A Study of Paul’s Teaching on Women (1 Corinthians 14: 33-40); Enriching the Church to Harness Potentials of Women for Church Growth

Adubasim, John Chukwuemeka

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Port-Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria

Abstract
This study tends to find out the distinction in women’s ministerial roles in the church. As Patricia Gundry rightly said, “Women in Christ are as fully human and as fully redeemed as men” if this statement is true, why then should there be distinction or differences in their in ministerial roles in the church? The study also tends to understand how God designed the gender to complement each other, most especially in the church. It critically examined the biblical teachings on men and women and their relationship as regards ministerial roles to enhance Church growth. It adopted a multi-dimensional approach and used the exegetical tool to look at the scriptural text. Historical criticism, socio-cultural biblical hermeneutics and feminist biblical hermeneutics were used to interpret the text with the view of avoiding misinterpretation and abuse of biblical text upon which religious doctrines are formulated. The study also interviewed key officers of the women’s group in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Diocese, officers of the Diocese and others outside the Diocese. The challenge before the church is differentiating the actual roles of those who are men and women, having known that the both are redeemed. Findings among others revealed that role confusion and distortion results when one’s role is self-empowered and self-directed, rather than God-directed.

Keywords: Women involvement, Church Growth, Women, Ministerial Roles, Christ

Introduction
It is obvious that I Corinthians was written by Paul to the Christians at Corinth. Barrett states, "No serious scholar questions it" (1968, 11). And Craig notes, "It has been denied only by fanciful scholars who have looked upon all the Pauline correspondence as falsifications from the second century. No letter has better external testimony than this one" (1953, 13). It is referred to by I Clement 37:5; 47:1-3; 49:5 (just 45 years after it was written); Ignatius to the Ephesians 16:1; 18:1; to the Romans 5:1; to the Philadelphians 3:3 (about A.D. 110); Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho 33); Athenagoras (On the Resurrection of the Dead 18); and numerous times by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria (Lindsay, 1977; Hunter, 1996).
It may be hard to date exactly when I Corinthians was written, but it could be within a couple of years of A.D. 55. Estimates vary between A.D. 53 and 57, with the most likely time being the spring of A.D. 54 or 55 (Murcott, 1991; Miller, 1993). In the introduction of the epistle, Paul associates Sosthenes, a Christian brother, with himself. Some have connected him with the Sosthenes mentioned in Acts 18:17 (Barrett: 1968). Bruce notes that he was probably "someone well known to the Corinthian church who was with Paul in Ephesus at the time of writing" (Bruce: 1971). But Conzelmann is right in noting that "the fellow-writer is not a fellow-author" (1975). Paul uses the singular Greek pronoun for "I" eighty-six times in the letter (Adelman, 2001).

The intention of this in paper is to examine the problems in the Corinthian Church and how the church today can avoid wrong interpretation and application of Paul's teaching and motive. The teachings as regards the place of women in the Church seemed to have raised a great deal of contradictions and inconsistencies. This affects the women negatively as it does not allow the women folk to exercise their God given rights towards church growth. It is worthy of note that numerically in some cases, women form greater number of the membership Church and are actively involved in every aspects of life in the Church except the ordained ministry as seen in Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. The paper recognized that majoriy of the new Pentecostal (New Generation) churches now ordain women as their pastors and bishops. This has not been so in Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches as only the men are proved worthy of being ordained as priests of God.

Green agrees that ‘the questions of the place of women in Christianity, its life and leadership, are an extremely hot contemporary issue’ (Green: 1982). While Barclay believed that ‘Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians have purely local and temporary significance’ (Barclay: 1975). A lot of meaning has be read into Paul’s teaching on women in I Corinthians, sometimes these are based on the readers cultural, social and religious interpretation of the place of women both in the Church and Society. They often neglect the historical background of the people who received the teaching first.

Contemporary, Paul’s teaching on women has continued to attract some criticism, particularly this period when there are current global debate on women’s emancipation from gender stereotype or patriarchy and empowerment. Barclay sees Paul’s teaching on this issue as “very improbable to be accepted in the twentieth Century”. He maintained that it is improbable that we accept this view of the inferiority and subordination of women Barclay (1975:97).

