Christian identity, why are men not doing the same? Besides that, there are Thursday gatherings for ladies, commonly referred to as *China* or *Ruwadzano* in the Zimbabwean context. The *China* gatherings mostly orient women to focus much on how best women can obediently please their partners. Unfortunately most of the lessons are not helpful to widows and single mothers who are usually part of the *Ruwadzano* gathering. Miss Ngwarai (interview, 04 November 2014) a member of Epworth branch of the Church of Christ have since stopped attending *Ruwadzano* gatherings arguing that, she was not benefiting anything as a widow besides being pressured to marry again”.

It is that attitude of viewing women as being there to serve the needs and interests of men that we find unacceptable in the modern day society. As a result, most of the *Ruwadzano* meetings orient women on the importance of men in their lives and not vice versa. The voices of women in the Church of Christ are suppressed so as to strengthen the position of men. Ruether (1993:63) is right to say that:

Religion to a greater extent is a force behind the inferior status of women. Yahweism which was the Jewish religion of the Old Testament dissented against class hierarchy but unfortunately issued no protest against gender discrimination. For example, male prophets who were aware of the oppression by rich urbanities were not similarly aware of their oppression to their own dependents who were women in the patriarchal family.

The views of Ruether are important especially in analysing the Church of Christ in relation to the status of women. Surprisingly there are some church elders who work for secular organizations that promote gender equality but surprisingly stand against the empowerment of women in the Church of Christ. One then wonders whether men feel threatened by the status of women and the respect they will get if their daughters or wives get leadership positions that are above theirs. Norah Lofts (1971:76) raised an important point that is also a reality in the Church of Christ by claiming that, after women have been dominated by men for a long time, it becomes psychologically acceptable that women feel that without men they cannot produce any positive results if they become leaders. Women are made to believe that everything in the church can be done for them by men as leaders and them (women) as followers. Yet women constitute more than 85% of the Church's followers in Zimbabwe (Machingura 2011:12-29). This goes against calls by renowned apostles like Paul in Galatians 3:28 that 'there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Reading Galatians 3:28 in the Context of Women in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

The status of women in most Zimbabwean Churches is generally sad when related to leadership positions. What worsens their situation as women is that, the Bible is usually quoted to support the servant role that they play as women when compared to men. If there is anything that is problematic and divisive for many Churches in Zimbabwe is the leadership status of women in Church. Should women occupy leadership positions that give them authority over men? It is this call by Paul to the Galatians that "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) that compels us to make the same call to Christian institutions like Churches and theological colleges that all people are special and equal in the eyes of God irrespective of gender, class, colour and political affiliation. Several theories and explanations have been raised in a bid to explain the context and meaning of Galatians 3:28.

In fact, Galatians 3:28 recently became the center of controversy with the rise of feminist and womanist readings of the Bible. Biblical scholars, theologians and critical readers of the Bible have sought to establish the context of biblical texts that seem to support the positive role and status of women against the current status quo of patriarchy. It is understandable for one to be wary of any attempts where texts are just uprooted without looking at the context from which they were written and the message which they sought to convey. The same can be done with Galatians 3:28 though there is no unanimity on its meaning, context and application today. Feminist and liberationist readings seek for women's empowerment in all aspects of life. Several interpretations have come on board in relation to the three couplets (Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female). Our focus here is on the third couplet, male or female hence producing the following theories that:

