

Male Chauvinism and the Interpretation of Gender in the Bible: A Theological and Hermeneutical Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

Male chauvinism remains a significant challenge in contemporary society and Christian communities, particularly where assumptions of male superiority are reinforced through cultural traditions, institutional practices, and interpretations of biblical texts concerning gender, authority, and submission. Although the Bible contains passages that have historically been interpreted as supporting male authority, it also contains substantial evidence of women's dignity, leadership, prophetic ministry, theological instruction, and participation in God's mission. This study distinguishes male chauvinism from the related concepts of patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny and investigates how these categories intersect within biblical interpretation. The study employs a qualitative theological methodology combining textual analysis, historical-contextual interpretation, theological analysis, and contextual hermeneutics. Particular attention is given to competing complementarian and egalitarian interpretations and to the influence of African cultural contexts upon the interpretation of gender-related biblical texts. The study argues that biblical interpretation becomes problematic when cultural assumptions of male superiority are imposed upon Scripture or when individual passages are isolated from their literary, historical, and canonical contexts. Genesis presents male and female together as bearers of the divine image and participants in humanity's vocation. Ephesians 5 places marital relations within the broader framework of mutual submission and Christlike self-giving, while 1 Corinthians 11:3 requires careful consideration of its literary context and the meaning of *kephalē*. The study concludes that responsible Christian hermeneutics should distinguish biblical teaching from culturally inherited patriarchy and should promote an understanding of authority characterized by service, mutuality, dignity, and participation in God's mission.

Keywords: Male chauvinism, patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, gender, biblical interpretation, hermeneutics, women, authority, submission

INTRODUCTION

Background

Questions concerning the relationship between men and women remain significant within contemporary theological discourse. Gender relations are shaped not only by social and political institutions but also by religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and interpretations of sacred texts. Within Christianity, biblical passages concerning creation, submission, headship, women's silence, and leadership have generated sustained theological debate. Some interpreters understand these passages as establishing differentiated roles for men and women, while others argue that the New Testament's central theological commitments to creation, redemption, spiritual giftedness, and mutuality undermine permanent gender hierarchy.

The relationship between gender and biblical interpretation is particularly important because interpreters do not approach Scripture without cultural assumptions. Biblical interpretation takes place within particular historical and social locations. Consequently, assumptions concerning masculinity, femininity, authority, family structure, and leadership can influence the way biblical texts are understood and applied. Recent African biblical scholarship has emphasized the need for hermeneutical approaches that take seriously the social realities of African communities while also interrogating cultural assumptions that contribute to the

marginalization of women (Mojola, 2022). African women theologians in particular have emphasized hermeneutics that foreground dignity, liberation, mutuality, and the agency of women (Baloyi, 2022; Mokoena, 2022).

Male chauvinism is therefore significant to biblical interpretation because theological readings can either challenge or reinforce assumptions of male superiority. Contemporary scholarship describes male chauvinism as a system of thought that links androcentrism with patriarchal structures and gives legitimacy to forms of male dominance, superiority, subordination, and discrimination against women (De la Cruz et al., 2025). Such attitudes may operate explicitly through claims that men are inherently superior or implicitly through institutional arrangements in which men are assumed to possess greater authority.

The issue is especially important in African Christianity, where biblical interpretation intersects with cultural assumptions concerning masculinity, seniority, marriage, family authority, and social leadership. Recent studies of Nigerian Christian communities have demonstrated that patriarchal understandings of marriage continue to influence interpretations of Ephesians 5:22–33 and can contribute to gender inequality and marital disharmony (Ademiluka, 2021; Uwaegbute, 2023).

The biblical material, however, is more complex than a simple opposition between male authority and female subordination. Genesis 1:26–28 presents male and female as created in the image of God and jointly entrusted with humanity's vocation. The Old Testament presents women such as Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah in prophetic and leadership roles, while the New Testament identifies women such as Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia as important participants in early Christian communities. Recent scholarship continues to draw attention to the leadership significance of these women. Nelson (2024), for example, examines Deborah and Priscilla as biblical models of women's leadership, while Bond (2024) specifically examines Junia, Priscilla, and Phoebe in relation to female leadership in the Roman church.