The Major Issue of Concern
The participation of women in ministry is a very challenging issue in today's church. There is the need to harness the gifts of all the members God's church. Mostly those God has called to serve the Church. There is also a growing concern, beyond the Church itself. Gradually more secular thinkers feels Christianity is against women and therefore not relevant to the modern world. Looking at 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35, it is difficult and challenging to interpret. The major reason is, Paul addressed a unique problem that they were having regarding women. However, he did not define what the problem was; Paul just addressed the attitude behind the problem. (1 Cor. 14:36). The problem then is, how does one reconcile these words to the fact of Paul’s recognition that women should pray or prophesy in the church, but with their head
covered in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16?

Some consider 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, as an interpolation, that it is not Paul’s words. They believe 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 should be ignored and therefore not part of the Bible. However, the evidence that support the verses as Paul's word and authentic is more stronger than the argument against it. The women in the major churches who have strongly adopted Paul’s views have made great impact in their participation in ministry at the various Churches in their Diocese and at the Diocesan levels; reconciling their commitment to the Church’s ministry and the statement in 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 poses a lot of challenge.

“let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church”.

There is need to look at scholarly views on women participation in ministry. It is worthy of note that there are scholars who are in favour of women participation in ministry, while others are against participation of women in ministry. Liefield, for example, believes that the women participation in ministry revolves around the 'nature of Christian ministry'. He writes,

“The conclusions we reach with regard to women and ministry are inevitably affected by the way the questions are posed. It could be said … that there is only one question: should Christian ministry, which by all testimony of scripture is spiritual in the nature, be limited by the gender of the minister, which is by nature a human distinction? That is a basic and straightforward way of putting it. It cuts through to the heart of the issue and the agenda without ambiguity (Liefield 1989: 127).

The issue here is 'what is the nature of Christian ministry?' Any stance without the understanding of the nature of Christian ministry will certainly lead to bias position. The actual question to ask is, “Should women be ordained?” this question needs careful evaluation. Is it not possible that church ministry could be both “human” and “spiritual.” However, is not ‘spiritual’ ministry done by those who are ‘human’? Without a biblical answer to this prior question any conclusion based on the proposed question is surely a case of question begging.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit was not giving to Christians based on whether you are a man or woman. For as much as the scripture does not clearly assign spiritual gift based on whether you are a man or woman, one can conclude, there can be no difference between men and women in ministry roles.

According to Patricia Gundry,

“There is but one central and watershed question in this conflicted issue: Are women fully human? All other questions and issues are peripheral to this question”. Responding to Gundry’s assertion, Gretchen Gaebelin Hull goes even further to ask; “Are women fully redeemed?”

The answer to the above questions will help in the interpretation of the scriptures relating to the role of women in ministry. Patricia Gundry said, "Women in Christ are as fully human and as fully redeemed as men” Our assertion then is, if women in Christ are fully human and redeemed, why then should there be distinction in there ministerial role in the church.
However, as good as Gundry's question may be to the issue, other biblical teachings on distinction at certain levels are ignored. The fact that "man and woman are fully human and redeemed" does not imply or remove the fact that there is difference between man and woman. If men and women are truly different and therefore complementary, to say that their differences cannot entail functional distinctions appears to assert more than can rightly be concluded from an equality of personhood and redemption.

We cannot deny the reality of the questions raised above. Specific questions such as the ordination of women are related to the issue of the role of women in church ministry. But their answers must be sought in further questions concerning underlying principles. Similarly, the issues of personhood and redemption have an important bearing on the entire question.

The major issues before the church are those who are men and women who are both persons and redeemed. So we have to critically examine the biblical teachings on men and women and their relationship. If the bible teaches that being human and redeemed eliminates all distinctions between men and women, then the matter of their roles in Church ministry would appear to be solved, that is, there can be no distinction of any kingdom if, on the other hand, a distinction between the genders is still valid even among believers, then the categories of personhood and redemption do not close the issue. The basic issue in the question of women’s ministry in the church is thus; does God intend any role distinction between men and women in relation to ministry in the church?

Although this is the fundamental question in the present controversy, its answer and an understanding of the biblical picture of the role of women in church ministry must be sought in the context of other questions related to the total picture of New Testament Church ministry.

1. There is need to understand the meaning and function of the New testament terminologies for church functionaries like elder, bishop, deacon, pastor, “ministers”, etc. What are their leadership roles within the Church?
2. There is need to understand “Church” in relation to the question of ministry? The ministry in the church, does it include all of the “Church” functions like gathering at homes, Sunday school, etc) or is it only “corporate” worship?
3. There is need to understand the nature of the meeting of the New Testament Church. Could it have involved the participation of more people than our modern services? That is, did more people (men and women) have opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts when the church met together than they do today?