- Galatians 3:28 must be taken as a baptismal ritual of the early Church or taken as a formula used in the baptism of new Christians. The focus is on the saving grace of baptism hence echoing the statement from the first creation narrative in Genesis 1:27-28. The baptismal proclamation is taken as having implied that, the division and conflict in human nature was the source of sin which was only to be defeated through the saving grace of baptism.
- Galatians 3:28 must be understood as a text that seeks for the emancipation of women ahead of time. The text is linked to other texts like 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35. The text is understood as advocating for an end to sexism and discrimination of any kind as in the case of women on leadership positions in Church. Paul is taken as having been prophetic by addressing issues that have gone beyond his place and time.
- Galatians 3:28 understood as a reference to the order of creation but not to the order of the fall. The focus is on the fundamental equality of male and female as created by God as alluded to in Genesis 1:27-28. The text is nostalgically taken as referring to the good old days before equality was shamelessly lost by sin.
- Galatians 3:28 as pointing to the time of salvation anticipated in the present where the tension between human opposites (Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female) disappear.
- Galatians 3:28 as a glimpse of the still distant future. The text is taken as speaking of the heavenly realm of the relationships in Christ with a new and transformed creation as envisioned in Revelations 21: 1-14; 22:1-5. As a result the text has nothing to say to the present predicament faced by women in some Churches in light of leadership positions (Newson and Ringe, 1998: 425).

The various scholarly debates can be easily put under the above categories when interpreting Galatians 3:28. These scholarly theories can be related to different positions that have been by the various Churches in Zimbabwe.

According to Martyn (1997:376), Galatians 3:28 does not fit the present context where it is used to engage in debates on gender issues. The text was typically a liturgical tradition cited by Paul in his interest on the abolition of the distinction between a Jew and Greek, master and slave, male and female. Cole (1989:59) adds that, it would be grossly unfair to invest Paul's great statement that 'there is neither male nor female' with a literal gender significance which would have been far from his mind. Fox (2008:103) is convinced that, Galatians 3:28 gets tricky for those who take a liberal approach to scripture by reading and applying it out of context to promote the teaching that women are just as qualified as men to serve as elders or pastors. In that context to regard the text as supporting women to get into leadership positions is wrenching the text out of its context so as to make it serve another purpose not intended for it. Fox (2008:103) adds that, to make Paul regard women eligible to lead men using Galatians 3:28 as the pretext is to make him a liar in 1 Timothy 2:12 when he says "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence". Cox fails to appreciate the arguments raised by a number of scholars that 1 Timothy was not written by Paul. So to use 1 Timothy as the premise to reject the place of women in leadership positions is not the best premise considering the contestation surrounding its authorship. As a result scholars like Fox believe that, Paul was making in this context a theological statement which is true at the deepest level, not a physiological or psychological pronouncement hence must not be misunderstood here or elsewhere in a crudely literalistic way. For Fung (1987:183) just like Martin also understand Galatians 3:28 as just a theological liturgical statement by saying that:

It refers not to ethnicity, social status and gender relationships within the church between members but only to the fact that baptism into the body of Christ is available to all regardless of ethnicity, social status and gender. This was according to Paul's understanding of the new covenant. Salvation is available to people of all nationalities, social statuses and genders, who are all equal coram deo ("in the sight of god").

Therefore the context of Galatians 3:28 is viewed as purely salvation oriented and as having nothing to do with roles and functions in Church leadership. Complementarians take Galatians 3:28 as having nothing to do with social, political and economic implications but only affirm that all humans have equal access to salvation in Christ. Galatians 3:28 is understood as a reference to the order of creation as well as the type of salvation anticipated spiritually or the expected future heavenly realm relationships. Galatians 3:28 is taken as a soteriological statement and not a gender-role statement (Schemm, 2003: 27).

Besides that, it's impossible to remove this text from the social, religious, economic and political world of the time and our own social context today as believers as in the case of the status of women in the Church of Christ today. The preceding text of Galatians 3:27 has often been used to support the salvation context as it clearly states that: "for as many as you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ". For most of the scholars and contemporary churches that are patriarchy oriented. Galatians 3:28 has nothing to do with social relation issues but must be understood from the context of spirituality. It never envisaged political and social connotations hence purely religious (Oepeke, 1957; Schlier, 1971). Women are then not allowed to take up any leadership positions as pastors. Church father, some reformists and ancient Christian writers never understood or took Galatians 3:28 as referring to anything other than a Christian's standing before God.