Consequently, the theological problem is not simply whether biblical texts contain statements concerning male authority. The more fundamental issue is how those texts should be interpreted within their literary, historical, theological, cultural, and canonical contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The interpretation of gender-related biblical texts has frequently been influenced by assumptions concerning male authority and female submission. Passages such as Ephesians 5:22–24 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 have sometimes been interpreted as establishing broad principles of male superiority that extend beyond their immediate literary and historical contexts. In some Christian communities, the concept of male headship has been interpreted as giving men unrestricted authority over women. Such interpretations can transform a theological discussion of marriage or ecclesial order into a generalized doctrine of male superiority. Research among Nigerian Christians demonstrates that patriarchal understandings of Ephesians 5 can contribute to perceptions of women as subordinate to men, although contextual readings of the same passage can emphasize mutuality and sacrificial responsibility (Ademiluka, 2021).

At the same time, a theological critique of patriarchy must avoid treating every distinction between male and female as inherently chauvinistic. Some Christian traditions affirm equal dignity while maintaining differentiated gender roles. Contemporary African ecclesiological scholarship continues to engage both complementarian and egalitarian interpretations of gender relations and authority (Mati, 2022). It is of great importance for African Christians to understand that the Bible is not meant to subject anyone but to help them live in peace and harmony.

The problem addressed by this study is therefore the hermeneutical relationship between biblical texts and cultural assumptions of male superiority. It asks whether interpretations of selected biblical texts concerning gender, authority, and submission adequately account for their literary and historical contexts and for the wider biblical witness concerning women's participation in God's purposes.

Research Question

The central research question is:

How do interpretations of selected biblical texts concerning gender, authority, and submission either reinforce or challenge male chauvinism?

The study further examines the following questions:

1. What is male chauvinism, and how does it differ from patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny?
2. How should Genesis 1:26–28, Ephesians 5:21–25, and 1 Corinthians 11:3 be interpreted in relation to gender and authority?
3. What significance do biblical women such as Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia have for discussions of gender hierarchy?
4. How do cultural assumptions influence the interpretation of biblical gender texts in African Christianity?
5. What theological implications arise from a responsible hermeneutical engagement with these texts?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine male chauvinism as a theological and hermeneutical problem in the interpretation of biblical texts concerning gender, authority, and submission. The study seeks to clarify the conceptual relationship between male chauvinism, patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny; examine selected biblical texts through contextual and theological analysis; evaluate competing interpretations; and consider the implications of biblical women's leadership for contemporary Christian communities.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative theological research. It combines textual analysis, historical-contextual analysis, theological interpretation, and contextual hermeneutics. The approach is appropriate because the research focuses on the interpretation of biblical texts and the theological assumptions underlying competing understandings of gender.

Three primary biblical texts constitute the central textual corpus: Genesis 1:26–28, Ephesians 5:21–25, and 1 Corinthians 11:3. These passages were selected because they are central to theological debates concerning human dignity, gender relations, submission, headship, and authority. The study supplements these texts with biblical narratives concerning Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia. The narratives provide a broader canonical framework for evaluating claims concerning women's participation in God's mission.

Historical-Contextual Hermeneutics: Historical-contextual interpretation examines biblical texts in relation to the social, literary, historical, and theological circumstances in which they were produced. Gender-related texts require such analysis because concepts of marriage, family, honour, authority, and public participation differed significantly between the ancient Mediterranean world and contemporary societies.

Recent scholarship on 1 Corinthians 11 illustrates the importance of historical-contextual analysis. Callon (2024) demonstrates that significant scholarly disagreement remains concerning the women addressed by Paul's instructions about head coverings, indicating that apparently straightforward gender instructions can contain substantial contextual complexity.

Contextual Hermeneutics: Contextual hermeneutics recognizes both the historical context of the biblical text and the contemporary context of its interpretation. African biblical scholarship has increasingly emphasized hermeneutical approaches that address present social realities rather than merely reproducing inherited

interpretations (Mojola, 2022).

African women's theological scholarship has particularly emphasized interpretive approaches that recover women's voices, interrogate androcentric assumptions, and promote human dignity and liberation (Mokoena, 2022).