The major issue today about the women participation in ministry is not the augment whether there is a different between men and women in terms of gender; but the understanding that the church grows through the ministry of every member. We need to understand how God designs the gender to complement each other, most especially in the church.

**Methodology**

Due to the significant nature of Paul's teaching on women, and the current debate on the level of women participation in ministry this work adopted a multi-dimensional approach; the study used the exegetical tool to look at the scriptural text. Historical criticism, socio-cultural
biblical hermeneutics and feminist biblical hermeneutics were used to interpret the text with the view of avoiding misinterpretation and abuse of biblical text upon which religious doctrines are formulated. The study also interviewed key officers of the women’s group in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Diocese, officers of the Diocese and others outside the Diocese. The study also sourced information from the Diocese of Niger Delta North synodical debate.

Discussion of Findings
The status of women in the gospel was so much influence by the cultural setting of the Palestine and the Jewish law. Women were considered to be inferior to men, and under the authority of men. They were limited to roles of little or no authority; they were largely confined to their father's or husband's home. From the Second Temple period, women were not allowed to testify in court trials. They could not go out in public, or talk to strangers. When outside of their homes, they were to be doubly veiled. "They had become second-class Jews, excluded from the worship and teaching of God, with status scarcely above that of slaves." Their position in society was defined in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the interpretation of those scriptures. Their status could be compared with that of contemporary women in Afghanistan during the Taliban dictatorship. (Metzger and Coogan, 1993:806)

However, the ministry of Jesus presented some freedom to women, as they were active in His ministry; although, all the twelve disciples were all men.

In the Old Testament, from the Genesis account man and woman were both created in the image of God; although, the woman was made from the ribs of Adam to become a mate suitable for him. Some school of thought has argued that since man is created first and the woman created out of man: woman is therefore not to exercise headship of man. The creation order does not in any way underscore the fact that man and woman was created in the image of God. One cannot deny the facts that were differences between men and women in the Old Testament times. It is mandatory for the women not to attend festivals. Exodus 23: 17. "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD".(KJV). The men are required to attend feast three times annually. Deutronomy.16:16 "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:"(KJV).

However, women are allowed to attend such religious events if they wish, but it is not mandatory (1 Samuel. 1:9, 21-22). The law of Moses acknowledges that women's duty should be at the home as wives and mothers of the family. This does not in any way exclude women from religious service. They served at the door of the Tabernacle. Exodus. 38.8. Exodus 38:8 "And he made the laver [of] brass, and the foot of it [of] brass, of the looking glasses of [the women] assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation".(KJV). Both men and women contributed their valuables for use in the building of the Tabernacle (Exodus.35:22, 25, 26). The Laver for ministry in the court of the tabernacle was made of brass from the mirrors of the women only.

Scripture teaches that men were always to be the spiritual leaders of the family but women were able to share in this role alongside their husbands. Women were able to consecrate themselves with the vow of a Nazarite (Numbers. 6:2), just like men. Women shared in the sacred meals and great annual feasts (Deutronomy. 16:11, 14); in wedding festivities (John
2:1-3); in the fellowship of the family meal (12:3). They shared in offering sacrifices, as Manoah’s wife did (Judges 13:13-14); the women were graced by theophanies just as men were, Ex: Manoah’s wife (Judges 13:3-5,9); Hagar (Genesis 16:7, 21:17); Sarah (18:9-10).

The priestly ministry in the old testament were exclusively reserved for the men from the priestly lineage.

"And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, [even] Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons" (KJV) Exodus 28:1.

See also Numbers. 18:1-7; notably there was no woman among the Levites who were involved in the priesthood. However the office of prophet in the Old Testament was not limited to men, there were a few women that were called to be “prophetesses,” God’s spokesperson, as were the prophets. Miriam (ca. 1400 B.C. Exodus 15:20) was the first prophetess to the nation Israel, then Deborah (Judges 4:4-7); Isaiah’s wife was also a prophetess (725 B.C.) (Isaiah 8:3). There were female prophets in the early New Testament times; we see this with Philip, “Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses” (Acts 21:9).