John Calvin as well as Luther agreed in upholding the traditional view that prohibited women from occupying any office of teaching and administering sacraments (Kling, 2004:275). For Picirilli (1989:209); Knight (1989) and Foh (1980), the above position is a traditional view that takes the woman's subjection both in the home and in the Church as always applicable regardless of the changing cultural conventions. The traditional view is taken as a universally normative regulation which prohibits women from any role especially that of teaching let alone leading positions in the Church. Fung and Martins explanation do not help us to address gender insinuations found in Galatians 3:28 and how the passage is interpreted today in relation to the emancipation of women in Christian institutions. However, Aune (2013:533) disputes the liturgical proposition by asking the following question that, what did Galatians 3:28 mean to Paul and his audience regardless of whether or not it had a liturgical origin? Will the text then remain a liturgical or baptismal text that doesn't address modern social, gender, political and economic concerns? Even if Galatians 3:28 is understood as having been a traditional baptismal formula, Saunders (2001:79) believes that,

Paul is interested, however, in the portion of the baptismal tradition that accompanies the act of baptism itself: "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus". The named pairs represent the primary distinctions by which humankind in Paul's day was described and relationships were ordered. When these pairs are said no longer to exist, the dependable (and enslaving) order of the world effectively ceases to have power over those who are baptized and thus the gathered congregation as well. Baptism for Paul means then, that the various distinctions that had shaped so profoundly Paul's own life prior to his own experience of the revelation of Jesus (1:11-24) no longer have any meaningful reference.

Christian identity for Paul demonstrates God's faithful fulfillment of the promises in Christ where people now belong together without the divisive, prohibitive and disadvantaging distinctions that we find in 21st century Churches as in the case of Zimbabwe. This was also confirmed by Augustine who wrote that:

Difference of race or condition or sex is indeed taken away by the unity of faith, but it remains embedded in our moral interactions and in the journey of this life, the apostles themselves teach that it is to be respected. For we observe in the unity of faith that there are no such distinctions. Yet within the orders of this life they persist.

Galatians 3:28 is taken as advocating for unity and inclusion in terms of privileges, rights and status before God. So God's household is taken as so inclusive of all races, ethnic, social, economic, gender and different status. Kling (2004:270) adds that, Paul implies that through faith in Jesus Christ, all persons have equal access to and equal standing before God. The text is taken as not excluding females from any right, office, work, privilege, or immunity which males enjoy. Though less likely, Paul is believed to have adopted Stoic anthropology, in which according to the Stoics, women like all human beings have the same 'nature' as men (Vengeyi, 2013). The new covenant is portrayed as different to the old circumcision covenant.

Martin (2003:112) argues that, Galatians 3:28 is entirely suited to the socio-religious, economic, political context and probably not as a traditional liturgical formulation as suggested by Martyn and Fung. Martin's position is supported by Kahl (2000:38); Dunn (1993) and Asamo (2005) who argue that, Galatians 3:28 is pre-Pauline in origin where the baptismal is genuinely Pauline in present rhetorical embedding and literary shape that does not eliminate the text from the real world of the time, for example, ethnicity, privileged social, economic, political status and gender issues. Paul's concern may have been extended to class, gender and ethnic differentiations hence the wider structural context. Good (2006:18) adds that, what Paul implied in this baptismal statement that baptism into Christ transcends the original complementarity by not perpetuating the polarity instigated by some people against women when it comes to leadership positions and roles. In fact baptism for Paul creates an identity and unity that is exclusive of gender by promoting a gender-free category. Being in Christ for Kügler (2009) *is the most important state as it transforms all into new creation, "sons of God" equally entitled to inheritance benefits of God.* Augustine noted as shown above that, the difference of race or condition or sex is indeed taken away by the unity of faith produced in Christ though it may remain embedded in our moral interactions.

It is clear from the various interpretations that have been and are still being put forward to get to the bottom of the matter that, according to Paul, in the Christian Church, the sex discriminations between man and woman have lost their significance (Vengeyi, 2013:433).