Competing Interpretations: The study engages two principal theological approaches: complementarianism and egalitarianism. Complementarianism affirms the equal dignity of men and women while maintaining differentiated responsibilities or roles. Mati (2022) demonstrates that this position remains influential within African ecclesiology and continues to shape discussions of authority and submission.

Egalitarian approaches argue that gender should not constitute a permanent basis for restricting women's participation in Christian ministry and leadership. Contemporary studies of biblical women and Pauline texts continue to develop this position (Nelson, 2024; Bond, 2024). The comparison of these approaches provides a framework for examining whether particular interpretations necessarily imply male superiority or whether they can be understood within a theology of equal dignity and mutual responsibility.

Conceptualizing Male Chauvinism

Male Chauvinism

Male chauvinism refers to a system of beliefs and practices that privileges men and constructs male identity, authority, and behaviour as superior to women and femininity. Recent scholarship conceptualizes male chauvinism in connection with androcentrism and patriarchal structures that normalize male dominance, privilege, and discrimination against women (De la Cruz et al., 2025). This has subjected many women to a second class status in the society.

Male chauvinism can therefore operate at both individual and structural levels. At the individual level, it may appear in beliefs that men are naturally more intelligent, rational, authoritative, or suited to leadership than women. At the structural level, it can become embedded in institutions, customs, and systems that provide men with greater authority or opportunities.

Within religious communities, male chauvinism can become particularly influential when assumptions of male superiority are presented as divinely ordained. The theological danger arises when cultural assumptions concerning male authority are identified uncritically with biblical teaching.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to a social system in which authority and power are disproportionately organized around men and male structures of authority. Although the concept historically referred to the authority of fathers or male heads of households, contemporary scholarship uses patriarchy more broadly to describe systems of male dominance and female subordination (Ademiluka, 2021). Patriarchy is justified sometimes as a culture allowed in the Scriptures.

Patriarchy therefore differs from male chauvinism in emphasis. Male chauvinism refers primarily to an ideology or attitude of male superiority, whereas patriarchy refers to the social and institutional structures through which male authority is organized and maintained. The two concepts nevertheless interact. A patriarchal social system can create an environment in which male chauvinistic beliefs are normalized, while chauvinistic beliefs can provide ideological justification for patriarchal institutions.

African theological scholarship has increasingly examined the interaction between patriarchal structures and Christian theology. Baloyi (2022) argues that androcentric cultural patterns can influence theological reflection and contribute to the marginalization of women within church structures.

Sexism

Sexism refers to prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, or unequal treatment based on sex. Savigny (2020)

describes sexism in terms of assumptions concerning male superiority and female inferiority and identifies its relationship to patriarchal structures. Sexism may be overt or subtle. Overt sexism occurs when women are explicitly excluded from opportunities because they are women. Subtle sexism occurs when gender stereotypes influence expectations concerning competence, leadership, intellectual ability, emotional capacity, or appropriate social roles.

In Christian contexts, sexism can become theological when gender-based assumptions are presented as religious necessities without adequate exegetical justification. For example, assuming that men are inherently more capable of theological reasoning or spiritual leadership constitutes a gendered assumption that requires theological examination rather than automatic acceptance.

Misogyny

Misogyny refers to attitudes, practices, or structures characterized by hostility, contempt, or hatred toward women. Savigny (2020) distinguishes misogyny from sexism while noting their relationship to patriarchal systems. Misogyny is specifically concerned with hostility or contempt than male chauvinism. A person may hold chauvinistic beliefs concerning male superiority without consciously expressing hatred toward women. Nevertheless, persistent beliefs that women are inferior, irrational, morally unreliable, or incapable of legitimate authority can contribute to misogynistic social environments.

Within theological discourse, misogyny may appear when women are systematically portrayed as spiritually dangerous, morally inferior, intellectually incapable, or inherently subordinate. Such portrayals require critical theological examination because they have consequences for how Christian communities perceive women's dignity and participation.

Relationship Among Male Chauvinism, Patriarchy, Sexism, and Misogyny

The four concepts are closely related but analytically distinct.