The women were present in services to hear the Word of God (Nehemiah. 8:2-3), and engaged in music ministry (Exodus. 15:20-21; 1 Chronicles. 25:5), women sang and danced in worship and often celebrated before the LORD with singing, dancing, and tambourines (e.g., 1 Samuel 18:6; Psalm 68:25), and prophesy often included instruments (1 Chronicles. 25:1-3), prophecy was also often sung as the Psalms were inspired words put to song. The “daughters of music” (Ecclesiastes. 12:4) were singing women, but they were not included in the temple choir. In Exodus. 15:19-21 Israel’s first prophetess (Miriam) led the women in timbrel, dancing, and singing the same song of Moses which is the most ancient praise song that we know of. This indicates that, Moses probably led the men and Miriam the women-the two groups responding alternately, singing the first verse as a chorus the song of Mariam. We can understand the modern customs of the East, where the dance is accompanied with singing and the sound of the timbrel is still led by the chief female of the company, the rest imitating her movements and repeating the words of the song. Miriam and Deborah composed the two oldest pieces of literature preserved in the Bible, which are regarded as literary masterpieces (Exodus 15 and Judges 5).

Deborah was a prophetess who ruled Israel. Judges 4:4: “And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.” It could be because men would not assume their responsibilities; God rose up and used a woman. God will put a woman in charge when men are lazy and cowardly. Anytime the leadership of men is dispensed with and women rule over men, it is a judgment. Isaiah.3:12.

The Old Testament Times in Comparison with the New Testament Times
The social practice of women taught by the religious leaders in Jesus’ day was anything but favourable or liberating. These religious rules were written down after the first century in the Mishna and Talmud. These books gave us some insight into practices that were already accepted by the religious leaders at the time of Jesus’ ministry.
It is forbidden for dogs, women or palm trees to pass between two men, nor may others walk between dogs, women or palm trees (Pesahim 111a). Gentile women were considered even lower than a Jewish woman as she was designated an animal (Kerithoth 6b and Berakoth 58a). Women were to be shunned in public social contact. From the Mishna tractate Abot, 1.5: “Engage not in too much conversation with women. They said this with regard to one’s own wife. How much more does the rule apply to another man’s wife? As long as a man engages in too much conversation with women, he causes evil to himself, for he goes idle from the study of the Torah, so that his end will be that he will inherit gehenna.” Imagine living with this kind of attitude of fear of damnation for a conversation.

The women did not have the right to be public witnesses in court cases. “Though the woman is subject to the commandments, she is disqualified from giving evidence” (Baba Kamma 88a). The Jewish historian, Josephus, records the attitude toward women of his time in Antiquities 4,219:

“It is forbidden to admit the testimony of women because of the levity and boldness of their sex.”

Restrictions on both men and women went far beyond the Scripture, but for the women it was far worse. “An unmarried man must not be a teacher of children, nor may a woman be a teacher of children”(Mishna Kiddushin 4,13).Women were not allowed to be taught the Torah publicly despite that it was allowed in the Old Testament period (Joshua. 8:35; Nehemiah. 8:2-3). Restrictions applied to any public reading of Scripture in the Synagogue (Megillot 73a) and they were unable to pronounce the benediction after a meal in the home (Mishna Bereshit 7:2). Women were restricted from orally communicating the Torah to others, even to children. From the tractate Sota, 10a: “May the words of Torah be burned, than that they should be handed over to women.” In Sota 21b it is written, “Rabbi Eliezer says: Whoever teaches his daughter Torah teaches her obscenity.” Women were not allowed to be educated in the same schools as men. They could not learn the Torah by themselves nor along with the men. This was practiced in the Second Temple period of Jesus’ time and in synagogues afterwards; they were separated from men in the service. This practice is continued today among Orthodox Jews. Although today in most areas of Judaism (the reform side) much of this has changed considerably.

These religious limitations were not always found in the Old Testament. This is why Jesus reacted so strongly against the teachings of the fathers (elders Mark.7), because they were not Biblical. Women being accepted in Jesus’ ministry were certainly not the practice of the Rabbis of His time. “One is not so much as to greet a woman” (Talmud b Berakhoth 43b). Jesus’ attitude toward women in His ministry becomes a liberating factor against these types of religious practices that were accepted in his day. Jesus often did the forbidden in the religious practice of the Pharisees by ministering to both women as well as men that were off limits. He conversed with the Samaritan woman at a well, (John 4:1-42 that was an unaccepted practice for a male and rabbi of His day.) Even his disciples in v:27 “came, and they marvelled that He talked with a woman”, as they were taught not to talk to a gentile woman in public. He instructed her and revealed Himself to her as the Messiah and she went forth with the message.

The Rabbis (tradition of the elders) taught that women were intellectually inferior and
incapable of studying the Torah. When Jesus was in the house of Mary and Martha, (Luke 10:38-42), as Martha went about her daily chores he instructed her that Mary had actually “chosen that good part” by sitting and learning (Luke 10:42). Jesus did not condemn Martha for going about her household duties, but commended Mary for a better ministry, her desire to learn the Word.