Vengeyi further argues that, in contrast to the two previous statements (Gal 3:20a and 28b), this one names the sexes in neutral which suggests that not only the roles that is; social differences between man and woman are involved but the biological distinctions also. Galatians 3:28c would then be interpreted as a reference points to the social emancipation of women. Even if the text is interpreted in the context of apocryphal and Gnostic parallels, ‘neither male nor female’ would claim the metaphysical removal of the biological sex distinctions as a result of the salvation in Christ hence social emancipation and androgyny (Meeks, 1987:3; MacDonald, 1987:2-3). Christ then becomes the androgynous Christ redeemer of sexual and biological distinctions. Aune (2013:536) adds that,

The expansion of the Jesus’ movement from a sect within Judaism to a social religious movement composed of both Jews and Gentiles was the cause of the lasting conflict between the two ethno-linguistic entities especially the role played by the Jewish ritual law on circumcision, food regulations, purity laws and Sabbath observance which were regarded as symbolic markers of Jewish national identity. By the end of the first century, Christianity had spread throughout the Mediterranean world as an unappalled socio-religious movement that accepted people from all ethnic groups, the rich and the poor, men and women, slaves and free. So the issue of whether or not Gentile followers of Jesus should be circumcised was the centrally divisive issue, with “circumcision” understood as an abbreviation for conversion to Judaism.

If Christianity as a movement accepted people from all ethnic groups, why do some Churches in Zimbabwe find it difficult to open spaces to women? It is really surprising when people go misogynistic on issues to do with women and leadership positions. Yet don’t find it problematic when women serve in Church as ushers, praise and worship leaders, decoration team leaders and intercession leaders. Critics argue that, the proponents of women’s ordination respond that the Church fathers and reformers failed to group the full implications of Galatians 3:28 as a result of their prejudices against women thereby ruling out any passages like Galatians 3:28 that grant women full involvement in Christian ministry (Kling, 2004:275). In fact it was common during that time to divide society into two spheres as in the case of the Greco-Roman and Jewish societies. We find the same arrangement persisting in Zimbabwe where the two spheres is comprised of that of men against women. The male public sphere dominates and conspires against women in all aspects of life like occupation of leadership positions. The Bible is evoked to feed into that conspiracy against women. The females are forced to occupy the private domestic sphere where they are not seen.

Cousar (2012:88) adds that, given the cultural, religious, economic and social circumstances of the Graeco-Roman and Jewish worlds of the first century, it is quite possible that many passages in the New Testament which seem to be conservative in nature were revolutionary statements or words in their original contexts. Galatians 3:28 is then seen as directly distinguishing how a person got characterized under the old covenant versus the new covenant in Christ. Paul's couplets statement can be understood as a direct attack against the Jewish prayer (Patterson and Kelley, 2011: 521) that:

Blessed art thou who hast not made me a Gentile,
Blessed art thou who hast not made me an uneducated man,
Blessed are thou who hast not made me a woman.

Therefore Paul could not have implied a debate on the present gender issues but the inferior role that women got because of cultural patterns of the first century. It is not surprising that, gender issues are still of concern today and the Church cannot wish them away except to holistically address the concerns of all the people as in the case of Zimbabwe.

It is common to find that, this text (Galatians 3:28) is not popular with the Christian male leadership save those biblical texts (1 Corinthians 14^{34ff} or 1 Timothy 2^{11ff}) that put women at the periphery of society and make them subservient to men. 1 Corinthians 14^{34ff} or 1 Timothy 2^{11ff} are used to explicitly prohibit women's public role in ministry. Yet the texts are local and specific in their application that dealt with the circumstances of a particular community of that time and in a particular place. The text had no general or universal bearing on all the past and present communities (Kling, 2004:271). Therefore to just uproot a text and apply it in different modern contexts would then be very unfair as situations or contexts differ. Even if the biblical narrative or context agrees with the modern cultural context, some cultural stances affect the way one engages certain key biblical texts that deals with men and women. Some cultural beliefs and practices can be an impediment to the status, rights and roles of certain groups like women, children and persons living with various disabilities in society. Culture as shown in this paper can create an identity that exploits other groups as in the case of women in the Shona society. The same old exploitative narratives and stereotype position can coincidentally find support in some biblical texts but this does not mean God looks at women that way. Paul was possibly right to seek for a change of perspective towards of women in Christian ministry. In the case of Galatians 3:28, we are faced with the serendipitous conjunction of a text that can also become the *locus classicus* in defense of the rights of women to occupy whatever position in ministry (Kling, 2004:272). It is a text that is in the right place at the right time as it is so valuable to the modern day discussion on the status of women in the mainline Churches in Zimbabwe. Catherine Booth (1975:17) is right to argue that:

