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**Editor's Note**

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**Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Guest Editor)**

I have the pleasure to write this editorial of volume 8.2 of *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* as a Guest Editor. The theme of Gender-Based Violence, to which this volume is dedicated, has been very dear to my heart since the 1980s, as I worked with different groups locally and internationally.

An initiative I took in 1980 to gather African Women in Theology in Ibadan, Nigeria resulted in the inauguration of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Accra in 1989. The inauguration of the 'Circle' put me deeply in the morals of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and the role that Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions and culture play.

I returned to Accra in 1997 filled with the trauma of GBV experience through the studies undertaken by the World Council of Churches; specifically that of the Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women.

Since 1999, I have in the context of the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture at the Trinity Theological Seminary listened to cases of gender-based violence in Accra, in Ghana and globally.

I have taking the word 'gender' seriously, and I have endeavoured to stimulate interest in the study of masculinity. This is because while women are questioning the rationale for engaging in feminist discourses, the men are not interrogating their masculinity: what does it mean to be a man? Therefore, we are proposing a study of masculinity.

From such a standpoint, I have not only had keen interest in the subject of your study, but also, I have been directly involved in keeping the issue alive among the people of faith in Ghana and abroad. I am, therefore, thankful to be part of your project.

At Thalita Qumi Centre at the Trinity Theological Seminary, in the context of Women in Religion and Culture, we study religious expressions in Ghana, focusing on Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions. We read the Scriptures – the Bible, the Qu'ran - and African proverbs and idioms and religious rituals. I am personally interested in

‘observing’ Christian rituals since they involve and impact Christian women. Let me share one experience.

I was in a huge Cathedral of an Eastern Orthodox Church; we were going to baptize two children. The boy was baptized in the font, that was in the Holy of Holies; and the girl in the font located in the space in front of the Holy of Holies. So, the discrimination starts right in the church! Christianity has often proclaimed the second creation account over the first to sanction ‘women inferiority and submission to men.’ The first account states that God created ‘Adam,’ the earth-being, he creates Adam male and female and blessed them. Today, I want to hear from biblical scholars that the Bible is used selectively to enforce women inferiority/submission. For example, Gen 2 says, “Therefore, a man leaves his mother and his father and clings to his wife and they become one flesh”. Yet in our culture it is the woman who leaves father and mother. Pauline teaching is used to sanction the inferiority of women and they are used to socialize women to submission. However, Galatians 3 reminds us of equality, and 1 Cor 7 teaches us of mutuality.

Personally, when the Scripture is read, I hear the Word of God. But, at the end of the reading, I ask: is this the Word of God? Or does Jesus endorse this? Preaching at marriage ceremonies by Christians makes selective use of Eph 5. Gender-based violence in Christianity affects mostly women.

Gender-based violence in African culture too needs to be interrogated. I would like to draw attention to violence in language. We socialise through proverbs to impute inferiority complex to women, socialising them not to be strong and bold. We teach women that they do not have the capacity to act but only to act. We socialize girls to grow up to become dependent on men for their material needs; we socialize women to eschew success. For example, we have a proverb: ‘if a tall girl carries something on her head, the birds will take it.’

We have decided how tall a girl can be; so, all the women go slumping, afraid to be taller than the boys. They do not want to be tall! But what the proverb really says is that if a woman is outstanding, she will be undermined, and I think you all recognize that.

The rituals of life need to be interrogated: we are more negative towards women. When I was growing up, not many years ago, when somebody has a child, one would ask, what did she have? The girl was associated

with fetching water and the boy with being strong... There is already a discrimination. What did she get? A human being or a girl? We need to investigate more; why have we developed this into disparaging the human female?

Our religious expressions, both verbal and physical generate support, signify gender-based violence in Christianity, Islam and African culture. Our task is to discover, and live, the justice and compassion that religions stand for.

In fact, the papers of this volume stimulate afresh the on-going discussion on the role of religion in the Gender-Based Violence discourse.

The first paper, which is a case study, establishes the ambiguous role of religion among the Asante of Ghana. While on one hand it protects women from violence because of its understanding of femininity, on the other, it exploits violently femaleness.

The second paper addresses the issue of gender-based violence from the Christian perspective by posing the question, "which theology of poor?" A biblical theological reflection reveals how 'prosperity preaching' a growing phenomenon in Ghana limits the goal of life to economics, thereby impoverishing majority of the weak in society.

From an Islamic perspective, the third paper, with empirical evidence, illustrates how inadequate interpretation of some Quranic verses have resulted in GBV in Muslim communities.

The two interventions from CHRAJ and DOVSU put into perspective the existence and precarious nature of GBV in Ghana. If GBV is to be completely eradicated from our society, then all of us are to see ourselves as stakeholders and activists!