

Christianity, Misogyny and Women

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Abstract

Misogynistic tendencies are not strange to society, rather, these attitudes pervade various strata of our existence. They are vocally audible and visibly present within the political, economic, social, cultural and religious spheres of our societies. Misogyny is an extreme hatred against women by men and women. The purview of this paper is to explore misogyny in Christianity, analyze the origin and extent of misogyny within Christianity and how it has affected the position of women within the church. The work adopted the historical and survey methods of data collection and it utilized the qualitative method to analyze the collected data. This paper discovered that misogyny was deeply rooted in Christianity in the period of the early church fathers and it negatively affected the placement of leaders in ecclesiastical positions, especially those assigned to women in the Church. The paper argues that misogyny also has negative implications for Christian ethics which focuses on love and affection. This paper recommended amongst other things that churches and related organizations must shun Misogynistic attitudes and related vices against women since it negates the teachings of Christianity which primarily are based on love.

Keywords: Misogyny, Christianity, Church fathers, Ecclesiastical, Christian Ethics, Women, Horizontal love, Vertical love.

Introduction

Misogynistic attitude pervades so strongly in African societies that it has eaten deep into the very fabric of our existence. Misogyny seems

common within Africa, perhaps, due to the patriarchal nature of our societies. It implies that, the African society is a man's world. Men are in control of home, political, religious, economic, agricultural spheres etc. To this end, women play subservient roles, they are marginalized, oppressed and their rights violated deliberately. It is this nature of our society that encourages Misogynistic tendencies. Men hate women because of past experiences of life. Women hate women because they feel they are superior or competing with each other lack of courage to face women makes men to hate women and perhaps the culture of a given society plays a dominant role in the existence of misogynistic attitudes.

In the church, Misogynistic tendencies traced its origin to the period of the early church fathers like; Tertullian, St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom. These men taught and wrote that women are the cause of sin in the world. They averred that Eve the first woman enticed Adam and made him to sin against God. They taught that women are exceptionally evil and weak, therefore, they are only useful for procreative purposes. These teachings have permeated the very soul of the Church, and thus, could be the reason women are denied leadership positions in most Christian churches. Those who struggle to get to church leadership as founders or co-founders of Ministries are seen as "show offs" in the society.

This paper discussed the origin of misogyny in Christianity, its consequences on the position of women and its implications for Christian ethics. The paper equally analyzed the concept of Misogyny and the factors responsible for the development of Misogynistic attitudes within a given society using academic literatures disposed to us. It also discussed the negative effects of misogyny on the position of women in Christianity and highlighted the implications of misogyny for Christian ethics and teachings.

Literature Review of the Concept of Misogyny

Many scholars have defined the concept of Misogyny differently in views and opinions. Some of these definitions, views and opinions will be critically analysed below: Bolander (2012) defines misogyny as

"The act of hatred directed against women". Etymologically Misogyny has its root from two Greek word "*Misein*" meaning to hate, and "*gune*" meaning women. Therefore, from the above etymological derivative. Misogyny is succinctly defined as the hate of women. Johnson (2016) defines misogyny as a cultural attitude of hatred for females because they are females". She argues further that:

Misogyny is central to sexist prejudice and ideology and, it is an important basis for the oppression of females in male dominated societies. Misogyny is manifested in many different ways, from jokes to pornography, to violence to the self-contempt women may be taught to feel for their own bodies.

Flood (2015) is of the opinion that, misogyny means hatred for women and notes that:

Though most common in men, misogyny also exist in, and is practiced by women against other women. Misogyny functions as an ideology, or belief system that has accompanied patriarchal or male-dominated societies for thousands of years, and continues to place women in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision making (25).

Ologies and Isms (2012) feel that, misogyny is an extreme dislike of females frequently based upon unhappy experience or upbringing. Misogyny manifests itself in laws regulating reproduction (birth control and abortion), social barrier to accessing political and economic power, rape and various forms of domestic abuses. In summary therefore, misogyny is a negative attitude directed towards women, by both men and women. It is a chronic hatred exhibited against women, in the home, church and society in general.

Causes of Misogyny

1. Psychological/Emotional Factors

One of the causes of misogyny is psychological or emotional; it develops as a result of early childhood strange relationship with

mother or step mother. Such a child grows up to become an adult with extreme hatred for women.

Benjamin and Virginia (1997) observe as follows:

Misogyny is an abnormal state of mind that may stem from childhood conflicts between the child and his, or her mother or mother surrogates, such as a step mother, often misogyny mask fear of women. A child raised by a cold rejecting or brutal mother, for example may develop a misogynistic attitude towards women on reaching adulthood.