If this passage (Gal.3:28) does not teach that in the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of Christ's Kingdom, all differences of nation, caste, and sex are abolished, we should like to know what it does teach, and wherefore it was written.

Booth's statement pre-empted much of the modern debate on the general status of women in our society and their specific status in Christian institutions like Churches whenever a text is evoked against women. Do such texts touch on issues to do with leadership positions? The context of Galatians 3:28 clearly focus on all believers without distinction of being sons of God and heirs of the promise. However, Schemm (2003, 27) is of the view that, the context of the verses (Galatians 3:29-4:7) that follow after Galatians 3:28 make a strong connection to the idea of inheritance. What one realizes is that, under the Old Testament law only Jewish, free males inherited land left by their fathers (Deut. 21:15-17; Gal 4:1-7). And Paul brings a new package of salvation whereby the promise to Abraham does not have these gender restrictions. It is only through faith in Christ Jesus that we find anyone becoming the rightful heir (Gal 3:26). Galatians 3:28 have evoked memories of freedom that every creature envy to have.

The text has inspired liberation and advocacy theologians when it comes to oneness in Christ of a Jew and gentile, slave and free, male and female. It becomes a rallying point in debates about women's ordination and the general civil rights (Lieb 2011:151). Cousar (2012: 87) is justified to argue that,

To say the church should only be interested in the spiritual development of women and men where people should avoid all discussion of the social import of equality in Christ is like saying the Church should never have involved itself in fighting the institution of slavery. The task of the Church is to listen to Paul's revolutionary insights to shed its dominant male orientation and to discover the fellowship which can occur only when all members are truly free.

It is clear that for most scholars, Galatians 3:28 has enormous implications which Paul could have possibly never thought of or much less think of implementing but have now become a gender issue to the modern Christians to carry out and address. We cannot run away from the arguments raised by critics that modern notions of equality are often imported into Galatians 3:28 especially on issues to do with women. Even if human and civil rights issues are not associated with Galatians 3:28, the text has a strong revolutionary, economic, religious, political and social implications. The text can still help us reorder our societies in the face of adversaries. However, we don't see anything wrong with the empowerment of women as long as that would not be reactionary by pushing men to the periphery. It is a revolutionary call from Paul against any form of exploitation and discrimination. Hebert Kiesler (<http://www.adventistarchives.org/galatians-3.28.pdf>) adds that,

The statement that “there is no male and female” is believed to have a bearing on the contemporary issue of the role of men and women in the church. This phrase seems to imply that from henceforth in the Christian church the sex distinctions between men and women have lost their significance.

Some egalitarians like Groothuis (1996:25) claim that Galatians 3:28 is ‘The Magna Carta of Humanity’ or the most important text that supports biblical equality and ‘the most socially explosive statement in the New Testament.’ We also take Galatians 3:28 as the ‘Magna Carta’ of the human cause of women in the Church of Christ hence also the interpretive key to the rest of scripture. In this case, the texts would help recreate the worldview proffered in chauvinistic Christian institutions by giving value added identity to all members including the formerly marginalized groups like women, children and persons living disabilities.

Modern feminists’ interpretations of Galatians 3:28 help us in understanding the pain of exclusion felt by women on leadership positions. Fiorenza (1995, 67) sums it all when she said that:

Sexual dimorphism and strictly defined gender roles are products of a patriarchal culture, which maintain and legitimize structures of control and domination-the exploitation of women by men. Gal. 3:28 not only advocates the abolition of religious-cultural divisions and of the domination and exploitation wrought by institutional slavery but also of domination based on sexual divisions. It repeats with different categories and words that within the Christian community no structures of dominance can be tolerated.