Concept	Central Emphasis	Primary Manifestation
Male Chauvinism	Male Superiority	Believes and attitudes privileging men
Patriarchy	Male-centred social structure	Institutional and Relational authority
Sexism	Sex-based discrimination	Unequal treatment and gender stereotyping
Misogyny	Hostility towards women	Contempt, hostility, and devaluation

The distinction is important for biblical interpretation because a particular theological position should not be labeled chauvinistic merely because it recognizes differences between men and women. The central question is whether those differences are interpreted as evidence of male superiority and whether they are used to justify domination or exclusion.

Biblical Interpretation of Gender, Authority, and Submission

Creation and Human Dignity: Genesis 1:26–28

Genesis 1:26–28 provides a foundational theological statement concerning human identity. Humanity is created in God's image, and Genesis 1:27 explicitly identifies humanity as male and female. Both participate in God's blessing and receive the mandate to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and exercise dominion over creation. The theological significance of this passage lies in the shared status of male and female as bearers of the divine image. The text does not present the divine image as exclusively male. Neither does Genesis 1:28 assign the dominion mandate exclusively to men.

This has significant implications for the interpretation of gender hierarchy. If male and female jointly participate in the imago Dei and in humanity's vocation, claims that women possess inherently lesser human dignity cannot be derived from Genesis 1:26–28. The text establishes a theological anthropology in which human identity precedes gender differentiation. Male and female together constitute humanity's representation

of God's image and together receive the divine vocation.

This does not, in itself, resolve the subsequent discussion concerning differentiated roles. Genesis 2 provides additional material concerning the creation of the woman and the relationship between man and woman. Nevertheless, Genesis 1 establishes a fundamental theological principle: gender difference does not entail inequality of human worth. Recent scholarship on biblical gender and leadership similarly emphasizes the significance of the creation account for discussions of women's participation and dignity (Nwoko & Igbokwe, 2023).

Mutual Submission and Male Headship: Ephesians 5:21–25

Ephesians 5:21–25 is central to Christian discussions of marriage and gender. Verse 21 introduces the household discussion with the command to submit to one another in reverence for Christ. Verses 22–24 address wives, while verse 25 begins Paul's instructions to husbands.

The command to husbands is significant because Paul does not merely instruct husbands to exercise authority. He commands them to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). The standard for male responsibility is therefore Christ's sacrificial love. The interpretation of Ephesians 5 has become particularly significant in African Christianity. Ademiluka (2021) demonstrates that patriarchal interpretations of the passage can contribute to marital disharmony among Nigerian Christians, while arguing that Paul's teaching also contains resources for mitigating patriarchal understandings of marriage.

Uwaegbute (2023), using a social-scientific rereading of Ephesians 5:21–33 in relation to Igbo society, argues that the passage can be read as challenging rather than simply reproducing patriarchal structures because of its emphasis on mutual love and submission. The command to husbands therefore requires careful theological interpretation. If headship is understood as domination, coercion, unilateral control, or male privilege, it becomes incompatible with the Christological model of self-giving love presented in Ephesians 5.

The text also requires attention to its literary structure. Verse 21's command concerning mutual submission precedes the specific household instructions. The theological relationship between verse 21 and the subsequent instructions remains an important aspect of contemporary interpretation.

Complementarian interpretations maintain that mutual submission does not eliminate differentiated marital responsibilities. Egalitarian interpretations emphasize that verse 21 provides the controlling framework for reciprocal Christian relationships. Both positions recognize that the text must be read as a whole. The decisive theological issue is therefore the character of authority. Authority modeled upon Christ cannot be equated with domination. Christian authority is expressed through responsibility, sacrifice, love, and service.

Headship and Gender Relations: 1 Corinthians 11:3

First Corinthians 11:3 states: "the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." The verse has generated extensive theological discussion because of Paul's use of the term *kephalē* ("head") and its implications for gender relations.

Interpretations of *kephalē* have differed concerning whether the word emphasizes authority, relational priority, source, or another aspect of relationship. The wider passage also presents interpretive complexities. Callon (2024) notes that scholars continue to disagree about whether Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 concern married women specifically or women more generally.

The immediate context is significant because 1 Corinthians 11:5 assumes that women pray and prophesy. Whatever Paul's teaching concerning headship means, the passage recognizes women's active participation in Christian worship. This observation complicates interpretations that treat the text as an absolute prohibition of women's public religious speech or leadership.