The psychological factor contributes to a large extent hatred for women. There are several opinions of scholars and the general public on this issue. Some are of the opinion that some women do not like men, consequently, men in turn hate such women. Many have argued that women who do not mind their business and engage in gossips attract hatred from people. Others argue that, women are hated because of their distasteful character and immoral dress code. Some argue that women are hated because they are rude, immoral and unfriendly; and that women who are boastful would naturally attract hatred from people.

Some people were interviewed to ascertain why women are hated by men. Elder (Mrs) Akpo notes; "Women are hated by men because they try to exercise authority over them". According to Pastor Clement Adie, men hate women because sin originated from women. For Ibiang Usang; "men do not hate women; rather they hate their wrong attitudes". Pastor Ubong Etim argues that men who hate women are men who are not broken in spirit and do not trust women. Rev. Gabriel Eteng is of the opinion that; "some men hate women due to cultural orientation which emphasizes that women are not to be heard, but only seen". For Mike Ipuole, "Women are hated because they are women" (Interviewed 10th - 12th February, 2019; Calabar).

Psychologically, a woman feels a sense of inferiority or superiority towards another woman she met for the first time. This makes her

exhibit hateful attitude towards her, and may not be willing to give assistance where necessary. The consequence of this attitude is lack of support for the cause of other women especially in the field of politics. It is quite unfortunate that majority of women feel at ease relating or seeking help from men than their fellow women. Even in the political field, it is more glaring that women prefer supporting a man to a woman in the field of politics. Consultations were made to know why women hate other women. Mr. Mike Ipoule declares as follows; “when a woman is beautiful, other women become jealous of her, because women are always in competition with one another”.

According to Ibiang Usang, “women hate other women who tends to show off or prove superior”. For Pastor Clement Adie and Pastor Ubong Etim, women hate other women as a result of jealousy and envy. According to Elder (Mrs.) Akpo, women hate other women as a result of envy and differences in class strata (interviewed 12th – 13th February, 2019). It is worth knowing that, lack of courage to approach a woman results to misogynistic attitude towards her. When a young man is too nervous and lacks courage to handle a situation or approach a young lady for friendship, consequently, such a situation eventually leads to frustration and hatred. Mr. Nkanu in an interview was asked why men hate women, he responded thus; “most men are not courageous enough in their advances towards women, such attitude puts them off, and they resort to hatred and resentment against women” (Interview; 16th August, 2018, Calabar).

Cultural Factor

It is worthy to note that there are some cultural restrictions that promote or encourage Misogyny. Most of these restrictions place on women engendered hatred. Women are punished for offenses collectively committed with their male counterparts, while such men are exonerated. In some cultures, women are punished in cases of adultery while the men are exonerated. Example is the case of the Bible where the woman alone was to be punished for a sin jointly committed by a man and woman if not because of Jesus’ timely intervention. The restrictions placed on women on the breaking of

kolanut, pouring of libation and officiating in ceremonies have no justification, it is a result of the hatred the society has for women.

Generally, in respect to leadership within the cultures of Africa, men are regarded as natural leaders, superior and born to rule, while women are inferior and born to serve due to the patriarchal nature of African societies. Culturally speaking, most of the taboos placed on women ranging from menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, widowhood rites etc. ought not to be as they are in the nature of women. In my thinking, this hatred against women breeds violence against women. The practice of widowhood rites in African is a glaring example of Misogynistic attitude. In widowhood rites, women are subjected to obnoxious and ugly treatment by the society, and their fellow women, on the demise of their husbands. This treatment points to the fact that they are responsible for death of their husbands.

Engel (2014) notes that, misogyny finds its roots in the cultural attitude of the Africans, it is most common in patriarchal societies where women are kept in subordinate positions because they are believed to be associated with evil and are not capable of making meaningful contributions to the development of the family and society.

Origin of Misogyny in Christianity

According to Peach (2002) women form the majority and major support for Christianity from the beginning for this reason women played central role in Christianity. The communities of Celibate Christian Women existed in early Christianity, the Catholic Church made monasticism available to women as well as men. Women became more active in apostolic activities of charity and social services. However, as the teachings of the church fathers permeated the church discussed earlier in this work, it began to generate hatred against women as time went on. A Papal Bulletin issued in 1298 mandated the enclosure of all nuns, forcing them to severely curtail or terminate their charitable activities in the community and withdraw into clusters. Those who refused enclosure were subjected to charges such as heretical and they rarely survived the punishment (204). This attitude of the church portrays hatred for women. Misogynistic

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attitude was introduced into Christianity from the period of the early patriarch such as Tertullian, Chrysostom and Augustine through their widely taught opinion that women are evil, their teachings were orchestrated by the story of the fall of man where Eve is presented as the cause of Adam's downfall and all the problems of mankind.