It is this sexual dimorphism and defined gender roles serving patriarchy that we find manifesting in modern day denominations like the Church of Christ. Therefore, Galatians 3:28 can go a long way in the empowerment of women in the broader society. The understanding is that Paul’s teaching about wives’ subordination is altogether taken as cultural and not normative to all situations. Societies are progressively changing where marriage has become egalitarian. It is not surprising that women are now bosses, directors and managers just like their male counterparts. To deny women that opportunity results in the modern Church lagging behind in terms of their empowerment. It is an unacceptable hermeneutic on the status and role of women in the modern 21st century Church. In fact, women should also be eligible for ordination if we base on Galatians 3:28. For Betz (1979:196), Galatians 3:28 can be interpreted as a declaration of the social emancipation of women where there is the metaphysical removal of the biological sex distinctions as the result of one’s experience in Christ. Paul’s statement seems to say, Christ’s new covenant redemption destroys the cultural, ethnicity, genders, religious, social and sexual distinctions.

Jervis (2011:43) adds that, the implication of Galatians 3:28 is that to regard oneself or others primarily in ethnic (Jews or Greek), social (slave or free), or gender (male or female) terms is to use categories inappropriate to the present, for after the coming of faith, those who believe are “sons of God and clothed with Christ”. In the same light, the task of the modern day Church is to introspectively listen to Paul’s revolutionary insights and shed off the dominant male orientation for the sake of both men and women in a bid to create an environment that is full of fellowship, innovativeness and freedoms for all the members (Cousar 2012:87). In matters of salvation, all men and women are equal before God. This ideal picture of the oneness of Christians regardless of their cultural, social, or sexual status illustrates what this intimate bond with Christ will do to human relationships. The new identity that is formed through faith in Christ transcended all typical social and moral distinctions that emanated from such socio-religious differentiating as affirmatively propounded by Paul in Galatians 3:29b that “and if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise”. The revolutionary call by Paul is the same call that we make on the status of women in Churches. All barriers need to be destroyed so that all groups serve God equally without racial, class, cultural, economic, gender and leadership barriers.

Conclusion

Since societies have responsibilities of constructing gender values, these rules can be deconstructed and then reconstructed again by reading Galatians 3:28 as a liberation text that does not suppress women or disadvantage men. If women had a place to preach and spread the word in the Old Testament, they certainly should have a place in the New Testament to do the same. Since women were prophetesses (Miriam, Hildah, Noadiah), preachers and leaders (Deborah-Judges 4 and 5; Miriam-Micah 6:4) in the Old Testament, certainly the New Testament offers greater opportunities for them to participate in these areas as members of the body of Christ in which there is neither male nor female but one body (Gal 3:28). Women must be regarded as responsible people in their own right who are able to perform their duties well. Therefore, it is good to give them a chance and credit to play their role in ministry. Women must stop treating themselves as inferior creatures. Churches must be on the forefront in empowering women as equal partners in God’s kingdom. The world is changing such that the Church in general and the Church in Christ in particular must be the leading players. The Church must not be left behind in advocating for gender equality as we do not find anywhere in the New Testament where Christ took women as second class citizens in terms of salvation. Women are still under represented in leadership positions in both Christian and secular platforms because of limiting cultural, social and traditional barriers. So it is important for men to know that women are not competing with men but that in women’s empowerment; neither are women seeking a chance to out-do men but only seek to be co-partners in doing the Lord’s work.

Many men in the Church of Christ still cling to the traditional culture where they are seen as the head and women as followers, and where women obediently show their subjection to them as heads. Culture is dynamic and changes with time. The nation at large must take the advice from the Church in terms of fighting sexism via its prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender that is typically waged against women.

The Zimbabwean government has been commented for making strides in promoting women's issues and appointing women to influential positions. Thus, we must ask, where is the Church on the genuine empowerment of women on leadership positions, because they too must take a leading role in empowering women.

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