Furthermore, Paul concludes his discussion by emphasizing mutual dependence: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man independent of woman" (1 Cor. 11:11).

The following verse grounds this mutuality in God: "For just as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God" (1 Cor. 11:12). The passage therefore contains both differentiated relational language and a strong affirmation of interdependence. An interpretation that transforms *kephalē* into a universal principle of unrestricted male control fails to account adequately for the passage's emphasis upon mutual dependence and women's participation in worship. The text consequently requires careful contextual interpretation rather than reduction to a simple hierarchy of male authority and female submission.

Women and Religious Authority in the Biblical Narrative

Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah

The Old Testament contains several women who exercise significant religious and social authority. Miriam is identified as a prophet in Exodus 15:20. Her prophetic identity places her among the recognized bearers of divine revelation in Israel. Her society or the Jewish culture did not strip her of her prophetic roles.

Another significant woman who made giant strides in her leadership is Deborah. Deborah is described in Judges 4:4 as a prophet and judge. She exercises judicial authority and plays a central role in Israel's response to military oppression. Her leadership is not presented as a theological aberration requiring her removal from public responsibility.

Huldah provides another significant example. In 2 Kings 22:14–20, representatives of King Josiah consult her concerning the Book of the Law. Huldah delivers a prophetic interpretation that contributes to the religious reforms associated with Josiah. She used her gifts to solve a problem and men listened to her.

The presence of these women challenges interpretations that associate legitimate divine authority exclusively with men. Recent scholarship continues to examine Deborah as an important model in discussions of biblical women's leadership. Nelson (2024) argues that Deborah's narrative provides significant biblical material for contemporary reflection on women's leadership. The interpretation history of Deborah is itself significant. Schüssler Fiorenza (2014) demonstrates that interpreters have repeatedly attempted either to restrict Deborah's significance or to employ her story in arguments concerning women's public and religious leadership. Such reception history demonstrates that cultural assumptions can influence the way biblical women are remembered and interpreted.

Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia

The New Testament provides additional evidence of women's participation in Christian ministry. Priscilla appears repeatedly alongside Aquila in Acts and Paul's letters. Acts 18:26 reports that Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos concerning the way of God. The passage therefore presents Priscilla as a participant in theological instruction.

Phoebe is introduced in Romans 16:1–2 as a *diakonos* of the church at Cenchreae and as a benefactor of many people, including Paul. The precise semantic range of *diakonos* continues to be debated, but the passage clearly presents Phoebe as a person of substantial standing and responsibility within the early Christian community. She was a blessing to the church and Paul recognizes her significant role. Both men and women should emulate her selfless lifestyle.

Junia is named alongside Andronicus in Romans 16:7. The interpretation of the phrase concerning her relationship to the apostles has generated substantial scholarly discussion. Recent research continues to investigate how translation and reception history have affected the interpretation of Junia and other women in Romans 16. Sybrandi (2024) specifically examines whether women leaders in Romans 16:1–16 have been obscured through translation and interpretation.

Bond (2024) similarly examines Junia, Priscilla, and Phoebe in relation to female leadership in the Roman church. These examples demonstrate that women were not merely passive recipients of Christian teaching. They appear as teachers, patrons, ministers, coworkers, and influential members of early Christian communities. Paul sees them as his fellow ministers called and endowed by God to make impact.

Implications for Gender Hierarchy

The biblical narratives of women exercising authority have significant implications for the interpretation of gender hierarchy. They demonstrate that gender did not prevent women from functioning as prophets, judges, teachers, patrons, or influential Christian workers. This does not mean that every biblical text concerning gender should be interpreted as affirming identical roles for men and women. Rather, the narratives demonstrate that claims of universal male superiority cannot adequately account for the full biblical witness.

Nwoko and Igbokwe (2023) identify multiple biblical examples that support women's participation in leadership and decision-making and argue that the biblical evidence provides a basis for greater recognition of women's leadership. The hermeneutical significance lies in the necessity of reading restrictive texts alongside narratives that demonstrate women's agency. A theological interpretation that emphasizes only texts concerning female submission while minimizing women who exercised recognized authority produces an incomplete account of the biblical witness.