The church fathers believed that sin and death would not have existed in the world, should Eve not lead Adam to sin. Eve according to the church fathers represent the womenfolk in the world. The Bible says thus :

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat (Genesis 3:7).

Also, St. Paul in his instruction to Timothy gave the following instructions regarding the position of women in the church:

But I suffer not the woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, the woman being deceived was in the transgression (I Timothy 2:12-14).

Armstrong (2014) argues that the early church fathers were probably informed by the above scriptures therefore they developed hateful attitude towards women, as a result they unleashed a vicious anti women campaign that eventually led to making celibacy for clergy mandatory. Ahmed (1992) quoted St. Augustine prayers regarding women as follows:

“Oh master, make me a chaste and celibate but not yet . . . I fail to see what use women can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children (90).

Augustine's attitude according to Ahmed indicates his hatred for women because they are daughters of Eve. Ahmed further notes that Tertullian was another early church father whose hatred for women was unprecedented that he derogatory comments about women thus :

You are the devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man on account of your desert (136).

Such comments made by respectable church fathers had negative implications on the attitude of Christianity towards women. The attitude of these church fathers made those who read their works to believe that God was very angry with Eve, hence a double punishment or curse was released on her as stated below:

“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing, your desire will be for your husband” (Gen. 3:16).

These writings of misogynistic Christian literature by the early fathers influenced Christianity's approval of the subordination of women from that period till date.

Uchem (2002) notes;

Many church fathers such as Tertullian, Augustine, Origen, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas and others are credited with several misogynistic attitudes towards women, which continues to influence the attitudes and behaviours of many of the clergy today.

The root of misogyny runs deep in Christianity. We find in an early twentieth century sermon in England, seven reasons summarized as the basis for misogyny in Christianity.

- Man's priority in creation: Adam was formed then Eve

- The manner of creation: The man was not created out of a woman, but the woman was created out of man.
- Purpose of creation: The woman was created for man.
- Results in creation: The man is the image and glory of God, the woman was the glory of man.
- Woman's priority in the fall: Adam was not deceived, but Eve was deceived.
- The marriage relation: The wife is subject to her husband.
- The headship: The head of every woman is man (website, anonymous [www.misogyny @yahoo.com](mailto:www.misogyny@yahoo.com)).

The Negative effect of Misogyny on the Role of Women in the Church

The overt negative effects of misogyny on the position/roles of women in Christianity cannot be overemphasized. Among them are discussed below:

1. The church defined Women's Position

McKenna notes that, from the early patristic age, the role of women in Christianity changed after the second century due to misogynistic attitude of the early church fathers. The teachings and writings of these reputable fathers of the church made the church to establish doctrine that defined the position of women restricted to that of subordination and not outright leadership. Armstrong (2014) observes that Tertullian a second century Latin church Father wrote, "It is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church, neither may she teach, baptize, offer, nor claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacramental office. Secondly, Origin, another church father said, "Even if it is granted to a woman to show the sign of prophecy, she is nevertheless not permitted to speak in an assembly".

According to Armstrong, the Christian view of women was developed as a result of the Jewish commentaries on the Myth of the fall which states that this was the foundation from which the early Christian writers built their misogynistic attitudes towards women. This negative view of women which was carried into the Christian culture

influenced the teachings of St. Paul, who was brought up the Jewish way, he instructed women to keep their heads covered, not to teach or speak in the church, and to be subjected to their husbands in all things.

“For man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man, neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man”

(I Corinthians 8 - 9).

The implication of the above passage according to scholars is that the woman is completely under the authority of the man since she is created for the man, she cannot live without the man. According to Sawyer (2002) John Chrysostom, an early church father interprets the passage to mean that women lost their divine image as a result of the major role Eve played in the fall (218).

Lucinda, (2002) highlights the position of the church fathers such as Tertullian, Chrysostom and Augustine concerning women according to their views, women are viewed primarily as passive reproductive vessels or fetal containers for active male seed, they attributed the original sin to be the fault of a woman, (Eve) She adds that, the views of these patriarch became dominant and resulted in severely curtailing women’s leadership roles in the church because they were regarded as weak and prone to fall into sin easily than men (207). These teachings may have influenced the position of a scholar like Campbell (1994) who argues that, a woman should be restricted from teaching in the church because her contributions towards the fall of man makes her a bad leader. For him, the God given role for a woman is in the sphere of service, both in the home and the church, He notes as follows:

Here, we have two reasons why a woman is not to teach in the church. One is Adam’s first place in creation, implying headship, and other, the woman was deceived by the serpent. Adam was not deceived like the woman; he sinned with his eyes open and was more guilty than his wife, but it was Eve who was

deceived. Such was her part in the fall of humanity, and since she proved herself a bad leader in this respect, in God's wise government, she is barred from the place of authority or teaching in the church (158).