We do not think it was God’s intention to exclude women from being servants, ministering in His kingdom. Jesus never spoke of women as being inferior to men. They were always honoured in His teaching and were not often used as negative examples. Instead He used the men who were to be leaders for His examples in correction. At least twice in His sermons Jesus used the example of a woman to rebuke the faithless men of His generation: the widow of Zarephath to the men of Nazareth, Luke 4:25-26, and the Queen of Sheba to the Pharisees, Luke 11:31. More than twice in His parables Jesus used an illustration with a woman to illustrate the faith and resolve they were to have: The persistent widow who troubled the judge in Luke 18:2-8 and the woman searching for the lost coin in Luke 15:8-10. In another parable a woman was used negatively as the church, hiding three measures of meal.

Jesus gave the women, who were often neglected by the teachers, a place of assurance and hope. We see this in the example of the immoral woman who was able to repent without fear of ridicule with tears of thankfulness by crying on Jesus’ feet and drying them with her hair. It was a woman who anointed the head of Jesus as he sat at supper in the house of Simon the leper, something no man would do. He rebuked Simon for not doing so (Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3; Luke 7:37).

Mary had no apprehension to anoint His feet with costly perfume, risking the rebuke by others. It was because Jesus accepted them all, not some. Because of his acceptance they were moved to repentance and followed. When Mary anointed Jesus for his burial with expensive oil, even his disciples complained about the waste.

“For in pouring this fragrant oil on my body, she did it for my burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Matt 26:12-13).

We never hear of this being done along with the gospel presentation. Certainly she deserves recognition in her bold sacrificial act, as she was conscious of what the disciples were not: his forthcoming death. Jesus’ condemnation of adultery and divorce did not isolate women as the Pharisees did (Matthew 5:27-28; 19:3-10). Women who were ostracized from society because of immoral practices were restored to righteous living finding a new devotion to God (Luke 7:37-50). The woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) Jesus treated impartially, as He protected her in front of her accusers. Jesus rebuked them, for the law commands to bring the guilty man along with her. He gave her forgiveness and said, “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11) she was restored. His compassion and fair treatment of women won many women disciples who followed Him and ministered along with the disciples (Luke 8:1-3), and accompanied Him and the disciples on their journeys through villages that sometimes had danger (Luke 8:1-3).

“And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were
with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils. And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance."

The women were the only ones who followed him to the cross except for John; the women were brave enough to stay there out in the open while the men stayed away hidden. They took part in the burial, as only one man came forward; they were able to observe the exact location of his tomb to go back again Matthew.27:61. Women were not only the last ones at the cross; they were also the first ones at the tomb. Jesus showed Himself to women first, and they were instructed by an angel to proclaim the resurrection Mt.28:1-8. The women believed the resurrection before the men. Mary Magdalene, a known sinner was the first woman privileged to tell them. The men when they heard the testimony of the women said “And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11).

In Judaism because of the Pharisees teaching they did not believe women were reliable witnesses. We believe that Jesus purposely used the women because of their faith, courage, despite this teaching of unreliable witnesses. Psalms 68:11 says, “The Lord giveth the word: The women that publish the tidings are a great host.” (ASV)

This was first fulfilled when the women went to the tomb and came back with the good news that the Lord had risen from the dead. This continues with the women being part of giving the gospel out, as evangelists. Although Mary Magdalene is sent by the angel to tell the good news of Jesus’ resurrection to the male disciples (Matthew 28:7-10), after the resurrection it is the men who are gathered together and specifically instructed in the apostolic commission to bring the gospel to all people (Matthew.28:16-20; Mark. 16:14-15).

Ever since God has used women in some important roles; a short summarization of the importance of women in history can be like this: A woman was the first to sin (Genesis. 3:6). A faithful woman was chosen for Christ’s birth to reverse the sin. God brings back honour to women as they were the last persons to see Jesus on the cross (Matthew. 27:55,56) the first to be at the gravesite (Mark. 15:46,47; Luke. 23:27,28) and first to see the risen Lord and tell the story to others. (Mark. 16:9; John. 20:14-18); so women were not ostracized from participating in key roles in God’s redemptive history; despite Eve’s failure.