Biblical Interpretation, Culture, and Male Chauvinism

Cultural Assumptions and Biblical Interpretation

Biblical interpretation takes place within cultural contexts. Interpreters bring assumptions concerning gender, authority, family, leadership, and social order to their engagement with biblical texts. This does not mean that culture determines the meaning of Scripture. It means that interpreters must recognize the possibility that cultural assumptions can shape interpretation.

The reception history of Deborah illustrates this phenomenon. Biblical interpreters have sometimes reconstructed her as a primarily domestic figure despite the biblical text explicitly identifying her as a prophet and judge. The history of interpreting Deborah demonstrates how assumptions about women's appropriate social roles can influence the interpretation of biblical narratives.

Gender-critical scholarship similarly examines the ways androcentric assumptions can become embedded in biblical interpretation. Mokoena (2022) argues that gender-specific frameworks can expose androcentrism and recover women's stories and experiences from interpretive traditions that have contributed to their marginalization.

African Christian Context

The African context is particularly important because biblical interpretation takes place within societies with distinctive cultural understandings of masculinity, femininity, family, seniority, and authority. It is important to interpret biblical concepts using the African context so as to address the challenges of the African lived experiences.

African theological scholarship has demonstrated that gender relations within African Christianity cannot be examined independently of cultural contexts. Baloyi (2022) argues that androcentric cultural patterns can affect theological discourse and contribute to the exclusion of women from structures of church leadership. Mojola (2022) similarly calls for African biblical hermeneutics that foregrounds life, dignity, liberation, and transformation rather than simply reproducing inherited cultural assumptions. Olojede (2021) further demonstrates the importance of examining biblical women through African hermeneutical perspectives. Her study of African women in the Hebrew Bible challenges simplistic representations of African women as passive victims of patriarchy and highlights biblical women who exercised agency and social independence.

Consequently, an African Christian hermeneutic must take seriously both the biblical text and the realities of African women and men. Such interpretation requires critical engagement with cultural practices that may conflict with the biblical affirmation of human dignity.

Distinguishing Biblical Teaching From Cultural Patriarchy

The distinction between biblical teaching and cultural patriarchy is essential. The presence of patriarchal social structures in biblical societies does not automatically establish every feature of those structures as a permanent Christian norm. Biblical interpretation requires consideration of what a text describes, what it prescribes, and what theological principle it communicates. The interpreter must distinguish between historical circumstance and universal theological principle.

This distinction becomes particularly important in Ephesians 5. The household code occurs within an ancient Mediterranean social world characterized by hierarchical household structures. Contemporary scholarship on the passage has examined how Paul's teaching both engages and transforms the household conventions of his context (Ademiluka, 2021; Uwaegbute, 2023).

A similar concern applies to 1 Corinthians 11. Paul's instructions concerning gender, worship, and appearance occur within a particular cultural setting in Corinth. Callon (2024) demonstrates that fundamental questions remain concerning the precise social group addressed by Paul's instructions.

Consequently, cultural practices should not be automatically identified with divine commands. The task of hermeneutics is to determine the theological significance of biblical texts while taking seriously their historical particularity. To be accurate in interpretation, hermeneutics is employed. We should interpret texts in their historical contexts.

Theological Implications for the Church

Responsible Hermeneutics

The church's response to male chauvinism requires responsible interpretation of Scripture. Gender-related texts should be interpreted within their literary, historical, cultural, and theological contexts. Responsible hermeneutics also requires canonical balance. Passages concerning submission should be read alongside passages concerning creation, mutuality, spiritual gifts, women's leadership, and participation in God's mission. Theological interpretation should therefore resist both selective traditionalism and selective revisionism. The goal is a reading that takes seriously the whole biblical witness.

Recognition of Women's Gifts

The biblical evidence of women exercising prophetic, judicial, teaching, and ministerial functions provides a theological basis for recognizing women's gifts within the church. Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah demonstrate women's participation in Israel's religious life, while Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia demonstrate women's participation in early Christian communities.

Nelson (2024) argues that Deborah and Priscilla provide significant biblical models for contemporary women's leadership. Bond (2024) likewise situates Junia, Priscilla, and Phoebe within the context of female leadership in the Roman church. The church therefore has theological grounds for recognizing and developing the gifts of women rather than assuming that gender automatically determines capacity for ministry.