2. Ordination of Women into Ecclesiastical positions

The position of Christianity on the issues that bothers on the ordination of women could be attributed to the concept of misogyny which emanated in the patristic age. The offices of teaching and sacramental ministries were reserved for men throughout most of the churches in the East and West in the medieval church age. This has continued unabated in most Christian churches today. Via Jane (1987) lament that women were significant to a full grasp of the theological meaning of Jesus' life and ministry. They were full participants in the early Christian ritual meal and played special roles in the church but in centuries after that, they experienced marginalization. She further notes that any church that ignores the ministry of women has betrayed Jesus and the salvation He sought to bring. According to her, Campbell has failed to understand that in Christ a man is a new creation entirely. "If any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are away, behold all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). A woman who is in Christ no longer carries the curse of Eve, she is a new creature.

Opinion varies regarding the roles of women in the church. Interviews conducted show that within the Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal churches, the positions of women in the ecclesiastical leadership varies.

When asked why some churches do not give women leadership positions and ordination, Rev. Gabriel Eteng notes;

Women are not ordained in most churches because it is commonly believed that they cannot handle scared things especially during their menstrual period. Secondly, men do not appreciate women laying hands

on them because they feel they are superior and see it as a slight on their personality.

For Pastor Clement Adie, most churches do not ordain women because they believe that women are under men's control and only "helpmeet" (necessary help), they should be placed in the service position, also a woman cannot celebrate the Holy Communion because she is not the head of the family, it is therefore needless for her to obtain leadership position in the church. According to Mr. Mike Ipoule, "most churches do not ordain women because they are considered as weak people, prone to easily fall when tempted by the devil, just like Eve who fell to the temptation of the serpent" (Interviewed 12th - 13th February, 2019; Calabar).

THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

1. The Spirituality of the Church

The church is a spiritual entity that can only survive under a charged spiritual atmosphere. The role women play towards spirituality cannot be overemphasized. Women are very sensitive to spiritual matters more than men in most cases. They are easily broken and when they labour in prayers, tangible results abound. Women like Esther labored to ensure the deliverance of the Israelites who were condemned to death; "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Sushan and fast ye for me . . . I also will I go in unto the King, which is not according to the law, if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). She succeeded and did not perish. Hannah needed a child, she laboured and travailed in prayers until Eli, the priest noticed her actions and thought she was drunk. "And it came to pass as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth . . ." (I Samuel 1:12). Hannah got her prayers answered and she had not only one child but children.

The woman with the issue of blood was very spiritual; she understood that cases that defy medical solution can be handled by God. All she needed due to her faith was just a touch of Jesus' garment. "She came behind him and touched the border of his garment inspite of the crowd and immediately her issue of blood stanchd" (Luke 8:43-48).

The Canaanite woman whose daughter was dying exercised great faith even when she was called a dog by Jesus, she persisted and her daughter was healed, "And she said, truth Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the Master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her O woman, great is thy faith" (Matthew 15:27-28).

The woman who anointed Jesus with costly oil did it as a result of her faith and spirituality. "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment" (John 12:3). This and many other women in the Bible days wrought spiritual exploits in spite of the fact that they were not recognized leaders. Apart from women in the Bible days, women such as Mary Slessor (1848-1915), Catherine Booths of Salvation Army, Mother Theresa, an Irish Missionary, Cindy Jacobs, an intercessor and many other women contributed to the spirituality of the church. Thus, if women are given leadership opportunities, they would do exploit for the church.

2. Population and Strength of the Church

Women form a greater percentage of the population of any church, they form about seventy percent (70%) of the total population of a church. We all know that population is the strength of the church, while majority of the men are busy struggling to make money, their wives go to church. Secondly, women form associations in their churches which are geared towards the development of the church and women as a group in particular. For example, the Catholic Women Organizations (C.W.O.) of the Roman Catholic church and the Women's Guild (W.G) of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. These groups are well organized and most of their projects have resulted to the establishment of schools, motherless baby homes, training institutions, etc. The church will stand to benefit if these women who are doing so well in the various organizations are given the opportunities to be leaders in the management of the church. But unfortunately the church frowns at giving leadership positions to women in spite their population, thus, the few men available are overburden with different leadership positions.