After the resurrection, Mary the mother of Jesus was among the 120 who continued in prayer in the upper room and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13-14). In 1 Corinthians.15 Paul mentions 500 witnesses of the resurrection, some which may include women. The women were among the first Christian converts in Samaria (Acts 8:12); the first convert in Europe was a woman, Lydia of Thyatira, who showed hospitality in her home for Paul and a meeting-place for the infant church (16:14). Women suffered equally with men in the early persecutions of the church. In reference to Saul, “if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2). Throughout early church history women were martyred just as men were. Their heroism, and faith withstood the same tortures and cruelties produced by Rome. Christian women such as Blandina, Potamiaena, Perpetua, and Felicitas etc. became known martyrs among the women. They may not be known as well as the names of Ignatius and Polycarp but they were defenders of the faith and stood side by side facing death through persecution. Such courage
was exhibited by Agathonica, a pious woman, who suffered martyrdom at Pergamopolis, in Asia. (Reference-Foxes book of Martyrs).

Many a woman was the influence to convert their husbands to Christ. Both Poland and Russia became Christian when their rulers accepted the faith of their Christian wives. Clotilda’s conversion of Clovis made France Christian. The marriage of Bertha, another Christian princess of France, to Ethelbert introduced Roman Christianity into England, which became the established religion when Edwin, in turn, was converted through the influence of his Christian wife. The process culminated, in the 19th century, in the long, prosperous, peaceful, Christian reign of Victoria, England’s noblest sovereign. (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia)

The women received spiritual gifts along with the men and served in them faithfully. In the Epistles the apostolic greetings give them a place of honour in the church at Rome. Paul’s closing salutations of his Epistles sends greetings to at least eight prominent women active in their faith and Church: Phoebe, Prisca, Mary “who bestowed much labour on you.” Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, and the sister of Nereus (Romans 16:1,3,6,12,15).

The apostle Paul commended Lois and Eunice, grandmother and mother of Timothy, whose “genuine faith” instructed Timothy from the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15). Like the women in Proverbs 1:8 “My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother” including her in instructing the child in the home. Much of Proverbs has warnings to men about women that are immoral, the harlot, the seductress, the contentious woman, yet Proverbs has wisdom personified as a she. And Proverbs 31 teaches about the productive woman, a virtuous woman. V.26 “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.” Prov. 31:30 “a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” She was praised because she worked at helping and supporting her husband.

We find the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 are not just men. They include Sarah (v.11), Moses’ mother (v.23), and Rahab the former harlot (v.31). Of course there were women included in the genealogy of Christ that did not originate outside the Hebrew faith. Women have had much influence for Godliness in history and need to be recognized for their important work. Wherever the gospel was introduced to a culture, the result was women’s social status being raised. Christianity does not oppress women, but liberates them. We can see this example from the first century. However God still has an order that was implemented from the fall that is necessary for the Church and home to follow to function correctly. By upholding this order we are submitting to His leadership. But not maintaining this order we are ignoring and even rebelling against God’s Word.

Conclusion
Having gone through all these, one can understand clearly that from the beginning of time, God made men and women in His image and likeness, therefore both are worthy of taking up ministerial roles in the church to support God’s works. But, some religious attitudes to women in ministerial roles imply a number of underlying assumptions that are highly problematic. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church have never felt that priestly or Episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women. This is the major concern of this study. Is the discrimination against women Biblical or is it as a result of man’s wrong interpretation of what was written in the Bible by St. Paul? From all indications, it is
very clear that there are misconceptions about what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14: 33-40 as regards women participation in church ministry. The paper therefore made the following observations:

1. There are various interpretations and misinterpretations of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. This could be as a result and bias or lack of proper tools of interpretation. The study therefore, recommends that proper biblical exegetical tools be used for the interpretation of the bible. This will enable clearer understanding of the biblical text and avoid erroneous interpretations.

2. That the gift of the Spirit is not gender specific, therefore women should be given equal rights to participate in moving the church forward.

3. Although it is sometimes portrayed that women in the Roman Empire were totally excluded from civic life, political power, business affairs, and the ability to gain an education, the situation for women in Asia Minor was different. There is evidence that women were afforded a much greater freedom than is often thought. Today, in Nigeria, women are allowed head organization, ministries etc but some churches tend to exclude them. This study therefore recommends that they be given every opportunity in the Church in any capacity that God has called them as this will enable their potentials to be harnessed towards the growth of the Church.

4. That the role of each gender needs to be empowered and given direction by one’s relationship with God, which requires the ability to trust. Role confusion and distortion results when one’s role is self-empowered and self-directed, rather than God-directed.

References