Servant Leadership

Christian authority is fundamentally shaped by the example of Christ. Ephesians 5:25 defines the husband's responsibility through Christ's self-giving love. Christian leadership more generally is repeatedly associated in the New Testament with service rather than domination. Consequently, the concept of authority must be distinguished from domination. Authority exercised through coercion, humiliation, intimidation, or exploitation contradicts the theological character of Christian leadership.

Within African Christianity, this principle has particular significance because cultural expectations of male authority can sometimes become intertwined with Christian concepts of headship. Uwaegbute (2023)

demonstrates the importance of rereading Ephesians 5 in the Igbo context in ways that challenge patriarchal assumptions and foreground mutuality.

Institutional Practices

Theological convictions concerning gender are expressed through institutional practices. Church structures therefore constitute an important dimension of the discussion. Gender inequality may be reproduced through unequal access to theological education, leadership positions, preaching opportunities, decision-making structures, and ecclesiastical recognition. Baloyi (2022) identifies the persistence of androcentric structures within African Christianity and advocates a partnership model between women and men in Christian ministry. A theology that affirms the dignity of women must therefore be reflected in institutional practices.

Christian Education

Christian education provides an important means of shaping responsible understandings of gender. Biblical teaching should expose congregations to the complexity of gender-related texts and to the diverse women who appear throughout Scripture. Education concerning Genesis 1:26–28, Ephesians 5:21–25, and 1 Corinthians 11:3 should be accompanied by study of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia. Such education can prevent the reduction of biblical teaching to isolated statements about female submission while encouraging a broader understanding of dignity, mutuality, service, and participation in God's mission.

Partnership Between Women and Men

A constructive theological response to male chauvinism should not replace male domination with female domination. The objective is a theological vision of partnership. Baloyi (2022), drawing upon Mercy Amba Oduyoye's African women's theology, emphasizes partnership between women and men as an alternative to androcentric models of Christian ministry. Such partnership recognizes the equal dignity of women and men while allowing individuals to exercise their God-given gifts responsibly.

CONCLUSION

The examination of Genesis 1:26–28 establishes that male and female are jointly created in the image of God and jointly entrusted with humanity's vocation. The passage therefore provides an important theological foundation for human dignity and does not establish male superiority.

Ephesians 5:21–25 requires interpretation within the framework of mutual submission, sacrificial love, and Christ-centered responsibility. Contemporary African scholarship demonstrates that patriarchal readings of the passage can contribute to gender inequality while contextual rereadings can recover dimensions of mutuality within Paul's argument. First Corinthians 11:3 similarly requires contextual interpretation. The meaning of *kephalē* remains debated, and the surrounding passage recognizes women praying and prophesying. Paul's subsequent emphasis upon mutual dependence further complicates interpretations that transform headship into unrestricted male control. Recent scholarship confirms the continuing complexity of the passage's historical and interpretive questions.

The biblical narratives of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia further demonstrate that women participated significantly in God's purposes. They appear as prophets, judges, teachers, ministers, patrons, and leaders. Recent scholarship on Deborah, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia reinforces the significance of these women for contemporary discussions of Christian leadership.

The study therefore argues that biblical interpretation should distinguish biblical teaching from cultural patriarchy. The existence of patriarchal social structures in the biblical world does not mean that every aspect of those structures constitutes a timeless Christian norm. Historical context, literary context, canonical coherence, theological purpose, and contemporary context must all be considered.

The African context makes this hermeneutical task especially important. African biblical scholarship has demonstrated the continuing influence of cultural assumptions upon biblical interpretation and has called for

hermeneutics that affirm dignity, liberation, mutuality, and transformation. We should not use the Bible to subject people but to uplift them.

The theological response to male chauvinism is consequently not the reversal of domination but the transformation of relationships according to the Christian vision of human dignity, mutual responsibility, sacrificial service, and participation in God's mission. A responsible Christian hermeneutic must therefore reject interpretations that make male superiority the theological foundation of human relationships while recognizing the legitimate diversity of Christian interpretations concerning gender roles.

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