In our contemporary period, few churches allow women to participate in ecclesiastical office by ordaining them as Deaconesses and Pastors while others do not see any reason to do so. Matts Costels (2002) gives a vivid answer to this situation. According to her, the issues concerning the role of women in the church ministry is controversial while some churches give women the opportunities to perform leadership roles, others do not. Those who believe women should be permitted to hold ecclesiastical position in the church belong to a school of thought known as the Egalitarian or progressive schools while those who believe that only men are permitted to hold such position in the churches are of the Historic or Traditional school of thoughts. The church thus has denied herself the benefit of the contributions women would have made towards leadership. The fact that women are home builders and managers by maintaining peace and harmony, they can as well perform leadership function in the church if given the opportunity to do so.

The task of carrying pregnancy, delivery and nurturing of babies performed by the women make her strong and an energetic leader. The woman manages the home, takes care of her husband and children tirelessly, why can't she take leadership role in the church?

Misogyny and its Implications for Christian Ethics

Christian ethics is a systematic explanation of the moral examples and teachings of Jesus, applied to the total life of the individual in society and actualized by the power of the Holy Spirit (Henlee Barnette, 1961). A Christian exist as God's representative in social interaction with fellow Christians and non-Christians for the purpose of establishing orderliness and the development of the society. The origin of Christian ethics is as old as creation. Right from creation, man was given a code of conduct which comprises a series of "dos" and "don'ts" to guide him to attain a good life. In Genesis chapter two we see one of such commandment.

And the Lord God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou

shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die (Genesis 2:16,17).

Peter Springer (1991) defines Christian ethics as an organized system that describes the moral examples and teachings of Jesus which is applicable to the life of the individual in the society and actualized through the power of the Holy Spirit. Unlike other forms of ethics which are based on secular rationalism, Christian ethics seeks to propagate an ideal Christian character or conduct in the society (Springer 1991:103).

Uduiguwomen (2009) is of the view that Christian ethics is concerned with the very best for the people, for him moral rules are not geared towards destroying the good life. They are meant to prevent a breakdown of law and order, and hence to promote the common good (38). Love is central to Christian ethics; love does not only express the nature of God, but demonstrate that God is love. Love is manifested in various ways: the Philos, Eros, Storge and the Agape. The Agape love is distinct from the other types of love. Agape is love because of what it does, not because of how it feels. For example, a man who loves his wife in spite of her shortcomings or weaknesses demonstrates the Agape love. Love is the greatest positive force in the world. No individual, society institution or government or religion can succeed without love; the teachings of Jesus Christ points towards one's love for God and neighbour. When His disciples came to ask of the greatest commandment he responded thus; "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength, this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30). "You shall love your neighbour as yourself, there is no commandment greater than this" (Mark 12:31).

The importance placed on love made Jesus to emphasis that love must extend to one's enemy. "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who loves not knows

not God; for God is love” (I John 4:7-8). In Christianity, love should dominate in all that people do with men. Kenyon notes;

If you were doers of love, we could not injure anyone knowingly. It could eliminate selfishness from our conduct. It would make us Jesus-like in our thinking, planning and doing. There are no broken homes where love rules, there are no broken hearts and wrecked lives (39).

Agape love must be expressed in two ways, it must be towards God which is vertical and towards one’s neighbour which is horizontal. It is worth knowing that Christian teachings centers on love but unfortunately, the early church fathers ignored these teachings and introduced teachings which brought about hatred into the church, of which women were and, are direct victims.

In Christianity, hatred is a vice and not a virtue “if a man say, I love God and hateth his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? (I John 4:20). If women are hated and despised because of the belief that sin came into the world through them, then those who hate women have committed more grievous sin. “But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded is eyes” (I John 2:11). Notwithstanding, we must understand that if a woman was a vessel through which sin entered the world, a woman also became a vessel through which righteousness was introduced to the world. The Christian ethics and teachings cannot be complete without love, therefore misogyny negates the teachings of Christianity and this attitude should not be tolerated by the church. The concept of Misogyny has negative implications for Christian ethics.

Conclusion

Misogyny is a great injustice and abuse of the essence of womanhood. The church is not excluded from the evils of injustice on women as a result of misogyny. We understand that any church where misogyny

thrives, the woman is viewed as an aesthetically child centered individual who has no talents for ordained ministry or policy making position, therefore, the greatest impact of misogyny is the controversial issues regarding the ordination of women.

The paper recommends that churches and religious organizations should shun misogynistic attitude because it is against Christian ethics which centers on love. Secondly, the Christian churches should strive to demonstrate the Agape love, which is love because of what it does, not because of how it feels. Thirdly, emphasis should be placed on Christians practicing both horizontal and vertical love which is believed to eradicate hatred among Christians.

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